

## China's Conservative Revolution

In this ambitious examination of the complex political culture of China under Guomindang rule, Brian Tsui interweaves political ideologies, intellectual trends, social movements and diplomatic maneuvers to demonstrate how the Chinese revolution became conservative after the anti-Communist coup of 1927. Dismissing violent struggles for class equality as incompatible with nationalist goals, Chiang Kai-shek's government should, Tsui argues, be understood in the context of the global ascendance of radical right-wing movements during the interwar period. The Guomindang's revolutionary nation-building and modernization project struck a chord with China's reformist liberal elite, who were wary of mob rule, while its obsession with Eastern spirituality appealed to Indian nationalists fighting Western colonialism. The Nationalist vision was defined by the party-state's hostility to communist challenges as much as by its ability to coopt liberalism and Pan-Asianist anticolonialism. Tsui's revisionist reading revisits the peculiarities of the Guomindang's revolutionary enterprise, resituating Nationalist China in the moment of global radical right ascendancy.

Brian Tsui is Assistant Professor at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His works on Guomindang ideology, China–India relations and the Cold War have appeared in journals such as *Modern China*, *Twentieth-Century China* and *positions: asia critique*.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19623-0 — China's Conservative Revolution  
Brian Tsui  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University*

The Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute of Columbia University were inaugurated in 1962 to bring to a wider public the results of significant new research on modern and contemporary East Asia.

# China's Conservative Revolution

*The Quest for a New Order, 1927–1949*

---

Brian Tsui

*The Hong Kong Polytechnic University*



Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-107-19623-0 — China's Conservative Revolution  
Brian Tsui  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107196230](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107196230)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108164610

© Brian Tsui 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take  
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2018

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-19623-0 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>A Note on Romanization</i>	x
1 Introduction	1
2 Orthodoxy: Purifying the Revolution	26
3 The Masses: A Youth Movement for the Conservative Revolution	68
4 State Comes First: Wartime Spiritual Revolution	114
5 Convergence: Liberal Sentimentalities and the Conservative Revolution	156
6 World Revolution: China, Pan-Asianism and India	195
Epilogue	229
<i>Glossary of Selected Romanized Terms</i>	241
<i>Bibliography</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	275

# Figures

1.1	Cover of <i>Chairman Chiang's Daily Life and His Outlook on Daily Life</i>	page 24
3.1	Cover of <i>Scouts of China</i> special issue on discipline, 1931	110
3.2	Girl scouts at a Nanjing high school performing needlework ( <i>Zhongguo tongzijun</i> 2, no. 2 [1936]: 10)	111
3.3	A scout from Nanjing Sanmin Junior High School in uniform: shorts, khaki shirt and group scarf and with the iconic campaign hat ( <i>Zhongguo tongzijun</i> 2, no. 2 [1936]: cover)	112
3.4	Scouts of China expressing camaraderie with its US counterpart organization (Zhao Bangheng et al., eds., <i>Kangzhan yu tongjun</i> , 276)	113
4.1	Pictures of the National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign launching ceremonies on May 1, 1939. Events took place in Chongqing, Xi'an, Guangdong province and Hong Kong. (Courtesy of the Collection of the Shanghai Library)	154
4.2	Children taught to make "aerial bombers" (Deng Chongdi, "Hongzha ji," <i>Shaonian bing</i> , no. 1 [1943]: 14–15)	155
6.1	Tan Yunshan in Gandhian cap and <i>khadi</i> , 1931 (Tan Yunshan, <i>Yindu zhouyou ji</i> , fig. 34)	226
6.2	Tan Yunshan welcoming Song Meiling and Chiang Kai-shek to Cheena Bhavana, 1942 (Tan Yunshan, <i>Twenty Years of the Visva-Bharati Cheena-Bhavana</i> )	227
6.3	Tan Yunshan welcoming Zhou Enlai to Cheena Bhavana, 1957 (Tan Yunshan, <i>Twenty Years of the Visva-Bharati Cheena-Bhavana</i> )	227

## Acknowledgments

---

It would be presumptuous of me to pretend that this book is a collective enterprise, but I could never have managed to link random jottings into prose, let alone a full monograph, without the generous help and contributions of many individuals and institutions. In New York City, where this work all began, I benefited from a community of dedicated scholars at Columbia University and beyond. My deepest gratitude goes to Eugenia Lean for her gentle encouragements and admirable open-mindedness as I meandered along the intellectual path. Her influence on me was by no means confined to this book. Mentors including Madeleine Zelin, Lydia Liu, Victoria De Grazia, Kim Brandt and Dorothy Ko helped me sharpen sensitivity to texts and arguments at different critical stages in the journey. Rebecca Karl and Vijay Prashad provided invaluable comments and models of intellectual creativity. It is a privilege to count as my fellow travelers Buyun Chen, Arunabh Ghosh, Gal Gvili, Ho Han-peng, Liza Lawrence, Li Pei-ting, Lin Shing-ting, Andy Liu, Chelsea Schieder, Shim Mi-ryong, Annie Shing and Tim Yang. I thank in particular Daniel Asen, Reto Hofmann, Then Siew Fung, Zhong Yurou and the late Chang Yi-hsiang, who guided me out of the darker alleyways with their camaraderie.

