

The Politics of Suzue Gen'ichi's

*Class Conflicts in the Chinese Revolution*¹

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The year 1930 marked the triumph of Chiang Kai-shek's 蔣介石 Guomindang 國民黨 (GMD or Nationalist) government in Nanjing. During the previous years, the GMD armies had won a series of military victories from the Northern Expedition in 1926 to a crackdown on subsequent uprisings led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Shanghai (1927), Nanchang (1927), Guangzhou (1927), and finally in Changsha (1930).³ Chiang's leftist rival within the GMD, Wang Jingwei 汪精衛, established the abortive Wuhan government in 1927 but merged with the Nanjing Government after only three months. Although the GMD government had not established direct administrative control over the whole of China, most of China's territory, including the Northeastern region under the control of General Zhang Xueliang 張學良, was (at least in name) united under the GMD's "blue sky and bright sun" flag in 1928. Importantly, the GMD regime had established a firm alliance with the financial and industrial forces of the major treaty ports, mainly in East and South China, giving it a solid base of support, and it gained widespread recognition by foreign powers as China's legitimate central government. For the first time since the downfall of the Qing dynasty, China regained the stability and political consolidation it had so long been without.

The fundamental issues which had given rise to the revolution, however, remained unresolved. These circumstances pushed Suzue Gen'ichi 鈴江言 — to argue: (1) insofar as the imperialists forcibly maintained and developed their interests through their Chinese agents, there would be more direct imperialist conflicts and finally a war in China; and (2) as a consequence, in the new stage of the Chinese revolution (different from the first stage), the Nationalist government had lost the right to lead and only the CCP could now guide China to ultimate victory.

¹ *Chūgoku kakumei no kaikyū tairitsu* 中國革命の階級対立 (Class Conflicts in the Chinese Revolution). This book was published in Tokyo by Taihōkaku in 1930. It was revised by Sakatani Yoshinao 阪谷芳直 and republished as issue numbers 272 and 275 in the Tōyō bunko 東洋文庫 Series by Heibonsha in 1975. Sakatani's revised version may be taken as the essence of Suzue's study of the Chinese revolution.

² I would like to thank Professor Edward Friedman, Professor Joshua A. Fogel, and an anonymous reader for helping me ready this paper for publication.

³ After the Nationalist government took Changsha back following the CCP Uprising on August 5, 1930, the CCP had to abandon the Comintern's urban uprising strategy. It would not occupy China's big cities again until 1946.

On August 15, 1930 (ten days after the CCP's failure during the Changsha Uprising), Suzue declared in the preface to his *Chūgoku kakumei no kaikyū tairitsu* (Class Conflicts in the Chinese Revolution) that the bourgeois democratic revolution, which had been led by China's national bourgeoisie, had reached a dead end. According to Suzue, the national bourgeoisie surrendered to imperialism, compromised with feudal landlords, and abandoned its former allies; the GMD and the Nationalist government were in general, he argued, comprised of the national bourgeoisie, feudal landlords, comprador bourgeoisie (*maiban* 買辦), warlords, and the bureaucracy; they were the general agencies of the imperialist powers, and they had lost the right to lead the revolution.

Consciously emulating Karl Kautsky's approach in his *Class Struggles in the French Revolution*,⁴ Suzue argued that, during the process of the Chinese revolution, ordinary people had been subjected to years of continuous chaos. China had been wracked by fighting between warlords, various military coups, student movements, boycotts of foreign goods, Communist uprisings, rural conflicts, looting, and the like. But, Suzue added, the revolution was only superficially chaotic and that in fact an accurate analysis of the substantive conditions of the Chinese revolution would illustrate a much different picture. The revolution, which had to some degree disillusioned the people who considered it "chaos," was actually moving along a purposeful trajectory. Suzue, therefore, wrote this book to pursue two ends: (1) to illustrate the logic of events for those who saw only a string of unrelated, chaotic happenings; and (2) to gather the necessary research for those who wanted to understand events in China from a Marxist perspective.

