



A WARNING FROM HISTORY

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THE GREAT ARENA OF EAST ASIA is the stage for a remarkable sequence of events. In the vortex of a powerful political storm, the national government of China is shaky; a long war with Japan has recently concluded and the Chinese coast and Korea are once more in friendly hands. While fighting an alien power, much of the government's attention has been directed toward the suppression of rebellious groups within. The combined civil and in-

ternational wars have left the nation exhausted, taxes are burdensome and natural disasters of drought and flood have heaped afflictions upon the peasantry. Dissatisfaction is rampant; dissension in high offices apparent. Striving to recover, the national government is desperately challenged on another front.

The critical frontier now shifts to the north where a new opponent begins a relentless pressure. Hardy, disciplined, ruthless, thoroughly

steeped in the rigors of war, this group is made all the more powerful by able and determined leadership. With the Manchurian countryside under firm control, the outnumbered enemy skillfully defeats the national army which is strung out along the routeways and in cities. "Fifth column" tactics prove especially fruitful. The nationalists retire to block the critical passageway into Peking and the vital Northern Plain, but the invader is now in a formidable posi-

tion: Manchuria is consolidated, the Korean flank secured, and the northwest highlands overlooking the capital are an enemy redoubt, supported in depth by allies from Inner Asia.

A skillful, insidious propaganda campaign becomes an integral part of the enemy's operations. All the defects and failures of the national government are exploited and exaggerated while the invaders offer the lure of reform and an end to the grievances of the people. Intrigue, bribery and treachery run rampant. Influential nationalists go over to the enemy and the government is torn by dissension and distrust.

Under such pressures the northern front collapses, Peking falls, whole armies lay down their arms and the invader sweeps southward toward the Yangtse. The national government, which had originally drawn its strength from South China, seeks desperately to regroup and rally support. The old capital of Nanking is the scene of a momentary stand, but ultimately the enemy sweeps on to the southern borders. Support from a Western power proves too little and is never effectively employed. Resistance becomes fragmented with the main force retreating to the southeast coast. Here there is strength and hope for the conqueror who proved irresistible on land, is impotent on the sea. A fleet is gathered to carry thousands of national supporters to the numerous offshore islands, and Formosa becomes the main refuge for loyal Chinese who refuse to submit to the alien rulers. Rallied by an indomitable leader, these people gird their defenses and through command of Quemoy and other islands harass the mainland and exasperate the new government. As the invaders are unable to challenge on the seas, and as hopes dwindle that the island leader can ever deliver the mainland from its new rulers, a stalemate ensues.

Does all this have a familiar ring? Does this seem but a retelling of the melancholy events still so fresh in our minds? If so, do not credit your memories but credit the cycles of history. For the national government of this story is the Ming Dynasty, the conquerors who arise in the north and sweep over the mainland are the Manchus, the Formosan leader is Koxinga — and it all happened just



Japanese invasion of the Mainland, 1592 — Is history repeating itself in the 20th Century?

300 years ago.

