

The Abortive American-Chinese Project for Chinese Revolution, 1908-1911

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WHILE MUCH HAS BEEN written about the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the role played by Americans in the event remains largely overlooked.¹ The recent acquisition of the Charles Beach Boothe Papers by Stanford University's Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace now makes it possible to discuss and analyze the role of those few Americans who tried to overthrow the moribund Manchu regime. These men, including Homer Lea, a self-styled "general," and his cohort, Charles Beach Boothe, a successful businessman, made grandiose promises of military and economic aid to the Chinese reformists and revolutionaries—a motley crew ranging from K'ang Yu-wei to Sun Yat-sen—who in turn pledged financial rewards to their American backers.²

American involvement in Chinese reformist and revolutionary movements, military and financial, had been initiated largely

¹ Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 143-144, 172-173. Jansen briefly refers to the activities of such Americans as Homer Lea, who was appointed Sun Yat-sen's personal military advisor in 1911-1912, and a Mr. Dietrick of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, who was granted powers of attorney to organize a "department store trust" in 1915. Frederic L. Chapin, in "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution" (unpublished A. B. Honors thesis, Harvard University, 1950), 90-111, deals primarily with Lea's military advice to Sun.

² The Charles Beach Boothe Papers, now being processed for public use, consist of about 120 letters, newspaper clippings, and other materials related primarily to financial dealings between American supporters and Chinese reformers and revolutionaries. The documents cover the period from April 7, 1908, to April 13, 1911. Unless otherwise indicated, all correspondence is from the Boothe Papers.

through the efforts of K'ang Yu-wei and Sun Yat-sen. While studying in Hawaii in the 1880s, Sun had first become acquainted with several dedicated, though not wealthy, Americans. In 1895 these individuals had contributed their time and talent to Sun's first unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Manchu house.³ Undeterred by this military misadventure, Sun had continued to sow the seeds of revolution and to attempt to solicit further American support. Despite his efforts, however, he had failed to obtain American aid in these early years.⁴

The reformist leader, K'ang Yu-wei, who in 1898 had led an abortive "One Hundred Day Reform" movement under the patronage of Emperor Kuang-hsü, was as dedicated as Sun. In 1900 he had employed Homer Lea as a secret agent to lead an ill-fated armed revolt in south and central China. K'ang had hired Lea on the recommendations of two important reformist leaders—Reverend Ng Poon Chew, editor of a Chinese newspaper (*the Chung Sai Yat Po*) in Los Angeles, and Dr. Tom She Bin, head of the Emperor Protection Society (*the Pao-huang Hui*) in San Francisco. Both men had been impressed with Lea's knowledge of military affairs which, incidently, he had acquired solely from irregular readings on the subject while attending Stanford University.⁵ Despite the failure of the revolt of 1900, Lea had sustained his interest in Chinese affairs. In 1901, on his way back to the United States, he had met Sun Yat-sen in Japan. Convinced of Lea's military expertise, Sun had prom-

³ Lo Hsiang-lin, *Kuo-fu yü ou-mei chih yu-hao* [Sun Yat-sen and His Friendship with the West] (Taipei, 1951), 11-12. See also Feng Tzu-yu, *Hua-ch'iao ko-ming k'ai-kuo shih* [Overseas Chinese and Their History of the Revolution for Founding the Republic of China] (Taipei, 1953), 27.

⁴ Feng Tzu-yu, *Chung-hua min-kuo k'ai-kuo ch'ien ko-ming shih* [The Revolutionary History before Founding the Republic of China] (Taipei, 1954), I, 155. In 1904 Sun wrote a pamphlet, "The True Solution of the Chinese Question," which he distributed to prospective American supporters. In Chinese translation it can be found in the Kuomintang Historical Commission, ed., *Kuo-fu ch'üan-chi* [Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen] (2nd ed., Taipei, 1961), VI, 220-226.

⁵ According to Chapin, Lea had gained some military experience during the Spanish-American War while serving with the California National Guard Cavalry, an emergency home defense force. Later Lea established in Los Angeles the Western Military Academy to train Chinese reformist soldiers. In 1905 he also established in Los Angeles the Chinese Imperial Army Headquarters in an effort to recruit 40,000 men from twenty American cities. Nothing is mentioned, however, of Lea's military activities between 1905 and 1908. Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 7, 12-13, 19-25, 34-40. For Lea's coalition with Sun Yat-sen, see W. W. Allen to Charles B. Boothe, Jan. 21, 1909. See also Lyon Sharman, *Sun Yat-sen: His Life and Its Meaning* (New York, 1934), 134.

ised to make Lea his "chief military advisor." At a subsequent meeting held in California in 1904, Sun and Lea discussed strategy for a future military operation in China.⁶

