

Nationalism Around the World, 1919-1939

THE STORY MATTERS...

World War I slowed the push toward independence among colonies in many parts of the world, but the end of the war gave a new strength to these efforts. Mohandas Gandhi was the charismatic leader of the Indian nationalist movement against British rule. He was committed to nonviolent action as a method for political and social change. Using peaceful methods, he eventually led India to independence. His actions inspired people to seek the end of colonialism, racism, and violence.

Lesson 29-3

Revolutionary Chaos in China

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

ceased eventually

Content Vocabulary

guerrilla tactics redistribution of wealth

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can political control lead to nationalist movements?
- How does economic exploitation lead to nationalist movements?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

In 1923 the Nationalist and Communist parties formed an alliance to drive the imperialists out of China. Tensions between the two parties grew, however. Sun Yat-sen's successor, Chiang Kai-shek, struck against the Communists. Many Communists went into hiding or fled to the mountainous north, where Mao Zedong set up a Communist base.

Nationalists and Communists

GUIDING QUESTION What was the relationship between the Nationalists and the Communists?

Revolutionary Marxism had its greatest impact in China. By 1920 central authority had almost ceased to exist in China. Two different political forces began to emerge as competitors for the right to rule China: Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party, which had been driven from the political arena several years earlier, and the Chinese Communist Party.

The Nationalist-Communist Alliance

In 1921 a group of young radicals, including several faculty and staff members from Beijing University, founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the commercial and industrial city of Shanghai. Comintern agents soon advised the new party to join with the more experienced Nationalist Party.

Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Nationalists, welcomed the cooperation. He needed the expertise and the diplomatic support that the Soviet Union could provide. His anti-imperialist words alienated many Western powers. One English-language newspaper in Shanghai wrote: "All his

life, all his influence, all his energies are devoted to ideas that keep China in turmoil, and it is utterly undesirable and improper that he should be allowed to prosecute those aims here." In 1923 the Nationalists and Communists formed an alliance to oppose the warlords and drive the imperialist powers out of China.

For more than three years, the two parties overlooked their mutual suspicions and worked together. They formed a revolutionary army to march north and seize control over China. The so-called Northern Expedition began in the summer of 1926. By the following spring, revolutionary forces had taken control of all of China south of the Chang Jiang (Yangtze River), including the major river ports of Wuhan and Shanghai.

Tensions between the parties eventually rose to the surface. Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, and General Chiang Kai-shek (JYAHNG KY • SHEHK), his military subordinate, succeeded him as head of the Nationalist Party. Chiang pretended to support the alliance with the Communists but actually planned to destroy them. In April 1927, he struck against the Communists in Shanghai, killing thousands. After the Shanghai Massacre, the Nationalist-Communist alliance ceased to exist.

In 1928 Chiang Kai-shek founded a new Chinese republic at Nanjing. During the next three years, he worked to reunify China. Although Chiang saw Japan as a serious threat, he believed that the Communists were more dangerous. He once remarked that "the Japanese are like a disease of the skin, but the Communists are like a disease of the heart."

The Communists in Hiding

After the Shanghai Massacre of April 1927, most of the Communist leaders went into hiding in the city. There, they tried to revive the Communist movement in its traditional urban base among the working class. Shanghai was a rich recruiting ground for the party. People were discontented and looking for leadership.

Some party members, however, fled to the mountainous Jiangxi (JYAHNG • SHEE) Province south of the Chang Jiang. They were led by the young Communist organizer Mao Zedong (MOW DZUH •

DUNG) . Unlike most other leading members of the Communist Party, Mao was convinced that a Chinese revolution would be driven by the poverty-stricken peasants in the countryside rather than by the urban working class. Mao, the son of a prosperous peasant, had helped organize a peasant movement in southern China during the early 1920s.

Chiang Kai-shek now tried to root the Communists out of their urban base in Shanghai and their rural base in Jiangxi Province. He succeeded in the first task in 1931. Most party leaders in Shanghai were forced to flee to Mao's base in southern China.

Chiang Kai-shek then turned his forces against Mao's stronghold in Jiangxi Province. Chiang's forces far outnumbered Mao's, but Mao made effective use of **guerrilla tactics**, using unexpected methods like sabotage and deception to fight the enemy. Four slogans by Mao describe his methods:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"When the enemy advances, we retreat! When the enemy halts and camps, we trouble them! When the enemy tries to avoid battle, we attack! When the enemy retreats, we pursue!"

– quoted in *Red Star Over China*

The Long March

In 1934 Chiang's troops, with their superior military strength, surrounded the Communist base in Jiangxi and set up a blockade of the stronghold. With the villages behind Chiang's troops, no food or supplies could pass to the Communist base. Chiang even built small forts to prevent Communist raids. However, Mao's army, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), broke through the Nationalist lines and began its famous Long March. Both Mao and Chiang knew that unless Mao's army could cross the Chang Jiang, it would be wiped out. Mao's army began a desperate race. Moving on foot through mountains, marshes, rivers, and deserts, the army traveled almost 6,000 miles (9,600 km), averaging 24 miles (38 km) each day, to reach the last surviving Communist base in northwest China. All along those miles, Mao's troops had to fight Chiang's army. Many of Mao's troops froze or starved. One survivor of the Long March remembered:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"As the days went by, there was less and less to eat. After our grain was finished, we ate the horses and then we lived on wild vegetables. When even the wild vegetables were finished, we ate our leather belts. After that we had to march on empty stomachs."

