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The Politics of Opposition: China's Moderates at the Political Consultative Conference of 1946

Abstract

When analyzed in the context of the first Political Consultative Conference (PCC), a series of multiparty negotiations held in January of 1946, the theory of third party incompetence begins to break down. A more in-depth analysis of the Chinese third force reveals that their liberal philosophies were backed up with practical plans, and primary source documents from the PCC reveal that Chinese liberals in fact possessed a detailed and comprehensive strategy for China's future.

Keywords

China, Political Consultative Conference, Third Force, Liberals

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Ryan M. Winter

By the end of 1946, US special representative to China General George Marshall proclaimed his mission a failure and returned home. The tension between the Chinese Nationalists and Communists had escalated so tremendously that Marshall no longer felt he could be of service in negotiating a peaceful compromise. In his concluding remarks on the mission, Marshall placed his final hope in the "third way," the diverse group of Chinese moderates and nonpartisans who he felt could be the "salvation of the situation."¹ A government that included this "splendid group of men" was, in Marshall's opinion, the last chance for peace and democracy in China. Those who have studied the Marshall mission may find this last-ditch effort baffling. After all, Marshall routinely criticized the third force for lacking a focused and practical plan for the country's future, and regarded them as weak and unreliable.² However, despite his misgivings, Marshall understood that the Chinese liberals represented the best hope for compromise between dictatorship and communism. Any democratic government would need the approval of the third force to be seen as legitimate, and therefore their approval was of paramount importance.³ Many historians have written off the third force as an insignificant bunch of elitists. Suzanne Pepper, for instance, dismissed them as "weak, disorganized, and powerless" at best; at worst, they were "opportunists and pawns of the two major parties."⁴ The third force has often been perceived as possessing lofty democratic ideals but no practical solutions, a shortcoming which contributed to the eventual failure of diplomacy in China.⁵ Looking back, it is easy to find faults in the third force and proclaim their failure as inevitable. However, when analyzed in the context of the first Political Consultative Conference (PCC), a series of multiparty negotiations held in January of 1946, the theory of third party incompetence begins to break down. A more in-depth analysis of the Chinese third force reveals that their liberal philosophies were backed up with practical plans, and primary source documents from the PCC reveal that Chinese liberals in fact possessed a detailed and comprehensive strategy for China's future.

¹ George C. Marshall, "Marshall's Statement upon Leaving China," in Larry I. Bland, ed., *George C. Marshall's Mediation Mission to China, December 1945-January 1947* (Lexington: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1998), 559.

² Wang Chen-main, "Marshall's Approaches to the Mediation Effort," in *Mediation Mission*, 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴ Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999).

⁵ For example, Roger B. Jeans, *Roads Not Taken: The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-Century China* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1992).

Although mention of the PCC in English-language history texts is rare, the third parties themselves have been discussed at great length in many accounts of the civil war era.⁶ *Roads Not Taken*, compiled by Roger Jeans, gives valuable insight into the history, philosophies, and goals of many of the liberal groups which were together called the Democratic League (DL). However, it also subscribes to the view that third parties were lackluster in their political plans, and that they sidestepped difficult issues. For example, in his introduction Jeans asked, “Did not the very minor nature of the little parties demonstrate clearly for all to see the futility of opposition in twentieth-century China?”⁷ Despite clear evidence from the Political Consultative Conference and throughout the civil war era that the third force was anything but “minor,” other historians have adopted this view. For example, Thomas D. Curran saw this so-called “futility” of the third parties as stemming from a lack of “clarity about precisely how they expected to accomplish their objectives. They seem to have consciously avoided hardball politics, hoping to generate a ground swell of public support for their cause but failing to formulate a concrete strategy for translating that support into political action.”⁸ Historian Wang Chen-main has ridiculed liberals as “unrealistic philosophers and old scholars,” and argued that “trying to build a democratic castle on loose Chinese sand was one of the reasons for the demise of Marshall’s mission.”⁹ Although they routinely discount the third force’s plans as unworkable, few scholars have actually scrutinized what exactly these plans were. The Second Political Consultative Conference presents a wonderful opportunity to assess the charges against the liberal and moderate forces by examining the goals and strategies, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the third force. Speeches and opinions published by delegates to the PCC can be integrated with secondary literature on the time period in order to evaluate the practicality of the third force’s plans and strategies at one critical moment in time.