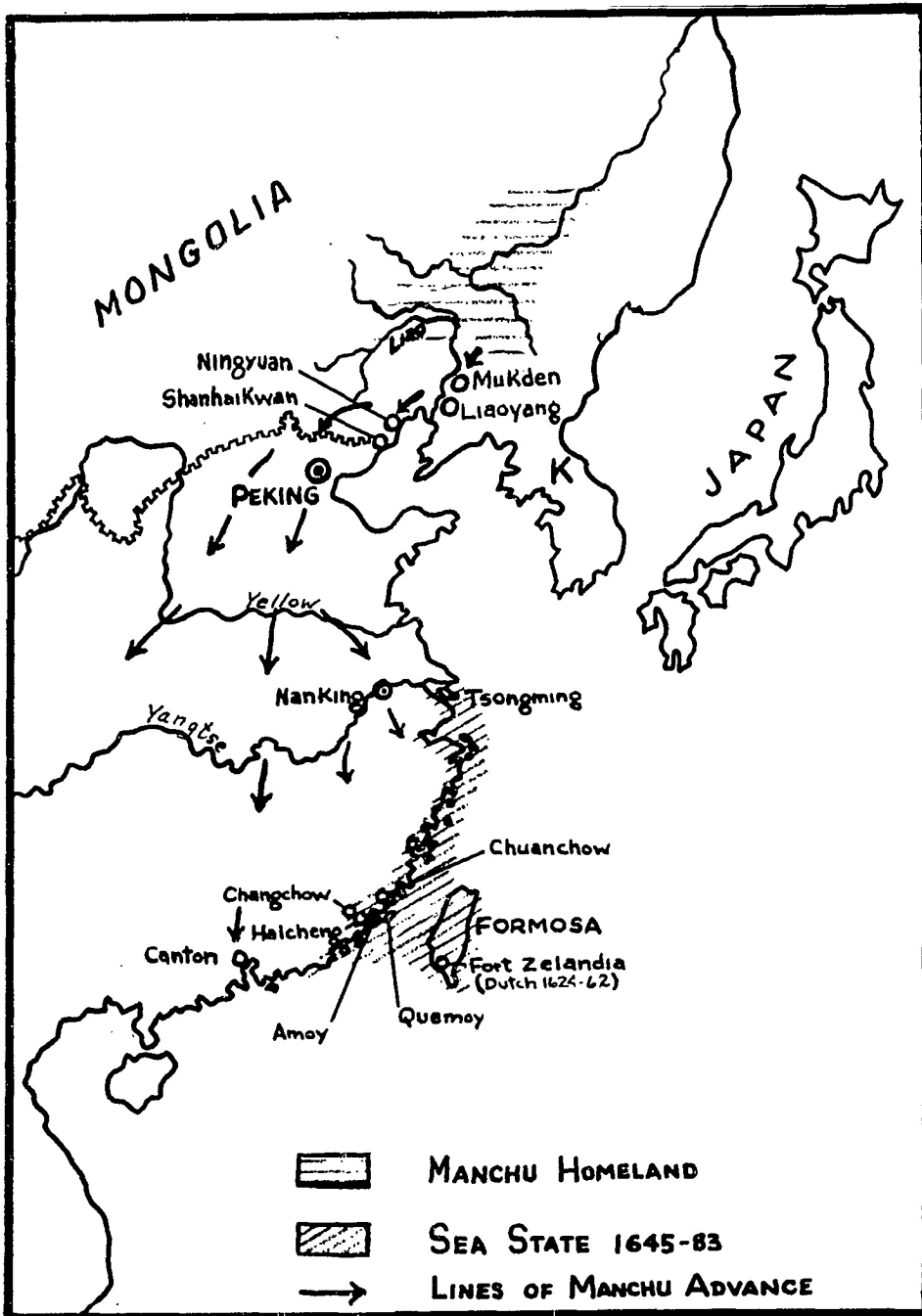
This parallelism of events is so striking as to be worthy of our attention. It would be untenable indeed to suggest that the Chinese context of today is exactly as that which prevailed 3 centuries ago. There are basic differences, but certainly there is enough similarity in broad outline to make the story of the Manchu conquest of more than antiquarian interest. It may well serve to cast the modern situation into a fresh and revealing perspective.

☛ THE MING DYNASTY, which lasted nearly 300 years, was in general an era of peace, prosperity and prestige. In several ways it was a unique regime. Unlike nearly all preceding dynasties, it originated in South China. The Yangtse Valley was its hearth and Nanking was its early capital and remained in many ways the chief center. Likewise, in contrast to an almost unbroken history of inward orientation, especially toward the critical northwest frontier, the Ming period is one of vigorous cultivation of trade and contact with the Southern Seas.

Despite its many achievements, the Mings eventually succumbed to that recurrent combination of internal decay and external pressures. Prosperity led to complacency and lack of reform, and when an inept bureaucracy, sinking ever more deeply into a morass of domestic problems, was challenged by a foreign power, the government found itself in mor-

tal crisis. The initial assault which paved the way for the ultimate disaster came from an old troublesome enemy. Piratical raids in northern waters were a chronic problem and by the middle 16th Century the entire coast was infested with Japanese corsairs. The problem assumed more serious dimensions in 1592 when the Japanese military leader Hideyoshi launched his audacious plan of conquering China itself. The wealth and prestige of China inevitably made her conquest the perennial dream of adjacent war lords whose visions soared beyond their local scenes. Hideyoshi was but one of many, before and after, who dared to entertain such glorious hopes.

