

The Spectre of ‘Red China’:

The Northern Expedition and Japanese Public Opinion, 1926–27

Andrea Revelant

Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia

Introduction

The Russian Revolution had far-reaching consequences in East Asia, starting from Japan’s military intervention in Siberia (1918–22, with the occupation of Northern Sakhalin continuing until 1925). On the long run, the most important influence exerted by Moscow in the region was arguably that of sowing the seeds of communism in China.¹ Under instructions from the Comintern, the small Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formed in 1923 a United Front with Sun Yat-sen’s Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD). The Communists’ goal was to infiltrate the GMD and steer China towards a bourgeois revolution, which in turn would lay the premise for the advent of socialism. Thanks to Soviet support, the GMD was able to strengthen its organisation, thereby launching from Canton in July 1926 a military campaign for the reunification of China. Under the command of Chiang Kai-shek, the “Northern Expedition” (hereafter NE) was a success, leading to the capture of Beijing in June 1928 and the establishment of a new national government in Nanjing.

In the meantime, however, the United Front had broken up. Many GMD leaders had been wary from the start about the CCP’s motives for cooperation. Moreover, Moscow pursued a contradictory China policy, which in the North aimed at the preservation of special rights inherited from the tsarist regime by means of secret diplomacy. It was only after Chiang staged an anti-Communist coup in Canton in March 1926, indeed, that the Soviet government gave up its opposition to the campaign. The uncomfortable relationship with the CCP sparked conflict between the Left and Right wings of the GMD, which escalated until Chiang carried out a large-scale purge of Communists in Shanghai on 12 April 1927. The United Front continued for a while in the territory under control of the Left GMD government, based in Wuhan. By July 1927, though, the Left leaders too had expelled the Communists. Attempts at insurrection by the CCP later that year ended in utter failure. While crippled, the CCP managed to survive for two decades and reacquire strength during the Sino-Japanese War, finally

¹ See ELLEMAN, Bruce. *Moscow and the Emergence of Communist Power in China, 1925–30*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009.

prevailing over the Nationalists in the civil war of 1945–49.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate how public opinion in Japan reacted to the rise and fall of Communist influence in China at the time of the NE. It is part of a wider research project on the international discourse on Republican China, whose purpose is to combine the perspectives of institutional actors with those of journalists and other observers. Although a number of excellent studies are available on Sino-Japanese relations in the period in question, the literature is still thin with respect to public opinion and its impact on foreign policy.² In order to obtain an articulate picture of the views represented in the press, the analysis is based on a selection of sources that differ in political leaning and target public. The survey conducted so far covers the four newspapers with largest circulation, published by the *Asahi* and *Mainichi* companies (these are, respectively, the *Ōsaka* and *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun*, and the *Ōsaka Mainichi shinbun* and *Tōkyō Nichinichi shinbun*); the leading newspaper in the Kyūshū region, that is the *Fukuoka Nichinichi shinbun*; four general-interest magazines, namely *Chūō kōron*, *Kaizō*, *Nihon oyobi nihonjin* and *Taiyō*; and the main journal specialised in foreign affairs, *Gaikō jihō*.³

Because of space constraints, discussion of the editorial policy of each publication has to be left to another occasion, together with the profiles of prominent authors and a thorough study of the articles collected. Here it will suffice to quote a few salient passages, so as to outline major trends detected in the public debate. The next paragraph samples responses to the NE in its early stage, before Chiang cracked down on Communists. The following section deals with reactions to the Nanjing Incident of 24 March 1927 and criticism of Japan's non-intervention policy. Next, the paper presents opinions on the outlook for communism in China after the Shanghai coup, until the fall of the Canton Commune in December 1927. The conclusion points at the lasting impact that the issue of China's «reddening» (*sekka*) had on Sino-Japanese relations.