⁶ Works on the third parties and the CCP’s united front strategy include Edmund S. K. Fung, *In Search of Chinese Democracy: Civil Opposition in Nationalist China, 1929-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas D. Lutze, “New Democracy: Chinese Communist Relations with the Urban Middle Forces, 1931-1952” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996); Lyman P. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); and Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony* (New York: Routledge, 2004). For a historical background to the civil war, the failure of US foreign policy, and the political situation at the time of the PCC, see Tang Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941-50* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963); and Thomas D. Lutze, *China’s Inevitable Revolution: Rethinking America’s Loss to the Communists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷ Jeans, *Roads Not Taken*, 27.

⁸ Thomas D. Curran, “From Educator to Politician: Huang Yanpei and the Third Force,” in *Roads Not Taken*, 100.

⁹ Chen-main, “Marshall’s Approaches,” 38.

At the end of 1945, as the Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rushed towards a final confrontation, it appeared, for one brief moment, that peace would prevail. Most Chinese, including the Communists, were even willing to continue under the leadership of the corrupt and repressive KMT regime, as long as Chiang Kai-shek made a few small concessions to opposition parties and granted constitutional freedoms.¹⁰ The country had just emerged from fourteen years of brutal warfare—fifteen million Chinese had died, and the Japanese army's scorched earth policies had displaced many more—and most Chinese were desperate to find peaceful alternatives to civil war.¹¹ From Kunming to Chengdu, massive student demonstrations demanded coalition government and an end to the hostilities between the KMT and CCP, but politics complicated the common desire for peace.¹² As long as Generalissimo Chiang enjoyed unconditional financial and military support from the United States, he had no incentive to soften his position and make concessions to the Communists. On the other hand, the CCP would never give in to Chiang's demands to relinquish the areas it had liberated.¹³ Due to public opinion, both Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek felt compelled to advocate for peace, but their terms were irreconcilable, and diplomatic talks in Chongqing had broken down.

The US government, too, had a vested interest in keeping China stable, and for this reason it encouraged Chiang to include liberals and opposition parties in his government. John Fairbank, US Director of Information Services in China and a man intimately familiar with the country's political culture, endorsed this foreign policy.¹⁴ Fairbank observed a marked shift in the alignment of the middle forces in the months leading up to the PCC. These liberals, who had previously remained neutral but were constantly repressed and threatened by Chiang's secret police, were becoming disillusioned with the KMT. If they were not quickly brought into coalition government, they might join the enemy and Chiang could lose all vestiges of credibility.¹⁵ At the same time that Chiang was driving liberals away, Mao was actively courting them.¹⁶ His program of New Democracy called for many of the same reforms as the middle forces; the goal was to first transform China into a democratic state, and then let the people decide which party should lead. Mao was confident that given the chance, the vast majority of Chinese

¹⁰ Paul A. Varg, *The Closing of the Door: Sino-American Relations, 1936-1946* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973), 212.

¹¹ Thomas D. Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution*, 26.

¹² Richard Watts Jr., "The Good Chance in China," *New Republic*, February 4, 1946, 153.

¹³ Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution*, 26-35.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Vincent)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946: Volume IX, The Far East: China* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, 194-97.

citizens would prefer his leadership to the corrupt and ineffective KMT's.¹⁷ In this way, the CCP hoped to draw in a large coalition of allies and then crush the isolated KMT.

Due to steady pressure from the Communists, the US, and the Democratic League, Chiang finally relented to holding a political conference in January of 1946, and invited the CCP, third parties, and independent political figures from across the country.¹⁸ In order to achieve peace, the PCC was charged with completely reorganizing the political and military framework to make space for a new constitution and a democratic government. For the third parties, the most pressing concern was military demobilization. As they saw it, if hostilities between the CCP and KMT did not cease, the civil war would render all other considerations meaningless.¹⁹ Equally important, but less immediate, was the need to open up China's one-party system to allow for a true democracy.