Despite his new relationship with Sun, who was determined to overthrow the Manchu court by force and establish a Chinese republic, Lea had never lost the confidence of Sun's political rivals, especially K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao. These latter were reformists who, while also interested in the overthrow of the Manchu government, wished to preserve the monarchical system in China. By 1900 the reformists were advocating an armed revolt against the Manchus in order to restore the reign of Emperor Kuang-hsü, whose power had been usurped by the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi in the wake of the One Hundred Day Reform of 1898. Indeed, when Lea and Sun had met in 1904, Lea was already a "marshal" of the reformist army, having been commissioned by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, a lieutenant of K'ang Yu-wei. In 1905 K'ang and Lea had an audience with President Theodore Roosevelt in Washington, to whom they explained their reformist cause and activities in the United States. Though Roosevelt had listened sympathetically, he promised nothing.⁷

For the next three years, Lea and K'ang had not worked closely together because of a disappointment over the handling of party funds raised from Chinese residing in the United States. Over Lea's objections, K'ang had invested those funds, a sum of nearly \$800,000, in Mexican business enterprises.⁸ In April 1908, when K'ang arrived in Los Angeles to solicit support, Lea and K'ang had patched up their differences, though their relationship never became as close as before. In the intervening year, however, Lea had changed his approach to the China question and had begun advocating support from American government and business leaders. The event most directly responsible for altering his attitude was a massive Chinese boycott of American goods called in 1905 to pro-

⁶ Carl Glick, *Double Ten—Captain O'Banion's Story of the Chinese Revolution* (New York, 1945), 153-154. See also Joseph W. Hall and Herbert H. Gowen, *An Outline History of China* (New York, 1934), 352; Feng Tzu-yu, *Ko-ming i-shih* [The Episodal History of the Revolution] (Taipei, 1953), I, 155.

⁷ Feng, *Ko-ming i-shih*, I, 155. See also Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 71, 77-78.

⁸ Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 89; see also Allen to Boothe, Jan. 21, 1909.

test the United States' unilateral renewal of the Chinese exclusion treaty in 1904. Although the effect of the boycott was not serious, Lea believed that American trade interests in China would be permanently damaged. Desiring to offset the effects of the treaty and to increase trade with China, Lea appealed to American government and business leaders for help in overthrowing the Manchus. When they rebuffed him, he turned to a number of Chinese reformists and revolutionaries. This time he was more successful. Though the reformists and revolutionaries were motivated differently, they agreed that the Manchus had to go.⁹

Lea's lack of success in obtaining American support was not surprising. By 1908 the American people and their government were not really interested in either Chinese revolution or better relations with China. Theodore Roosevelt continued to uphold the "Open Door" policy and thereby maintain equal opportunities for the Western powers in China. To preserve the balance of power, Roosevelt tried to check Tsarist Russia's expansion in Asia by helping the Japanese. This policy was costly and disastrous: the United States was forced to make a series of concessions, including recognition of Japanese supremacy over Korea and southern Manchuria, after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. These arrangements were made unilaterally without any regard for China's territorial or sovereign rights and caused much bitterness among the Chinese.¹⁰

There were other signs of discord between China and the United States. In 1904, the unilateral renewal of the Chinese exclusion treaty, mentioned earlier, had irritated the Peking government as well as the American business community. To protest this high-handed action, Chinese merchants in 1905 had boycotted American goods in several treaty ports. As a result, the export of goods, particularly textiles, was nearly stopped. A political uproar then ensued in the United States and Roosevelt's administration was pressured by business interests to improve relations with China. Ignoring Chinese pride, the American government demanded an immediate cessation of the boycott, and succeeded in restoring American trade and interests considerably, if not completely, by

⁹ Homer Lea to Boothe, April 7, 1908.

¹⁰ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (5th ed., New York, 1965), 479-502. For a detailed discussion, see Howard K. Beal, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore, 1956), 172-252.

means of threat—the demonstration of military might—which China could not match. This action—often characterized as “gun-boat” diplomacy—contributed to the further disintegration of American-Chinese relations. Even after William Howard Taft became President in 1909, relations between the two countries did not improve, primarily because his “dollar” diplomacy was little more than an attempt to maintain the policies of his predecessors.¹¹

Under these difficult circumstances, neither Chinese reformists nor revolutionaries could generate American interest, official or private, in their schemes to overthrow the Manchus. Hence, they turned to the overseas Chinese for financial aid. Although some monetary assistance was secured, especially from those Chinese living in Southeast Asia, Japan, and North America, the campaign failed to raise sufficient funds.¹² The failure of armed revolts in China, the leadership struggles between the reformist and revolutionary groups, and the opposition of the Japanese government to Chinese revolutionary activities discouraged the overseas Chinese from providing as much as they might have.¹³

