

# THE REPUBLIC: TROUBLES AND TRIUMPHS

(1912–1927)

## 1 Yuan and the Republic

Republican  
government  
based in  
Beijing

The charismatic Yuan Shikai becomes president (1912)

Yuan reforms law, education, economy

Though flawed, Yuan has unifying influence on China

Wuhan becomes new seat of government,  
undermining Jiang Jieshi

Communist-led worker strike paralyses Shanghai

Jiang joins with criminals, e.g. Green Gang

## 7 The White Terror

Green Gang kills 10 000 communists (Shanghai Massacre)

CCP cuts ties with Jiang, but GMD recognised  
as China's government

Launched by Jiang Jieshi to overthrow warlords (Jul 1926)

Jiang's Nationalist Revolutionary Army supported by Soviet Comintern

Communists contribute effective guerrilla tactics

## 6 The Northern Expedition

Military success, but tensions between coalition parties

## 2 The New Culture Movement

Radicalised urban youth

Led by Cai Yuanpei, Chen Duxiu and other intellectuals

Explored identity and criticised Confucianism

Made new ideas accessible to people

## 3 The Communist Party

Chinese party grew out of Russian Comintern

Chen Duxiu saw urban workers as key revolutionary class

Li Dazhao (Mao's mentor) saw revolutionary potential in peasants

Tensions between Chinese and Soviet officials

## 4 The United Front

Sun Yixian heads Canton government

Sun forms coalition with southern warlords

Sun-Joffe Declaration: CCP+GMD+Comintern

Borodin overhauls Nationalists (GMD)

Front adopts Sun's Three Principles of the People

1912  
to 1927

Sun dies of cancer (Mar 1925)

Death destabilises United Front

Communist Party grows after May 30 Incident

Jiang Jieshi becomes key Nationalist leader

## 5 The Death of Sun Yixian

# INTRODUCTION

AFTERMATH OF THE  
1911 REVOLUTION



Inspired by the revolutionary propaganda of Sun Yixian's Tongmenghui, the Qing dynasty was overthrown in the 'Double Tenth' (10 October) revolution of 1911. Yet a democratic new society did not immediately emerge. General Yuan Shikai, a powerful militarist, assumed the presidency but showed little respect for republican sentiment. The Guomindang (GMD) (Kuomintang), a popular political party that emerged from the Tongmenghui, proved to be an ineffective opposition as Yuan placed increasing pressure on the newly-elected parliament. He eventually did away with the parliament altogether and crowned himself emperor, ironically declaring his reign the 'Grand Constitutional Era.' Yuan was strong but not strong enough to enforce autocratic power. He was forced to step down from the Dragon Throne and died shortly thereafter. Without Yuan's unifying influence, the Middle Kingdom fell under the rule of warlords with little regard for the unity or good of the nation. This was made clear when corrupt deals with the Japanese government were exposed at the Versailles negotiations in 1919. A new period of protest subsequently emerged, involving critical evaluation of politics, ethics, philosophy and literature. The New Culture and May Fourth movements showed that young people were no longer willing to accept China's humiliation at the hands of warlords and foreign powers. For some, Marxism offered an appealing framework for change. Soviet Russia provided practical guidance and funding for the revolutionary struggle. The Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began a struggle for power, but the road to revolution would be a long one. At first, both parties worked together with the Russian Comintern as the United Front. After the death of Sun Yixian in 1925, however, the militarist Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) steadily gained influence in the GMD, turning the party more conservative and anti-communist in outlook. Jiang's distrust of the communists led to the Shanghai Massacre of 1927, which greatly weakened the CCP and violently concluded the relationship between the two parties. The CCP fled in disarray to the countryside while Jiang Jieshi – facing down bitter recriminations and outwitting his political rivals – emerged as the victorious hero who had united China by defeating the warlords.

*Supplement to The National  
Review, 12 October 1912.*



**BRAVO!**

On the 19th February three Imperial Edicts were issued by the Throne, the first accepting a Republic, the second accepting the conditions agreed upon by Yuan Shih-k'ai and the Republicans, and the third stating that the Emperor was abdicating in deference to the will of the people. These Edicts instructed Yuan Shih-k'ai to undertake the task of organising the Republic, and the next day Yuan published a manifesto announcing his acceptance of this task and asking the co-operation of Dr. Sun and his associates in Nanking.