Though Suzue was not initially a Marxist in his theoretical approach, his own research and thinking about Chinese political affairs led him to draw Marxist conclusions. In his estimation, Marxism offered the best methodology with which to analyze the respective characters of the contending classes in China. In the first chapter, "Warlords and Bureaucracy," Suzue argued that the status and activities of warlords depended upon the colonial exploitation of imperialism on the whole. Ultimately the warlords opposed the national unification of China and instead hoped to maintain the old feudal relations in order to dominate workers and peasants. The warlords were militant representatives of the landlord class, but still lacked the capacity to govern the whole of China on their own.⁵ For this, they needed the bureaucracy as their political representative. By bureaucracy, Suzue meant only administrative power, because, as he rightly observed soon after arriving in Beijing, there existed no independent legislative or judicial system in China.

⁴ Suzue studied German under the guidance of Nakae Ushikichi 中江丑吉 in Beijing. Together they read the works of Marx, Hegel, and Kant in the original German. See Itō Takeo's 伊藤武雄 postscript for Suzue's *Son Bun den* 孫文伝 (A Biography of Sun Yat-sen) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1950), p. 537.

⁵ The professional diplomat, Gu Weijun 顧維均, who worked as Yuan Shikai's 袁世凱 English secretary and Wu Peifu's 吳佩孚 Foreign Affairs Minister, was a model bureaucrat during these periods. He excelled when having to fend off the incursions of other government departments. Gu tended to prevail, but on several occasions he threatened to resign from his position in order to guarantee that he could proceed without interference.

Suzue also recognized the importance of China's countryside. In Chapter 2, "Landlords, Local Tyrants and Evil Gentry (*tuhao lieshen* 土豪劣紳), and Peasants," Suzue noticed that despite the fact that the fundamental issue for peasants--land reform--had not been resolved, the Nationalist government had begun to dissolve peasant associations. It turned to the old ruling classes of landlords and "local tyrants and evil gentry" to maintain its interests in the rural areas. Actually, many Nationalist government officers themselves were great landlords, occupying all the land near the capital city of Nanjing. Suzue, therefore, concluded that the GMD paid only lip service to Sun Yat-sen's "equalization of land rights" policy when it wanted to utilize peasants and as a result had lost the right to mobilize its supporters around the issue of land. The more the GMD promised the peasants, the further the peasants would move away from the GMD. And where would these peasants go with their aroused political consciousness? They would be drawn by the propaganda of the CCP. By using a class-centered analysis, Suzue was able to predict that it was the underground CCP, not the ruling GMD, which could carry out the task of China's national revolution.⁶ This choice on the part of the peasants would eventually determine China's destiny in the final civil war (1946-49).

The Marxist argument about the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe emphasized that the bourgeoisie was able to unite the working class and peasantry to fight against surviving feudal elements. But the picture was somewhat different in less economically developed countries. In pre-revolutionary Russia, Lenin argued in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, three-quarters of the big Russian banks were dominated by foreign capital. Trotsky also emphasized in *A History of the Russian Revolution* that 40 percent of Russian industries were controlled by foreign capital. These situations led to substantially different conclusions: (1) foreign capitalists would prevent the Russian bourgeoisie from developing to its full capacity; (2) the Russian bourgeoisie had neither the interest nor the ability to develop Russian industry; and 3) only the Russian proletariat could therefore thoroughly promote national industry. Based on his own observations, Suzue took the same Marxist approach, applying the same concepts quite easily to the Chinese case. In the preface to his book, Suzue argued that when some Chinese landlords, after harshly exploiting the peasantry, at last put on their (capitalist) caps, they found that China's important coasts, rivers, mines, railways, customs, and banks were completely under the control of the imperialists. The Chinese bourgeoisie thus lacked the objective foundation to develop national industry.

