

# The Chinese Civil War (1927-37 and 1946-49)

- first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century: China faces political chaos
- revolution in 1911: Manchu dynasty overthrown, new Republic fails to take hold, China continues to be exploited by foreign powers, lacks any strong central government
- Chinese Civil War: two ideologically opposed forces: nationalists and communists
- struggle between forces begins in 1927, interrupted by Sino-Japanese war in 1937, starts again in 1946

## Long-term causes of the Chinese Civil War

### Socio-economic factors

- 1900: China ruled by imperial Manchu dynasty, majority of population are peasants
- peasants are extremely poor but are the ones paying taxes
- peasants face starvation during floods or droughts
- imbalance: population grows more than cultivated land: famines more frequent
- peasants are driven to cities by poverty

### Political weakness and the influence of foreign powers

- 19<sup>th</sup> century: European imperialists powers humiliate and exploit China, cause destabilization of ruling Manchu regime
- Britain defeats China in Opium Wars (mid 19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Chinese Empire carved up into spheres of influence by Europeans, Americans, Japan
- China is forced to sign unequal treaties: imperialist powers gain extraordinary control over trade
- missionaries flood into China
- inflation and corruption weaken financial position of Manchus
- widespread corruption among officials: tax revenues do not reach central government
- 1850-64: Taiping Rebellion in southern China: part religious movement, part political reform
- involvement of regional armies begins to move away from centralized control: results in Warlord Era in 1920s
- Self-Strengthening Movement is divided on how to modernize China
- 1899: Boxer Rebellion against Westerners: without modern weaponry, the anti-foreign revolt is doomed to fail

### The overthrow of the Manchu dynasty

- growing feeling that Manchu dynasty should be overthrown: China westernized
- political weakness of Manchu dynasty: Emperor dies with succession of two-year old boy
- Oct. 1911: Double Tenth: ruling dynasty is overthrown, republic is created
- soldiers in Wuchang revolt and rebellion spreads quickly; revolution begins when government loses power over military
- Nov. 1911: delegates from “independent” provinces gather in Nanjing to declare Chinese Rep.
- first president is a political exile, Dr. Sun Yixian
- imperial government attempts to use Yuan Shikai to suppress rebellion; he double crosses them; deal that Sun Yixian makes Yuan Shikai president
- revolution is incomplete: no real introduction of democracy, most former imperial officials keep their positions
- not middle class, but military ignites rising; revolt of provinces against centre

### The rule of Yuan Shikai

- military dictator from 1912 to 1915
- key issues from 1911 revolution remain unsolved
- regionalism continues and is key obstacle for Yuan

- Sun's party reforms as Guomindang (GMD); has three principles: nationalism, democracy, people's livelihood
- argued that Sun agreed to Yuan's rule to avert possibility of civil war: republicans are not powerful enough to take on military
- Sun attempts to undermine Yuan's government: moves power base from Beijing to Nanjing: Yuan refuses to leave; republicans are not sufficiently organized to resist Yuan
- Yuan masters his downfall: abolishes regional assemblies from centralized power, provincial powers are alienated because tax revenues are centralized, proclaims himself Emperor (1916)

## Short-term causes of the Chinese Civil War

### Political weakness: regionalism - the warlords 1916-18

- key cause of war is increasing lack of unity: regionalism and provincialism
- with death of Yuan, China breaks up into small states and provinces, each controlled by a warlord and his private army: run territories independently; own laws, own currencies
- peasants suffer from constant wars of warlords
- warlord period increases sense of humiliation in China: desire to rid foreign influence, increase in nationalism
- China ceases to exist; internal anarchy

### The May Fourth Movement

- two political movements develop in response to warlords and foreign influence
- May Fourth Movement begins in 1919: students lead mass demonstration in Beijing
- hostility is ignited by Versailles settlement
- movement is dedicated to change and the rebirth of China as independent nation
- Bolshevik revolution (1917) provides a practical example
- other Chinese are inspired by GMD nationalist party which strengthens during warlord era
- two groups - nationalists and communists - are to form alliance in 1922

