In 1936, two parties competed for power: the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists led by Mao Zedong. Intermittently in alliance in a national struggle against the occupying Japanese, the two parties remained mutually hostile. Mao ruthlessly imposed himself on his followers in a way that Chiang, although nominally head of the Chinese Republic, was never able to do on his followers. When the Japanese occupation ended in 1945 the Communists were better placed to win the civil war that ensued.

These developments are described in the following sections:

★ Introduction: China in 1936
★ The Communists under Mao
★ The Guomindang under Chiang
★ The Sino-Japanese war and the second United Front
★ Mao’s ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign 1942–4
★ The impact of the Japanese occupation

### Key dates

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### Introduction: China in 1936

*Why, in 1936, were the two main revolutionary parties in China opposed to each other?*

In 1911, China had undergone the first of its modern revolutions when the ruling Qing dynasty collapsed. The imperial system was replaced by a republic, which claimed authority over the whole of China, but in reality lacked real power. As a consequence, China entered the warlord era, a time when conflicting groups and interests fought to impose themselves on their regions. The general hatred of the warlords and of the continuing subjection of a weak China to foreign
influence expressed itself in a driving desire for Chinese regeneration. It was in this atmosphere that two main revolutionary parties developed. One was the nationalist **Guomindang (GMD)**, founded by Sun Yat-sen and led after 1925 by Chiang Kai-shek; the other was the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**, whose leader from the later 1920s was Mao Zedong.

At first, the two parties co-operated in a **United Front** in order to break the warlords. After this had been achieved by 1927, Chiang turned savagely on the Communists. He intended their complete destruction, an aim in which he nearly succeeded. By 1934, the Communists were on the point of extinction, having being penned in their Jiangxi base by surrounding GMD forces. However, the Communists survived by a desperate break-out and flight in 1934–5, known as the **Long March**. In the new northern base of Yanan, reached in 1935, Mao began to construct a **soviet** in defiance of the GMD and of the Japanese who had begun to occupy parts of China in 1931.

![A map showing the route of the 1934–5 Long March.](image-url)
2 The Communists under Mao

How did Mao’s political ideas condition the way he led the CCP before 1945?

Mao’s concept of leadership

Mao Zedong, a peasant from Hunan province, had grown up an intensely patriotic young man, angered by China’s failings and much impressed by Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary ideas. Between 1912 and 1919, Mao had witnessed scenes of great violence as rival Republican factions had fought for supremacy in his home province of Hunan. He recorded that the experience deeply affected him and led him to conclude that to be a leader and to gain success politically or militarily required total commitment and a willingness to use extreme methods. This helps to explain why throughout his career he was so ready to use the toughest means to crush political opponents. One of his most revealing sayings was that ‘all power grows out of the barrel of a gun’.

All Mao Zedong’s experiences as a young revolutionary convinced him that unless he was prepared to use brutal, unyielding methods he could achieve little. He was a dialectician, which was why he had become a Marxist and a founder member of the CCP in 1921. He held that all change, all progress, resulted from suppression of the weaker by the stronger.

Mao’s ruthlessness

Moving to Beijing, Mao became attracted to Marxist ideas and developed the conviction that if China was to regain its greatness it would have to undergo a profound social and political revolution. To further this aim, Mao in 1921 became one of the founder members of the CCP. When Chiang’s White Terror in 1927 forced the Communists to flee to Jiangxi province, Mao began his first endeavour to build a Chinese soviet. It was at Jiangxi that Mao revealed the ruthlessness that he regarded as essential to effective leadership and which characterised his whole career. In 1930 he ordered the torture and execution of some 4000 Red Army troops whom he accused of plotting against him. His written instruction read: ‘do not kill the important leaders too quickly, but squeeze out of them the maximum information’. Mao showed a similar unwillingness to compromise in establishing his leadership over the party during the Long March.

Mao’s ideology

Once established in Yanan in 1935, Mao, over the next decade, turned the camp into a Communist soviet; it served as both a protective base and a haven to which Communist sympathisers flocked. It was at Yanan that Mao developed and formalised his revolutionary ideas. This involved him in an ideological
battle to enforce his leadership in the face of opposition from within the CCP and from the Comintern. It is important to stress that it was because he was an ardent nationalist that Mao had adopted Communism. He saw in Marxism–Leninism a set of principles that he could turn into a practical programme for restoring China to its original greatness. Mao was never a slave to Marxist theory; he interpreted the ideology to suit his purposes for China. The persistent theme in his actions and his writings was that Chinese considerations always had primacy. Since foreign communists, no matter how eminent, could not truly understand actual Chinese conditions, it was not for them to dictate policy.

**SOURCE A**


China’s revolutionary war is waged in the specific environment of China and so it has its own specific circumstances and nature ... Some people say that it is enough merely to study the experience of revolutionary war in Russia ... However although we must value Soviet experience ... we must value even more the experience of China’s revolutionary war, because there are many factors specific to the Chinese revolution and the Chinese Red Army.

Mao was also concerned that to give too much consideration to the opinions of foreign communists as expressed through the Comintern would damage his claim to personal authority in China. His conviction was that ‘correct leadership should be based upon careful, detailed study of local conditions which can only be done by each of the Communist parties in its own country. The Comintern, far away from the actual struggle, can no longer provide proper leadership.’

**The urban versus rural dispute**

Mao’s ideas brought him criticism from the pro-Moscow elements in the party who accused him of ignoring Comintern instructions and taking an independent line. A particular point of contention was Mao’s insistence that the distinct conditions in China determined that revolution must first come in the countryside. He rejected the Comintern’s demand that the CCP direct its efforts into preparing risings in the urban areas. His central belief was that China’s revolution must be a peasant revolution. This was heresy in the eyes of the Comintern theorists. They asserted that:

- Mao was ignoring the laws of the **dialectic** whose stages followed a predetermined, ordered path and thus could not be bypassed.
- Peasant revolution was not an end in itself; it was merely the precursor of the final proletarian revolution.
- China lacked an **urban proletariat** and was, therefore, incapable of achieving a genuinely proletarian revolution.
- The best that the CCP could accomplish would be to help bring about the **bourgeois stage** of revolution by merging with the Nationalists.
Mao rejected this analysis and stressed that Marxist theory had to be interpreted in the light of the actual conditions in China. The stark reality was that China did not possess an urban proletariat large enough to mount a revolution. Furthermore, he dismissed the notion that genuine revolution could be achieved only by the industrial workers and countered it by asserting these convictions:

- In China, urban industrial workers accounted for less than four per cent of the population, whereas the rural peasants made up over 80 per cent. It followed that a popular revolution would have to be the work of the peasantry.
- In China, therefore, a peasant revolution would be sufficient to fulfil the demands of the dialectic.
- Mao redefined the term proletarian to mean not so much a social class as an attitude. Those who were genuinely committed to revolution were by that very fact members of the proletariat. Anyone who had suffered oppression at the hands of class enemies could be counted a member of the proletariat.
- There was, therefore, no necessity to wait for the growth of an industrial proletariat in China. Genuine revolution would be achieved by the peasants: ‘no power, however strong, can restrain them’. He told his followers that it was their task to unleash the huge potential of the peasantry: ‘The peasants are the sea; we are the fish. We live in the sea.’
Mao’s particular interpretation of the dialectic put him at variance with the orthodox Communists, such as Li Lisan, a Moscow-trained Marxist, who continued to follow the Comintern line by insisting that the Chinese Communists concentrate their revolutionary activities in urban areas. Throughout the 1930s, Mao was involved in a battle to assert his authority within the party. His major opponents were a faction known as the ‘Twenty-eight Bolsheviks’, who followed Li Lisan in criticising Mao for ignoring Comintern instructions and acting independently. Mao was accused of ‘reckless adventurism’ for assuming that the stages of proletarian revolution could be skipped at will. Mao survived such criticism thanks largely to four key factors:

- His selection in 1934 of the correct northern route to follow on the Long March, in opposition to the pro-Moscow faction who had argued for a different western route, had given him a moral superiority over them.
- As a result of his own field research, Mao had an unrivalled knowledge of the Chinese peasantry, which meant he dominated any discussion of the party’s peasant policy.
- His intense self-belief and determination allowed him to silence opponents and browbeat waverers into line.
- He was indispensable as a military planner.
Mao defined the revolution he was leading not as a class movement but as a national one. Faced with the Japanese occupation of China after 1937 (see page 000), Mao declared the aim of his party to be ‘long-term co-operation with all those classes, strata, political groups and individuals who were willing to fight Japan to the end’. He appealed to all Chinese of goodwill to unite against the enemies of the nation.

Helped by Yanan’s geographical distance from Soviet influence, Mao was able to dominate the urban-orientated members of the CCP and bring the party to accept his line of thinking. He was acting very much in the Chinese tradition of taking from a foreign ideology those elements considered to be of practical value for China. He made Marxism fit the Chinese situation, not the Chinese situation fit Marxism. For some years he had to contend with opposition from within the party over his reshaping of revolutionary Marxism, but by outmanoeuvring and, where necessary, removing opponents he was able to establish an unmatched authority and so impose his ideas.

Mao Zedong: career to 1949

1893 Born in Hunan province
1912 Joined anti-Qing army in Hunan
1919 Worked as a librarian at Beijing University
1921 Founder member of the CCP
1927–34 Created the Jiangxi soviet
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1935–45 Created the Yanan soviet
1945–9 Led the CCP to victory in the civil war
1949 Founded the People’s Republic of China

Background
A natural dialectician, who believed in violence, Mao developed the conviction that if China was to be regenerated it would have to undergo a profound social and political revolution. In 1921, he became a founder member of the CCP and over the next few years helped to organise the GMD–CCP United Front against the warlords. Then, to avoid being destroyed by Chiang Kai-shek, Mao fled to Jiangxi where he established the first Chinese soviet. He frequently rejected the orders from Moscow which instructed the CCP to base its activities in the towns rather than the countryside.

Leader of CCP
In 1934, facing extermination by surrounding GMD forces, the Jiangxi Communists undertook the legendary Long March. It was during the year-long march that Mao began to assert his authority over the CCP, an authority that he then ruthlessly consolidated at Yanan, where the Communists established their main base between 1935 and 1945. While at Yanan, Mao developed his theories of revolution based on the peasantry as the major dynamic of revolutionary change in China. Communists gained a not-entirely deserved reputation for being foremost in resisting the Japanese who occupied China between 1931 and 1945.

Civil war victor
With the surrender of Japan at the end of the Second World War in 1945, the GMD–CCP civil war that had lasted intermittently since 1927 was renewed. A four-year struggle ended with the complete victory of the Communists. Chiang’s GMD was driven from the Chinese mainland to the island of Taiwan. In October 1949, Mao triumphantly declared that a new Communist society had come into being: the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Mao was destined to rule this new nation for the next quarter of a century until his death in 1976.

Mao’s ideological dominance

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Mao’s peasant policy

Mao gave practical form to his concept of revolution by sending out Red Army units from Yanan to occupy neighbouring regions. The method was for the troops, having occupied a particular area, to round up the landowners, who were then driven out or shot. That done, the land was immediately reallocated to the peasants, who were invited to co-operate in reorganising the village or region into a soviet. The hope was that such treatment would persuade the local people to become CCP supporters.

Mao urged the soldiers who did the liberating to regard themselves as ambassadors carrying the Communist message to the peasants. Until the Yanan period, Chinese armies by tradition had invariably terrorised local populations. The imperial and warlord forces had ravaged and plundered. But the Red Army was instructed to behave differently. Its duty was to aid and comfort the people. Mao laid down a code of conduct for his troops (see Source B for an extract).

**SOURCE B**


Be courteous and help out when you can.

Return all borrowed articles.

Replace all damaged articles.

Be honest in all transactions with the peasants.

Pay for all articles purchased.

Be sanitary and establish latrines at a distance from people’s houses.

Don’t take liberties with women.

Don’t kill prisoners of war.

Mao’s instructions provided a simple guide which, when followed, endeared the Red Army to many in the rural population. To win further supporters from the peasants in the *liberated* areas, the Red Army introduced a number of schemes, including:

- the creation of local peasant associations, which were invited to work with the CCP in improving their own conditions
- a programme for ending *usury*, which had so often blighted the lives of the peasants
- the introduction of literacy and education programmes
- the provision of basic medical services.

In Source B what message is being conveyed to the troops?

**KEY TERMS**

Liberated The Communist term for the areas brought under its military and political control.

Usury Charging exorbitant interest on money loans.
This evident sensitivity to the wants of the peasants was the most popular of the CCP’s land policies and played its part in the growth of the party from 40,000 in 1937 to one million by 1945. It was from this expanding membership that the volunteers for the Red Army came. However, it was not all harmony, there was a darker side to Communist land policy.

Repressive land policies

Mao was certainly prepared to be moderate at times, but all the moves that the CCP made under him had the essential purpose of strengthening Communist control. The removal of the landlords in the areas where the Red Army held sway was often a brutal process. Moreover, despite its feeling for the peasants and its genuine popularity with many of them, the Yanan regime was fiercely authoritarian. In the liberated areas, villages that would not conform to the demands of the CCP’s land programme were subject to harsh penalties such as having all their crops and livestock confiscated and ruinous taxes imposed on them.

What the CCP’s occupation of ‘liberated areas’ actually entailed was described in 1938 by Edgar Snow, who travelled with the Red Army.

**SOURCE C**


While theoretically the soviet was a ‘workers and peasants’ government, in actual practice the whole constituency was overwhelmingly peasant in character. Various committees were established under each of the district soviets. An all-powerful revolutionary committee was elected in a mass meeting shortly after the occupation of a district by the Red Army. Under the district soviet, and appointed by it, were committees for education, co-operatives, military training, political training, land, public health, partisan training, revolutionary defence, enlargement of the Red Army, agrarian mutual aid, Red Army land tilling, and others.

The work of all these organizations and their various committees was co-ordinated by the Central Soviet Government, the Communist Party, and the Red Army. The aim of soviet organization obviously was to make every man, woman, or child a member of something, with definite work assigned to him to perform.
The Guomindang under Chiang

**What strategy and principles did Chiang Kai-shek adopt in his leadership of the GMD?**

Such was the violence and lawlessness of warlord China that a party needed an army if it was to survive. That was why Sun Yat-sen, as well as developing his party’s political ideas, devoted his attention to the construction in 1924 of the Whampoa Military Academy. This proved of major significance since from that point on, the GMD became essentially a military organisation. All the party’s leading figures, most notably Sun’s successor, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), were products of the academy, branches of which were later established in other Nationalist strongholds, such as Nanjing and Chengdu.