Recognizing that the outcome of the talks could literally mean life or death for millions of their countrymen, all delegates treated the conference with respect and civility. The Shanghai newspapers *Sin Wen Pao* and *Ta Kung Pao* both described a pre-convention get-together of some of the delegates, held on January 7. Over tea, they talked for hours and reportedly behaved with utmost sincerity and frankness, a feat "unprecedented to the political history of China."²⁰ The delegates knew that the fate of their country, and perhaps the world, depended on the outcome of the PCC. Speaking for the Democratic League at the conference's opening ceremony, Chairman Zhang Lan reflected, "As we attend this Political Consultative Conference, we remember our responsibility to the people and the debt owed to those who died during the eight-year War of Resistance. Our victory, and this country's independence, was won by the blood of these martyrs, and we cannot let this success be in vain."²¹

At the conference, the KMT was awarded eight seats, the CCP seven, and the rest went, at least theoretically, to the middle forces.²² Nine were given to the Democratic League and nine to nonpartisans and other independents. These

¹⁷ Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution*, 40.

¹⁸ Joseph K. S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution in China: The CCP-GMD Struggle for Beiping-Tianjin, 1945-1949* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995), 25-26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117-19.

²⁰ "Delegates at the Conversational Meeting," *Sin Wen Pao*, January 9, 1946, in *U.S. Consulate General Chinese Press Review* (Shanghai: U.S. Consulate General, 1950); "Conversational Meeting Held By PCC Delegates," *Ta Kung Pao*, January 9, 1946, in *U.S. Press Review*.

²¹ Zhang Lan, "Zhongguo minzhutongmeng zhuxi Zhanglan zai zhengzhi xieshang huixi kaimushi shangde jianghua," in *Zhongguo minzhutongmeng lishi wenxian*, trans. Kong Yelei (Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1983) 1:119.

²² In reality, five of these were occupied by the Youth Party, an extreme right-wing anti-communist party that sided with the KMT. The Youth Party had recently split from the Democratic League at Chiang Kai-shek's request, and in return was assigned a disproportionately large allotment of seats at the conference.

numbers alone should indicate the power and legitimacy possessed by the middle forces at the time of the PCC. Historians like Pepper and Curran, who argued that the middle forces were insignificant or politically irrelevant, would struggle to explain why the middle forces outnumbered the right and the left combined.

After weeks of difficult negotiations, the PCC ended successfully. Although not every party was completely satisfied, its resolutions were unanimously approved by the delegates, and China's oppressive one-party system had finally cracked. Even more promising, the draft of the new constitution guaranteed all the basic rights and freedoms the liberals had requested.²³ Celebrations broke out across the streets of Chongqing, and over all of China, as hope for peace renewed. This atmosphere of jubilation, however, was short-lived, and tainted by KMT crackdowns. Clearly, the ruling party had no intentions of keeping its word or even protecting basic civil liberties. Chiang promised at the conference's opening that political rights and freedoms would now be extended to all, but he did not follow through. Journalists reported that during the conference itself, KMT secret police ransacked the lodgings of Democratic League (DL) delegates, jeopardizing the trust and good-will of the meetings.²⁴ When DL members tried to hold peaceful public meetings to inform citizens of the PCC proceedings, hired thugs threw rocks at speakers and violently broke up the assemblies.²⁵ Already marred by these instances of KMT insincerity, the PCC resolutions completely dissolved over the following months, when reactionaries in the KMT leadership flatly denied the legitimacy of the PCC's reforms.²⁶ Chiang's secret police continued to harass and even assassinate opposition party leaders, and within months he convened a puppet National Assembly in violation of the PCC agreements.²⁷ Aggressively remobilizing—again in contrast to his promises at the PCC—Chiang transported troops to the front lines with American assistance.²⁸ The CCP responded in kind, and once war broke out, the middle forces lacked the power to impose peace. Because of this spectacular failure, the PCC has often been held up as an instance of the futility of the middle forces. Examining the different groups that made up the DL and the strategies they pursued at this conference can help uncover the reality of their influence and political focus at the time.