² For a review, see the Introduction in REVELANT, Andrea. “Revolution Deconstructed: Chiang Kai-shek and the Northern Expedition in the Japanese Press, 1926–28” in DE GIORGI, Laura; SAMARANI, Guido (eds). *Chiang Kai-shek and His Time*. Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017. <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-127-0/>

³ According to the police, the *Ōsaka Asahi* had at the time a daily circulation of about 1.2 million copies. The *Ōsaka Mainichi* followed with 1.1 million copies, while the *Tōkyō Asahi* and *Tōkyō Nichinichi* (hereafter *TN*) sold both about 400 thousand copies. The estimate for the *Fukuoka Nichinichi* (*FN*) was of 130 thousand copies. Although it did not reach the numbers of popular magazine *Kingū* (300 thousand copies), *Kaizō* was one of the most widely read monthlies, with 100 thousand copies. *Chūō kōron* and *Taiyō* sold respectively 20 and 10 thousand copies. Figures are not available for fortnightly *Nihon* and *Gaikō jihō* (*GJ*). See Keiho kyoku. *Shinbun zasshisha tokuhi chōsa*. Tokyo: Taishō shuppan, 1979 (1927), 7, 21, 29, 667.

The emergence of the ‘red threat’

Recent research on a narrower documentary basis indicates that in the initial phase of the NE the Japanese press perceived the campaign as a Soviet-planned operation, aimed at extending Moscow’s influence in China chiefly at the expense of Great Britain. For this reason, there was considerable confusion about Chiang Kai-shek’s relationship with the Left GMD and the Russian advisors. It also appears that the main concern of commentators was not so much about the possible consequences of revolution within China, but rather the threat this posed to the ‘unequal treaties’ that guaranteed the interests of Japan and the other foreign powers.⁴ Additional sources presented here confirm these findings, but they also shed light on a wider range of opinions on the gravity of danger and on possible countermeasures.

While the *Mainichi* took a consistently negative attitude towards the GMD, the *Ōsaka Asahi* expressed sympathy for its effort to reunify the country, and dismissed Communist influence over the party as a transitory condition. The *Tōkyō Asahi* stressed that Japan should uphold her legitimate rights in any case, regardless of China’s likely «reddening». The *Tōkyō Nichinichi* adopted a more cautious tone, stating only that «From the standpoint of ideology, politics and foreign relations, a great change can’t be avoided» in China.⁵ All four newspapers are usually labelled as liberal, in the sense that they supported parliamentary government in Japan and cooperative diplomacy. Nevertheless, as this survey suggests, there were significant differences among them, even within the same publishing group.

Kaizō, a progressive magazine that often hosted pieces by Marxist intellectuals, framed the question in a way similar to that of the *Tōkyō Asahi*, but diverged in the conclusion:

«Someone sees the Canton government as a branch office of Moscow. Leaving aside whether this is true or not, as a matter of fact the Canton government has a number of Russian advisors, and the organisation of government follows that of Moscow. But this does not matter. One question is whether the Canton Revolutionary Army that looks up to Chiang Kai-shek as its leader will be able, as their propaganda goes, to crush the Northern military factions, defeat imperialism, and expel foreign power. [...] Should China become a militarist, imperialist country, or should it turn into a democratic country or a communist organisation, we are not so much interested in that. However, depending on the attitude of our country, we have to expect right away the day when this leads to the boycotts of goods and

⁴ See REVELANT, *Revolution Deconstructed*, 130-134. Refer to the same for all *Asahi* and *Mainichi* articles mentioned further.

⁵ Editorial (ed.) “NanShi senkyoku shinten”. *TN*, 2/9/1926.

interruption of economic exchanges.»⁶

To avoid such damage, the author argued, Japan should absolutely abstain from any interference against the Southern forces, as it would only backlash.

In a more alarmed tone, China expert Kurone Shōsaku stressed the political consequences of the NE in the pages of nationalist *Nihon*:

«the country cannot but roll into the palm of that red army's hand. [...] I think that we can guess from now that events will follow one after another, much uglier than expected by the average Japanese [...] In the first place, at present the Canton Nationalist government and the Nationalist Party are the realm of the Communist faction. [...] Moreover among supporters outside the party there are many members of the Communist Party; in other words, since the Nationalist Party is popular thanks to members of the Communist Party, if one day there will be a national assembly or a constitutional assembly, inevitably demands from that side will emerge.»⁷