In Chapter 3, "The Bourgeoisie and Imperialism," Suzue sought to show that a Marxist perspective best explained the Chinese revolution. If China's national bourgeoisie could not complete the so-called national revolution, then they would naturally try to ally themselves with the other powerful, propertied class of feudal landlords, surrender to imperialism, and abandon the nationalist cause. This dynamic explained the distinctive character of China's capitalist development, China's industrial development, and hence the revolution's development. In short, the Chinese revolution,

⁶ In the preface to *Chūgoku kaihō tōsō shi* 中国解放闘争史 (A History of the Chinese Liberation Struggle) (Tokyo: Ishizaki shoten, 1953), p. 8, Suzue further argued: "The first characteristic of the Chinese revolution is that it is a social revolution while at the same time a national liberation revolution against foreign imperialist domination."

now led by the CCP, was simultaneously a thoroughgoing national liberation movement and a social revolution.

As for Chinese intellectuals, Suzue continued, they played a leading role in the revolution during the overthrow of the Qing dynasty and the May Fourth Movement, but they lost influence quickly as the Chinese revolution gathered pace (Chapter 4, “Intellectuals”). Since 1923,⁷ a new class, the proletariat, had stepped onto the political stage of the Chinese revolution as an independent force. Jiang betrayed his former “regenerating parents” (workers and peasants) because he felt threatened by the independent movement of workers led by the CCP. Here Suzue’s analysis draws on policies taken directly from the Executive Bureau of the Communist International (Comintern). In addition to assigning the proletariat the leading role in the Chinese revolution, he also elevated the Chinese proletariat to central importance in the international front against imperialism, which relied on exploitation of the colonies (Chapter 5, “Workers”).

Even though Suzue’s book was published in 1930, long before the final victory of the CCP in 1949, contemporary readers will be struck by how closely Suzue’s account mirrors official versions of the period subsequently published in the People’s Republic of China.⁸ Suzue agreed completely with the Comintern and CCP perspective of a Chinese revolution in two stages: the first stage, the old revolution led by Sun Yat-sen, was seen as a bourgeois democratic revolution; the second stage, the new revolution led by the CCP, would be a proletarian revolution. Suzue emphasized that due to the fact that China’s proletarian population (2.7 million industrial workers and twelve million handicraft workers) was larger than Russia’s, the Chinese proletarian revolution would have an even greater chance of victory (Chapter 5, “Workers”).

Readers may feel that such rough analogies can be faulted for their oversimplifications. Indeed, it may be said that Suzue’s book borrows from the Comintern and the CCP a generally effective perspective, a few brilliant descriptions, some insightful conclusions, as well as a number of ideological defects. This is not the “scientific” theory based on an objective assessment of the historical moment that Suzue (and Itô Takeo 伊藤武雄) initially wanted to employ⁹; rather, in retrospect his analysis

⁷ The Jinghan 京漢 (Beijing-Hankou) Railway general strike in February 1923 first showed Chinese workers’ political independence and the leadership of the newly established CCP.

⁸ For the authoritative historical view sanctioned by the PRC, see Hu Sheng 胡繩, *Cong Yapiān zhānzhēng dào Wǔsì yundòng* 從鴉片戰爭到五四運動 (From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981). In this work, Hu criticizes the recent trend towards employing a “cultural” perspective (with the choice of “salvation or enlightenment”) to degrade the social and political meaning of the Chinese revolution. See Hu’s “Preface” to the second edition of his book, *Jindaiishi yanjiu* 近代史研究 (February 1996).