Chiang Kai-shek had fought his way to the leadership of the GMD in a power struggle that followed the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925. Before this, Chiang had gone to the USSR in the early 1920s to receive revolutionary training, but his experiences there, rather than drawing him to Marxism, did the opposite. He returned to China with an abiding detestation of communism. This became the motif of his political career. He remained in his conviction that China could not progress towards true modernity unless it first destroyed Mao’s Communists.

Chiang’s life was dominated by military considerations. He thought of politics in militaristic terms. At its starkest, this meant that he approached issues not by discussion and concession but by destroying opposition. In this respect he was very similar to his great adversary Mao, who thought in terms of dialectical struggle.
Chiang Kai-shek’s ideology

The defeat of the warlords by the United Front and the near destruction of the Communists in the White Terror appeared to give Chiang Kai-shek the freedom to shape the new China according to the GMD’s policies. From Nanjing, which in 1928 officially replaced Beijing as China’s capital, Chiang planned to build Nationalist China on the basis of the Three People’s Principles, first enunciated by Sun Yat-sen.

There is no doubt that Chiang was sincere in this, but, as he saw it, China’s instability as it struggled to adopt modern ways did not permit him to introduce democracy immediately. There were too many difficulties in the way. That is why he turned to Sun Yat-sen’s definition as a guide. Sun had taught that the circumstances in China meant that the Three People’s Principles could not be put into effect until China had gone through three stages of development:

- A preliminary stage which would witness the overthrow by the Nationalist armies of China’s internal and external enemies.
- An intermediate stage of GMD dominance during which the people would be educated in political knowledge and values.
- A final stage in which the now enlightened people would play their part in turning China into a full democracy.

Chiang claimed that the preliminary stage of development had been achieved by the defeat of the warlords. China was now at the second stage, which required that the GMD take on the role of government and teacher and instruct the Chinese people in political understanding. What this meant in reality was that Chiang’s Nationalist government claimed the right to govern until such time as it considered China ready for democracy. It provided a justification for authoritarian control by Chiang and the GMD. A symbol of this was the dismantling of the remnants of the republican regime in Beijing, which was renamed Beiping to indicate that authority had passed south to Nanjing.

The Three People’s Principles

National Sovereignty

The re-establishment of China’s lost sense of national pride by ridding it of the remnants of foreign control and restoring its position as a sovereign state.

Democracy

Not individual freedom, as in the Western sense, but collective freedom of the people to build the nation. ‘Personal freedom should never be too excessive. In fact, in order to win national freedom, we should not hesitate to sacrifice our personal freedom.’

People’s welfare

The adoption of a form of socialism in order to end the poverty of the Chinese people. Private property should be limited and government-owned enterprises encouraged. ‘We should have the political power to protect our native industry so that it will not be encroached upon by foreign powers, enchained by foreign powers.’
Mao’s China

Of considerable value to Chiang in attempting to exercise personal control over the GMD was the fact that the party had been structured along Leninist lines. This was a result of Comintern having had a major influence on the development of the party in its early days. Comintern believed that the GMD met the criteria of a bourgeois revolutionary party playing its role in the dialectical process. That was why it had urged the CCP to join forces with the Nationalists and work towards a bourgeois revolution, which China had to go through before it could move to the proletarian stage. Comintern agents in 1924 had drafted a new GMD constitution that was clearly Leninist in character. The key element was the insistence that the party should operate on the principle of *democratic centralism*. Chiang found this a convenient mechanism and justification for demanding conformity from the party. It has to be added that although the GMD and CCP ran on the same leadership principle, Chiang never attained the same degree of authority over his party that Mao did over his.

**Chiang Kai-shek**

1883 Born to a middle-class family
1906 Entered military academy
1912–18 Began developing contacts with Shanghai’s underworld
1918 Joined Sun Yat-sen at Guangzhou
1925 Become GMD leader
1927 Launched the White Terror
1928–34 Head of the Nanjing government
1936 Kidnapped at Xian and obliged to re-form the United Front
1937–45 Led the struggle against Japan
1945–9 Defeated by the Communists in the civil war
1949 Fled to Taiwan

**Emergence**

Born into a well-to-do peasant family, Chiang was a rebellious student who became quickly attracted to revolutionary ideas. Trained as a soldier, he retained a military attitude to politics, believing that compromise was necessary only when one could not enforce one’s will. His gangster links compromised the party’s claim to moral leadership. His desire for reform was sincere but he believed China’s people needed to be politically controlled if China was to progress. He returned from training in Moscow with a deep distaste for communism and, after seizing the leadership of the GMD in 1925, devoted himself to destroying the CCP. However, the survival of the Communists meant that he was never in full control of China, despite his internationally recognised claim that the GMD was the rightful government of China.

**Record**

In an obvious sense, Chiang Kai-shek’s record before 1949 was one of failure. He had failed to crush the Communists and, having been the dominant force in China for over a decade, he had then lost the civil war and had been forced to escape to Taiwan. Yet, prior to his defeat in 1949, Chiang had triumphed over the Japanese, and been acknowledged as a world statesman. In the face of huge problems he had begun the process of modernising China and freeing it from foreign domination. Against that has to be set the argument that he was essentially a ruthless warlord, who ran a corrupt government in league with gangsters and was reliant on foreign capital. Chiang’s constant willingness to compromise his principles meant that the conditions of the Chinese people deteriorated rather than improved. He had failed to meet any of the high expectations with which he and the GMD had come to power.

**KEY TERM**

**Democratic centralism**

The principle, originally introduced by Lenin in Soviet Russia, that in a truly revolutionary party the members owed absolute loyalty and obedience to the leaders.
Chiang’s economic and social policies

In keeping with his assumption that the Nationalists had the right to govern without challenge, Chiang introduced a number of reforms from the top. These included:

- China’s civil service was modernised by the creation of special administrative departments and training colleges.
- Measures to improve the quality and availability of education were implemented.
- Chinese banks were brought under the central control of the Bank of China.
- The Shanghai stock exchange became an international financial market.
- A national resources commission was set up to develop Chinese industry and negotiate foreign trade deals.
- Schemes were adopted to improve urban transport and communication. Modern buses and trams appeared in major cities, and railways and airlines spread across China.
- Government subsidies were provided to help the Chinese film industry, based mainly in Shanghai, which became internationally renowned.
- Similar government support enabled fashion houses in Shanghai to compete with Paris and Milan.

One of Chiang’s aims was to reassert some degree of control over the foreign concessions whose presence had angered Chinese revolutionaries for decades. Efforts were made to restructure the legal system within the concessions so that Chinese law played a more central role. Foreign commercial companies were required to pay higher export and import duties. However, because of the constant presence of foreign troops, Chiang was not in a position to attempt the physical removal of foreigners.

Chiang was also handicapped by the hard truth that many Chinese people depended for their livelihoods on being employed in the diplomatic offices and commercial agencies within the concession areas. Such reliance on foreigners, particularly in financial matters, was one of the great problems that prevented the Nanjing government from achieving the Chinese independence that the Three People’s Principles advocated. Chiang’s dislike of the foreign presence in China was real enough but he had to be circumspect in the way he dealt with the issue. His various schemes for boosting China’s economic and financial standing indicated that he needed foreign support. This became increasingly so after the Japanese threat to China began to grow following the occupation of Manchuria in 1931 (see page 000).