On the other hand, there were those who tried to reassure the public that the advance of the GMD posed no serious threat to Japan. It is the case of Horiuchi Tateki, a mid-ranking official in the Foreign Ministry, who wrote as follows in *Gaikō jihō*:

«In order to solve the problem of whether the Canton government will enforce red ideology as people fear, as a premise it is convenient to think if the Chinese people may accept communism. [...] China is an agricultural country and farmers are satisfied with the present system. Modern production is managed by foreigners [...] when factory workers make a fuss, their strength is not enough to sweep the whole country and overthrow a firm social order. In other words in present-day China there is not a situation of widespread social unrest such as to arouse sympathy for communism. [...] The reason why the Canton government has approached people in the worker-farmer [i.e. Soviet] government is not because it sympathises with communism and aims to lead the Chinese revolution in that direction; instead, there is no mistake in asserting that their goal is mainly to acquire power based on factory workers and the military, and also to borrow from the worker-farmer government its

⁶ Ed. “Kanton kakumeigun to Nihon”. *Kaizō*, October 1926, 1.

⁷ “Kōdai seru Shina kōhaku sensō. Shina wa sekka no tenka ka”. *Nihon*, 15/11/1926, 15-23.

skilled propaganda leaders, getting at the same time support in money, weapons and other things. [...] As for the immediate repeal of the existing treaties, the above mentioned statement by Chiang Kai-shek tells clearly his resolution, but seen from a different angle it also looks like an act to win the hearts of the people in the Wuhan region; as a matter of actual politics, Chiang Kai-shek too must be aware enough that immediate repeal of all treaties cannot be put into effect, [...] hence no matter how violent the Canton government may be, it will not do that.»⁸

These assertions were in line with the official position of the Japanese government, at the time led by the Kenseikai party. Foreign minister Shidehara Kijurō, who had normalised relations with the Soviet Union earlier in 1925, upheld in public a policy of strict non-interference in the Chinese civil war.⁹

In the same journal issue, another advocate of neutrality was Ōnishi Itsuki, chief editor for China at the *Tōkyō Asahi*. Ōnishi, however, based his argument on an entirely different prediction:

«I do not hesitate to say that China, which through political revolution is leaping towards social revolution, is on her way to become a second Russia. Half of China has already turned red. The reddening of the other half is just a matter of time [...] I am neither surprised nor scared that China turns red. If that is the overall trend in China, it can't be helped. It is necessary, and most appropriate, that China's domestic affairs be managed by China herself. [...] Even if a red government is set up, once the country is unified there will be several advantages compared to the current situation of turbid unrest, in which the country is split into pieces and ceaselessly caught into the whirl of war; the growth of industry and the economy as well will be definitely better than now. Today in China there are no emerging forces in view other than those backed by the Canton government. Japan too should acknowledge this, be sympathetic, and get along with it, as there is no choice.»¹⁰

⁸ “Kanton seifu to kyōsanshugi”. *GJ*, 530, 1/1/1927, 73-82. For similar views, see YAMAI Kakutarō. “Shina wa sekka sezu”. *GJ*, 523, 15/9/1926, 34-37; GOTŌ Asatarō. “Shina gaikō no shin kyokumen”. *GJ*, 525, 15/10/1926, 19-33.

⁹ As in YOSHIZAWA Kenkichi (Japan's minister to China). “Shina jikyoku ni kansuru kansō”. *Taiyō*, 32: 13, Nov. 1926, 27-28. For a positive appraisal, see MATSUBARA Kazuo (law scholar). “Shidehara gaikō no yosan to kessan”. *Taiyō*, 33: 1, Jan. 1927, 12-16.

¹⁰ “Kyūgunbatsu no sōkessan (Shina no sekka naru)”. *GJ*, 530, 1/1/1927, 102-114. For a study tracking changes in Ōnishi's views on China from the 1920s up to the Manchurian Incident, see SHIMADA Daisuke. “Shinbun kisha ni okeru kokumin kakumei ninshiki to tai ManMō kyōkōron no keisei”. *Rekishī hyōron*, 811, Nov. 2017, 57-70.