⁹ Their intention to establish a “scientific” approach had another special academic meaning independent from the needs of SMR business or Japanese politics. As Itô recalled: “As a notice in the new journal, I wrote a piece entitled ‘Toward a Scientific Synthesis of China Studies.’ In it I offered a general overview of European studies [of China] and argued that Japanese studies had not gone beyond the methods and approaches of economics and textual scholarship. I concluded that the new scientific approach could not elucidate matters unless it was based in Marxism.” See Itô, *Mantetsu ni ikite* 滿鐵に生きて (Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1964). Translated

was affected by the particular interpretation of events that the Comintern generated in order to offer a political justification for their actions. Completely self-educated,¹⁰ Suzue could not and saw no need to differentiate the ideological policy of the Comintern from the reality of the Chinese revolution. He had already shown his excellence as a field researcher. In fact, after the CCP shifted its focus from urban to rural areas, Suzue lost contact with them and could not continue his important work on the Chinese revolution. He had no exposure to Mao's strategy within the CCP which ultimately led to final victory in the Chinese revolution. Later, he could merely assert his belief that the CCP would eventually achieve victory, but was unable to offer any "scientific" evidence to prove his case.

It is significant that such a thoroughly Marxist book was written by an employee of the South Manchurian Railway Company (SMR),¹¹ a company whose research department carried out research in order to counsel the interest of Japanese policy on the mainland. Suzue's book served as a report for the SMR, and much to Suzue's dismay, Japanese imperialism eventually became the main enemy of the Chinese revolution. In September 1929, his *Chūgoku musan kaikyū undō shi* 中國無產階級運動史 (History of the Chinese Proletarian Movement) was published under conditions of extreme secrecy by the SMR.¹² In September 1930, Taihōkaku published *Chūgoku kakumei no kaikyū tairitsu*, essentially a compact version of *Chūgoku musan kaikyū undō shi*.

Suzue's other major work, *Son Bun den* 孫文傳, is also crucial for understanding the Chinese revolution. In September 1931, Kaizōsha 改造社 published this book with the author listed as Wang Shuzhi 王樞之, a Chinese name, in order to minimize political controversy in Japan. Suzue wrote the biography not as a report on Sun's personal activities but for the purpose of studying the first stage of the Chinese revolution under Sun's leadership.¹³ He traced its origins back to the Taiping Rebellion (1851-65). Due to a lack of primary materials and/or personal experience with the subject matter, however,

by Joshua A. Fogel, *Life Along the South Manchurian Railway* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), p. 109. Also see note 11.

¹⁰ Suzue lost his father when he was a schoolboy and could not continue his studies after his teens.

¹¹ Also known as Mantetsu, the abbreviation for Minami Manshū tetsudō kakushiki gaisha 南滿州鐵道株式会社 (South Manchurian Railway Company). Besides military and economic information, the SMR collected a wide variety of materials on general Chinese affairs. It also organized a huge research project on the rural customs in Northeast China. As a director of SMR, Itō encouraged Suzue to "scientifically" study China and arranged for Suzue to receive a special position with a salary from the SMR.

¹² Published by Ishizaki shoten in 1953 with a new title, *Chūgoku kaihō tōsō shi*.

¹³ "Son Bun den was written from a Marxist perspective. Because of this, the book represented a particular view of the history of the nationalist revolution and the most accurate biography of Sun." (p. 5) "Sun was a leader in the struggle during the time when China's bourgeoisie was revolutionary. He emerged as the leader of the first stage in China's bourgeois movement and went away precisely when the bourgeoisie had come to the historical end of its revolutionary role." (p.2) *Son Bun den* republished by Iwanami shoten in 1950.

this book is much less compelling than *Chūgoku kakumei no kaikyū tairistu* which contains the essence of Suzue's study of the Chinese revolution.¹⁴