### Communists and nationalists

- by time Sun dies in 1925, GMD makes little progress to fulfill their "Three Principles"
- GMD has to rely on alliances with warlords due to weak military power
- General Jiang Jieshi takes over leadership of GMD
- Soviets begin to invest in GMD: aid and assistance to party; foster good relationship with nationalist China
- Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerges during warlord period
- due to military weakness and some shared aims, CCP works with GMD: encouraged to do this by USSR

### Attempt to unify China: the First United Front

- GMD and CCP want united China: first step is to get rid of warlords
- agree on freeing China of foreign imperialist powers
- despite Soviet links, Jiang is not a communist; becomes increasingly anti-communist and begins leadership in GMD by removing communists from key positions
- stops short of breaking alliance with communists because he has to defeat warlords
- GMD and communists set out on "Northern Expedition" (1926) to crush warlords of central and northern China: operation is great success
- within two years, GMD and CCP destroy power of warlords and GMD announces itself the legitimate government of China with new capital Nanjing

## Immediate cause of the Chinese Civil War: the GMD attacks the CCP

- United Front (GMD & CCP) is only friendship of convenience
- fight against warlords unites them; once it is over, ideology divides them
- CCP gains local peasant support due to promise of land
- popular support for communists is key reason that Jiang decides he can't tolerate them in GMD

- areas under communist control see peasants attacking landlords
- seems to Jiang that CCP needs to be crushed before China is unified under GMD
- Jiang expels all communists, attacks on them reach peak in "White Terror" (April 1927)
- powerful workers' army proves effective, are used to shoot communists
- despite attempts to resist (Mao's Autumn Harvest Rising fails), CCP is nearly crushed in 1927
- Comintern orders to retain United Front; CCP flees to mountains of Jinagsi
- GMD pursues them, determined to destroy the communists: civil war begins

## The course of the war

### The Jiangxi Soviet

- CCP is forced to retreat into Jiangxi province (Jiangxi Soviet) to survive GMD onslaught
- Mao believes that GMD and Comintern have wrong strategy for China: base revolution on urban areas; Mao's revolution would be based on peasants (88% of population in rural areas)
- Mao arrives at Jiangxi, organizes Jiangxi Soviet around idea of revolutionary role of peasants

### Division within the CCP

- Mao's key points how the revolution should be fought: carried out by peasants, guerrilla warfare, land reform in controlled areas
- Mao's views are not shared by Soviet Union and Comintern
- Feb. 1930: Comintern official Li Lisan issues instruction to CCP members to attack cities in Jiangxi and Hunan: order is known as "Li Lisan Line"
- attacks fail, army is forced to retreat; appears that CCP can only hold its influence in rural areas

### GMD attempts to exterminate CCP

- 1928-34: Jiang has chance to carry out Sun's principles
- Jiang's government is ineffective, makes no progress towards democracy or land reform
- Jiang's support comes from landlords and the rich: building of roads and schools is limited
- from 1931: Jiang faces threat of Japanese (invade Manchuria)
- Jiang carries out "Five Encirclement Campaigns" to destroy Jiangxi Soviet
- GMD strategy is to encircle Reds and cut off from supplies
- Li Lisan is replaced by "Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks" who remove Mao as chief commissar
- first three campaigns are launched between Dec. 1930 and Sept. 1931
- Red Army under Mao and Zhou Enlai faces increasingly strong GMD forces; defeat all three
- Mao's strategy: allow GMD to enter, begin rounding up communists, then attack on fragmented units: knowledge of terrain and use of local support allow place and timing of engagements
- Mao is not involved in Fourth Encirclement Campaign (March 1933): GMD forced back again

### The Long March

- Oct. 1933: Jiang attempts fifth and final campaign; takes advice from German general
- Red Army cannot take advantage of higher mobility and local support
- outnumbered and surrounded by GMD forces, lose final battle in 1934
- CCP faces annihilation: Mao decides that only chance is to break through GMD lines and set up another base: succeed on 19. Oct. and embark on Long March
- 9'600km trek, takes 368 days, 90% of 90'000 communists die

### Key events of the Long March

#### *Crossing the Xiang River*

- Xiang River is strongly defended by GMD
- Mao criticizes: CCP does not use tactics of outmaneuvering GMD and is loaded down with unnecessary equipment (furniture etc.)

