

UNIT 3 - THE POWER STRUGGLES

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 - *General Chiang Kai-shek*
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- *Civil War: KMT vs CCP*
 - *The Long March*
 - *War of Resistance against Japan*
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Introduction

During the last unit, we reviewed the period covering the fall of the Qing dynasty, ending over 2,000 years of the old imperial system of government; the establishment of the Republic of China; and the student rebellion of 4 May 1919 – events that contributed significantly towards changing the political landscape in China.

For over a decade after the death of President Yuan Shikai in 1916, control of the country was fragmented through the rise in power of regional, semi-independent military commanders, known as warlords. The warlords were a phenomenon that had emerged previously in the confusion occurring between changes of dynasties. Their power had been strengthened considerably in this new era by access to modern weapons and financial resources provided by the Western world. This era is often referred to as The Warlord Period and was eventually ended by the triumph of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist, or Kuomintang (KMT), army around 1928. There were other elements in the mix at this time, such as the influence of students and intellectuals, the growing strength of both the Kuomintang and the local Communist Party (CCP), the influence of Russia on both, and the continuing threat from Japan.

In this unit, we will follow the power struggles over the next three decades between the three main protagonists – Kuomintang, Chinese Communist Party, and Japan – until 1 October 1949 when Chairman Mao proclaimed the **People's Republic of China**.

Kuomintang (KMT)

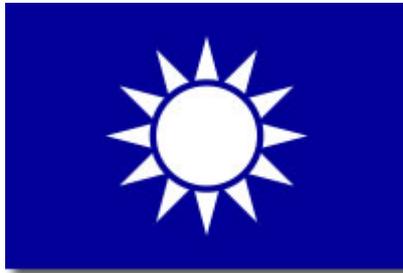


Figure 3.1 The flag of the Kuomintang (KMT)

Dr Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925)

Sun Yat-sen had originally formed the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in 1912 by merging his Revolutionary Alliance with several other revolutionary groups. President Yuan Shikai regarded this new party as a threat to his power as a virtual dictator and formally dissolved the KMT in 1914. After Yuan's death in 1916, the government fell under the control of various warlords and Sun returned to his home base in Guangzhou (now Canton) in the south in 1920, where he was elected president of the Republic of China by the parliament in that city. Although there were, in effect, two separate seats of government in China until 1927 (Beijing and Guangzhou), Western powers continued to regard Beijing as the accepted seat of government, so Sun's task of establishing a national power base in the south was quite challenging.

It should be noted that, by this time, many Soviet advisers had arrived in China to help the Chinese Communist Party (founded in Shanghai in 1921), and they also supported the KMT, with the overall aim of establishing the principles of Russian communism throughout the Chinese political system. In his efforts to reorganise the KMT, Sun had considerable assistance from the Soviet adviser Michael Borodin, a special envoy seconded from the Russian government.

The KMT and the CCP were cooperating with each other during the early 1920s with the mutual aim of overcoming the warlords. As a first step towards achieving this, they jointly set up the Whampoa Military Academy near Guangzhou in 1924 to train military officers to lead a Northern Expedition against the warlords, with General Chiang Kai-shek, Sun's senior military confidant, as its commander.

Subsequently, after a warlord coup in Beijing in late 1924, Sun was invited there to assist with the formation of a new government and, hopefully, to promote his lifelong ambitions. He had just completed his strategy paper, *Outline of National Reconstruction*, which predicted that China's reconstruction would undergo three stages, from direct military government to leadership by the KMT and, finally, to a democratic form of government. Sun's aspirations were to be cut short, however, by his untimely death from cancer in 1925; so died the "Father of the Republic" after an extraordinary career in China's political development. Through his persistent efforts, Sun's Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang, was to become the most powerful political party in China until the Japanese invasion in 1937.

General Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975)



Figure 3.2

General Chiang Kai-shek

Chiang Kai-shek received his military training in Tokyo, where he fell under the influence of Sun Yat-sen for whom he fought during the 1911 army revolt. In 1926, he was appointed commander of the Whampoa Military Academy, an establishment for training officers along the Russian model, and then commanded the Northern Expedition aimed at defeating the warlords and unifying China. Within two years, these tasks were completed, initially with the assistance of the CCP; Chiang was appointed chairman of the KMT government based in Nanjing.