It is worth of notice that this view was more optimistic than the one earlier expounded in the author's newspaper (unsigned editorial of 30 November 1926), as mentioned above. Stylistic differences between the two articles, as well as the fact that Ōnishi was not in charge for editorials in that period, suggest that the first piece was written by one of his colleagues.¹¹ It is a case in point of the autonomy which journalists could enjoy within their company at that time.

Later in January, the Nationalists forced the British authorities to surrender their concessions in Hankou and Jiujiang. As radical activism intensified in the territories under control of the Left GMD, concern that Japan might suffer soon some major blow grew stronger. Miyaji Kandō, president of the *Shanghai Nichinichi shinbun*, accused «*The communist government hidden under the name of nationalist movement*» of fomenting disorder:

*«the increase in unemployed people caused by the damage to our domestic industry, combined with a worsening trend in the realm of thought, give a golden opportunity to the propaganda of Red Russia. If the reddening campaign of the Nationalist government succeeds, and we get to the foundation of a Soviet republic in China, this danger will become even greater. What sort of crisis it may generate, it is almost beyond imagination [...] A parasite dwells in its [i.e. of the Nationalist Party] bowels, and it is no more a healthy body [...] It is impossible to enforce a de-Communistisation of the Nationalist government. The force of Red Russia's cell organisation is to be feared.»*¹²

In the conclusion of the same article, he urged the Japanese government to take effective countermeasures: «*Everyone would acknowledge that, when a robber plunges into the next home, to pretend that this is not our home's business is against human feelings.*»

Equally charged with dramatic overtones was an interview to Akaike Atsushi in the *Fukuoka Nichinichi*, a newspaper that had close ties with the opposition party, the Rikken Seiyūkai. Akaike, a former bureaucrat from the Home Ministry who sat in the House of Peers, claimed that

«The Nationalist government is planning the reddening of China. [...] Last December in

¹¹ I am indebted to Shimada Daisuke for this observation.

¹² “Shina kokumin undō no shinsō (rekkyō no toru beki kyōdōsaku)”. *Gaikō jihō (GJ)*, 532, 1/2/1927, 65-74.

*Hankou they have kidnapped the Chinese employed in Japanese banks and trading firms; they have formed trade unions and murdered the good workers. Japanese companies are oppressed. If the authority of the Southern army reaches to Shanghai, this will have grave consequences for our interests. The struggle for Shanghai is a matter of life or death for China.»*¹³

Nihon, which regularly featured satirical vignettes, published one with a raging Chinese struck by the «*fever of sovereign rights' recovery*», shown in the act of kicking away a man in tailcoat (likely a British capitalist). Below, a worried character in Japanese dress said «*If you rampage like that I'll be in trouble*», while holding a sword for the «*protection of the established rights*». Uncle Sam stood aside with crossed arms.¹⁴

Other observers insisted that a wait-and-see policy was still the best option. The editor of the *Fukuoka Nichinichi* did not exclude that someday circumstances might force Japan to «*take adequate action*» towards China.¹⁵ For the time being, however, he approved the government's decision to reject London's appeal for a joint expedition to Shanghai, which would only throw Japan «*into the whirl of a useless conflict*».¹⁶ The director of *Gaikō jihō*, Hanzawa Gyokujō, believed that the «*communist faction*» was losing both popular support and its hold on GMD leadership. Therefore, Japan and the other powers should «*leave it to its natural course and let them take poison and antidote by themselves*».¹⁷ This approach, he clarified, would not prevent Japan from using any legitimate means to strike back at those violent groups that might harm her residents and their property.¹⁸

After the Nanjing Incident

The looting and assaults on foreigners that followed the capture of Nanjing by the National Revolutionary Army on 24 March 1927 was widely reported in the press as a Communist plot to provoke retaliation by the powers and bring down Chiang Kai-shek, whose conflict with the Left had already become patent.¹⁹ Both domestic and international pressure to suppress the

¹³ “Shina no dōran (ka). Shisōjō kara kansatsu shitaru”. *FN*, 24/3/1927.

¹⁴ Untitled. *Nihon*, 117, 1/2/1927, 131. There was a pun on homophones, as *ken* means either ‘sword’ or ‘right’.

¹⁵ Ed. “Jikyoku no shinten to Nihon”. *FN*, 15/1/1927. See also IKKISHA. *Taiyō*, 33: 3, March 1927, 9-14.