Because of earlier disappointments, the Chinese reformists and revolutionaries alike responded positively when in 1908 Lea proposed an American-Chinese military adventure aimed at the overthrow of the Manchus. To implement this plan, Lea persuaded Charles Beach Boothe, formerly an officer with the American Exchange Bank in New York City and now living in retirement in southern California, to try and obtain funds necessary for a joint military operation in China. The recruitment of Boothe augured well for the cause because even after retirement he had remained active in business in the Los Angeles area and also maintained connections with financiers in the East. In September 1908 Boothe was sent east to discuss the project with the American government, eastern business leaders, and a noted Chinese reformist leader, Yung Wing.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Huang Chen-wu, *Hua-ch'iao yü Chung-kuo ko-ming* [Overseas Chinese and the Chinese Revolution of 1911] (Taipei, 1963), 203–219. For more information on the source of the income of Sun's *T'ung-meng Hui* (the Federal Association of China), see Shelly Hsien Cheng, “The T'ung-meng-hui: Its Organization, Leadership, and Finances, 1905–1912” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1962).

¹³ Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*, 119–123.

¹⁴ Lea to Boothe, April 7, 1908.

Though Lea and K'ang had earlier failed to get Roosevelt to support the Chinese reformist cause, Lea thought Boothe should try again to convince the President. Lea believed that, if Boothe were successful in obtaining the monetary or moral support of the three principal American interests in China (the cotton growers associations, cotton-piece goods association, and the trans-Pacific transportation companies), Roosevelt might be persuaded to appoint Lea as American consul-general in Canton, the city where the business interests of the three groups were focused. As consul-general, Lea thought that he could restore "American trade to the condition . . . prior to the Boycott [of 1905]" and also bring "several tens of millions of dollars to the American people annually." But, alas, Boothe convinced neither the American business nor government leaders to support Lea's grand project for China.¹⁵

Despite this rebuff, Lea and Boothe never ceased to seek out prospective American supporters. Their efforts paid off when Boothe won over his boyhood friend, W. W. Allen, who had organized the Guggenheim Exploration Company and been associated for many years with some of the largest financial houses of New York and London. In late 1908 Allen, then a consulting engineer for the League Club of New York City, was urged to enlist eastern financiers with promises of future profits. Though initially not too enthusiastic about the project's success, he committed himself to Lea and Boothe.¹⁶

The original plan for the China project was drafted mainly by Lea and Boothe. They proposed that K'ang Yu-wei and other dissidents be brought to Los Angeles to form an "Advisory Board," which was to be composed of both American investors and Chinese reformists. Together they would coordinate the plan for a military campaign against the Manchus in China. Lea had already raised a million dollars in cash and another million in pledges. This sum, plus an additional million dollars (half of which had already been collected by K'ang Yu-wei) pledged by the Chinese living in the United States, made the plan look promising. Still, it was thought that \$5,000,000 would be necessary to guarantee success. And success, Boothe explained, would mean great financial gains for Amer-

¹⁵ Lea to Boothe, Sept. 21, 1908.

¹⁶ Boothe to Yung Wing, Dec. 28, 1908; Boothe to W. W. Allen, Nov. 18, 1908; Allen to Boothe, Nov. 25, 1908.

ican investors. He promised repayment to investors within six months and offered additional inducements in the form of mining and railroad concessions. If Americans backed the project financially, he promised that the Manchus would be defeated within eighteen months at the most. Financial and military operations would be coordinated and executed by Boothe and Lea respectively in consultation with the Chinese reformists.¹⁷

At first Allen did not respond favorably to this plan. He saw no need for creating an advisory board nor did he believe that the Chinese would be able to repay American backers "within six months or so," or benefit the Americans through trade. Allen pointed out that, according to the official statistics on American trade with China published in the *Foreign Commerce and Navigations of the United States*, the Americans had increased trade profits without the help of the Chinese reformists. Moreover, Allen, unlike Lea, asserted that American trade with China had not been set back by the 1905 boycott. For these reasons, he foresaw difficulty in attracting American investors into the advisory board. He also had serious doubts about the strength and influence of the reformists in China. Although he ultimately agreed with reluctance to negotiate the loans, Allen wanted more substantive "data and other requirements" about potential profits before he approached those who might give "their cooperation in a project of a great magnitude."¹⁸

In the meantime, Lea and Boothe had described the project to Yung Wing, who, unlike Allen, responded enthusiastically. Yung had been living in Hartford, Connecticut, since his escape from China as a political exile who had allegedly been connected with the "One Hundred Day Reform" debacle engineered by K'ang Yu-wei and his followers. Although he was not as influential as K'ang, Yung was still an important figure, who was highly respected by the moderate, Western-educated Chinese. Boothe, while on his trip east in September 1908, had explained the nature of the project to Yung and received the latter's endorsement. The only questions Yung raised were when and how the Chinese leaders should be brought to the United States. If these problems could be ironed out, he thought chances of success for the project would be great. Yung

¹⁷ Boothe to Allen, Nov. 18, 1908.