During this military campaign against the warlords, Chiang felt that the CCP was placing too much emphasis on rural, social, and economic revolutionary reforms influenced by their Russian advisers. He engaged in persistent efforts to consolidate his Nationalist regime by eliminating communist elements both from his own party and from the developing CCP.

To achieve this aim, Chiang sent his troops to Shanghai in April 1927 with orders to purge communist elements, including labour unions and their organisers. Hundreds were massacred; and survivors, including Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai, who later became such famous names in Chinese history (and whom we will talk about in some detail in a later unit), fled to the relative safety of Hunan Province where Mao Zedong had established a soviet, or regional rural commune.

Chiang ruled with few problems until 1931, when he decided to offer no resistance to Japan's invasion of Manchuria. He considered the elimination of the communist threat and the destruction of Mao's Chinese Red Army – renamed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1946 – to be more important than the Japanese threat to China, so he brokered a peace deal with Japan in 1933. Many later analysts, with the benefit of hindsight, have suggested that, had Chiang offered resistance to the Japanese at that time, the disastrous effect of their operations in the Asia-Pacific theatre of World War II may have been mitigated. This, of course, remains a moot point.

During World War II, Chiang was Allied commander-in-chief in China and, rather ironically, joined forces with his old "enemy", the CCP, in the war against Japan. After the war ended on 14 August 1945, Chiang was twice elected president of China until his troops were defeated by Mao's PLA in 1949. Chiang then fled to Taiwan to establish the Nationalist Republic of China (ROC) in that country.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP)



Figure 3.3 The flag of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

After the Russian Bolshevik revolution in 1917, which saw the beginnings of communism in the Soviet Union, several Chinese students who had gone abroad to study became members of the Communist Party in Japan, France and other countries and returned home espousing this form of political philosophy. In 1920, agents from the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow arrived in China to assist with the establishment of communist cells in Beijing, Shanghai and Hunan provinces. Mao Zedong, a native of Hunan, led the communist cell there. In July 1921, delegates from these communist cells, together with Japanese sympathisers, met secretly in Shanghai to convene the First National Party Congress of the CCP. Mao attended as the delegate from Hunan and subsequently played an increasingly significant part in the party's later development until he eventually became chairman of the People's Republic of China in 1949. (We will look at Mao's personal background, as well as his political ideology, in some detail in the next unit.)

After the purge of communists by the KMT in Shanghai in 1927, military confrontations between the two parties continued throughout the countryside, with the understrength CCP forces under Mao resorting to strategic retreats and guerrilla warfare in an effort to defeat the KMT – a victory not finally achieved until 1949.

Civil War: KMT vs CCP (1927–1949)

Even though the CCP had supported Chiang's Nationalists during the Northern Expedition against the warlords, Chiang suddenly changed his attitude and sent his troops into Shanghai with orders to arrest and execute the communists. The Shanghai Massacre of 1927, as it became known, marked the start of the civil war between the KMT and CCP. The so-called White Terror period lasted for three years, by which time the Communist Party was virtually extinguished – membership falling from 58,000 to under 10,000. Those who survived the carnage fled to the more remote areas of the countryside. This turn of events was to impact dramatically on the lives of the Chinese people over the next two decades and beyond.

From his base in remote Hunan Province, Mao led several guerrilla-type insurrections against the KMT, but they were bloodily suppressed. In 1930, Chiang launched the first of his five annual major "encirclement campaigns" against Mao's Chinese Red Army. Finally, in 1934, Chiang's fifth campaign was undertaken on a very large scale with some 700,000 troops and the crucial aid of General Hans von Seeckt of the German High Command, whom Chiang had secured from Hitler. The communist-controlled areas were overrun, even though, by this time, the Red Army troop levels had been bolstered by the arrival of around 100,000 trained fighters from the Fourth Army under the leadership of General Zhu De. (In recognition of his efforts, General Zhu was made a marshal in 1955 and served as head of state and chairman of the standing committee of the National People's Congress in 1976, just prior to the death of Chairman Mao.) To avoid annihilation, the Red Army command decided upon a strategic retreat and embarked on an epic journey that was to take an iconic place in the annals of Chinese history – the Long March.