Understanding the works of any pioneer thinker about society is inextricably linked to the project of understanding that thinker's life. But aside from Joshua Fogel's brief mention of Suzue's life before 1928, Suzue's work is not known beyond the Japanese-speaking world despite his important study of the Chinese revolution.¹⁵ Fogel recounts Suzue's family background, unfinished education and work experience in Tokyo, and his correspondence writings for Japanese magazines during his first years in Beijing.¹⁶ Fogel also mentions Suzue's participation in the Chinese labor movement (in Beijing, Qingdao, and Wuhan) and his relationship with Nakae Ushikichi 中江丑吉 and Itō. As his chapter subtitle "Suzue Gen'ichi: A Life Dedicated to the Chinese Revolution" suggests, Fogel emphasizes the respect Suzue earned as a participant in the Chinese revolution but does not deal with Suzue's works on the Chinese revolution. Moreover, suspicions that Suzue was secretly a member of the CCP (aired by Itō and Sakatani, later claimed by Etō Shinkichi 衛藤瀧吉 and Hsü Shu-chen 許叔眞¹⁷) leads Fogel to speculate about why Suzue had no contacts with Japanese radical circles.

A more complete treatment of Suzue requires some supplementary information, especially as regards his relationship to the Chinese revolution. Born in 1894, the same year that China and Japan entered into the First Sino-Japanese War, Suzue throughout his life did not involve himself in Japan's political conflicts. Nor did he have any knowledge of Marxism before he left for China. In the middle of the Taishō period (March 1919), disillusioned with his circumstances in Japan, he left for Beijing with an uncertain "Pan-

¹⁴ As Professor Marius Jansen, the only English-language researcher to mention Suzue's work, has argued, "Suzue Gen'ichi's *Son Bun Den* (Tokyo, 1950), 555 pp., is useful, but marred by the author's attempt to give a complete interpretation of the Chinese revolution in Marxist terms. Sun frequently drops out of sight." Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 230.

¹⁵ Suzue's work on the Chinese revolution does often read like "textbook Marxism," perhaps making it hard for English-speaking researchers to appreciate his unique contribution.

¹⁶ Joshua A. Fogel, "Suzue Gen'ichi: A Life Dedicated to the Chinese Revolution," in *Nakae Ushikichi in China: The Mourning of Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1989), pp. 44-47.

¹⁷ Etō claims that "Suzue was probably the only Japanese who held close relations with the organizational center of the CCP" (p. i); and Hsü states that: "From 1928 until 1932, Suzue traveled between Japan and China as a *secret envoy* of the Comintern." Etō Shinkichi and Hsu Shu-chen, *Suzue Gen'ichi den: Chūgoku kakumei ni kaketa ichi Nihonjin 鈴江言一伝: 中国革命にかけた一日本人* (Biography of Suzue Gen'ichi: The Life of a Japanese Dedicated to the Chinese Revolution) (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1984). However, the book offers no direct evidence of Suzue's membership in the CCP or the Comintern besides his friendship with some CCP members. Moreover, after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, many documents relevant to Japanese Communists and others (for example, Nosaka Sanzō 野坂参三) have become available to the public, but as yet no document mentioning the name of Suzue Gen'ichi has been forthcoming.

Asianism.”¹⁸ Fortunately, his timely arrival in China enabled him to witness firsthand the May Fourth Movement--the beginning of the subsequent (new) Chinese revolution. During these first years in China, Suzue showed no particular interest in Marxism and watched Chinese society through ordinary Japanese eyes. He noted the degeneration of the Beijing judicial system, the corruption of politicians and the bureaucracy, and the necessity of a central Chinese government for the imperialists (because no single imperialist could occupy China). As expressed in the preface of *Chūgoku kaihō tōsō shi*, it was the Chinese revolution and its promise of radical change during the 1920’s which stimulated Suzue’s thirst to study. He abandoned aspects of his lifestyle that marked him as a Japanese, lived as common Chinese people did (with a Chinese name), and became acquainted with Beijing’s radical activities. It was during this time that he gradually adopted a Marxist perspective on Chinese society.