¹⁸ Allen to Boothe, Nov. 25, 1908.

was so optimistic about the outcome that he even believed he might be able to appoint Lea a "Viceroy" and Boothe a "Baron" in the new Chinese government. Yung also offered to send his son to China to assess the situation and remove any doubts Allen still had about the project's success.¹⁹

Impressed with Yung's offer and pressured by Lea and Boothe, Allen agreed to negotiate a loan with the agents of J. P. Morgan in January 1909. He believed, however, that the overthrow of the Manchus would require more than the \$5,000,000 estimated by Lea and Boothe. That sum had not rested on a careful analysis of military costs in China. Allen believed that a request for \$9,000,000 would be more realistic and acceptable to the financiers he might approach and that was the amount he hoped to obtain.²⁰

Although all seemed to be going smoothly, a series of unexpected political developments in China and differences of opinion among the plotters in America complicated the matter. In November 1908 Emperor Kuang-hsü and the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi suddenly died. In the wake of these deaths, Yung proposed an alliance with Yüan Shih-k'ai rather than with K'ang Yu-wei. In Yung's opinion, Yüan, who had risen to power in late 1908 and then been removed by the Regent Prince Ch'un early in 1909, would serve the project better than K'ang, whose influence in China was doubtful. In the first place, Yüan had been disgraced and therefore would be ready to cooperate with anyone who was against the Manchus. Moreover, Yüan might be induced to come to the United States under the pretext of having his children educated and then be persuaded to join in the China project. Yung argued further that such an alliance was desirable because Yüan had not only demonstrated his statesmanship to the world but had also gained "the respect and the good opinion of all the foreign representatives in Peking." On the other hand, K'ang was an unreliable leader, who not only lacked followers but also had maliciously accused Yüan of fatally poisoning Emperor Kuang-hsü. Above all, K'ang and Yüan had become mortal enemies following the failure of K'ang's "One Hundred Day Reform" movement, which had collapsed largely because of Yüan's betrayal of

¹⁹ Edmund H. Worthy, Jr., "Yung Wing in America," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXIV (1965), 287; Yung to Lea, Dec. 4, 1908; Yung to Boothe, Dec. 6 and 14, 1908; Boothe to Allen, Dec. 28, 1908.

²⁰ Allen to Boothe, Jan. 21, 1909.

K'ang's patron, Emperor Kuang-hsü. In short, Yung completely wrote off K'ang and, to win Yüan's favor, he also ruled out the possibility of cooperating with any dissident groups in south China because of K'ang's political strength there.²¹

Allen agreed with Yung that K'ang would "never recover a normal position as a safe, and reliable reformer" because of his lack of integrity in money matters. K'ang had raised about \$800,000 from the Chinese in America for his reformist cause and then invested the funds in a street railway company in Veracruz under his daughter's name. Because of his illegal dealings with that company, he had gotten into trouble with the Mexican authorities.²² Pressured by both Yung and Allen, Lea and Boothe finally yielded to the demand to dump K'ang, admitting that he "had been unquestionably impulsive, unwise and untactful in some matters."²³

With K'ang out of the picture and Yüan still in China, Yung tried to step into the vacuum and play an important role in the project. He failed, however, largely because his views, especially on military and financial matters, clashed with those of the American backers. The first head-on collision was between Yung and Allen and took place at their initial meeting. Allen wrote of this encounter:

I found that our ideas run very parallel, the principal divergence being a rather persistent idea on his part that operations should be started from some point, which he has in mind, and spread from there over the whole territory. My idea is that the ground should be prepared in advance by negotiations with very prominent local people and, when the situation is ripe, that the project should break out all over the country at a given hour and work be done and completed between sunrise and sunset, or between sunset and sunrise, as might be considered wiser. . . . The people who finance the project will not only have the right . . . but will demand as well, to specify, or at least approve of, the method adopted for carrying out the project for which they furnish the money.²⁴

Apart from fundamental differences in military strategy, Allen doubted the possibility of making a profit if Yung were in a position

²¹ Yung to Boothe, Jan. 4, 16, and 25, 1909.