Figure 3.4 The Long March

The Long March to Shaanxi Province in northwest China, by any standard an extraordinary accomplishment, ranks as one of the great military exploits and a remarkable example of human endurance. Over 100,000 men and women began the Long March, which covered 6,000 miles in just over one year, crossed 24 rivers and 18 mountain ranges, five of them under permanent snow. Historians have recorded that their numbers were reduced in the end to fewer than 10,000 through illness and fighting casualties. There were 15 pitched battles along the way with KMT troops and skirmishes of some sort almost daily. Only about 50 women survived, including Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, and the wife of Zhou Enlai, Deng Yingchao. Amongst the missing were two of Mao's children, who had been left for safety along the way with a peasant family. They were never seen again.

The American journalist Edgar Snow, who accompanied the march, described the journey of Mao and his colleagues in *Red Star over China* (1937) as 'an Odyssey unequalled in modern times' and quoted Mao's fatalistic comment: 'death just did not seem to want me'.

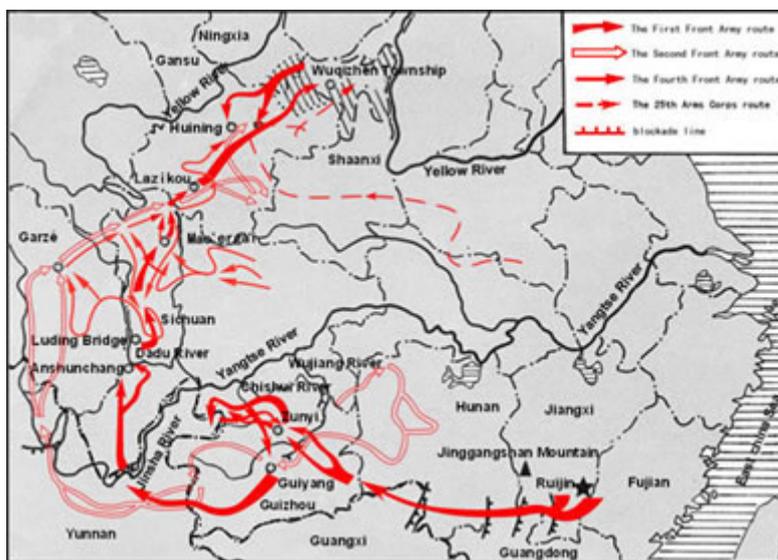


Figure 3.5 The Long March Route

By the end of 1935, despite these privations, the survivors had entrenched themselves in the remote and comparatively safe region of Yanan, where they continued to harass the Kuomintang forces with Mao-led guerrilla warfare tactics: "the enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy halts, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue".

The veterans of the Long March became the elite in the CCP and later held major positions in the government of the People's Republic of China founded by the Communists in 1949.

War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945)

The rising power and territorial ambitions of Japan were to have a considerable impact on the future of China, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. Japan had defeated China in Korea in 1895 and defeated Russia in Manchuria in 1905, the first Asian power to achieve such a victory. Although Russia was convincingly routed by Japan in this conflict, it is interesting to note that Japan lost the diplomatic negotiations that followed. The Russian Tsar had sued for peace through the offices of American President Theodore Roosevelt, who had offered to act as intermediary. As Japan had provided over 50% of the relief force in putting down the sieges of the Boxer Rebellion at the turn of the century, in doing so, it felt that it had been accepted by the Western powers. However, during the peace negotiations in New Hampshire, the Russian foreign minister, Witte, skilfully regained by diplomatic means much of what his country had lost in the military conflict, enabling Russia to retain its influence in Manchuria. Ironically, Japan received very little from the negotiations and withdrew from Manchuria altogether until they invaded again in 1931.

In 1931, Japan's troops invaded Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo with the last Qing emperor, Pu Yi, as chief executive and later emperor. (We talked about Pu Yi in some detail in the last unit.) This rich new colony then became a training ground and base for Japan's armies that invaded China in 1937, committed the atrocities during the Rape of Nanjing and went on to overrun most of the Asia-Pacific area during World War II.

During the period of Japanese incursion from 1937 to 1945, the KMT and CCP put aside their differences in a joint patriotic effort to frustrate the Japanese army on several fronts but with limited success. Japanese troops were much better equipped and trained; by the end of 1937, Japan had blockaded most of the east coast of China, with the exception of Hong Kong, thus preventing the delivery of wartime supplies from Western allies in Europe and the U.S.