– quoted in *A Short History of China*

One year later, Mao's troops reached safety in the dusty hills of northern China. Of the 90,000 troops who had embarked on the journey, only 9,000 remained. In the course of the Long March, Mao Zedong had become the sole leader of the Chinese Communist Party. To people

who lived at the time, it must have seemed that the Communist threat to the Nanjing regime was over. To the Communists, however, there remained hope for the future.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Central Issues Why did the Nationalists and Communists form an alliance?

The New China

GUIDING QUESTION What characterized the new China?

Even while trying to root out Mao's Communist forces, Chiang was trying to build a new Chinese nation. He publicly declared his commitment to Sun Yat-sen's plans for a republican government. But first, a transitional period would occur. In Sun's words:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"China ... needs a republican government just as a boy needs school. As a schoolboy must have good teachers and helpful friends, so the Chinese people, being for the first time under republican rule, must have a farsighted revolutionary government for their training. This calls for the period of political tutelage, which is a necessary transitional stage from monarchy to republicanism. Without this, disorder will be unavoidable."

– quoted in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*

In keeping with Sun's program, Chiang announced a period of political tutelage (training) to prepare the Chinese people for a final stage of constitutional government. Even the humblest peasant would be given time to understand the country's problems and the new government. In the meantime, the Nationalists used their dictatorial power to carry out a land-reform program and the modernization of the urban industrial sector.

A Class Divide

It would take more than plans on paper to create a new China, however. Years of neglect and civil war had severely weakened the political, economic, and social fabric of the nation. Faint signs of an impending industrial revolution were appearing in the major urban centers. However, most of the people who lived in the countryside were drained by warfare and civil strife. Rural peasants – up to 80 percent of China's population – were still poor and overwhelmingly illiterate.

Meanwhile, a Westernized middle class began to form in the cities. It was here that the new Nanjing government found much of its support. However, the new Westernized elite were concerned with the middle-class Western values of individual advancement and material accumulation. They had few links with the peasants in the countryside or with the rickshaw (a small, two-wheeled cart that usually carried one passenger and was pulled by a person) driver, "running in this world of suffering," in the words of a Chinese poet. In the cities, observers would have believed that Chiang Kai-shek had lifted China into the modern world. Young people in cities wore European clothes; they went to the movies and listened to the radio.

Innovations and Traditions

Chiang Kai-shek was aware of the problem of introducing foreign ideas into a population that was still culturally conservative. Thus, while attempting to build a modern industrial state, he tried to bring together modern Western innovations with traditional Confucian values of hard work and obedience. With his U.S.-educated wife Soong Mei-ling, Chiang set up a “New Life Movement.” Its goal was to promote traditional Confucian social ethics, such as integrity, propriety, and righteousness. Four ancient Confucian virtues would serve as guides for living: Li (courtesy), I (duty), Lien (honesty), and Chih (honor). At the same time, it rejected what was viewed as the excessive individualism and material greed of Western capitalist values.

Unfortunately for Chiang Kai-shek, Confucian ideas had been widely discredited when the traditional system failed to provide answers to China’s decline. Moreover, Chiang Kai-shek faced a host of other problems. The Nanjing government had total control over only a handful of provinces in the Chang Jiang valley. Also, the Japanese threatened to gain control of northern China. The Great Depression also was having an ill effect on China’s economy. All of these problems created difficulties for Chiang.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

The New Life Movement

“The new life movement is based upon the preservation of these four virtues [courtesy, duty, honesty, and honor], and it aims to apply them to actual, existing conditions, in order that the moral character of the nation shall attain the highest possible standard.”

– Madame Chiang Kai-shek, quoted in *War Messages and Other Selections*

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

What were the goals of the New Life Movement?

Limited Progress In spite of these problems, Chiang did have some success. He undertook a massive road-building project and repaired and extended much of the country’s railroad system as well. More than 50,000 miles (80,467 km) of highways were built around and through the coastal areas. New factories, most of which the Chinese owned, were opened. Through a series of agreements, the foreign powers ended many of their leases, gave up

extraterritorial rights, and returned the customs service to Chinese control. Chiang established a national bank and improved the education system.

The government was also repressive. Fearing Communist influence, Chiang suppressed all opposition and censored free expression. In so doing, he alienated many intellectuals and political moderates. Because Chiang’s support came from the rural landed gentry as well as the urban middle class, he did not push for programs that would lead to a **redistribution of wealth**, the shifting of wealth from a rich minority to a poor majority. A land-reform program was enacted in 1930, but it had little effect on the country. For the peasants and poor townspeople, no real improvement occurred under the Nanjing government. Sun Fo, Sun Yat-sen’s son, expressed disapproval of the Nanjing government:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“We must frankly admit the fact that in these twenty years the machinery and practice of the Kuomintang [Chinese Nationalist Party] have turned in a wrong direction, inconsistent with the party constitution drafted by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1923 and contrary to the spirit of democracy. The practice of the revolutionary party has subsequently become the same as that of a bureaucratic regime.”

– quoted in *China*. 1946

Chiang Kai-shek’s government had a little more success in promoting industrial development. Between 1927 and 1937, industrial growth in China averaged only about one percent per year. Much of the national wealth was in the hands of the so-called “four families,” a group of senior officials and close subordinates of the ruling elite. Military expenses took up approximately half of the budget. Little money was left for social and economic development.

The new government, then, had little success in dealing with the deep-seated economic and social problems that affected China during the interwar years. This was especially true when internal disintegration and foreign pressure were occurring during the virtual collapse of the global economic order during the Great Depression. In addition, militant political forces in Tokyo were determined to extend Japanese influence and power in an unstable China.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Conclusions Why did Chiang Kai-shek believe a period of political tutelage was necessary for China?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

guerrilla tactics the use of unexpected maneuvers like sabotage and subterfuge to fight an enemy

redistribution of wealth the shifting of wealth from a rich minority to a poor majority