²³ "Resolution of the Draft Constitution Adopted by the Political Consultative Conference, January 1946," in U.S. Department of State, *The China White Paper: August 1949; Originally Issued as United States Relations with China: With Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), 619-21.

²⁴ "How the Dispute Developed," *Ta Kung Pao*, January 29, 1946, found in *U.S. Consulate General Chinese Press Review* (Shanghai: U.S. Consulate General, 1950), microfilm.

²⁵ Curran, "Educator to Politician," 101.

²⁶ Varg, *The Closing*, 247.

²⁷ Lutze, "New Democracy," 296-99.

²⁸ Varg, *The Closing*, 247-252.

Zhang Lan, an esteemed scholar and outspoken critic of the KMT, acted as chairman of the DL, and was accompanied by prominent civil rights activist Luo Longji. Since the Democratic League represented an amalgam of China's middle forces, only two leaders specifically represented this party and the other seven seats were filled by the various groups and associations enumerated below.

The Nationalist-Socialist Party (NSP), led by Zhang Dongsun and Zhang Junmai, was allotted two seats. The conservative and elitist NSP favored Western-style democracy but also argued for socialization of key economic industries.²⁹ To overcome the inefficiency associated with Western democracy, it favored a strong, democratically elected "moral dictatorship," but with adequate protections for individual rights.³⁰ Although strongly anti-Marxist, the NSP was not totally opposed to making concessions with the Communists if it would help avert civil war. As long as the CCP stuck to its moderate demands of democracy and coalition government, even the ultraconservative Zhang Junmai was willing to negotiate.³¹

The National Salvation Association (NSA), also allotted two seats, was not so much a party as a nationalist movement. During World War II, the NSA had close ties with Sun Yat-sen's widow, Song Qingling, who helped organize student rallies against Japanese aggression. Its membership may have been small and loosely organized, but its social influence was enormous.³² Hoping to create a strong China independent of foreign imperialism, the NSA tried to patch up the old united front between the CCP and KMT.³³ As Zhang Shenfu explained, unity and democracy were twin goals, and national strength would be secured through democratic reform.³⁴ At the conference the NSA was represented by Shen Junru and Zhang Shenfu.

The Vocational Education Association, (VEA), held one seat, occupied by its founder, Huang Yanpei. Huang's vision was to democratize China through educational and economic reform, with American industrial-arts schools as his model.³⁵ Huang's relationship with the KMT was tenuous; at one time he had been marked for execution and was forced to go into hiding, but later he acted as Chiang's trusted advisor and diplomat.³⁶ He had recently been flown to CCP headquarters in Yenan, and was very impressed by what he saw. He realized that the CCP was not totally abolishing private property, and had actually achieved

²⁹ Fung, *In Search*, 133-34.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 135-40.

³¹ Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, 172-96.

³² *Ibid.*, 174.

³³ Lutze, "New Democracy," 255.

³⁴ Fung, *In Search*, 300.

³⁵ Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, 173.

³⁶ Curran, "Educator to Politician," 89-99.

many of the reforms he himself sought.³⁷ From that point on, Huang's relations with CCP became much friendlier.

One chair was given to Zhang Bojun, leader of the Provisional Action Committee of the KMT, also known as the Third Party. As Van Slyke wrote, "This party represented those members of the left-wing Kuomintang who had neither gone over to the Communists nor been reintegrated into the main body of the party after the split of 1927 at Wuhan."³⁸ Considered traitors and Communist agitators by many in the KMT, in 1946 this group remained intensely opposed to Chiang's personal dictatorship, and had crowned itself the true inheritor of Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and Three Great Policies.³⁹

The final component of the DL was the Rural Reconstruction Association (RRA), a small group that hoped to improve the quality of life in the countryside through research and education.⁴⁰ Only through reform and education, argued party leader Liang Shuming, could China regain the ideal of Confucian harmony and peace.⁴¹ The RRA argued for socialism and had close relations with the CCP, but never could accept class conflict as a solution to China's unique situation.⁴² This group was allotted one delegate, Liang, at the PCC.