German influence in Nationalist China

China’s foreign ties were also very evident in relation to Chiang’s development of the Nationalist army and police forces. In planning to modernise his army,
Chiang formed close links with the Third Reich, which sent military advisers to train the Nationalists’ armies.

A further striking example of German influence was the organisation of Chiang’s secret police, the Blue Shirts, on similar lines to the Gestapo. It was such associations that led to the suggestion that Chiang Kai-shek’s regime merited the description fascist, since in its authoritarianism, nationalist ideology and policing methods it paralleled the right-wing governments of 1930s’ Europe. A central figure in the development of the Blue Shirts was Dai Li, whose fearsome leadership of the GMD’s secret police earned him the nickname the ‘Chinese Himmler’.

Dai Li built up the innocuous sounding Investigation and Statistical Bureau (ISB) into a highly effective and feared security organisation. By the mid-1930s, Dai had some 1800 agents working for him. Operating outside the law, they were free to arrest and hold suspects indefinitely without having to bring charges against them. They regularly used torture to extract information concerning the names and whereabouts of Communist sympathisers. CCP members were Dai Li’s main targets but his agents also used intimidation and threats to prevent even moderate criticism of the Nationalist regime being voiced in the press.

The New Life Movement

Despite his Nationalist regime’s preoccupation with economic and military affairs and state security, Chiang Kai-shek always spoke in terms of his party and government leading a moral revolution. In this period there were two main themes in his speeches and writings:

- the need for the Chinese people to unite and crush the Communists
- the duty of the Chinese people to elevate the ethical standards of their country by returning to Confucian values of social harmony and by living lives of moral integrity.

Chiang appealed to the people to expose and fight public corruption and called on youth organisations, such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA, to set an example in teaching the young to behave responsibly, especially in sexual matters. To inculcate a sense of shared Nationalist values, he encouraged couples to include a pledge of loyalty to the GMD in their marriage vows. This programme of moral improvement was formalised in 1934 with Chiang’s launching of the New Life Movement, intended as a rejection of both communism and Western capitalism and a reassertion of Confucian values. Chiang’s wife, Soong Meiling, regarded the New Life Movement, which she defined as ‘a direct attempt to compete with the Communist platform of economic and social reform, substituting a retreat to Confucius for an advance to Marx’, as being ‘the only path for the salvation of the country’.
Chapter 1 Nationalists and Communists

The weakness of the New Life Movement

For all the moral uplift that Chiang and his wife sought to encourage among the people, the reality was that his government had compromised itself from the first by its need to deal with some of the most disreputable elements in Chinese society. This was apparent, for example, in its attempts to control the use of drugs. Chiang’s sincere aim was to bring the opium trade under state control, and provide treatment for addicts. But the GMD had received considerable illicit funding from gangster organisations, such as the Green Gang. The Nationalists were reluctant to forgo such income. It was also the case that Chiang had received crucial assistance from the drug-dealing underworld in his campaigns against the Communists; he owed the gangs a large favour.

The same contradictions applied to Chiang’s attempt to follow a socialist path and end China’s reliance on capitalism. His need for inward foreign investment and the heavy costs of his military campaigns meant he could never genuinely abandon capitalism. Despite his professed adherence to the party’s policy of ending China’s dependence on foreign money, Chiang could not discontinue his association with Western commercial and financial interests. The character of the GMD party in government was determined by the manner in which it acquired its finance.

The GMD’s basic problems in government

The underlying political weakness of the GMD was that the social composition of its membership meant that it could never become a mass party. The GMD claimed that its revolutionary purpose was to serve the Chinese population as a whole by implementing the Three People’s Principles, but in reality it became the representative of particular minority interests. Chiang Kai-shek’s GMD party was largely drawn from the merchants and businessmen who operated in the ports and cities. Such men had little sympathy for the rural peasants, which meant they were no more interested in improving conditions in the countryside than they were in paying for welfare in the urban areas.

Here lay the GMD’s crippling limitation as a political party. China’s most pressing problem was the poverty of its people. In the years 1934–5 another of China’s recurrent famines caused the death of 30 million people. Yet, notwithstanding the Nationalists’ commitment to honouring the third of Sun Yat-sen’s principles – the people’s welfare – no sustained attempt was made to tackle the issue. There was little in the Nationalists’ approach to government that allowed it to make a genuine effort to introduce the land reforms the GMD had originally promised. Among the measures that Chiang’s government had failed to implement were the following:

- ending of landlord control and exploitation of the peasants
- extension of property rights to the peasants

KEY TERM

Green Gang Shanghai racketeers who dealt mainly in prostitution and drug running and who were notorious for bribing police and government officials to co-operate.
• protection of the peasants against excessive rents
• guarantee of fair prices to the peasants for their produce.

At no time did Chiang’s government control more than one-third of China or two-thirds of its population. It is true that these were quite substantial proportions in themselves, but, given the strength of Chinese regionalism and the distribution of the population, the authority exercised by the GMD was far from complete. Resistance from local ruling factions was a major obstacle, preventing the Nanjing government from carrying out its declared policies of land reform. Moreover, the warlords still held sway in a number of provinces. The limitation this placed on GMD control was increased after 1937 when Japan occupied large tracts of territory (see page 000), a humiliating reminder of how far China was from being an independent nation.

The Nationalist record

Nationalist supporters could claim that in its first period of government the GMD under Chiang Kai-shek had:
• overthrown the warlords
• gained international recognition
• taken steps towards the creation of workable governmental and legal systems.

Yet while these were not insignificant achievements, it could be argued that they were far outweighed by failures:
• The Nationalist government had proved unable to tackle China’s most urgent social and economic problems.
• The GMD had betrayed its own sense of moral purpose by aligning with some of the worst elements of the Chinese underworld.
• The GMD had turned to coercion and authoritarianism in order to consolidate its power.
• The Nationalists had been powerless to prevent or alleviate the suffering of the victims of widespread famine.
• Chiang’s preoccupation with crushing his Communist opponents had diverted vital energies away from the structuring of an ordered civil society.
• Such progress as had been made towards removing foreign dominance from China had been undermined by the Japanese occupation of China that began in 1931.
The Sino-Japanese war

Why did the Chinese suffer so severely at the hands of the Japanese? Why was the United Front not able to offer effective resistance to the Japanese?

The Japanese had occupied Manchuria in 1931. Over the next six years they used it as a base for extending their control over many other Chinese areas. In 1937, the Japanese extended their occupation into a full-scale war that was to last until 1945.

The Sino-Japanese war can be divided into two distinct phases:

- 1937–41. During this first phase, Japan made rapid advances down the eastern seaboard (see the map on page 000), to which the Chinese response was a mixture of courageous resistance, retreat and appeasement.

- 1941–5. The second phase saw the Chinese struggle become part of the Second World War, in which China as an ally of the USA recovered to gain victory over the Japanese.

The Marco Polo Bridge incident

On 7 July 1937, a relatively minor clash between Chinese and Japanese troops occurred at the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing. The confrontation had been deliberately planned by the Japanese to create trouble. Using the clash as a pretext, Japan demanded that, in order to prevent further trouble, the GMD
government yield even further greater authority to the occupying forces in China. On this occasion, Chiang Kai-shek refused to make concessions. He declared to the Chinese people that their country was now in a state of total war against Japan. ‘If we allow one inch more of our territory to be lost, we shall be guilty of an unpardonable crime against our race.’