The fate of Korea, as the overland bridge between Japan and Peking, has likewise had a long and melancholy persistence in history. Hideyoshi sought the acquiescence of this strategic country, but the Koreans were an unwilling vanguard and resisted the Japanese landing at Pusan. Unable to stem the invasion, they appealed to their historic protector for aid and a Chinese army was dispatched only to meet a crushing defeat at Pongyang. A second Ming army finally stopped the invasion but an indecisive struggle dragged on for 7 years, ending only with the death of Hideyoshi in 1598. Although the Japanese ultimately failed in their conquest, the attrition of the war plunged the Chinese government into critical internal difficulties. But, as in the modern ver-



rhachu remained submissive to Ming rule, sending annual tribute and receiving in turn favors and titles for keeping the Ming borders secure. As long as the imperial government was not challenged, such border chiefs were allowed a free hand in their own areas, and Nurhachu methodically enlarged his own power and wealth until he was dominant over all Manchuria beyond the Ming frontier. But there was always an incipient risk in this imperial policy. Nurhachu was a skillful administrator, but the basis of his success lay in his military genius and the momentary stability of Manchuria was the reflection of his feat of organizing his entire people into a formidable military structure known as the "Eight Banner System." It was almost inevitable that having forged such a ruthlessly efficient fighting machine, Nurhachu would look beyond his homeland for new fields of conquest. Again, China was the obvious prize and the apparent weakness of the Mings strengthened the temptation.

In the opening decade of the 17th Century, Nurhachu issued a public proclamation accusing the Mings of a long history of encroachment upon his homeland, and announcing his decision to conquer China. An audacious proposal this, for Nurhachu probably commanded not over 40,000 men. But quality and determination often outweigh quantity, and the Manchus were to provide the world with a memorable example.

While the Great Wall was the critical frontier shielding the North China Plain from the horsemen of the steppe, advanced defenses were often maintained for added security. The Mings had long been entrenched in southern Manchuria. Nurhachu's obvious first task was to shove the Chinese out of this northern zone. Complacent Ming commanders allowed a rapid clean up of marginal posts, and when a huge force was belatedly dispatched, the far outnumbered but brilliantly general-led Manchus slaughtered, in turn, the 4 unco-ordinated Chinese armies.

The two great fortress cities of Mukden and Liaoyang, each well equipped for siege, fell in turn as their commanders made the mortal error of marching out to meet the Manchu bowmen in the field. Fol-

sion of this historical drama, hardly had the Japanese struggle ended than a new challenger arose in the north, and domestic problems were necessarily deferred.

The Manchus were but one of the many nomadic peoples who inhabited the great steppe and desert belt which separates the Orient from the Occident. Pressures from that zone were nothing new to the Chinese as the Mongol Dynasty, to which the Ming was successor, attests. Prior to the later Ming period, however, the Manchus had been a relatively insignificant people tucked away in the

easternmost compartment of the steppe zone, the Manchurian Plain. Near the end of the 16th Century, however, events were shaping up which would ultimately bring to this obscure people a secure place in history. As was so often the case in the social and political contexts of the time, the mainspring of development was an individual — in this instance a brilliant leader named Nurhachu. Born in 1559, he succeeded his father to a position as minor chieftain at the age of 25 and soon enlarged his local fame.

Throughout this early period Nu-

lowing up these successes Nurhachu shoved the Chinese remnants back along the narrow corridor between the mountains and the sea to the great bastion of Ningyuan. Here a prolonged siege proved unsuccessful and the invaders finally withdrew to revise their tactics.

After over 40 years of campaigning Nurhachu had met his first major defeat; 7 months later, in September 1626, the great Manchu leader died at the age of 67. This audacious warrior of the North who had so boldly announced his grandiose plan to conquer the great empire of the East had not so much as set foot on the soil of China proper. Yet he must be accorded a major measure of the credit for the ultimate success of his people. Starting as a minor tribal chieftain, at his death he left a unified people in a freed homeland, skillfully organized into a military machine and full of confidence based upon the harsh test of battle against the imperial armies. It was Nurhachu who had set the spectacular Manchu conquest in motion.