The last faction to add its voice to the PCC was the non-partisans. These men were chosen for their contributions to China's social and intellectual culture. Included were two representatives of China's highly respected newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*, as well as the esteemed educator Fu Sinian and the political scientist and historian Wang Yunwu. Other scholars, teachers, innovators, and thinkers brought the total number of independents to nine. It should also be noted that the distinctions among these liberal groups was blurred, and sometimes even overlapped with each other. Therefore, when reconstructing the third force's plans it is dangerous to use any one politician's statements as representative of the whole. Instead, party documents and platforms represent a more accurate method of reconstructing the third party's plans and beliefs.

³⁷ Ibid., 96-98.

³⁸ Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends*, 173.

³⁹ Ibid.; The Three People's Principles were nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood. Democracy was to be achieved through unification by military conquest, a period of tutelage, and then democracy once the people were prepared. People's livelihood entailed a strong state-owned sector of the economy. The KMT used Sun's endorsement of a period of tutelage to legitimate its one-party dictatorship, promising that democracy would come eventually but that China was not yet ready. The Three Great Policies were cooperation with the CCP, alliance with the Third International, and organization of a mass-based revolution. Clearly, the KMT completely disagreed with the first and second policies.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Edmund S. K. Fung, "Nationalism and Modernity: The Politics of Cultural Conservatism in Republican China," *Modern Asian Studies* 43 (2009): 789-92.

⁴² Ibid.; Carsun Chang, *The Third Force in China* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 113.

One such statement was delivered by Zhang Lan, chairman of the Democratic League, at the opening ceremony of the PCC on January 10. Delegates had cause to celebrate on this day: besides the successful start to the conference, George Marshall had just finalized a ceasefire agreement between the CCP and KMT, which many took as a good omen for the upcoming PCC. In his opening speech, Zhang summarized the party's "detailed plan" and readiness to put political bickering aside to face the country's pressing concerns. "To solve these problems, we emphasize the following points: first, we cannot violate the common will of the people; second, we cannot reject help from allies who have good intentions; and third, when a solution is reached, we must follow it sincerely and keep our promises."⁴³ However, as the third force knew all too well, good faith at the talks alone was not enough to guarantee peace. The first problem in any CCP-KMT settlement was overcoming the extreme level of suspicion and hostility between the two parties. George Marshall noted that "the greatest obstacle to peace has been the complete, almost overwhelming suspicion with which the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang regard each other."⁴⁴ If the third force possessed no concrete solutions to overcome this impasse, then perhaps it is correct to label them as a fuzzy focus party that advocated democracy but had no idea how to make it work. However, numerous declarations circulated by third parties during the PCC suggest just the opposite. In fact, if historical documents attest to the presence of many practical suggestions to resolve the security dilemma.

A statement by the China Democratic National Construction Association, a group founded by Huang Yanpei in 1945 provides a perfect illustration. Although this newly formed party held no seats at the PCC, its leader, Huang, was present as a representative of the Vocational Education Association. US State Department observers identified this new association as trustworthy and unbiased, "one of the most respectable and honest" of all the liberal groups.⁴⁵ The party closely followed the PCC proceedings and concluded that tensions could be eased by the release of political prisoners, dissolution of secret service forces, and the use of nonpartisan inspectors to oversee bilateral demilitarization.⁴⁶ Independent overseers could "survey possible conflict zones and report back to the conference. Then, if a conflict breaks out, we could allocate responsibility and it would be easier to stop the confrontation."⁴⁷ Newspapers in Shanghai also reported on five

⁴³ Zhang Lan, "Kaimushi," 119.