¹⁶ Ed. “Teikoku no kyōdō shuppei kyōhi”. *FN*, 27/1/1927.

¹⁷ “Shina ni okeru EiRo sensō”. *GJ*, 532, 1/2/1927, 1-13.

¹⁸ The same view is in MATSUI Hitoshi (professor at Kokugakuin University and former army lieutenant). “Shin Shina no yukue”. *GJ*, 532, 1/2/1927, 31-38.

¹⁹ See REVELANT, “Revolution Deconstructed”, 137. See also “Gaijin hogo o seigon shitemo Shō shi jishin no chii ga abunai”. *FN*, 1/4/1927; “Shina no terorizumu to rekkyō (zai Shi EiBeijin no hikiage)”, “Nankin jiken no shinsō”. *GJ*, 537, 15/4/1927, 158-161, 161-163; “Nankin kokujoku jiken to nanjaku muteikō gaikō”. *Nihon*, 123,

Communists increased on Chiang in the following weeks, contributing to his ultimate decision to start the purge.²⁰ In Japan, the news from Nanjing ignited further debate about the red threat and Shidehara's policy.

The four big newspapers retained the opinion that direct intervention would be counterproductive.²¹ However, they also criticised Japan's diplomacy for failing to prevent the incident, and casted doubts about the quality of Nationalist leadership. Even after the Shanghai coup, the *Mainichi* in particular remained pessimistic on the prospects for stable government under the GMD. *Nihon* complained that the government's policy of non-interference meant in practice «*non-resistance*» to any violence committed by the Chinese. Taking «*adequate measures*» to protect the lives and property of expatriates would be instead «*a legitimate act in self-defence of the state*». ²² The *Fukuoka Nichinichi* accused the authorities of irresponsible behaviour, as they had just «*watched the growth of the Communist movement*» without taking any preemptive measure.²³ Noting that «*China, most clearly, is becoming a battlefield between capitalism and communism, worker-farmer Russia and the powers*», the editor concluded that

*«the time has come to shelve the loose policy of so-called non resistance. [...] In order to protect our interests, as well as peace in our neighbouring country of Korea, we must of course prevent the reddening of Manchuria-Mongolia. [...] To this purpose, we might at times have to support Zhang Zuolin [the leader of the Northern coalition]. If we are dissatisfied with Zhang Zuolin, we might have to rely directly on our strength.»*²⁴

Japan's foreign policy took a turn shortly after, as the emperor's Privy Council took advantage of a banking crisis to force the resignation of the Kenseikai cabinet. On 20 April the Seiyūkai formed a new administration led by its president, retired army general Tanaka Giichi,

15/4/1927, 3.

²⁰ See IECHIKA Ryōko. "Shō Kaiseki to Nankin kokumin seifu". Tokyo: Keiō gijuku daigaku shuppankai, 2002, chapter 3.

²¹ REVELANT, "Revolution Deconstructed", 137-138. See also editorials "Nanpō no naisō to rekkoku no taido", "Tanaka shushō no tai Shi tōben". *TN*, 31/3, 7/5/1927. In the magazines, see Ōi Jirō. "Nankin jiken to Nihon no taisaku (gensei ni dankyo taru sochi o tore)". *GJ*, 537, 15/4/1927, 22-30; HONDA Kumatarō (diplomat). "Tai Shi gaikō no hasan (zen naikaku no shittai to shin naikaku no kōryo subeki shoten)". *GJ*, 538, 1/5/1927, 19-38; NAGANO Akira. "Nihon no tai Shi konponsaku". *Taiyō*, 33: 9, July 1927, 31-54.

²² "Nankin kokujoku jiken to nanjaku muteikō gaikō". *Nihon*, 123, 15/4/1927, 4-5. A vignette in the same issue (p. 126) depicted two scared Japanese men, whom Chinese soldiers had stripped to their underpants. They bore the captions «*non-interference*» and «*non-resistance*».

²³ Ed. "Shina gaikō hinan". *FN*, 13/4/1927.

