

Describe the different ways in which Communists and Nationalists fought the Japanese.

Japan and China have over the past century had a very difficult relationship. This most deteriorated in the period from the early 1930s and culminated in Japanese occupation of all the major cities in China during World War Two. There were basically three ways for trying to help create a China, which in some way or other would be independent. Wang Jingwei, the head of the Japanese-sponsored Reorganized National Government, believed to some extent that by collaborating with the Japanese he could reduce the suffering of his people. However, partly due to the fact that he lent the Japanese the great prestige of his name (Boyle, p. 337) his work played into their hands. The other two sides, the Nationalists from the *Guomindang* (GMD) under Jiang Jieshi and the Communists (*Gongchandang*) sought a more active resistance approach.

The relationship between these two sides was always very tense. Jiang Jieshi had a particular disliking of the Communists. Before the Second World War the two sides were only able to work together for a short period during the United Front. However, the *Guomindang* suddenly turned on the Communists in a surprise attack in 1927. The CCP then had to move from its urban bases, especially Shanghai, out to Jiangxi. This changed the basis of the Communist movement completely as it now slowly became more rooted in the peasant society. This is also where the *Gongchandang* developed its guerrilla warfare strategy, which it deployed for a long time successfully against the *Guomindang*. But in 1934 after being pushed out of Jiangxi by German-advised Nationalists, they went on the Long March when the CCP finally moved to Yanan the more northern Shanxi.

In the meantime the *Guomindang* stayed close to the large coastal cities, with its capital in Nanjing. It was a much more opportunist organisation where political connections and money often meant more than anything else. This was part of the reason for the unsuccessful resistance to the Japanese. As no one wanted to lose out in the struggle for power, none of the various generals in the nationalist army really wanted to commit their forces and best equipment in active combat. And when they did it was usually in an all-or-nothing attempt that ended with large numbers of casualties on their own side.

In 1931 the Japanese began the occupation of China in Manchuria (*Manzhouguo*). When the Japanese started their full attack on China in 1937 they took over the major populated areas, in particular the coastal cities. This meant that the *Guomindang* were forced to retreat to Wuhan and then to Chongqing. As the Communists had already left the populated areas for the countryside ten years previously they were a lot more used to the situation there than the *Guomindang* were. The nationalists were rather unable to adapt to the new position they found themselves in. They believed in their own superiority over the poor, uneducated peasants.

Militarily there were big differences between the Communists and Nationalists. The *Gongchandang* as I have said before were very experienced in guerrilla warfare. They only attacked when they were in a position to beat the Japanese. Another method they used was to get behind enemy lines and draw support from the Chinese there or to sabotage the enemy from within. This meant that the CCP appeared a lot more successful to the ordinary people. At the same time with the 2nd United Front established, Mao Zedong's followers were able to concentrate on fighting the foreign invaders.

At the same time they also reformed the countryside they were in. However for the time being they did not install the radical reforms they were going to after the warring period so as not to upset the landlords. The Nationalists themselves did not do anything of the kind but left the social system as it was. They used the landlords to force the peasantry to fight, while at the same time increasing the output of paper money, which meant that inflation rose, and the peasants became even poorer.

The *Guomindang* would have been able to fight the Japanese more successfully too if only the various generals in Jiang's army would have been willing. Also to a great extent it was Jiang's own fault, as he wanted to save his resources to fight the Communists after the World War. However, even though that was one of his main aims he did not even succeed to suppress the coalition movement in Yunnan and other areas, which were supposedly part of their "Free China". They also forcibly requisitioned grain from the locals, which especially during the famine in Henan in 1942-43 nearly led to a major revolt against them. Situations like these also increased the already rampant corruption in the Nationalist forces. All this meant that morale in Nationalist-controlled areas was very low as opposed to Communist China.

By means of the co-operation with the local peasantry the Communists were also very successful in recruiting more party members and soldiers for their armies. The *Gongchandang* was also able to publicise their achievements in 'Free China' because it was able to represent itself in Chongqing as part of the United Front. Zhou Enlai was its representative as leader of the Communist Eighth Route Army. Through its strict discipline and good organisation the Communists often achieved to take over local councils in areas they controlled with the Nationalists in northern China on the basis of their merit.

This superior organisation was one of the reasons for the Communists to be or at least appear to be more successful in the war against the Japanese and then finally in the Civil War afterwards. Corruption, inflation and confusion reigned supreme in 'Free China'. They offended the local people; they lost battle after battle against the Japanese – that is when they fought at all. Even though they had American support they did not use it in an efficient way, but continued in their belief of moral superiority. They believed this would be reason enough for them to win, which evidently did not turn out to be. The differences between Nationalists and Communists in the Anti-Japanese War (*Kangri Zhanzheng*) were so great and so many that there was basically no

way the former could have won the later Civil War. Like the Japanese their tactics at war were hopelessly over-confident.

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