In 1924, Suzue also had the chance, in a large crowd gathered at the Beijing railway station, to catch a glimpse of Sun Yat-sen. This was quite meaningful for Suzue because he also admired the Miyazaki brothers who had devoted their lives to Sun’s revolution.¹⁹ However, Suzue soon came to understand that Sun’s time, along with the bourgeois revolution, was over and that he would not have the same opportunities to participate in events as had the Miyazaki brothers. Suzue, therefore, found himself caught. He did not have the educational background that enabled Nakae Ushikichi, another Japanese expatriate, to become a serious scholar of Chinese history. Instead, Suzue had to search out a different approach to integrating his political interests with whatever self-taught talents and enthusiasm he had. Finally, he found it. While fully utilizing the opportunity to collect Comintern and CCP documents to carry out his scholarly work, Suzue could not refrain from identifying with the revolution, becoming a sympathizer in addition to an observer. He was one of two Japanese to participate in the three-month-long abortive Wuhan Government in 1927.

Proud of his involvement with the CCP, Suzue sometimes behaved toward other Japanese as if he was a member of the CCP, especially when he translated Comintern or CCP messages for Japanese Communists. But until today, there is really no hard evidence (neither in Japan nor in China) documenting his formal membership in the CCP. Suzue did not take an active role in the Chinese revolution,²⁰ except during his participation in the Wuhan Government under Su Zhaozheng’s 蘇兆征 Labor Bureau.

¹⁸ Until their surrender in 1945, many Japanese youths concentrated their concerns on how to “manage” “Greater Asia” under the leadership of Japan. Many of them, including Suzue, took a xenophobic attitude toward white Westerners. See Etô and Hsü, *Suzue Genichi den*, p. 40.

¹⁹ The Miyazaki brothers, especially the younger Miyazaki Tôten 宮崎滔天 (1871-1922), devoted their lives to the first stage of the Chinese revolution. “One may question the presence of some of the Japanese at the ceremonies for Sun Yat-sen in 1929, but Miyazaki, had he lived, would have stood there with as much right as anyone in the procession.” (Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*, p. 58). Recently, the story of the Miyazaki brothers has been revived as the Japanese have turned their concerns to Asia again. For example, see Yamamuro Shin’ichi 山室信一, “Ajia, gensô kara jitsuzô e” アジア：幻想から実像へ(Asia, from delusion to reality), *Asahi shinbun*, August 14, 1996.

²⁰ See Etô and Hsü, “A Chronological Biography of Suzue Gen’ichi,” in *Suzue Genichi den*, pp. 233-60.

Suzue's participation was limited only to this minor post. In the first instance, his presence in Wuhan was not due to his relationship with the CCP (in the sense of being instructed or ordered by the CCP to do so); he went initially of his own intellectual and scholarly curiosity about events there and partly because he received permission from the SMR (Itô) to go as an observer. And because of his personal friendship with Su Zhaozheng (whom he had met during the Qingdao strike in May 1925), he was treated as a friend and a guest (he described himself as a "state-level guest"). This also fit nicely with the aims of the CCP: a neutral foreigner with a talent as a chronicler of events was much more useful than an additional member (Edgar Snow played a similar, much greater role in later years).

Even after he mastered Marxism, Japanese politics did not interest Suzue enough for him to attempt a Marxist analysis of Japan. Besides, the political situation in Japan was completely different from that in China; in fact, it would have been dangerous for Suzue to "scientifically" study Japanese politics. And it was only Suzue's interest in studying the Chinese revolution that led him to establish ties to the CCP. Suzue was dedicated to the study of the 1920's Chinese revolution, but not to the movement of the Chinese revolution.

Nonetheless, Suzue's novel contributions to scholarship about the Chinese revolution cannot be replaced by other studies. He offers us a field study of the Chinese revolution as well as evidence of the relevance of Marxism for understanding the new stage of the Chinese revolution since the 1920's. During the Chinese revolution of the 1920's, Suzue was an onlooker, an information collector, an observer, a sympathizer, a friend, and a guest. Ultimately, he established himself as a pioneering researcher with this book, *Chûgoku kakumei no kaikyû tairitsu*, a classic of the period.