Tai 'tsong, eighth son of Nurhachu, succeeded to the leadership. His first move was to sweep over the Korean peninsula, to secure his flank and deprive the Chinese of an ally. After testing once more the Ningyuan defenses, Tai 'tsong sent his army westward through the Jehol mountains directly toward Peking. The badly outwitted Chinese were able to pull a portion of their armies back to shield the capital, but the impregnable forward fortress was flanked and the enemy was now entrenched in the hills overlooking Peking itself.

For 17 years the Manchus lay upon the periphery of the great Chinese Plain, with hardly a skirmish being fought. Bold and confident as they were, they could not yet afford a direct assault upon the heart of the Empire, for the Chinese were still far superior in numbers and not without capable leaders and strongly fortified defenses. The only real campaign was an expedition into the hill lands of Shansi province to the west, which drew in the support of the Mongol tribes under Manchu leadership, and resulted in a firm control over the entire northern and northwestern frontiers.

But though these were quiet years

they were neither uneventful nor unimportant, indeed, they were decisive. And once more the events have a familiar ring to modern ears. For as soon as his armies were in position and the flanks secured, Tai 'tsong began a skillful propaganda campaign. By the means of open proclamations to the Chinese, Tai 'tsong skillfully played upon all the grievances against the Mings. Actual conditions were bad enough and these were magnified in every possible way. Persons within the capital were bribed into betrayal, and an insidious rumor campaign cast doubt upon the loyalty of the Ming military command.

While steadily undermining the position of the national government, Tai 'tsong put equal emphasis upon his own virtues. He established model Chinese schools, administered the area under his control with well advertised efficiency, and displayed a well organized government. Desertions were encouraged, prominent Mings were welcomed, given an advance in rank, and put in the "show window" so that all could see the advantages of joining the winning side. Defections were aided by the breakdown of Ming organization, soldiers were left unpaid, supplies were often interrupted and as a result mutiny and wholesale desertion were not uncommon.

The deceptive "cold war" of the time was likewise an insidious factor working against the Chinese. While in reality every Manchu move was calculated toward the ultimate assault upon the Empire, the lull in the actual fighting gave the impression that the external threat had subsided, in contrast to the internal conditions which continued unimproved. Thus, the demand for reform overshadowed the need for concerted military preparations and defense.

In 1643 Tai 'tsong died at Mukden. In many ways the gross outline of his career paralleled that of his father, Nurhachu. Their objec-

tives were identical and neither lived to achieve them, yet each, in turn, had completed an essential stage toward the final conquest. The 17-year reign of the son had carried forward the momentum of the father. The latter had united his homeland and developed a small disciplined nucleus; his successor had greatly enlarged both the numbers and area under Manchu control. Although his assumption of the title "Emperor of China" was pretentious at the time of his death, Tai 'tsong was the leader of an impressive coalition of Manchus, Mongols, disaffected Chinese and subjugated Koreans, who were poised for the assault upon a weakened, defeatist government vainly attempting to hold together a disintegrating empire. Tai 'tsong's tactics had been as successful in peace as in war.

Indeed, the final crisis came in the following year, 1644, precipitated by an internal revolt in the West. A chronic economic depression and severe famine had produced a rampant anarchy of local bandits which the harassed Ming leaders were powerless to stamp out. From this morass of petty war lords an unscrupulous adventurer, Li Tseching, rose to leadership of a large army. His local success, coupled with the ever-widening public dissatisfaction with the ineptness of the imperial rulers, led him to aspire to the throne. Turning upon the Ming garrisons in the valley of the Yellow River he swept over them like a storm and marched boldly across the plain toward Peking. The government, faced with the hopeless task of defending the capital on two fronts, disintegrated. The emperor committed suicide, bringing his great dynasty of nearly 3 centuries to an ignominious close. The merciless Li Tseching marched virtually unopposed into the capital as waves of panic and terror rolled out before him.

There remained one final nucleus of government resistance. A highly competent young Ming general,

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Won Sankwei, was in charge of the northern defenses against the Manchus where he still had a loyal army under his command. In response to a desperate last-minute appeal from the emperor, Won Sankwei had withdrawn from the crucial Ningyuan fortress, and started toward Peking to block the rebels. While enroute he received word of the collapse of the government and the loss of the capital. Knowing that the rebel, Li Tseching, was holding his father as hostage (and had already taken his favorite concubine), the unhappy Ming general was now placed in a terrible dilemma. The Manchus had promptly moved into the abandoned frontier fortress, the rebel army was moving northward against him: His choice was either to await certain annihilation or to join one of his enemies. Won Sankwei did not procrastinate, he promptly sent a letter to the Manchus asking their aid against the rebels. It was decisive support, the rebel army was shattered, its leader fled, and the capital lay open to the victors.