#### *Zunyi Conference*

- CCP captures town of Zunyi
- Twenty-Eight Bolsheviks are discredited due to disasters at Xiang River
- party conference: Mao emerges as leader

**Upper Yangtze River Crossing**

- Mao leads Red Army to Sichuan to meet up with strong communist army under Zhang Guotao
- GMD destroys all boats at Yangtze River crossing
- Mao deceives nationalists that army is building bridge: sends units 136km further
- while bridge is built, CCP crosses river in another place: Mao gets across before GMD realizes

**The Luding Bridge**

- two weeks later Red Army is at Dadu River: local people built a bridge
- GMD could have blown the bridge but that would lead to local outcry: remove wood planks
- crossing is great morale booster to CCP and courage inspires many GMD members to switch

**Disputes between Zhang Guotao, Zhu De and Mao**

- Mao has 10'000 left and meets with 45'000 men under Zhang in Sichuan
- two leaders disagree on what the next move should be
- Mao wants to go north to Shaanxi Soviet to fight Japanese
- Zhang wants to stay in western Sichuan, have closer access to USSR
- do not agree and end up going separate ways
- Zhu De goes with Zhang and these two take majority of forces; GMD attacks them, Zhu flees to Mao, Zhang is virtually destroyed

**Songpan Marshes**

- Mao has to cross unmapped and deadly Songpan Marshes
- men sink down into mud, drown, face attack from local tribes, eat poisonous plants

**Shaanxi**

- Oct. 1935: Mao arrives at Shaanxi Soviet, sets up communist base

**Mao and revolutionary warfare**

- Mao's war against GMD: revolutionary war: not only trying to defeat, but also impose ideology
- Mao's priority is to persuade peasants to support communist cause
- setting up base areas: for organizing and educating peasants, base areas would be remote, rule is to treat everyone with respect which helps to gain support
- organization phase: once base camp is set up, CCP leaders are sent to other villages, goal is to take over slowly countryside, isolation of cities
- defending bases: Mao organizes peasants to use hit-and-run tactics, goal is to decrease GMD's morale, when pursuing the person they would be pulled into enemy territory
- guerrilla phase: during retreat, new bases can be created, causing more guerrilla fighters
- protracted war: Mao sees that his strategy is for a long war, at some point the balance will finally tilt in the guerrilla's favor
- seizing power: war goes into open or mobile phase, guerrilla units join together to form conventional army, CCP is at this stage when second phase of civil war breaks out

**End of the first stage of the Chinese Civil War - the Second United Front, 1937**

- Long March is essential for ensuring survival of CCP and making Mao unchallenged leader
- Jiang Jieshi has to deal with threat of Japanese invaders; but still detests communists a lot more than Japanese
- Jiang fails to resist Japanese attacks; Japanese up to Great Wall (Jan. 1933)
- growing Japanese control in China leads to anti-Japanese sentiment
- Mao calls for another United Front to fight the Japanese
- Comintern, not Mao, pushes the alliance between GMD and CCP
- Second United Front is sealed when Jieshi is kidnapped by warlord Zhang; is released on Comintern orders after 13 days
- Second United Front is formed in April 1937: civil war is suspended
- communists hope that the war against Japan will exhaust GMD
- Japan reacts to alliance with show of force

- Nanjing faces onslaught (Rape of Nanjing)

## Why was the CCP able to survive the first stage of the Chinese Civil War?

- final victory of CCP in 1945 would not be possible without successes between 1928-36