⁴⁴ Marshall, "Statement upon Leaving," in Bland, ed., *Mediation Mission*, 556.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum by the Second Secretary of the Embassy in China (Sprouse)," in *Foreign Relations*, 136.

⁴⁶ "Minzhujianguohui xiang zhengzhixieshanghuiyi tigong chubuyijian," in *Zhongguo minzhujianguohui lishi wenxian xuanji*, trans. Kong Yelei (Beijing: shumu wenzian chubanshe, 1992), 1:36.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

suggestions presented by the Democratic League to ensure that the provisions of the PCC would be carried out. Among them were allowing the talks to be open and transparent so that no trickery or falsification could be employed later, ordering all military leaders to submit to the PCC's authority, and requesting the creation of a committee to investigate infringements of the agreements, especially human rights violations.⁴⁸ As these documents show, peace was more than an ideal for the liberals; it was a struggle, a formula designed to overcome clearly-defined obstacles. However, an argument could still be made that, while third parties had a plan for peace, their democratic ideals were restricted to high-sounding rhetoric, with no concrete plans, rendering them politically irrelevant.

This accusation, too, is not borne out when one evaluates the real proposals and suggestions of the DL at the PCC. In actuality, the League's proposals would not only have led to a peaceable China; they were also based on a solid and practicable understanding of how to run a modern, democratic country. Documents from the Democratic National Construction Association at the time of the PCC reveal no shortage in suggestions to implement democracy in reality, not just in the abstract. The party advocated a federal structure like the US, with more responsibility for local government, but also a national parliament elected through "universal suffrage and a thorough reform of local autonomy."⁴⁹ As Gerry Groot, author of *Managing Transitions*, noted, the third force essentially based its political model on the West, especially the US and Britain.⁵⁰ While it is true that the Democratic League relied heavily on the expertise of technocrats and intellectuals to lead the masses to democracy, Luo Longji definitively clarified that sovereignty was vested in ordinary citizens, and that these elites would be dismissed if their actions contravened the will of the people.⁵¹

Many scholars protest that these parties were elitist, out of touch, and therefore not truly democratic.⁵² Some Chinese liberals, such as Zhang Junmai, believed that the people were not yet ready for its responsibilities; education and economic reform had to come first, and democracy would inevitably follow.⁵³ Yet, while all liberal leaders saw the necessity of educating the masses before democracy could flower, their thinking was no more illiberal than the founding fathers of the United States, and was in many ways much more progressive and democratic. For example, the political program of the Democratic League pronounced, "The nation will put into practice a system of general elections;

⁴⁸ "Letter Addressed by Delegates of China Democratic League," *Ta Kung Pao*, January 30, 1946, in *U.S. Press Review*.

⁴⁹ "Minzhujianguohui xiang zhengzhixieshanghuiyi tigong dierci yijian," in *Lishi wenxian*, 55.

⁵⁰ Groot, *Managing Transitions*, 44.

⁵¹ Lo Lung-Chi, "My Frank Criticisms of Kuomintang," *Pacific Affairs* 3 (June 1930): 580.

⁵² Jeans, *Roads Not Taken*, 12-14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

voting rights for the people; the right to be elected with absolutely no limits imposed by property ownership, education, belief, gender, or nationality.”⁵⁴ The Democratic League’s principles clearly went further than a basic understanding of liberalism and democracy.

A related charge against the third party was that because it was so elitist, it did not really represent the masses. Certainly, the men representing liberal forces at the PCC were much more educated and cosmopolitan than the vast majority of the country they served. It could be argued that this modern intelligentsia, so far removed from the lifestyle of the peasant, was not a true representation of the people. One humorous example of the skepticism Chinese third parties faced was retold in newspapers covering the PCC. General Marshall, attempting to learn more about the DL, had asked a certain Chinese friend how many people Luo Longji’s opinion could represent. The man replied that Luo could not even represent the opinion of his own wife, at which point “General Marshall laughed on hearing such an answer.”⁵⁵ Other sources have chronicled Marshall’s frustration with third parties that exaggerated the number of members they could represent.⁵⁶ The assumption was that these parties stood for a few urban elites, but in reality, the National Salvation Association and other democratic movements were able to consistently mobilize far beyond their formal memberships, with tens of thousands taking part in protests. In June of 1946, just five months after the PCC, the middle forces were able to rally fifty thousand protestors against the civil war. While the DL’s leaders may not have been a representative sample of the Chinese public, it would be careless to brand them as out of touch.⁵⁷