But who had been victorious? The Ming general, who had conducted a brilliant campaign, found his army half Manchu, with more northmen pouring down upon the capital every day. In short, Won Sankwei found himself a Chinese general in a Manchu state. His decision can be set down as the culmination of Tai'tsong's skillful propaganda campaign. The Empire had been delivered over to the Manchus by the Chinese themselves.

The new government now assumed all the pomp of the historic Chinese rulers, inaugurating a new dynasty under the regency of Prince Dorgan (brother of Tai'tsong and fourteenth son of Nurhachu). The first great task was the completion of the conquest. The ravages of Li Tseching had left all north of the Yellow River in disruption, incapable of any resistance. Nanking was the rallying center for a brief loyalist stand, but dissention, irresolution, and lack of public support, paved the way for its fall and opened the whole lower Yangtse to the Manchu armies. There followed a push southward through Kiangsi, the fall of Canton and the final mopping up operations. By 1650 the mainland

resistance was shattered, the Ming leaders and sympathizers exterminated and a ruthless control imposed upon the nation.

But there remained a final phase of distinctive interest. So far the Manchu conquest had not been unparalleled in the cycles of Chinese history; dynasties had risen and crumbled and alien conquerors had swept over the land before. But now a wholly new context of events developed, setting a precedent for the patterns of our own time. While the Manchu armies could sweep irresistibly over the mainland, they were powerless on the sea. Naval warfare was completely foreign to these leaders from the northern steppelands.

But along the rugged, island-studded southeastern coastland from the Yangtse to Canton a local maritime tradition was firmly established. Fishing was a way of life, maritime commerce had been greatly fostered under the South Chinese Ming dynasty and the maraudings of local and Japanese pirates had made naval warfare a not unfamiliar activity. Thus, as the Manchus began mopping up the maritime provinces the coastal population took refuge on the offshore islands. The pressures were heavy enough and loyalties firm enough to induce thousands to make an unprecedented retreat to the great island of Formosa. Hitherto populated largely by an aboriginal group, with a Dutch outpost on the south-

ern coast, Formosa became the great asylum for Chinese who refused to submit to Manchu rule.

As the national defenses crumbled, a pirate leader, Kuo-hoing-yeh, known to the West as Koxinga, rallied the coastal forces and became the acknowledged leader of the Chinese resistance. Koxinga's forces completely controlled the offshore islands. He directed the harassments from the island base of Tsongming, just off modern Shanghai. However, following a disastrous attempt to recapture Nanking, Koxinga was forced to reorganize his position and he laid plans for an unprecedented island empire. On Formosa he was welcomed by thousands of Chinese refugees. Koxinga ousted the Dutch from their trading post of Fort Zeelandia, assumed the title of "King of Formosa," and laid plans for the capture of Manila from the Spaniards. However, the following year this adventurous freebooter who had become the leader and symbol of loyal Chinese resistance died.

Koxinga was succeeded by his son, Cheng Ching, who carried on his father's policies as related to the Chinese coast. He captured Haicheng and laid siege to such prominent mainland ports as Changchow and Chuanchow. So exasperated were the Manchus that they ordered an evacuation of all the populace from a coastal strip 10 miles in width in order to block local support for the naval forces and to clear the ground for defensive action. This policy was never effectively carried through, but gradually over the years the Manchus captured all the mainland positions and began to marshal a fleet. Yet Cheng Ching, a worthy successor of his father, successfully defied the new dynasty for 20 years until his death in 1682.

However, as the grandson of Koxinga now assumed leadership, the situation had deteriorated. Amoy, Quemoy and Haicheng had been lost, there was little hope of regaining significant control over the mainland shores, and the attritions of over a generation of struggle had undermined the vigor of resistance. Thus in 1683 a Manchu fleet, under the command of an admiral who had been expelled from Formosa after a dispute with other leaders, sailed from Amoy, captured the Pescadores

and gained the capitulation of Formosa. Koxinga's grandson was given an empty title of Duke and exiled to Peking. Formosa was now placed under Fukien province and administered from Amoy. After 36 years of resistance, the great island became for the first time part of the Chinese Empire.