²² Allen to Boothe, Jan. 21, 1909.

²³ Boothe to Allen, Jan. 25, 1909; see also Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 87-88.

²⁴ Allen to Boothe, Jan. 29, 1909.

of authority because he was "illogical in thinking . . . , greedy and financially shrewd." Allen also believed that Yung's political connections were of doubtful value: Yung had tried to serve two masters, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, king of the Taiping kingdom, who had rebelled against the Manchus, and Li Hung-chang, defender of the Manchu regime, who had crushed the Taipings. Obviously, Allen concluded, Yung was a man of "limited patriotism" and considerable "self-interest." Moreover, Yung was too ill-informed about the situation in China and too old to be of help to the project. Allen did not believe that Yung had any trusted representatives in China or any followers, even among Western-educated Chinese.²⁵

Boothe had anticipated the friction between Allen and Yung in a letter he had written to Allen several months earlier. He defended Yung as "a man of great ability, the greatest man of his nation and generation." "His patriotism," Boothe wrote, "is broad and must be unquestioned for I hold in my possession in writing a statement which amounts to absolute self-abnegation on his part." "His reference to himself as a leader," continued Boothe, "is only because he has been made to believe that it is necessary and desirable at this juncture." Boothe emphatically concluded that "I have abundant evidence that he [Yung] has no personal ambition whatever, except to accomplish for his people what he believes most beneficial to them." As to the reliability of Yung's information on China and his political strength there, Boothe was equally encouraging: "He had kept in close touch with movements in his own countries [sic], and to . . . the source of his information he refers with great caution with the purpose of protecting his informants."²⁶

Unable to convince Allen of Yung's ability and integrity, however, Boothe toned down the importance of Yung in the overall plan. Actually it appears that Allen's imputations about Yung were well founded. Yung did not have leadership over the Western-educated Chinese; nor did he possess the integrity requisite of a leader of the China project; and, finally, he did not have a direct source of information on the situation in China.²⁷ Consequently,

²⁵ Allen to Boothe, Jan. 29, Feb. 1, 1909.

²⁶ Boothe to Allen, Dec. 28, 1908, Feb. 3, 1909.

²⁷ Yung had repeatedly asked Boothe to raise an additional \$100,000 for his own personal use to establish near Canton what he called the "Ramie" plants to manufacture synthetic fiber textiles. For this, see Yung to Boothe, Feb. 19, June 5, 1909; Allen

Boothe agreed with Allen to remove Yung as a potential leader of the China project, and further assured Allen that without Yung the planned military operation in China could be adequately handled by "General" Lea who was well versed in Chinese affairs in general and in military affairs in particular.²⁸

Once the trouble over Yung had subsided, Boothe pushed Allen to secure loans from the J. P. Morgan Company in New York. The negotiations were very discouraging, however. Allen reported bitterly to Boothe: "I stated my case very greatly—the reply was concise and clear, running thus:— 'I [a J. P. Morgan representative] am ready to do business with any established government on earth but I cannot . . . make a government to do business with.'" "That was the substance," Allen skeptically concluded, "almost the exact words: It was positive and left us [no] room for doubt as to his position."²⁹ Despite this rebuff, Allen later promised to visit personally with J. P. Morgan and try to change his mind. In turn, Allen asked Boothe and Lea to draft a new proposal, making larger concessions of business rights to American backers in China. In September 1909, Allen, armed with the new proposition for the China project, finally managed to confer with J. P. Morgan, but without success.³⁰ As a consequence, a pall fell over the future prospects of the project.

Disappointed by their setbacks, the plotters contemplated changing their tactics, though not their objective. Even so, the only substantial modification came in the increasingly frequent references to Sun Yat-sen's name in the correspondence of the group. "Sun Yat Sen of Canton," Allen noted, "is considered the most reliable of all.

to Boothe, Feb. 1, 1909. Yung, who as a reformist was not supposed to believe in revolution, supported the revolutionary Sun Yat-sen as a leader of the China project and wanted to work for Sun's revolutionary government in 1912. Yung to Boothe, June 5, 1909; Kuo-fang yen-chiu yüan [National Defense Research Institute], ed., *Kuo-fu ch'üan-shu* [Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen] (Taipei, 1963), 517. According to Yung, T'ang Shou-yi was one of his informants about conditions in China. Yet, while T'ang was visiting Washington and New York in early 1909 as foreign minister of the Peking government, he did not provide Yung with any information about Yüan Shih-k'ai. Indeed, T'ang did not meet personally with Yung during his stay in the United States. Yung to Boothe, Jan. 16, 1909; *New York Herald*, Jan. 24, 1909.