The Democratic League, diverse as it was, presented a unified economic plan, which aimed to reform the inept one-party control of industry, which had led to suffering for the workers.⁵⁸ They called their proposal “national capitalism,” signifying that it was based on a combination of private enterprise and centralized state planning, and was intended to strengthen and serve the whole nation.⁵⁹ Even right-leaning Zhang Junmai believed that China was not ready for capitalism, and called for state managed industry along with private capital.⁶⁰ Finally, the DL’s economic model contained land reform provisions to help struggling peasants; in this way, the third force hoped to achieve a more equal society without the violent

⁵⁴ “Minzhujianguohui chengli xuanyan,” in *Zhongguo xiandiashi ziliao xuanji*, eds. Jin Degun and Du Jianjun, trans. Thomas D. Lutze (Beijing: Zhongguo renminda xue, 1989), 6:29.

⁵⁵ “How Many People Can Lo Lung-chi’s Opinion Represent?” *Shun Pao*, January 30, 1946. Found in *U.S. Press Review*.

⁵⁶ Wang Chen-main, “Marshall’s Approaches,” 29.

⁵⁷ Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution* 46; Jeans, *Roads Not Taken*, 14.

⁵⁸ “Chubuyijian,” 39.

⁵⁹ Groot, *Managing Transitions*, 44.

⁶⁰ Roger B. Jeans, *Democracy and Socialism in Republican China: The Politics of Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang), 1906-1941* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997), 207.

class struggle so blatantly endorsed by Mao.⁶¹ While this economic proposal was strikingly similar to what the CCP recommended for China's immediate future, the Rural Reconstruction Association's leader Liang clarified that it was an alternative, and not a copy.⁶² In other words, his plan was to beat the Communists at their own game.

The predominant, but mistaken, view on the Chinese middle forces is that they represented a hopelessly overpowered, politically insignificant group of elitists without a distinct plan to revitalize and save China. When Thomas Curran stated that "Huang and others like him never really conceived of a third party that could stand as an equal to the Nationalists and Communists,"⁶³ he failed to realize that Liang Shuming and many others in the third party had long thought of themselves as strong enough and realistic enough to stand as an alternative to the KMT and CCP. In fact, as historian Thomas Lutze has found, at the time of the PCC, the Communists even thought of the third force this way.⁶⁴ By assessing party speeches, positions, and platforms at the PCC, it is clear that the prevailing opinions about the middle force are misguided, and that they did indeed possess a concrete plan which could have successfully revitalized China and brought peace and democracy. As Zhang Junmai of the Democratic League recalled it, the PCC was a victory for the third force. It saw many of its designs and proposal implemented, only to be torn away by war.⁶⁵ While it eventually turned out to be powerless to force the war to a halt, the third force was far from the pathetic, fuzzy focus parties described by Suzanne Pepper, Roger Jeans, and others. As Lutze pointed out, "Such conclusions slighting the liberals appear to be the result of historical hindsight, for at the time, these 'democratic parties and personages' were not so easily dismissed."⁶⁶ In fact, their vision was much more realistic than the KMT's, which was dedicated to one party-rule and intolerance of diversity. The belligerent and undemocratic KMT, however, was the party that the US continued to fund on a colossal scale, inadvertently undermining the third force Marshall so dearly hoped would succeed, and with it, China's hopes for peace.

⁶¹ Fung, "Nationalism and Modernity," 792.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Curran, "Educator to Politician," 87.

⁶⁴ Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution*, 60.

⁶⁵ Chang, *Third Force*, 156.

⁶⁶ Lutze, *Inevitable Revolution*, 60.