## YUAN SHIKAI AND REPUBLICAN CHINA

**Yuan Shikai:** 'The republic is universally recognized as the best form of state ... Let us henceforth forge ahead and endeavour to reach a state of perfection. Never shall we allow the monarchical system to reappear in China.'

According to C.P. Fitzgerald, 'the decision to replace the dynasty, and the monarchy, with a republic was, at that time, a most radical step ... That the Chinese, of all people, should choose a republic rather than a new dynasty seemed to be wildly idealistic, unpractical

and reckless.<sup>1</sup> Was a republic a fanciful adventure bound to end in disaster? President Yuan Shikai, a man of the Self-Strengthening generation, was a capable administrator and a charismatic military commander. Modernisation projects such as judicial reform, suppression of opium farming and improved primary education were implemented by Yuan.<sup>2</sup> China's national currency was centralised, with the government taking greater control of minting, and outdated banknotes were withdrawn. Yuan also hoped to further develop the economy by raising crop yields through irrigation and flood control projects, and by encouraging farmers to breed hardier livestock. There was much praise in the British press of Yuan's firm leadership in holding together the volatile former Chinese empire. 'Yuanity' was the byword for 'unity' and 'strength'.<sup>3</sup> Yet Yuan's strength was also a potential threat to the fledgling republican system: according to John King Fairbank, 'He knew how to make the old system work, but it turned out that ... he had no vision of a new system.'<sup>4</sup> Yuan, though a stabilising influence, was ambitious and domineering; he was far from democratic in style.



Yuan Shikai.

Sun Yixian was given the post of minister of railways and set to work expanding the train network. Song Jiaoren (Sung Chiao-jen), Sun's deputy, began preparing the revolutionary movement for parliamentary politics. A founding member of the Tongmenghui and a long time anti-Qing revolutionary, Song turned the Revolutionary Alliance into a modern political party. In August 1912, the Tongmenghui was combined with four smaller parties to form the Guomindang (National People's Party, or 'Nationalists'). Under Song's able direction, the Guomindang campaigned strongly for the parliamentary elections of January 1913. The GMD subsequently secured a majority of seats and Song was chosen by his party colleagues to serve as prime minister. Song had hoped to curb the executive powers of Yuan Shikai by encouraging a 'responsible' ministry and determined parliamentary opposition. As it turned out, electoral victory did not translate into real power for the GMD.

Yuan, who retained his hold over the military, had no intention of allowing the parliament to impede his authority. He insisted that the new government reside in Beijing, his stronghold, rather than Nanjing. The most influential cabinet posts, such as minister of foreign affairs and minister of war, were given to Yuan loyalists. In June 1912, Yuan pressured the four ministers of his cabinet who were former members of the Tongmenghui to resign. On 20 March 1913, Song Jiaoren was killed by one of Yuan's men. In April 1913, Yuan secured a 'reorganisation loan' of \$100 million from a consortium of foreign banks. He did so without the approval of parliament. As Yuan made a mockery of republican democracy, the forces of opposition prepared for a showdown. When the Guomindang tried to impeach the president over the Reorganisation Loan, Yuan had the parliament surrounded by armed troops and forced a backdown.

In July 1913, the GMD-backed provincial governor of Jiangxi declared independence from Yuan's government; within a month, six other southern provinces had followed suit. This so-called 'second revolution' was easily put down by Yuan's armies. Fearing for his life, Sun Yixian again fled to Japan. Bolstered

#### DID YOU KNOW?

George Morrison, an Australian journalist, served as Yuan Shikai's public relations officer. Morrison, a respected China correspondent, ensured that Yuan got favourable press in the West.