The second United Front

Chiang’s appeal for national unity may be regarded as the start of the second United Front between the CCP and GMD, a commitment by both parties to suspend their differences and ally against the Japanese aggressors. In doing this, they were activating an agreement they had made seven months earlier following an extraordinary event known as the Xian incident.

The Xian incident

Undoubted patriot though he was, Chiang’s response to Japan’s occupation of parts of China between 1931 and 1936 had been unambitious. He believed that China was too large a country for the Japanese to occupy without exhausting themselves; a protracted occupation would mean war and the eventual defeat of Japan. He defined his approach as trading space to buy time. However, the policy of avoiding direct conflict with the occupier proved uninspiring and his supporters frequently found it difficult to maintain their loyalty. In 1933, it took Chiang over a year to suppress a rising among his troops at Fujian who were reacting against his failure to confront the Japanese.

The culmination of this deep dissatisfaction with Chiang’s strategy came in December 1936. During a visit to Xian in Shaanxi province, which, ironically, Chiang had undertaken in order to berate his forces for their slowness in crushing the CCP, he was seized by mutinous GMD troops and handed over to the Communists, whose chief representative at Xian was Zhou Enlai, Mao’s closest colleague. Zhou offered to spare his prisoner’s life if he would promise to end his persecution of the CCP and lead a genuine resistance against the Japanese. Finding himself in an impossible position, Chiang Kai-shek gave in; he agreed to the formation of the second GMD–CCP United Front, pledged to wage unceasing war against the Japanese invaders.

Given the bitter relations between Chiang and the Communists, Chiang had been trying for a decade to annihilate them, it seems surprising that the CCP did not simply assassinate him. That they refrained from doing was not clemency but a calculated risk; by allowing Chiang not merely to survive, but to remain as the recognised leader of China, the CCP had won a major propaganda victory. It had shown remarkable restraint in forgoing party advantage for the sake of the national struggle. In return, Chiang made a formal commitment to:

- cease all attempts to suppress the CCP
- recognise the CCP as a legitimate party
- lead a new United Front against the Japanese invader.
The Communists could now claim that it was they who were the genuine nationalists whose prime motivation was their love of China as expressed in their willingness to fight under Chiang’s leadership. At the same time, they had undermined the GMD’s claim to be the sole representative of the nation. Chiang for his part did not feel bound by his Xian promises and frequently went back on his word by renewing his attacks on the Communists. Throughout the ensuing eight years of the Sino-Japanese war, Chiang’s principal aim remained the defeat of the CCP; victory over Japan was a means to that end.

**Failure of the United Front**

The complex turn of events that led to the formation of a second United Front meant that from the beginning it was a marriage of convenience, never a genuine alliance. The CCP and GMD forces invariably fought as separate armies and, although they did liaise on occasion, their mutual distrust meant that they rarely acted as a combined force. Outweighed by Japanese military strength, which made them reluctant to risk large-scale battles, the Nationalist–Communist allies engaged mainly in sniping and *guerrilla warfare* tactics.

Given the inability of the United Front to mount sustained resistance it was not surprising that matters went badly for China in the early stage of the war. By 1938, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Nanjing had all fallen to Japan, disasters which obliged the GMD government to withdraw their capital westwards along the Yangzi River to Chongqing (see the map on page 000).

**The Hundred Regiments Offensive of 1940**

A major exception to China’s poor military showing was the Hundred Regiments Offensive of 1940. It was undertaken by Mao’s Communists to convince the GMD and the Chinese people of the dedication of the CCP to the anti-Japanese war. It followed a period of relative quiet when the Japanese, having seized a large number of provinces and cities by 1938, slowed their advance and concentrated on consolidating the gains already made. In August 1940, under the overall command of Peng Dehuai, the Communist forces, numbering 400,000 troops in over 100 regiments, undertook a series of attacks on Japanese positions in northern and central China. For two months the Communists had considerable success. A number of Japanese garrisons were overrun and over 950 km (600 miles) of railway lines were destroyed along with extensive damage to roads, bridges and canals.

**Communist defeat**

Under the slogan of ‘Kill all, Burn all, Loot all’, Japanese forces responded with a terror campaign against the population in the areas which had supported Communists’ attacks. Murder, mutilation and rape were the order of the day. Whole villages were systematically destroyed. By December 1940, the Japanese counteroffensive had regained the territory lost earlier. Over 100,000 Communists, a quarter of the force, were killed.
Recriminations followed within the CCP. Mao dismissed Peng Dehuai, not simply for being defeated by the Japanese but for causing the CCP to lose reputation among the Chinese people. What had also angered Mao was that the Hundred Regiments Campaign had revealed to Chiang Kai-shek the true size and disposition of the PLA’s forces. It was certainly the case that Chiang exploited the defeat of the Communists to renew his attack on them. In a set of ambushes and surprise raids in January 1941, the Nationalist forces inflicted 4000 casualties on the retreating PLA. It was not difficult to see that Chiang regarded the Communists as a greater enemy than the Japanese. He was making a fiction of the supposed GMD–CCP alliance against the occupier.

Character of the war: Japanese brutality

The grimmest aspect of the Sino-Japanese war was the savagery with which the occupiers treated the Chinese people. Easy military successes early in the war confirmed the deeply held conviction of the Japanese that they were a superior race, entitled to treat those they defeated with contempt. One of the commanders of the first Japanese invasion force to arrive in China in 1937, Sakai Ryu, declared: ‘The Chinese people are bacteria infesting world civilization.’ Lieutenant Ryukichi of the Imperial Japanese Army remarked to a foreign correspondent, ‘you and I have diametrically different views of the Chinese. You may be dealing with them as human beings, but I regard them as swine. We can do anything to such creatures.’

**SOURCE D**

The aftermath of a Japanese air raid on Shanghai in 1937. Although the picture appears to have been composed by the photographer, there is little doubt that what became an iconic image represented the reality of the Japanese bombardments of Chinese cities.
The rape of Nanjing 1937

It was the Japanese contempt for the Chinese that resulted in one of the worst atrocities in twentieth-century warfare: the rape of Nanjing. In December 1937, after spirited resistance and the refusal of its defenders to surrender, the city eventually fell to the Japanese attackers. Responding to the specific instruction of their commander, Asaka Yasuhiko, ‘to kill all captives’, the Japanese soldiers engaged in a sustained month-long programme of murder and terror. The details tell a fearful story:

- 300,000 Chinese people were slaughtered during the four-week period.
- The ways of killing included: shooting, bayoneting, beheading, burying alive, soaking in petrol and setting on fire, and suspending on meat hooks.
- 20,000 girls and women were serially raped regardless of their age. Many were so abused that they died from the rape itself or the mutilations that were inflicted afterwards; those who did not die were bayoneted to death.
- A Japanese private later confessed, ‘We sent out coal trucks to the city streets and villages to seize a lot of women. And then each of them was allocated to fifteen to twenty soldiers for sexual intercourse and abuse.’
- Half the city was burned to ashes.

SOURCE E

A souvenir photo taken by a Japanese soldier in Nanjing in December 1937, showing the burying alive of bound Chinese prisoners.