This brief outline of the events of 3 centuries ago is sufficient to show something of the challenging parallels with those of our own day. Comparisons are revealing both in the nature of the combatants and in the pattern of events. Like the Ming dynasty, the modern Nationalist party was essentially a South Chinese movement, spreading northward over the country and establishing its national capital not in the old northern imperial centers, but at Nanking. The Mings ultimately transferred their capital to Peking but Nanking remained unusually important throughout their era. Likewise both regimes reoriented China from its old landed and inward patterns, emphasizing instead the maritime frontiers, the great coastal cities and the commerce of the southern seas. Such similarities only become meaningful when contrasted with the opposite patterns which persist during most of the lengthy remainder of Chinese history.

On the other hand, a likeness of the Manchus and the Chinese Communists is not lacking: the ruthless development of a tightly disciplined shock nucleus; the forging of this unity in a secluded redoubt (Manchuria and Yenan) off the margin of the Chinese heartland; and the formulation of and quite candid announcement to the world of an audacious, long range goal—a warning, moreover, largely unheeded until too late in each case.

The causes of the Nationalist failure to hold China are indeed importantly different. Their historic predecessors succumbed in part to the culmination of a long history of misrule, while the Nationalists never really had a chance to face the insistent problems of the nation. Yet in each case the heavy burdens of a Japanese war were almost immediately followed by heavy pressures as a fresh challenger on the northern margins (although the Communist

threat had been incipient for a generation). Certainly the use of fifth column tactics, bribery and skillful propaganda to destroy national unity and public confidence is evident in each case.

The deliberate Manchu pose of efficient reformer rather than alien conqueror has a familiar ring. The exact sequence of events is, of course, varied, but apathy, disunity, confusion, and outright disaffection were abundant elements. The retreat from the crucial northern theater, the momentary stand at the Yangtse, the withdrawal to the southeast coast and the rallying of defiant resistance on the offshore islands, a pattern peculiar to the two eras, is a striking culmination of the historic parallel.

Realizing all of this as we stand at our moment of time, there arises an almost insistent temptation to project the analogy. But here we must pause and change our focus. For we would be guilty of an unforgivable historical blindness if we failed to recognize that there are also *differences* of overwhelming significance between the contexts of the times.

If the domestic political question in China were only a matter of a new government in the old tradition there would be little cause for critical concern. The Manchu preten-

sions toward reform in keeping with the historic Chinese pattern were not entirely a dishonest pose. But the chaos of China over the last century represents not just a troubled transition from one dynasty to another, it expresses the agony of a comprehensive cultural revolution that is remaking Chinese society. No new government can emulate the traditional patterns, for these have crumbled under a century of cultural conflict of the greatest magnitude.

Both of the modern movements, Nationalist and Communist, therefore necessarily represent revolution, not reform. Moreover, the ultimate pattern of that revolution is of global significance and the struggle in China is but one strand in a web of mortal contention among the great ideologies of the world. One could press for a more complete analogy and equate the Russian support of Red China with the Mongol warriors who joined the Manchus, and find for the Western powers' position *vis-a-vis* the Nationalists a precedent in the Portuguese cannon which were offered (but never used) in support of the Mings. But to do so would be guilty of making history a plaything rather than a vital reservoir of human experience.

There are lessons in history. But if we cannot dismiss the past as irrelevant, neither can we accept it as prologue. What we must do is study it as objectively as possible for whatever meaning it may have. The historical parallel presented here is worthy of our attention. The political storms rage unabated and who, in the midst of the shifting winds of these days, would be bold enough to say that the analogy is necessarily at an end? But lest our reading of history make us simply accept such a conclusion as "logical" or inevitable, we must likewise understand that the *differences* of today are vital and make it imperative that we resist with all our energies a modern projection of this historic pattern of events. History reveals striking analogies between the Manchu and Communists conquests; should the latter remain dominant for long, we can assuredly expect that history will likewise reveal striking disparities in their ultimate consequences to China and to the world.



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