### CCP successes

- Long March ensures CCP survival and is propaganda victory; also proclaim policies on the way
- win patriotic support for claim of going north to fight Japanese
- march confirms Mao as the leader
- joint front with GMD against Japanese wins CCP popularity; pose as true nationalists

### GMD errors

- decision to deal with CCP before Japanese loses them patriotic support
- poor treatment of peasants by GMD forces degrades popularity
- fail to implement Sun's Three Principles

## The Sino-Japanese War

- reason for the outbreak of the second phase and the ultimate victory of the CCP

### The impact of the war on the GMD

- does little to resist the Japanese, but waits for USA winning war: bad impact on morale of army, results in loss of support among population
- do not want to fight themselves: already lose many troops (need soldiers for war against CCP) and do not want to risk potential defeat (could have a bad impact on the morale of troops)
- Japanese initial control of large GMD-areas leads to decrease in tax income: more money printed: leads to a high level inflation
- GMD faces many problems
- loss of support among the peasants (natural supporters of the GMD); are hit hard by rising taxes and the inflation and further when conscription is introduced
- corruption in the army
- unmotivated soldiers: badly treated, forced to fight
- Japanese control the coast: limited supply possible
- remain divided
- only control South China & area around capital in Central China: lack control in many provinces
- conventional warfare results in heavy losses (CCP uses guerrilla warfare, only light losses)
- lack of support among the population: seems as they are just waiting for USA
- food shortages: do not control the countryside

### The impact of the war on the CCP

- guerrilla warfare: need the support of population, they achieve this by radical social policies, egalitarian policy (women treated as equals with men, intellectuals with peasants), land reform, education (build schools), reducing taxes, modernization
- military contribution of CCP in war is debated, but there is a general perception within China and internationally that the CCP gives good leadership
- good propaganda: Mao argues that Jiang is not more than a puppet of Western powers: catalyses anti-foreign feelings in China
- holds back inflation by taxing people in goods
- tries to be self-sufficient: soldiers have to participate in agricultural production: garrison-system
- tries to establish unity within party: Rectification Campaigns: correct ideas are Mao's

## Second phase of the war (1946-49)

- by end of Sino-Japanese war: CCP is significantly strengthened and GMD weakened
- in contrast to first phase: international war: in context of the Cold War, as a first step USSR and USA want to form a coalition government
- 1945: real war not broken out yet (need some time after WWII to re-establish troops)

- GMD controls cities; CCP controls countryside
- 1946: focus Manchuria, CCP can take weapons from Japanese with help of the Soviet Union (has military posts in Manchuria)
- 1947: focus Central and Northern China, CCP loses support of peasants: in retreat, lose Yenan, GMD advances, control majority of the cities
- 1948: focus Southern China, tide turns, CCP advances, attacks important cities, possible as they can move from guerrilla warfare to more conventional fighting, as they gain weapons of Japanese, gain weapons of GMD in occupied regions, troops increase in size (many soldiers change side GMD to CCP because they are treated better)

## Failure of the USA

- USA works actively to achieve a diplomatic solution: General Marshall
- 1946: negotiations are stopped: both sides move troops to Manchuria

## Initial victories for GMD (1945-47)

- have more troops than CCP (four million to one million)
- better weaponry (supported by USA), even after CCP could take over weapons of Japanese in Manchuria
- GMD is able to force CCP out of cities in Manchuria, CCP establishes bases outside the cities: seems as if GMD wins over Manchuria
- USA further promotes coalition government (USA difficult situation, officially do not support one-party states)

## CCP on the offensive (1947-48)

- June 1947: ceasefire is agreed, helps CCP to reorganize and re-establish their troops
- support among population further increases
- GMD recaptures cities in Manchuria (e.g. Yenan)
- Red Army (People's Liberation Army, PLA) reverts to guerrilla warfare: effective: can isolate cities in Manchuria
- March 1948: CCP and GMD evenly matched in terms of manpower and resources but the PLA has more heavy weapons
- Jiang does not accept defeat and fighting on results in loss of 40'000 troops

