

The year 1949 witnessed the exit of the Kuomintang from the Chinese mainland and the triumph of the Red flag of the Chinese Communist Party. The Nationalist Party founded by Dr Sun Yat-Sen in the 1920s, thus came to a sorry end within a period of less than thirty years. And yet the Kuomintang had been a popular party, so much so that Stalin was not prepared to allow the CCP to give up the Kuomintang flag, "the most popular flag of China". There was a time when the leader of the Russian Communist Party took the position that the CCP by itself could never hope to drive the imperialists out or unify China; till 1945 Stalin did not believe that the Chinese communists could play an effective role in bringing about a socialist revolution in China. And yet by October 1949, the Red flag fluttered from the Tien An-men the Heavenly Gate of Peace in Peking. How can one account for this debacle of the once powerful Kuomintang? There were obviously numerous factors which contributed to the Kuomintang collapse. But the most important single factor which contributed more than anything else was without doubt, Chiang Kai-shek, who for nearly a quarter of a century presided over the destiny of the Chinese nation, and who therefore, influenced the fortunes of that unfortunate country. There were other factors too, such as the Japanese invasion of China, which provided an opportunity to the Chinese communists to expand and consolidate their position. But the struggle between the Kuomintang and the communists was decided not on the battlefield but on the political front. Chiang Kai-shek lost the battle as well as the war even before he sent his legions to fight the communists on the battlefield. The real battle was waged on the domestic front and lost there. The Kuomintang Party started as a party of reform. It stood for progress and was dedicated to improving the economic lot of the mass of people. In Sun's thinking, the people's livelihood had primary importance. But he had not worked this out very well. He vaguely desired some kind of economic justice and certainly land

reform. The peasants supported the Kuomintang since it talked of the People's Livelihood and land reform. It also talked of introducing democratic government as soon as the country had been unified. This would bring to end the period of military rule. The intellectuals supported Sun because they too like him desired modernization, land reforms, clean and competent administration, and democratic government. These were values which they cherished, and they wholeheartedly supported the Nationalist Party. The students in the universities were captivated by this new wind of change. Many of them, like their teachers in the university considered Confucius outmoded, and wished to bring into existence a new society based on science and democracy. The bankers, traders and businessmen who supported the Kuomintang favoured land, reform and democratic government. If Chiang could have satisfied these legitimate urges of the Chinese people, he would have become their undisputed leader and hero. Unfortunately, Chiang could not fit into this role. History had provided Chiang with an opportunity to become the Leader of the Revolution. Chiang chose to suppress the very revolution which had given him birth and had installed him in power. The child of the revolution had turned against its progenitor. If Chiang were differently made, Chinese history would have been different. Instead of spending his last days on the island of Formosa, he would have ruled from Peking and would have been remembered by a happy and grateful posterity. Time had thrown Chiang a challenge, and had found him wanting. Chiang was not made of the stuff of which heroes are made.