Why should the Japanese government have wished to prevent actions such as those shown in Source E from becoming known in Japan?
Chinese collaboration with the Japanese

As Japan gained ground in China, it sought to consolidate its military hold by enlisting Chinese leaders who were willing to co-operate in the setting up of nominally independent areas. In an effort to wreck the United Front, Japan, which saw the Communists as the major enemy, offered to recognise Chiang Kai-shek as the national spokesman for China if he would abandon his alliance with the CCP. Chiang refused. While it is true that Chiang’s ultimate objective was the defeat of the Communists, he was not willing to abandon his claim to the leadership of China by throwing in his lot with the Japanese.

However, there were lesser public figures who were prepared to respond to the Japanese approaches. One such was Wang Jingwei, a former colleague of Chiang. Judging that China could not win the war, Wang agreed in 1940 to become the head of what the Japanese called the ‘New Government of China’. From Nanjing, the captured former capital, Wang denounced Chiang and his Nationalist government as traitors to the true interests of China. Wang’s rival government survived for four years until his death in 1944, but it was never able to match either the GMD at Chongqing or the CCP at Yanan as expressions of Chinese aspirations. Without the backing of the occupying forces, Wang’s government was powerless.

China and Japan at war 1941–5

On 7 December 1941, Japanese air forces attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii with the aim of destroying the US Pacific fleet and forcing the Americans to settle on Japanese terms. It proved a fateful miscalculation. Rather than make peace, the Americans committed themselves to total war against Japan. The importance for China of Japan’s attack on the USA in 1941 was profound. What had been a Sino-Japanese conflict now became a theatre of the much larger world war. From that time on:

- China was seen by the Allies as a chief means of defeating Japan. It was supplied with vast resources in an Allied effort to turn it into a base of operations.
- By 1945 the USA had invested over $1 billion dollars in China.
- The USA’s entry gave a tremendous political, as well as military, boost to Chiang Kai-shek as China’s leader.

The USA’s entry into the war did not bring immediate relief to China, despite the influx after 1941 of US money and supplies. Indeed, Japanese pressure increased. Chiang and the GMD remained reluctant to face the Japanese head on. There were few pitched battles between Chinese and Japanese forces. To avoid being overwhelmed by the superior Japanese armies, the Chinese necessarily fought a guerrilla war. This could not prevent the cities and urban areas suffering
severely from Japanese air strikes. It was in the GMD-held areas in central and southern China that the Japanese found the easiest targets to bomb. Chongqing, for example, suffered prolonged periods of aerial attack that made it the most heavily bombed city in twentieth-century warfare.

**Continued GMD–CCP rivalry**

The friction between the supposed defenders of China worsened the situation. The term United Front had become a misnomer. By 1940, fighting between the Nationalists and Communists had broken out again. The CCP had gained control of nineteen ‘liberated’ areas in northern China and resisted all the efforts of the GMD to retake them. Thus, between 1940 and 1945 there were two wars going on in China: the national war of resistance against the Japanese and the continuing CCP–GMD civil war.

**The war’s end**

In 1944, the Japanese unleashed the *Ichigo campaign* (see the map on page 000), their largest offensive undertaken in China. Chiang’s armies were unable to stem the advance, which carried the Japanese deep into southern China. What eventually saved the GMD forces was not the quality of their resistance but the curtailing of Japan’s war effort in China as the Japanese mainland fell under increased Allied attack from 1944 onwards. The climax came with the atomic bombing of Japan by the USA in August 1945; within a few days the Japanese had surrendered. The war’s sudden ending dramatically changed the internal situation in China, leaving problems that could not be resolved except by civil war.
### Summary diagram: The Sino-Japanese war

#### Onset
- The pretext for the extension of the Japanese occupation
- Chinese resistance 1937–45 created the Sino-Japanese war

#### Japanese brutality: the outstanding feature of the war. Why?
- Tradition of deep Sino-Japanese animosity
- Japanese notion of Chinese racial inferiority
- Contempt for prisoners

#### The rape of Nanjing 1937
- The most graphic example of deliberate brutality towards civilians

#### GMD–CCP officially re-formed the United Front; uneasy alliance but produced some resistance to Japanese
- The Hundred Regiments Offensive 1940, abortive Communist attack on Japanese
- Fearsome Japanese response

#### Japanese assisted in their occupation by collaborators

#### Pearl Harbor changed the character of the war
- The USA now an ally of China
- Chiang elevated to international status

#### Chiang and the Americans
- Chiang’s strategy after 1941 to wait on a massive US landing
- Chiang not an easy ally
- Americans on the spot were unimpressed by Chiang
- USA not necessarily opposed to the Chinese Communists
- Chiang’s Nationalists declined in popularity during the war

#### Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings
- Soviet Union entered the war
- End of Japanese resistance

#### Problems for Chiang
- Japan’s surrender denied Chiang the expected US landings in China
- Japanese surrender in Red-held areas challenged GMD authority
- Chiang entered into Soviet–GMD friendship treaty to offset Communist gains
Mao’s ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign 1942–4

What methods did Mao use to achieve and enforce his leadership and authority?

For all its claims to be a movement of liberation, the brand of communism that Mao developed at Yanan was fundamentally oppressive. Discipline and obedience were required of all those living under it. In one sense this was understandable, given that the regime was engaged in a constant fight for survival against both the Japanese and the GMD. But it went deeper than that. Mao had begun to manifest a belief that was to become a dominant feature of his outlook – the notion of revolutionary correctness.

Mao held that, unless the party maintained a constant struggle against error, the revolution would be betrayed from within. For Mao, an obvious danger was that those responsible for running the party would become a bureaucratic, self-justifying élite. To fight this tendency, in 1942 he launched a ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign. Party members were to engage in public self-criticism. To assist them in their search for revolutionary truth they were obliged to study prescribed texts, among which Mao’s own writings figured prominently.

In Source F, Mao explained why all good party members should undertake self-criticism.

**SOURCE F**


One who has a truly good intention must take the effect into consideration by summing up experiences and studying methods, or in the case of creative work, the means of expression. One who has a truly good intention must criticize with the utmost candor his own shortcomings and mistakes in work, and make up his mind to correct them. That is why the Communists have adopted the method of self-criticism.

The chief organiser of the purge was Mao’s head of security, Kang Sheng. He was a frightening figure who dressed totally in black and rode a jet-black horse. Kang, asserting that 70 per cent of the party were infected by revisionist ideas, made it his task to expose and punish them. In Mao’s name, Kang ordered the arrest of some 1000 CCP members, many of whom were subsequently imprisoned and tortured. Peter Vladimirov, a Russian Comintern agent, described the prevailing system of thought-control that he observed at first hand in Yanan in Source G.
Chapter 1  Nationalists and Communists

SOURCE G

From La Bureaucratie au Vietnam by Pyotr Vladimirov, quoted in Michael Lynch, Mao, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 121. Vladimirov was a Russian Comintern agent and here he gives a hostile account of what he witnessed while living with the Communists in Yanan in the early 1940s.

Party discipline is based on stupidly rigid forms of criticism and self-criticism. The president of each cell decides who is to be criticised and for what reason. In general it is a Communist who is attacked each time. The accused has only one right: to repent his ‘errors’. If he considers himself to be innocent or appears insufficiently repentant, the attacks are renewed. The cruel method of psychological coercion that Mao calls moral purification has created a stifling atmosphere inside the Party in Yanan. A not negligible number of Party activists in the region have committed suicide, have fled or have become psychotic. Under the protocol of criticism and self-criticism, the thoughts and aspirations and actions of everyone are on full view.