## Collapse of the GMD resistance

- PLA launches offensive on railway junction of Xuzhou (conventional warfare relying on massed heavy artillery, change their tactics effectively)
- Jan. 1949: CCP takes over Tianjin and Beijing: whole North under control, then Nanjing (April), Shanghai (May)
- 1. Oct. 1949: Mao proclaims establishment of the People's Republic of China

## What were the reasons for the communist success?

### Strengths of the CCP

- guerrilla tactics and revolutionary warfare; in first phase, their fight against Japan and in Manchuria; in second phase: change their tactics effectively depending on the fight
- leadership of PLA, led by Lin Bao: transformation from guerrilla to regular army, capture enemy weapons, more effective organization than nationalist troops, better morale, good behavior of soldiers attracts peasantry's support
- role of Mao: innovates guerrilla tactics, takes advantage of Sino-Japanese war, adapts his ideas and policies to changing military situation
- spread of communist ideas: land reform and fairer taxation systems guarantee support, after they capture cities, they bring food to starving population
- role of intelligence: superior, Jiang's assistant Chief of Staff, Liu Fei is communist spy, additionally many national commanders are communist agents

## Jiang Jieshi's errors

- political: resists democratic changes, corrupt and inefficient party, unfair tax system: fails to win mass support, relies on a narrow, wealthy section of businessmen
- economic: inflation devastates middle class, reforms to stop inflation come too late (new currency in 1948): economy collapses in 1949
- military: low morale, high number of desertions, especially decision of Jiang to fight on in Manchuria, far away from his real bases of support, is a disaster; generally Mao tries to interfere too much, although he is removed from actual actions

## What was the role of foreign support in the final outcome?

### The USA

- economic and strategic interests in China
- do what they can to assist Jiang (regime too ineffective to survive): almost 3 billion in aid and large supplies of arms, help to transport troops to north of China (beginning second stage), US troops occupy Tianjin and Beijing until GMD is ready
- some historians believe there should have been more or different support
- Americans make Jiang agree to truces at critical times
- their support gives Mao excellent anti GMD-propaganda

### The USSR

- at no time the same level of military and economic assistance: Stalin does not see that the CCP can win war until later in 1948
- assistance in Manchuria, establish training centers, train pilots, help establishing more modern and effective PLA
- Stalin is worried that USA will involve itself further in Chinese Civil War, therefore attempts to limit Mao's successes in later stages of conflict; additionally he sees in Mao a potential opponent for power within the communist world

## Results of the Chinese Civil War

### For China

- CCP consolidates its control and pursues their communist ideas (single-party state)
- war results in militarization of society
- Mao has a god-like status
- war used to justify authoritarian rule of CCP and suppression of individual rights/freedom

### For Asia

- Cold War is globalized: Asia now a region where super powers struggle for control and influence: Bamboo Curtain in Asia

### For the USSR

- victory for spread of communism; Stalin fears Mao as rival for leadership of communist world
- Stalin does not accept Maoism as "genuinely revolutionary" and Mao's "hybrid" ideology
- Mao says that Stalin's policies are rooted in self-interest
- Mao visits Moscow in 1950: Sino-Soviet Treaty: helps to start a certain excitement and enthusiasm about CCP's victory
- Soviets try to expand their influence in China: Soviet style constructions built in China's towns, Soviet technology prioritized over Chinese
- relation chills during Korean War: Soviets give material assistance to the one million Chinese troops engaged in battle, but demand that Chinese pay for all material

### China's relation with the USA and the West

- Mao's victory leads to much anxiety in USA
- many Americans see communist victory as inevitable given the lack of support that exists for Nationalists among Chinese population; state officials are still accused of having lost China

- USA fails to understand different types of communism and increasing hostility between Mao and Stalin (Stalin seen as mastermind behind Mao's success)
- USA refuses to recognize PRC as a legitimate state
- vast new military budget is passed to fund struggle against spread of communism
- 1960s: China and the USA enter a period of dialogue (ping-pong-diplomacy)