- 1 C. P. Fitzgerald, *Communism Takes China: How the Revolution went Red* (London: St Giles House, 1971), 30–1.
- 2 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *China: A Cultural, Social and Political History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 237.
- 3 'The Giant and the Pygmies' (cartoon - reproduced on page 60), *Supplement to the National Review*, 12 October 1912 (Courtesy Essex Institute, Salem Massachusetts); reproduced in Terry Buggy, *The Long Revolution* (Silverwater: Shakespeare Head Press, 1988), 64.
- 4 John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution 1800–1985* (London: Picador, 1988), 170.

by the formal recognition of his leadership by foreign powers, Yuan banned the Guomindang on 4 November and dissolved the national and provincial parliaments in February 1914. The parliaments were replaced with a purely advisory state council. By May, Yuan had secured a new constitution that extended his tenure as president from five to ten years – a decisive consolidation of his dictatorship.

## DOCUMENT

C.P. FITZGERALD, EXTRACT FROM *THE BIRTH OF COMMUNIST CHINA*, 1976

Not far from Peking [Beijing], in the western hills, there is an ancient temple, where grew a strange and rare plant. This plant flowered at long intervals, and then only at the accession of a new emperor. Then it put forth a single blossom. When the Empire fell the plant flowered again, but this time was covered with a multitude of small flowers. So, at least, the Peking people will tell you. The monks were asked to explain this strange phenomenon. To republican officials, visiting foreigners and other persons of modern cut, they said that the crowd of little flowers symbolized the rule of the many, the people of China. To the more old-fashioned inquirers the monks would say perhaps the explanation of the miracle was that in place of one sovereign, the Empire would now suffer the oppression of many small despots.<sup>5</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

Read the extract from *The Birth of Communist China* and complete the tasks below.

1. According to the source, when would the 'strange and mysterious plant' flower, and what form would the blooms take?
2. Analyse the key message of the source, as conveyed through the allegory of a plant. What political events does it allude to?
3. Using the source provided and your own knowledge, explain why China struggled to develop an effective democracy after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911.
4. Evaluate the significance of the early years of the Chinese Republic. In your response, refer to the source provided and other views.

## JAPAN'S TWENTY-ONE DEMANDS

On 15 January 1915, Yuan's luck changed. Japan presented Twenty-One Demands in return for granting loans to the Chinese government. The demands proposed to give Japan, among other things: extensive rights to economic development in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia; control over mining in central China; control of the Liaodong Peninsula near Korea; and the right to appoint Japanese advisers of the Chinese government. China would be a virtual protectorate (district) of Japan.

Yuan rejected the demands for participation in China's administration but accepted the economic conditions. Many Chinese were outraged and patriotic protests erupted. When the Twenty-One Demands were signed, a 'day of shame' was announced. The date, 7 May, was commemorated annually thereafter with anti-imperialist rallies.

Disregarding popular sentiment, Yuan set about founding a new Imperial dynasty; on 1 January 1916, he assumed the title of emperor. His quest for power had gone too far. Many of his generals and provincial governors made known their disapproval; some even declared independence from Yuan's rule. Yuan was forced to

### DID YOU KNOW?

Each Chinese emperor took a 'reign name' which said something about their era. Yuan Shikai chose 'Hong Xian,' meaning 'Grand Constitutional Era.'

5 C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1976), 43.



renounce his claim to the throne on 22 March. His ambition thwarted and deeply humiliated, Yuan grew ill, and on 6 June 1916 succumbed to kidney disease – the Chinese say he died from ‘eating bitterness.’

## YUAN’S SIGNIFICANCE

For all his faults, Yuan Shikai held China together – a considerable achievement given its size and ethnic diversity. When he died, regional tensions resurfaced, fragmenting China into areas controlled by provincial strongmen, or warlords. Tibet and Mongolia declared independence. A ‘national’ government, in name only, continued at Beijing under Yuan’s successor, Li Yuanhong (Li Yuan-hung). In the coming years, control of Beijing would change hands more than ten times. Real power was divided amongst the warlords, who ruled over more or less autonomous regions. Some warlords received the backing of foreign powers and signed their own treaties and business agreements. For the next decade, China would be governed by these ‘many small despots’ whose rule did indeed bring much ‘oppression.’ The warlords were not all bad – some did try to provide for the ordinary people – but for most, the first priority was holding and capturing territory. Because they were poorly paid, warlord armies often plundered peasant crops and resources. This, combined with their strong-arm tactics, earned them the reputation of marauders.