Vladimirov was not exaggerating the psychological effects of rectification. Sixty Communist Party officials committed suicide rather than undergo public humiliation. Mao did relent a little in the light of such grim news and lessened the severity of the campaign, but he was in no way apologetic about the need for the rectification process itself. He curtly dismissed suggestions that individual suffering should be allowed to modify party policy. In 1942, he wrote: ‘Some comrades do not understand the Party’s system of democratic centralism; they do not understand that the Party’s interests are above personal interests.’

Notable victims of the rectification campaign were Wang Shiwei and Ding Ling. Wang was a brilliant young Communist writer who, in 1942, published an article heavily critical of members of the CCP who lived comfortable lives in Yanan while Red Army comrades were dying in the struggle against the Japanese and the GMD. For this he was rounded on by those party officials who felt that they had been implicitly accused. Mao, angered by Wang Shiwei’s charge that he as leader was behaving improperly with pretty young women, backed the officials and chose to attack Wang as representing the intellectual class he despised.

Initially, a number of other writers came to Wang’s defence. One of these was the feminist Ding Ling, who had joined the CCP only to be shocked by what she regarded as the party’s hypocrisy in relation to the principle of female equality. The CCP claimed to treat women as equals, but her experience was that women in the party were in practice treated as inferiors. However, when Ding made her findings public she was brought before a party gathering and accused of insulting the CCP. She broke under the pressure, withdrew her previous criticisms and also abandoned Wang Shiwei. Left friendless, Wang was then subjected to a show trial at which he was accused of ‘anti-party thinking’.

According to the writer of Source G, what has driven party activists ‘psychotic’?

KEY FIGURES

Wang Shiwei (1906–47)
A believer in social justice, he was offended by the CCP’s terror tactics.

Ding Ling (1904–86)
A prolific novelist, essayist and feminist writer.

KEY TERMS

Intellectual class Those, according to Mao, who merely talked and theorised rather than acted.

Show trial A public hearing in which the accused, whose guilt is assumed, is paraded as an enemy of the people.
He resisted courageously, refusing to retract what he had written. His temerity earned him a life sentence and eventual execution in 1947 on Mao’s personal order. His body was chopped into small pieces and thrown down a well.

Wang Shiwei’s disgrace had the intended effect. It terrified the CCP’s officials. Between 1943 and 1944, leading party members came forward to engage in public self-criticism. It was an extraordinary spectacle. Expressing contrition for past mistakes, they pledged total loyalty to Mao Zedong and the party. Even Zhou Enlai admitted to having been dilatory in carrying out Mao’s orders.

Consequences of the ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign

- Mao had rid himself of opposition and consolidated his position as leader.
- Mao had finally triumphed over the pro-Moscow wing of the party.
- Mao had begun to move towards cult status in Yanan.
- Chinese communism was now so closely identified with him personally that it had become Maoism.
- Mao was elected Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP in 1943.
- By 1945, when the Japanese war came to an end, Mao was being regularly referred to as the Great Helmsman.

Summary diagram: Mao’s ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign 1942–4

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The impact of the occupation

How were China’s two conflicting parties affected by Japanese occupation?

The Japanese occupation changed China’s domestic politics in ways that the two contending parties, the Nationalists and the Communists, had not seen or planned for in 1937. This transformation became particularly marked after 1941 when the Sino-Japanese conflict transmuted from a regional Asian struggle into part of a world war.

Communist salvation

The most striking feature of the occupation was that it saved the Chinese Communists. Mao was well aware of what a close-run thing their survival had been and how much was owed to chance and to Japan. In 1972, he told the visiting Japanese prime minister, who had been expecting a frosty reception because of his country’s war record in China, that, far from being ill-disposed towards Japan, he looked on it with gratitude since it had been the Japanese occupation of China that had diverted and weakened the GMD and thus inadvertently prevented the Communists from being destroyed. The presence of the Japanese spared the Communists the all-out assault that Chiang would have unleashed had he been free to do so.

The Communists were, of course, often under attack from both the Nationalists and the Japanese, but, desperate though their situation appeared at times, they not only survived in their base at Yanan, but by the end of the war in 1945 had established their control over nineteen other ‘liberated’ areas in northern China. The full period of the Japanese occupation from 1931 to 1945 had seen the CCP grow from a fringe political party on the verge of extinction to a force that vied with the Nationalists for authority and that was recognised by the international powers as a political movement that could not be ignored in any settlement of Chinese affairs.

Chiang and the USA

The first phase of the occupation did not go well for Chiang. The Japanese expansion seemed unstoppable and the Communists had survived. All that seemed to change in 1941. Chiang referred to 8 December 1941, the day the USA declared war on Japan, as the happiest day of his life. It is easy to see why. The Americans, anxious to use China principally as a means of defeating Japan, naturally turned to Chiang. As the leader of China, acknowledged as such even by the CCP under the Xian agreement (see page 000), he was the obvious person with whom to liaise. President Roosevelt now regarded Chiang Kai-shek as an important world figure.
Chiang Kai-shek proved a difficult ally after 1941. He frequently quarrelled with the American advisers and demanded that those he disagreed with be replaced. Not wishing to weaken the war effort, the USA tended to do as he asked, despite the charge made by many American observers that Chiang’s perverse preoccupation with crushing the Communists was a principal cause of China’s poor showing against the Japanese. A prominent critic was General Stilwell, the US chief of South-East Asia command.

What dismayed the Americans was that the GMD conscript armies too often lacked the will to fight and rarely gained the wholehearted support of the Chinese people whose protector they supposedly were. Indeed, a feature of the war was the unpopularity of the GMD armies among the Chinese peasantry, a product of the abusive treatment the peasants invariably received at the hands of the Nationalist troops and of the GMD government’s harsh conscription policies. Reports reached US ears that the Communists were far more popular with the ordinary Chinese people and resisted the Japanese more resolutely.

The USA and the Chinese Communists

Arguably, the USA grasped the importance and strength of the Chinese Communists only after it was too late. In its eagerness to defeat Japan, the USA gave its support to Chiang and the GMD. Yet the interests of Chinese Communists and the Americans in China often coincided, the most obvious example being their joint determination to defeat Japan. Moreover, at that stage their ideological differences were not an insurmountable hurdle. During the Japanese occupation, the CCP deliberately played down its political aims; it dropped its call for a class war and emphasised that it was engaged in a national struggle against the Japanese aggressor. Mao asked the Americans to understand that his party members were ‘agrarian reformers’ rather than violent revolutionaries. However, any real chance of the USA switching its allegiance was stopped short by the sudden end of the war in August 1945.

The impact of the sudden ending of the war

The surrender of Japan in August 1945, directly following the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was in one obvious sense a great Chinese victory. Japan had finally been defeated after fifteen years of struggle. But it had not come the way that Chiang had expected. For him, the war had ended too soon. His belief throughout had been that the fanatical Japanese resistance would eventually lead to two critical developments:

- The landing in China of huge US armies, which would roll up the Japanese in a large land operation.
- In the course of this landing the Americans would overwhelm not only the Japanese but the Chinese Communists as well. This would leave Chiang both the victor over Japan and the master of China.
But events betrayed him. When the war abruptly ended in August 1945, the location of the Japanese within CCP-held areas in northern China meant that it was invariably Mao’s forces to whom the Japanese formally surrendered. The events of August 1945 had thus destroyed Chiang Kai-shek’s dream. He did not have the expected US troops at his disposal in China, which prevented him from crushing the Communists as he had planned. A further limitation on Chiang’s claim to mastery of China was that Soviet forces had now occupied Manchuria, the USSR having declared war on Japan the day after the Nagasaki bombing.