²⁴ Ed. "Nanboku Shina ni taisuru Nihon no taido". *FN*, 14/4/1927.

who also occupied the post of foreign minister. The Tanaka cabinet adopted the principle of protecting expatriates on the spot, which soon justified a military expedition to the Chinese province of Shandong (May-August 1927). This move got harsh criticism from the *Asahi* and *Mainichi* groups. Both drew a parallel with the disastrous Siberian Intervention, recalling that at the time Tanaka had served as War minister.²⁵ The *Fukuoka Nichinichi*, on the contrary, warmly welcomed the government's initiative.²⁶ *Gaikō jihō*, which functioned as a forum for foreign policy debates, hosted articles both in favour and against the expedition.²⁷ The director's own opinion was one of prudent support, as was that of *Nihon*.²⁸ What seemed an unjustified delay in the withdrawal of troops later prompted criticism from the latter magazine.²⁹

The eradication of Communist influence within the GMD that took place between April and July 1927 eventually led Moscow to order the CCP a change in strategy, which resulted in a series of desperate uprisings from August to December of the same year.³⁰ Most of the publications examined responded with a sense of relief to the defeat of radicalism in China. Only a few Leftist commentators attacked Chiang, whom they considered a traitor of the Chinese revolution.³¹ Different opinions remained, however, on the outlook for a resurgence of "reddening".

Some observers feared that the CCP may still have enough popular support, and Soviet backing, to harass the GMD again in the future.³² Others stressed instead that communism

²⁵ REVELANT, "Revolution Deconstructed", 147-150.

²⁶ Ed. "Nihon no Santō shuppei". *FN*, 29/5/1927.

²⁷ For the first view, see Ōi Jirō. "HokuShi shuppei wa jūzoku genshō nomi". *GJ*, 541, 15/6/1927, 5-15; YAMAMOTO Kumatarō. "Kinji no tai Shi gaikō rongi". *GJ*, 543, 15/7/1927, 106-111; NINAGAWA Arata (professor of International Law). "Gōrisei no tai Shi shuppei". *GJ*, 545, 15/8/1927, 19-26; MATSUI Iwane (army general). "Iwarenaki Santō shuppei hinan". *GJ*, 545, 15/8/1927, 58-74. Negative opinions were in KASHIWADA Tadakazu (Lower House member for the Kenseikai). "Shuppei o chūshin toshite". *GJ*, 541, 15/6/1927, 25-33; KANDA Masao (*Asahi* editor, member of the Lower House for the Kenseikai). "Nuita katana no shimatsu". *GJ*, 542, 1/7/1927, 51-60.

²⁸ Ed. "Shuppei gaikō no shimatsu". *GJ*, 541, 15/6/1927, 1-2; "Tai Shi sekkyoku gaikō to naikaku kaizō". *Nihon*, 127, 15/6/1927, 2-6. *Nihon*, however, also featured an article that neatly opposed the sending of troops. See KIMURA Hanzō. "Tai Shi shuppei o ronzu". *Nihon*, 128, 1/7/1927, 13-23.

²⁹ "Gen naikaku no shissei to kōki bunran". *Nihon*, 130, 1/8/1927, 2-6.

³⁰ These developments are explained in the light of factional strife in the Bolshevik party in ELLEMAN, *Moscow and the Emergence...*, chapters 8-9. For an account of the dispute on China between Bucharin and Trotsky, see SAKAKIBARA Kazumi. "Aka Ro no tai Shi kakumei shidō no shippai". *GJ*, 547, 1/9/1927, 120-132.

³¹ REVELANT, "Revolution Deconstructed", 142, 149. See also INOMATA Tsunao (economist, former member of the illegal Communist Party of Japan). "Kakumei Shina to Ei Bei to Nihon to". *Taiyō*, 33: 11, Sept. 1927, 238-248; MIZUTANI Chōzaburō (socialist lawyer). "Dai niji sekai sensō no kiki". *Taiyō*, 33: 12, Oct. 1927, 61-71; YAMAKAWA Hitoshi (former secretary of Japan's Communist Party). "Shakai jiji". *Taiyō*, 33: 13, Nov. 1927, 71-84.