²⁸ Boothe to Allen, Feb. 3, and 12, 1909. Boothe told Allen that Lea's book, *The Valor of Ignorance* (New York, 1909), might easily get an endorsement as well as a foreword from President Roosevelt.

²⁹ Allen to Boothe, Feb. 6, 1909.

³⁰ Allen to Boothe, Feb. 13, 1909; Boothe to Yung, Oct. 2, 1909.

Twice he has nearly taken Canton in his attempts to organize a rebellion.”³¹ Not only did Sun offer a new hope to the project, but he also promised to reinvigorate its members. By the end of 1909, Sun’s revolutionary group, the Federal Association of China (*the T’ung-meng Hui*), was drawing Chinese support away from the reformists led by K’ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch’i-ch’ao. In view of this development and the earlier troubles with such reformists as K’ang Yu-wei and Yung Wing, Lea and his colleagues decided to collaborate with Sun, with whom Lea had had no contacts since 1904. To draft new plans for soliciting funds, Boothe suggested that Yung, who had now recanted his reformist views and thrown his support to Sun’s revolutionary cause, and Sun, who then was in New York, come to Los Angeles. Sun agreed to make the trip. Since he had failed to obtain funds from Chinese residing in the United States, he readily turned to Lea and Boothe, who offered some prospect of delivering the needed money.³²

Following the meeting in late February 1910, Sun, through Yung, asked Lea and Boothe to make \$1,500,000 available immediately and \$2,000,000 subsequently for a planned military campaign in China.³³ To this request, Lea and Boothe responded positively and met again with Sun in mid-March in Los Angeles. They agreed to raise \$3,500,000 from American backers, and also agreed to provide Sun with this amount within seventeen months and in four installments. Since loans from American backers were regarded as a *sine qua non* for the project’s success, Sun agreed to pay American backers three times the amount of their loans plus interest.³⁴

To coordinate American and Chinese efforts to carry out the revolution in China, Lea, Boothe, and Sun created the “Syndicate” at the mid-March meeting. This was to replace the advisory board

³¹ Allen to Boothe, Jan. 21, 1909.

³² Lea and Sun met in April 1909 in Long Beach, California. Lea in late 1909 had joined Sun in Indochina for a military campaign in south Kwanghsi province. For this, see Chapin, “Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution,” 90–93. Feng attributes Sun’s failure to raise adequate funds largely to the organizational weakness of the Federal Association of China, particularly in the western part of the United States where many influential Chinese lived. See Feng, *Hua-ch’iao ko-ming k’ai-kuo shih*, 65–67.

³³ Yung to Boothe and Lea, March 4, 1910.

³⁴ Yung to Boothe, March 12, 1910; Sun to Boothe, March 14, 1910. Chapin notes that Lea changed in pencil the amount of \$2,400,000 originally penned to a larger figure of \$3,630,000 instead of \$3,500,000. For this, see Chapin, “Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution,” 119–120.

and be jointly run by Sun and Lea. Sun, president of the Federal Association of China, became president of the syndicate and appointed Lea "the Commanding General" with powers to lead the revolutionary army composed of the members of the five branches of the Heaven and Earth Society (the *T'ien-ti Hui*), whose estimated membership was about 10,000,000 in China, and the Revolutionary Party (the *Ko-ming Tang*), officially known as the Federal Association of China and supported by over 30,000 students and intellectuals at home and abroad. Because of his expertise in military affairs Lea was granted special permission to lead all Chinese forces over which Sun actually had control. Sun appointed Boothe the "sole foreign agent" for both the syndicate and the Federal Association of China.³⁵ As such Boothe was given powers of attorney to handle loans and purchase all military and naval supplies but, if necessary, the syndicate also would designate other representatives at the request of President Sun and "General" Lea. The syndicate, however, reserved the right to authorize loans for construction of railroads, to grant concessions of Manchu mining lands to American backers, and to transfer loans for economic reconstruction of China after the formation of a provisional government.³⁶

As the revolutionary tide rose increasingly higher in China, Sun, who had been overly optimistic about the fund-raising efforts in America, revised the figure of \$3,500,000 upward and asked Boothe to raise \$10,000,000 in gold, which he pledged to pay back in ten annual installments of \$2,000,000 along with an annual interest of fifteen percent. He also promised the members of the syndicate that they would be named commissioners of customs in Kwangtung province for a period of fifteen years. Members of the syndicate would also be given the management of the tele-postal service and trade monopolies in petroleum, wood-pulp, and "Ramie" textiles.³⁷

But the project again sputtered to a halt because of Allen's doubts about Sun, whom he had met earlier in New York at the request of Boothe. Allen was not impressed and considered Sun's thinking incoherent and illogical. As soon as he had learned about the financial and military agreements reached in Los Angeles by Sun, Lea, and

³⁵ Sun to Boothe, March 14, 1910; Boothe to Yung, March 12, 1910.