**CCP–GMD conflict over Japan’s surrender**

The Communists resisted the GMD’s claim to the nineteen liberated areas, which during the occupation had become Communist-administered zones. Mao ordered the Red Army to occupy the former Japanese-controlled regions, receive the formal surrenders of the Japanese and hold them as prisoners. Chiang’s government at Chongqing, however, insisted that the Japanese should surrender only to representatives of the Nationalists. But the GMD could not enforce this demand since they had no troops in the Communist areas. Chiang, therefore, instructed the Japanese to continue to maintain order and discipline in their former regions until Nationalist forces arrived.

The Nationalists would have been unable to accomplish this had the USA not stepped in. Anxious to prevent Soviet forces in Manchuria from extending their control southwards, the Americans mounted a huge airlift of GMD forces to the liberated areas. **General MacArthur** declared that only Chiang Kai-shek’s GMD had the right to receive Japan’s surrender in China. The question now was whether the Communists would accept this. Although Mao condemned Chiang and the GMD as ‘fascists’, he announced that he was willing to make the necessary concession. Mao explained why to his followers: ‘Without these concessions, we will not be able to shatter the GMD’s plot for civil war, nor take the political initiative, nor gain the sympathy of the rest of the world ... nor gain legal status for our party.’

Mao knew that the recent **Soviet–GMD friendship treaty** meant that he was unlikely to receive support from the USSR should he openly challenge Chiang’s US-backed claims over the surrender issue. Despite Mao Zedong’s caution at this stage, it would soon become clear that the net result of the Sino-Japanese war had been to leave the Communists in a position of strength from which, within five years, they were able to take control of the whole of China. The Japanese war had served as the great catalyst in Chinese politics.

**Final breakdown of GMD–CCP alliance**

Even before the defeat of Japan, the Americans hoped that the two rival parties in China could be brought together into some form of power sharing. Patrick Hurley, the US ambassador, sponsored a number of meetings between the CCP and the GMD. Intermittent talks between the two parties were held in 1944–5.
Mao declared himself willing to consider a compromise. However, in March 1945, Chiang broke off negotiations, announcing that he had no intention of sharing power with the Communists.

Again through American auspices, further talks were held in Chongqing in August 1945, following the Japanese surrender. Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek met face to face for the first time in twenty years. They even drank toasts to each other. But this was for show; there was no mutual respect, nor could there be in the light of their long animosity. The truth was they were preparing for civil war with each other. President Truman, however, still believed that a compromise could be achieved. He sent the USA’s most distinguished soldier and diplomat, George Marshall, to try to broker a lasting agreement.

Marshall spent some months attempting to resurrect the GMD–CCP talks but by March 1946 he had to admit that a compromise settlement was impossible. There were two complementary fears that prevented agreement between Chiang and Mao:

- The GMD’s concern that the Communists, while willing publicly to recognise Chiang Kai-shek as the legitimate leader of China, were not willing to co-operate in practice and were planning to overthrow him.
- The Communists’ profound doubt, based on past experience, that the Nationalist regime would honour its promise to allow them to retain the liberated areas that they now held. It was their fear over this that led the Communists to walk out of the talks.

Put simply, neither side trusted the other. Even as they talked they were seizing territory and preparing for the conflict they knew was coming. Initial skirmishes had already occurred before the civil war broke out in earnest in June 1946. It was to last for four years.

**Summary diagram: The impact of the occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communist salvation</th>
<th>Chiang and the USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• GMD weakened</td>
<td>• Acknowledged as China’s leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CCP internationally recognised</td>
<td>• Hated by some Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• US recognised CCP’s growing popularity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of the sudden ending of the war</th>
<th>Final breakdown of GMD–CCP alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Chiang in wrong location</td>
<td>• US efforts at mediation failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CCP took Japanese surrender</td>
<td>• Both parties prepared for civil war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Soviet forces in Manchuria</td>
<td>• Lack of trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
Nationalists and Communists

Refresher questions
Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

1. In what sense was Mao a dialectician?
2. Why was Mao at Yanan opposed by the ‘Twenty-eight Bolsheviks’?
3. How did the CCP exercise its control in the liberated areas?
4. How did the GMD government deal with the issue of the foreign presence in China?
5. What principles inspired the New Life Movement?
6. What factors undermined the New Life Movement?
7. What difficulties prevented Chiang Kai-shek from fully achieving his political aims?
8. How successful had Chiang’s Nationalist government been in the period 1936–45?
9. Why were some Chinese people willing to co-operate with the Japanese occupiers?
10. How did the entry of the USA into the war change the character of the Sino-Japanese conflict?
11. How did Chiang’s expectations change after December 1941?
12. What did the behaviour of the Japanese in Nanjing reveal about their attitude towards the Chinese?
13. Why did Chiang’s Nationalists decline in popularity during the war?
14. Why did the USA support the GMD rather than the CCP between 1941 and 1945?
15. In what ways did the sudden ending of the war in August 1945 act as a catalyst in Chinese politics?

Chapter summary
Originally united in their revolutionary aims, the CCP and the GMD drew apart. This was less a matter of their conflicting ideas than of the characters of their leaders. Chiang and Mao were driven personalities, each convinced of the correctness of his own position. Both attempted to stamp their authority on their respective parties, Chiang with less success than Mao, who emerged from the war as master of the CCP, having crushed opposition within the party in a violent ‘rectification of conduct’ campaign. The second GMD–CCP United Front against Japan was continually riven and weakened by mutual suspicion, arising largely from Chiang’s abiding desire to exterminate the Communists. By an extraordinary irony it was the presence of the Japanese that saved the CCP since it diverted the Nationalists from their destructive campaigns.

The United Front had already broken down irrevocably by the time of the war’s sudden ending in 1945. By then, the parties’ response to the Japanese occupation had revealed that their deep divisions over China’s future development could not be reconciled. Although smaller in number and in control of fewer Chinese regions than the GMD, the Communists in 1945 were better positioned strategically to win the civil war that soon broke out.
Question practice

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1 'The entry of the USA into the Pacific war in 1941 strengthened the CCP and undermined the GMD.' Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

2 How far did Mao Zedong use the rectification campaign at Yanan to consolidate his authority over the CCP?

3 'The Japanese occupation of 1937 to 1945 fundamentally altered the Chinese political situation.' Assess the validity of this view.

SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1 With reference to Sources G (page 27) and H (below) and your understanding of the historical context, which of these sources is more valuable in explaining why Mao asserted his authority over the CCP at Yanan?

2 With reference to Sources C (page 9), G (page 27) and H (below), and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these sources to a historian studying the ways in which Mao and the Communists controlled Yanan and the liberated areas.

SOURCE H


Young people have come here to be in the revolution, and they are committed to self-sacrifice. They have not come to seek the satisfactions of food and sex or the pleasures of life.

Some say there is no system of hierarchy and privilege in Yanan. This is not true. It exists. Others say, yes, there is but it is justified. This requires us to think with our heads.

I am no egalitarian. But I do not think it is necessary or justified to have multiple grades in food and clothing. If, while the sick can’t even have a sip of noodle soup some quite healthy big shots are indulging in extremely unnecessary and unjustified perks, the lower ranks will be alienated.