### DID YOU KNOW?

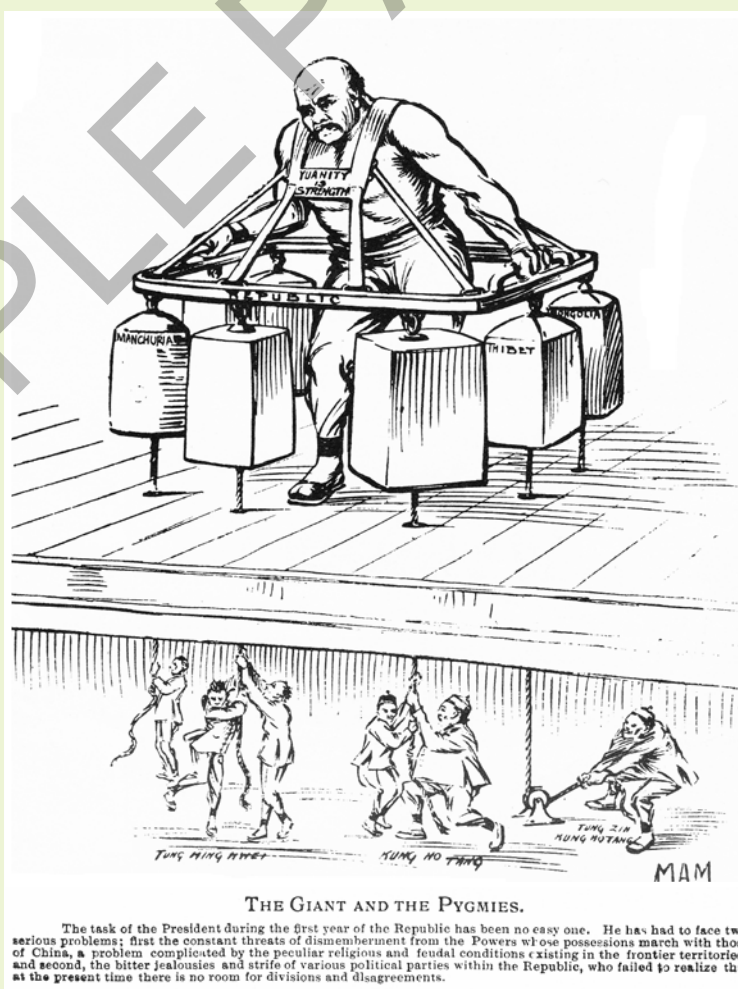
Yuan Shikai claimed that he assumed the Imperial throne in response to popular pressure; he said he received a series of telegrams and petitions from across China. It is now known that Yuan faked these so-called popular appeals.

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

Look carefully at *The Giant and the Pygmies* and complete the tasks below.

1. What message is conveyed about China under Yuan Shikai, and how is it communicated visually?
2. Describe the perspective of the source. To what extent does it appear to approve of Yuan?
3. Using the source provided and your own knowledge, discuss the extent to which Yuan brought ‘Yuanity’ (unity) to China.
4. Analyse the significance of Yuan Shikai’s leadership to early republican China. In your response, refer to the source provided and other views.

*The Giant and the Pygmies*, from *Supplement to The National Review*, October 1912. The harness reads, ‘Yuanity is strength.’ The weights are labelled ‘Manchuria,’ ‘Tibet’ and ‘Mongolia.’



### ACTIVITY

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some warlords were quite eccentric. General Feng Yuxiang, known as the Christian General, 'baptised' groups of soldiers with a fire hose.

### ACTIVITY

#### CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography. Topics:

- 'Yuan Shikai's desire for power doomed hopes for a democratic republic in China.' To what extent do you agree?
- 'Sun Yixian could inspire a revolution, but he failed to establish a republic.' Is this a fair assessment of Sun?
- 'After the 1911 Revolution, China needed a strong leader and Yuan Shikai fulfilled this role effectively.' Discuss.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Several Western thinkers were invited to China during the New Culture period, such as Albert Einstein (1922), Margaret Sanger (1922), Bertrand Russell (1920–21) and John Dewey (1919–21). Dewey said, 'There seems to be no country in the world where students are so unanimously and eagerly interested in what is modern and new in thought.'