Following a series of defeats, Chiang Kai-shek moved his government base and troops to Chongqing in Sichuan, a province in southwestern China protected by high mountain ranges. (Those readers who have visited the Three Gorges Dam area on the Yangtze near Chongqing will be familiar with the difficult terrain.) At the same time, the CCP was active in northwest China near the Manchurian border, continually harassing the Japanese through tactical guerrilla forays.

Famine was widespread, and hundreds of thousands of people starved to death. In a courageous effort to address this disaster, the "Flying Tigers", a voluntary group of mainly American pilots under General Claire Chennault, flew supplies into China from India over "the Hump", the Himalayan Mountains.

After World War II broke out in Europe in 1939, Chinese forces, although exhausted, continued to fight against Japan, with intermittent support from Western allies.

The two sides entered into a stalemate, however, as Japan's military resources were spread thin by reason of their south-east Asian expansion, as well as by their declaration of war on the U.S. in 1941. By that time, the tenuous partnership between the KMT and CCP had started to break down. With the Pacific war against the U.S. diverting some of their military resources, Japan did not command as much of Chiang's attention, and he again focused on his long-held prime objective:

the elimination of communism. Accordingly, he made an unprovoked, successful attack on the Communist New Fourth Army in the lower Yangtze valley, an event known as the New Fourth Army Incident. Both sides looked forward to resuming their civil war, which continued, despite the efforts of the U.S. to mediate, until the final withdrawal of the KMT to Taiwan in 1949.

The Chinese War of Resistance tied down over one million Japanese troops in China who would otherwise have been sent against the Americans in the Pacific theatre of war. Japan eventually surrendered to the Allied forces on 14 August 1945, following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It is interesting to note that, even though there was a full-scale war, Japan never officially declared war on China and referred to its military operation there as the "China Incident" or the "China Affair".

To the Victors, the Spoils (1945–1949)

The last phase of the civil war was frustrating for Chiang, for, although he benefited from more military supplies and resources and was a master of political bargaining with his Western allies, he had little understanding of the peasant mentality and did not trust any policy of arming peasants for guerrilla warfare.

Mao, on the other hand, had gained invaluable experience during the Long March, gathering the support of the rural communities, harnessing their abilities, and raising their level of political consciousness. This hard-earned peasant support laid the foundations, in no small measure, for his later success in overthrowing the Kuomintang government and establishing the People's Republic of China at the end of 1949.

Even though Chiang had re-established his Nationalist government in Nanjing at the end of World War II, he experienced economic problems that exacerbated his position, which was already weakened by the loss of peasant support. Post-war inflation was rampant, resulting in increasing poverty and misery in the ranks of the less-affluent middle class and civil servants (his erstwhile power base). Resentment against the government grew, the military became increasingly demoralised, and desertion to the CCP intensified. Despite an attempt by the U.S. to broker a peace deal between the KMT and the CCP by sending General George G. Marshall (now best remembered for the European Marshall Plan), the political views of the two parties were too far apart for this to be successful.

The climax to the civil war came with the surrender of over 300,000 KMT troops to the CCP in Manchuria in 1948. By the end of that year, KMT troop levels had decreased by almost one million men – more than two-thirds by desertion.

The Kuomintang regime was finished in the mainland; and in 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and his government fled to Taiwan, taking with them millions of dollars worth of China's gold reserves, together with priceless antiques from the Forbidden City in Beijing, many of which can still be viewed at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan.

Conclusion

Nearly three decades after the formation of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong and his

followers had at last achieved their victory. On 1 October 1949, Mao stood above the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, and proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with himself as chairman. It had been a long and arduous journey for the revolutionaries but "to the victors, the spoils".



Figure 3.6 Republic of China 1949

Activity 3

1. Please look at:

- <http://en.wikipedia.org> for an overview of the life and times of Chiang Kai-shek.
- www.paulnoll.com/China/Long-March for a description of the epic Long March.

2. Do you consider that the War of Resistance in China significantly affected Japan's efforts in the Pacific theatre during WWII?

Share your thoughts on the **Course Discussion Forum**

Next - Mao Zedong's Political and Socio-economic Ideologies

In Unit 4, we will look at China's transformation as a result of Mao's radical ideological initiatives (in particular his large-scale social engineering) which had such disastrous consequences for his people during the following decades.

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