³⁶ Boothe to Yung, March 12, 1910.

³⁷ Yung to Boothe, March 28, 1910.

Boothe, he denounced the arrangements, claiming that Sun did not deserve support. "Until definite organization and discipline are established and in full operation, it would be insult to the intelligence of any capitalist to ask him to risk his money in this project, and the man who would propose it would be damned for all time." Allen's distrust of Sun continued to grow. Lea and Boothe, aware of this development, assured Allen that not only was Sun a trustworthy leader but that he also firmly controlled the forces in south China. To substantiate this claim, Boothe told Allen about the receipt of loyalty oaths, dated March 20, 1910, embellished with the great seal of the Federal Association of China and signed by provincial leaders in the south.³⁸ The oaths that Sun had secured from his collaborators, Boothe explained, proved that Sun was in complete command of all revolutionary forces in China. Pressured constantly in this fashion, Allen finally gave in and agreed to try and negotiate the necessary loans with J. P. Morgan. Despite his efforts, he failed. The reasons for Morgan's refusal are unknown, but he was probably influenced by Allen's own distrust of Sun's grandiose financial and military propositions. Allen's letter to his colleagues in Los Angeles supports this interpretation: "Evidently a trip across the water will be necessary before the proper position can be secured here."³⁹

Unaware of Allen's disillusionment, Sun and Yung continued to write Boothe about Allen's efforts in New York.⁴⁰ Unable to provide Sun with satisfactory answers, Boothe became increasingly evasive. "I have been working steadily on our matters ever since you were here," he wrote, "and while I am not yet able to advise you of the final results, I am very glad to say that so far I have received very satisfactory encouragement."⁴¹ As Sun's revolutionary movement acquired new impetus, Allen's fund-raising efforts became more important than ever. Although Sun himself tried hard to raise funds during his visits in 1910 to San Francisco, Honolulu, Tokyo, and Penang, the results were not impressive. He even pushed the sale of bonds for the revolution, promising that bond buyers would be made "heroes" and their investment doubled in the event that the

³⁸ Allen to Boothe, March 4, and 14, June 7, 1910; Boothe to Allen July 19, 1910.

³⁹ Allen to Boothe, June 23, 1910.

⁴⁰ Sun to Boothe, March 21, April 5, 1910; Yung to Boothe, March 26, and 28, 1910.

⁴¹ Boothe to Sun May 12, 1910.

Manchu regime fell. He also continued to pressure Boothe and Lea by letter to raise funds. He even asked Boothe to provide \$50,000 from his own pocket, for which he promised to repay double the amount. Repeatedly Sun reminded Boothe that necessary preparations had been made. He had even won over "the chief command of the whole Chinese fleet." If Boothe failed to provide \$50,000, Sun threatened to take his own "independent measures" to secure the necessary funds.⁴²

Boothe, who was unable to provide the money from his own pocket, informed Sun of Allen's unsuccessful meeting with Morgan. Boothe also reported on his futile efforts to raise funds from the syndicate which had met at the request of Lea and Boothe during Sun's absence in October 1910. "As I first explained to you," Boothe noted discouragingly, "I could not personally assure you of the success of my efforts . . . [but] I am sparing no efforts or expense to bring about the desired result." Sun replied that he would now have to take his own "independent measures" to get money; nevertheless, he begged Boothe for a few thousand dollars to support the Canton uprising that he was about to initiate. In desperation, he also asked Lea to do something, warning that unless the aid came soon it would be necessary to remove Boothe as financial agent.⁴³

Unaware of the threat to replace him, Boothe was moved by Sun's pleas. In February 1911, he appealed for help to his personal friend, Charles B. Hill, a Montclair, New Jersey, lawyer. Although previously sympathetic to Boothe's China project, Hill was not willing to risk his money on Sun. Boothe's description of Sun as "the real ruler of China" and his claim that business opportunities in China went "beyond the dream of avarice" did not sway Hill. By March 1911, Hill finally admitted that he could not help Boothe.⁴⁴

Anticipating Boothe's reply, Sun untactfully demanded that all Chinese documents be returned to him by registered mail. He explained that he had promised his "comrades to return their signa-

⁴² Sun to Boothe, June 22, July 15, 1910. See also Sun to Lea, March 24, May 9 and 24, Aug. 11, 1910, in Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 121, 140-142; Huang, *Hua-ch'iao yü Chung-kuo ko-ming*, 217; Sun to Boothe, July 15, Sept. 4, Nov. 8, 1910; Sun to Lea, Sept. 5, 1910.