## THE NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT

**Hu Shi:** 'Chinese literature produced by the literary men during the last two thousand years is a dead literature written in a dead language.'

### REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

In the ferment of emerging nationalist feeling and political fragmentation during the warlord period, a 'flowering of intellectual energy' occurred. A result of both the new education system begun under the Qing and a decline in Confucian influence,<sup>6</sup> this so-called New Culture movement emerged during World War I (1914–18). Headed by young intellectuals and adopted by students, the movement sought to articulate a new cultural identity for China. A leading thinker of the time, Hu Shi (Hu Shih), wrote, 'What is the sole aim of the new thought tide? It is to recreate civilisation.'<sup>7</sup> With the country seemingly in danger, morally and physically, from foreign powers, the New Culture movement began to ask what it meant to be Chinese.<sup>8</sup> This involved questioning Confucian traditions, finding new writing styles and examining China's future. Nationalism, women's rights and feminism, liberalism, Darwinism, democracy, anarchism, socialism, Marxism-Leninism and more were discussed with passionate interest. Partly because the republican revolution had not brought peace or national unity, as had been hoped, China's young people engaged in soul searching and intellectual re-evaluation in the quest for a way forward. It was, reportedly, 'intellectually and socially one of the most promising and exciting times in Chinese history.'<sup>9</sup>

Beijing University was one of the centres of the New Culture movement. A thriving intellectual community emerged there under the liberal-minded university chancellor Cai Yuanpei (T'sai Yuan-p'ei). Cai had been a member of the Tongmenghui and briefly served as education minister in the republican government. An advocate of free thinking, Cai attracted brilliant and innovative staff to the university. Four of the leading figures of this intellectual renaissance (rebirth) were Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu), Li Dazhao (Li Ta-chao) and Lu Xun (Lu Hsun).

Hu Shi's major contribution was to advocate a more accessible, vernacular form of writing. Most written texts (*wenyan*) produced by Confucian scholars, were

6 Jonathan Spence and Annping Chin, *The Chinese Century* (London, HarperCollins, 1996), 60.

7 Cited in Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 500.

8 Steve Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8–10.

9 Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.



incomprehensible to ordinary people. Hu popularised *baihua*, everyday writing, which had previously been considered coarse or vulgar. Hu saw that using everyday writing had great value for it allowed a wide spectrum of people access to literary works and new ideas. He dismissed *wenyan* as a ‘dead language.’ Advocates of New Culture argued that a modern nation needed literate people since they would be more likely to understand new ideas and values.<sup>10</sup>

Criticising Confucian values was a central part of the New Culture movement. Lu Xun, a philosophy lecturer and short-story writer, composed of number of works accusing Confucian culture of being outdated and morally bankrupt. Written in *baihua* style, Lu’s stories inspired others to break with classical literary traditions. Fiction, according to Lu, was a powerful means of educating people about the problems inherent in Chinese society. In *The Diary of a Madman*, written in 1918, Lu described Confucian society as cannibalistic:

I recollect in ancient times, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history [the Confucian Canon] has no chronology, and scrawled over each page are the words: ‘Virtue and Morality.’ In any case, I could not sleep, so I read half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words, ‘Eat People.’<sup>11</sup>

By equating Confucian texts with cannibalism, Lu was condemning what he saw as an amoral tradition. Confucianism, he argued, reinforced exploitation at the expense of social harmony.

Chen Duxiu was arguably the most influential scholar of the New Culture movement. In 1915 he had founded the literary journal *New Youth*, a forum for discussion and new ideas. Terrill describes it as ‘a magazine that jabbed the rapier [sword] of modern Western ideas through the ribs of China’s rigid traditions.’<sup>12</sup> *New Youth* was at the forefront of the vernacular language drive. Lu Xun and Hu Shi regularly contributed articles. The journal gained considerable circulation. In the first issue Chen wrote, ‘The strength of our country is weakening, the morals of our people degenerating, and the learning of our scholars is distressing. Our youth must take up the task of rejuvenating China.’<sup>13</sup> In one article he praised ‘Mr Science’ and ‘Mr Democracy’ as being far superior to Confucianism. ‘Scientific’ ideas would allow a ‘new’ society to emerge while ‘democracy’ held attraction as both a political and a moral system.<sup>14</sup> Chen would become one of China’s founding Marxist thinkers – revolutionary Marxism was seen as particularly inspiring and ‘modern’ after the successful Russian Communist revolution of October 1917.