In Canberra, Geremie Barmé provided a stimulating sanctuary for me to refine and substantiate the work. I can only look up to his breadth of knowledge and command of languages. Benjamin Penny was a most caring senior colleague. Other scholars at the Australian National University, including Tomoko Akami, Duncan Campbell, Hyaeweol Choi, Richard Rigby, David Brophy, Sue Chen, Huang Hsuan-ying, Olivier Krischer, Elisa Nesossi, Tsai Tsan-huang, Shuge Wei, Qian Ying, Nathan Woolley, Zhang Yinghong, Zhu Yayun and Zhu Yujie, never hesitated to share acumen, food and company. At The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, I am fortunate to be mentored by Chak Chi-shing, King-fai Tam and Han Xiaorong, who are ever supportive in my development as a scholar and teacher. I thank my dean Chu Hung-lam for giving me the opportunity to contribute to my hometown and Ho Koon-wan for easing my transition to

viii Acknowledgments

a full-fledged faculty position. Colleagues at the Department of Chinese Culture, particularly Wicky Tse, Leung Shuk Man, Chien Li-kuei and Pan Lu, have been supportive. Hu Nan, my research assistant, is a paragon of patience and detail-mindedness.

Many scholars have graciously provided me with opportunities to present parts of this book in their various stages of development. I especially thank Prasenjit Duara and Tansen Sen for introducing me to the study of China-India interactions. John Carroll, Angela Leung, Chen Kuan-hsing, Madhavi Thampi and Max Ward made it possible for this work to reach larger audiences. Gratitude is due to interlocutors who raised stimulating questions and sustained my interest in intellectual pursuits, particularly Chen Yunqian, Hon Tze-ki, Lai Chi-kong, Fabio Lanza, Lin Shaoyang, Pan Kwang-che, Dan Vukovich, Wang Yuan-yi, Philip Wickeri, Yen Hsiao-pei, Peter Zarrow and the late Arif Dirlik. Maggie Clinton, whose scholarship I greatly admire, is most generous in sharing her insights. I thank Alfred Lin, my teacher at the University of Hong Kong, for keeping an interest in my career. The friendship of Calvin Hui, Kelvin Ng and Lorraine Wong, whom I have known from my high school or undergraduate days, has been invaluable. I thank Charles and Loretta Matthews, Li Hoi Hung and Eliza Sainsbury for welcoming me to their homes in New Jersey and Sydney and nudging me away from the computer screen.

A postdoctoral fellowship from the Australian Centre on China in the World has afforded this project the luxury of time to take shape. Start-up funding for new staff members from the Dean's Reserve of the Faculty of Humanities, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University allowed me to incorporate new materials and substantiate this book's argument. In its former incarnation as a doctoral dissertation, this project was supported financially by the Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, the Consortium for Intellectual and Cultural History and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange. I thank all these organizations for their generosity. No less critical, for a work of history, is the help of staff members at Academia Historica, the Kuomintang Party History Institute, the Second Historical Archives of China, the Guangdong Provincial Archives, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Academia Sinica library system, the Peking University Library, the National Library of China, the C. V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University, the University of Hong Kong Libraries and the Pao Yue-kong Library at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Lucy Rhymer at Cambridge University Press has been a joy to work with. I thank her and Ross Yelsey at the Weatherhead East Asian



## Acknowledgments

ix

Institute, Columbia University for their enthusiasm for this project. I was most fortunate to be able to enlist the expertise of Glenda Browne, who prepared a detailed and user-friendly index. Two anonymous readers read the entire manuscript and their generous but exacting comments helped me to fill gaps and avoid embarrassing mistakes.

Portions of Chapter 2 are reproduced from “Class Politics and the Entrenchment of the Party-State in Modern China,” in Lion Koenig and Bidisha Chaudhuri, eds., *Politics of the Other in India and China: Western Concepts in Non-Western Contexts* (London: Routledge, 2016), 115–26, with permission from Taylor & Francis. An earlier version of Chapter 6 appears as “The Plea for Asia – Tan Yunshan, Pan-Asianism, and Sino-Indian Relations,” which was originally published in *China Report*, vol. 46, no. 4 Copyright 2010 © Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.

My parents, Tsui King Wah and Tam Oi Ling, my grandmother Cheng Mei Hing and my grand aunt Lau Wai Sok have nurtured me in many more ways than I can begin to enumerate. I cannot ask for a more faithful companion than Agnes Pau. To them I gratefully dedicate this book.

## A Note on Romanization

---

This book adopts the *pinyin* system for transliterating Chinese names and terms.

Exceptions are made for historical figures who are no strangers to general English readers, most notably Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, and scholars of Chinese descent who publish under their personal names. Places and institutions, including those outside mainland China, are rendered in their official transliterations. For the Chinese Nationalist Party, this book uses Guomindang (GMD) or the party's name in English translation to refer to the subject under study and Kuomintang in connection with the archives maintained by the party now headquartered in Taipei.