⁴³ Boothe to Sun, Oct. 21, 1910; Sun to Boothe, Dec. 16, 1910. The Canton uprising, led by Sun's lieutenants—Huang Hsing and Chü Cheng—failed on March 29, 1911. See also Sun to Lea, Sept. 29, 1910, in Chapin, "Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution," 143.

⁴⁴ Boothe to Charles B. Hill, Feb. 7, 1911; Hill to Boothe, March 3, 1911.

tures in case of failure of [*sic*] raising the intending [*sic*] funds.”⁴⁵ Boothe agreed to return the documents, but he also suggested that Sun try to visit personally with Hill, whom Boothe still considered a good prospect. Aside from this, Boothe was able to convey little more than a spirit of resignation to Sun. “There have been obstacles in the way of accomplishing what we wanted to accomplish, which it has been impossible to overcome.”⁴⁶

Despite Boothe’s difficulties, Sun and Lea continued their efforts. Soon after the Wuchang revolt in October 1911, Lea tried to persuade both the British and French governments to withhold aid from the Manchu regime.⁴⁷ Failing in these efforts, he returned to China with Sun who, upon his arrival in Nanking, was made president of the provisional government of the Republic of China. Sun then appointed Lea his personal military advisor. But, by March 1912, it had become apparent that Sun was unable to control the military cliques in the north, and he relinquished the presidency in favor of Yüan Shih-k’ai, who possessed both military support and administrative talent.⁴⁸

His position undercut, and plagued by poor health, Lea resigned and returned to California. There he lost his eyesight and finally died of paralysis on November 1, 1912, at the age of thirty-six. Boothe did not long outlive him. He was fatally stricken by a cerebral hemorrhage on April 11, 1913, at the age of sixty-two. And Yung Wing, still another of the plotters, died suddenly on April 22, 1912, at the age of eighty-three.⁴⁹ Although W. W. Allen, who earlier had bowed out of the project, and Sun Yat-sen, who had triumphed briefly during the short-lived revolution, outlived their collaborators, they never again worked together to promote another Chinese revolution.

The American-Chinese project for revolution in China failed because American government and business leaders considered the

⁴⁵ Sun to Boothe, March 6, 1911.

⁴⁶ Boothe to Sun, April 13, 1911.

⁴⁷ Sun to Lea, Aug. 10, Sept. 25, 1911, in Chapin, “Homer Lea and Chinese Revolution,” 144–145; Lo, *Kuo-fu yü ou-mei chih yü-hao*, 100. See also Hatano Kanichi, *Chugoku kokuminto tsushi* [A Comprehensive History of the Chinese Nationalist Party] (Tokyo, 1943), 133–134, 144–145.

⁴⁸ Hatano, *Chugoku kokuminto tsushi*, 150–151, 161.

⁴⁹ Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1933), XI, 69–70; Laurence Boothe to the author, Aug. 11, 1969; Worthy, “Yung Wing in America,” 286.

military venture too costly and too risky. Contrary to the urging of the plotters, the United States remained satisfied with and dedicated to the maintenance of the Open Door policy even after the 1905 boycott of American goods. Continual dissent and distrust among the plotters themselves further hampered their ability to raise funds.

Despite the duplicity, scheming, and hopes of acquiring instant wealth, the China project had serious possibilities for influencing future developments in China. If the United States had supported Sun's efforts, considerable economic gains in the form of increased trade as well as railroad and mine concessions might have been forthcoming to American sponsors. Such support would have been compatible and consistent with the Open Door policy which, after all, had strongly encouraged the security as well as expansion of "equal" economic opportunities for Americans in China. Also, increased financial benefits might have been supplemented by the political influence which Sun might have granted to Americans either out of gratitude for the aid or because of considerations of power politics.

In the crucial period 1908–1911 the United States, however, refused support for either the reformists or the revolutionaries, believing that neither group had the ability to alter significantly the political situation in China: the overthrow of the Manchu regime. This miscalculation soured Sun Yat-sen who became president of the new China after the 1911 revolution. In view of America's non-committal attitude, he turned elsewhere for support, first to the Japanese, without much success, and then to the Russians, who in the 1920s proved more than willing to support his anti-imperialist cause. The ultimate result of Sun's efforts had greatly undermined the effectiveness of the Open Door policy, whose aim supposedly was to preserve American interests in China by all means. When in the 1940s the United States finally modified the Open Door policy and decided to aid the Chinese Nationalist Party (the *Kuomintang*) that had been created by Sun, it was too late to repair the damage. By then China already had reached the point of no return and the victory of Russian-backed communists had become more than a probability.