³² *Ibidem*, 139-140; "Shō shi no kyōsantō dan'atsu. Zento wa utagawashii". *FN*, 29/4/1927 (evening); INAHARA Shōji. "Shidehara gaikō yori Tanaka gaikō e". *GJ*, 539, 15/5/1927, 7-25; FUNAKOSHI Mitsunōjō. *GJ*, 539, 15/5/1927, 26-35; ŌNISHI Itsuki. "Shina kakumei no zento". *GJ*, 542, 1/7/1927, 33-40; SAKAKIBARA, "Aka Ro...".

stood no chance of success in China.³³ A recurrent argument, among the latter writers, was that such an ideology was incompatible with Chinese culture. Suehiro Shigeo, professor of Law at Kyoto Imperial University, put the question in these terms:

«In short, to ask the Chinese to profess communism is an unreasonable request. For the Chinese, first comes money, second comes money, third comes money; from dawn to sunset, they don't care about anything else than money. To root communism in those people is like transplanting a tropical plant to the frigid zone. Hence the reddening campaign towards China will fail overall.»³⁴

The same author, though, continued by saying that *«However the smashing of imperialism and denunciation of the unequal treaties will likely succeed, because these are fine popular movements, they are patriotic movements»*. Therefore, as another writer pointed out, Japan would still have to face the problem of how to deal with Chinese nationalism:

«to consider it as simply based on agitation and support from Red Russia, and try to ignore the awakening of the Chinese people, is not a correct perception. I recognise the support from Russia, but more than that, it is rather international oppression against China that has boosted today's crisis. I cannot but conclude that the fundamental problem is the rebellion against the powers' international imperialism and capitalism.»³⁵

Conclusion

Documents presented in this paper indicate that 'reddening' was one of the major threads through which Japanese public opinion read the facts unfolding in China at the time of the Northern Expedition. The widespread inclination to overrate Moscow's influence, especially in the early phase of the campaign, is a telling sign of the fear for the spread of communism that many observers shared. At the same time, it shows that a major criterion for evaluating the GMD was that of its degree of autonomy from the Soviet Union. This is a key point to

³³ REVELANT, "Revolution Deconstructed", 138-139, 143; editorials "Kyōsantō dan'atsu to sono go no eikyō", "Shina to Roshia", "Shitsuyō naru sekka". *FN*, 2/7, 21/7, 22/12/1927; OGAWA Setsu. "Tai Shi kōgaikō no shin igi". *GJ*, 539, 15/5/1927, 47-56; SHIOSAKI Kanzō. "Unmeigeki toshite no kokumin kakumei". *GJ*, 543, 15/7/1927, 11-16; TAKAYAMA Kensuke. "Shina no kakumei wa sareri nari". *GJ*, 544, 1/8/1927, 33-44; SAKANISHI Rihachirō (army general and member of the House of Peers). "Shina sekka bōatsu no kōki". *GJ*, 540, 15/5/1927, 17-23.

³⁴ "Shina no kokumin undō", part 2. *FN*, 30/6/1927.

³⁵ OKANO Ichirō. "Kokusai shihonshugi to Shina no teikō undō", part 2. *GJ*, 547, 15/9/1927, 115-130. See also SHIRAYANAGI Shūko. "Shina wa Roshia o kanka shiezarū ka". *Taiyō*, 33: 5, 48-50.

understand Chiang Kai-shek's determination to purge the communists, as well as later relations between Nanjing and Tokyo. After 1927, China's "reddening" ceased to be a prime issue in public debates, as attention turned first towards the final fight between the Nationalists and Zhang Zuolin, then to Japan's negotiations with the new government in Nanjing. The legacy of the United Front, however, remained in the organisational skills that the GMD had developed with communist assistance. As one contributor to *Gaikō jihō* pointed out, Comintern agent Mikhail Borodin had «succeeded in teaching organisation and control to the Chinese, who had no organisation and hated constraints.»³⁶ While this may well be an overstatement, it cannot be denied that not just the party, but also the wider nationalist movement had learnt much from the Soviet model. Despite the failure of its policy in terms of fostering a socialist revolution, Moscow did play a major role in shaping the future course of both Chinese politics and China's international relations.

³⁶ TAKAYAMA, "Shina no kakumei...", 43.