Li Dazhao was the chief librarian and a history professor at Beijing University. A close associate of Chen Duxiu, he began a study group to explore Marx’s theories. Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) was a member of Li’s study circle and worked as one of his library assistants. Li wrote articles and served as editor for *New Youth*. One of his theoretical contributions was exploring how nationalism and Marxism could be brought together. Li argued that the whole Chinese nation was being exploited by stronger capitalist imperialist powers.<sup>15</sup>



Lu Xun.

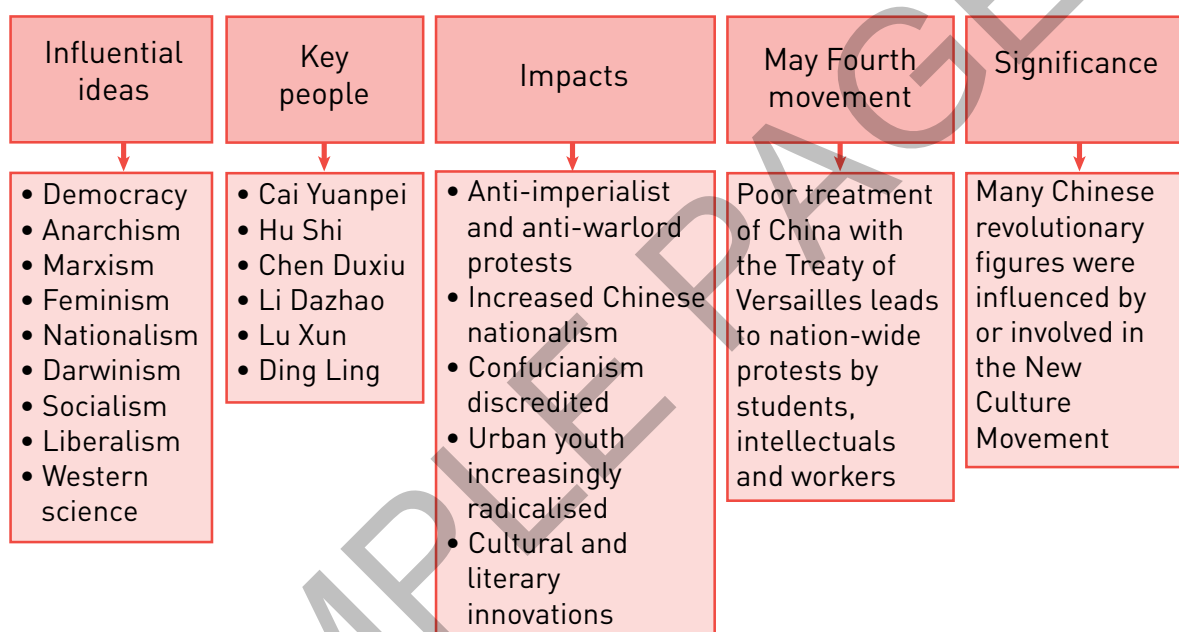
- 10 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *China: A Cultural, Social and Political History*, 240.
- 11 Cited in Ruis, *Mao for Beginners* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 47.
- 12 Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995), 53.
- 13 Cited in John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 182.
- 14 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 270; Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 65.
- 15 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 272.

## DID YOU KNOW?

While Japanese delegates to the Versailles conference were seated at the main table with Western powers, the Chinese had to remain standing throughout.

Women activists, such as the writer Ding Ling, were prominent in the New Culture movement. Having lacked many rights under the old order, young women embraced new learning and opportunities with enthusiasm. An increasing number of women in the cities took up employment as teachers, civil servants and nurses. Many campaigned for female suffrage (right to vote) and higher legal status. Female students at high schools and universities were avid readers of *New Youth*.<sup>16</sup> Ding wrote important literary works that explored the nature of love in China's changing society. *The Diary of Miss Sophie* was one her most popular stories. Only limited gains were made in furthering women's rights, however, due to ingrained patriarchal attitudes in wider Chinese society, especially in the countryside.

## NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT



## MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT



The New Culture movement expressed outrage at the disproportionate power of warlords and at China's treatment at the hands of foreign powers. In early May 1919 Beijing students were preparing for Day of Shame protests when they received news of the Treaty of Versailles – the peace agreement that concluded World War I. China had entered the conflict in 1917 on the side of the Allies, contributing 100 000 labourers to the war effort in Europe. The Chinese had expected that German concessions<sup>17</sup> in Shandong Province would be returned to China following an Allied victory. American President Woodrow Wilson had also made many public declarations in support of national self-determination. However, the national government in Beijing had made a secret agreement in 1918 to give German concessions to Japan. Chinese diplomats had not known about the secret agreement before Versailles and were mortified to hear of them. They protested the terms of the treaty vigorously.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *China: A Cultural, Social and Political History*, 246.

<sup>17</sup> German-controlled areas and infrastructure.

Popular reaction was even stronger. Outrage and shame at this betrayal and further capitulation to imperialism led to the Day of Shame protests being brought forward to 4 May. Students from Beijing's universities took to the streets in a series of huge protests that came to be known as the May Fourth movement. Three-thousand students rallied at the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Tiananmen Square. After a number were arrested, protests in support of the students and their cause broke out in cities across the nation. Workers



Student demonstration at Tiananmen Square during the May Fourth movement.

went on strike and Japanese goods were boycotted. The leading figures of the New Culture movement were also prominent in May Fourth – the terms are often used interchangeably. This unity of workers, students and intellectuals indicated the beginning of a credible and important nationalist movement, albeit an urban one. This yearning for national renewal was one of the defining and most significant periods of modern Chinese history.<sup>18</sup> Resisting foreign treaties and the corruption of warlords was now considered urgent within the May Fourth movement. According to historian Rana Mitter, 'the May Fourth period marked a unique combination of ... a sense of real and impending crisis; a combination of a plurality of competing ideas aimed at "saving the nation", and an audience ready to receive, welcome, contest and adapt these ideas.'<sup>19</sup> Radicalised by anti-imperialist sentiment, many turned to the revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx.



#### MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT

18 Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (London: John Murray, 2004), 92.

19 Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution*, 23.

### DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Create a journal entry, poem or cartoon capturing the experiences of a student during the May Fourth movement.

### POPULAR MOVEMENTS

In note form, evaluate the significance of the following popular movements in challenging the old order in China:

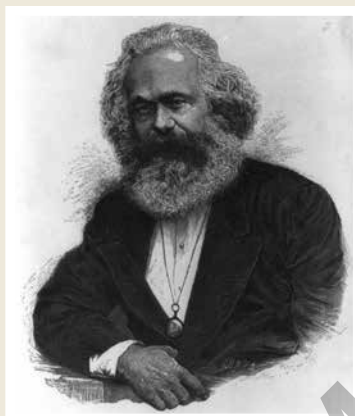
- Revolution of 1911
- Twenty-One Demands
- New Culture movement
- May Fourth movement
- Day of Shame protests
- Chinese Communist Party
- *New Youth* journal.

### ACTIVITY

## KEY IDEAS: MARXISM

**Karl Marx: 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!'**

Marxism is the revolutionary philosophy of German thinkers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In 1848, Marx and Engels authored one of the most influential texts of modern times – *The Communist Manifesto*. Making use of a detailed study of the lives of industrial workers in Britain, Marx and Engels proposed a framework for understanding the modern world. For Marx, economic forces and class struggle were the primary forces shaping society and history. He famously declared that all history is the history of class struggle. The ongoing



Karl Marx.

struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' was seen as the driving force behind development and change in human societies.

Marx's theory of *historical materialism* was an attempt to demonstrate

that history is made by humans, not by 'the hand of God' or 'destiny.' Past history and the predicted future progress of human development could be seen in definable stages that reflected differing *modes of production*.

The force that brought about each stage in social development (except the step from socialism to communism) was revolution. Revolution, for Marx, was inevitable. The scientific manner proposed for understanding the conflict that brought revolutionary change about was called *dialectical materialism*. Materialism considers that there is nothing in the world other than material things; it denies divine or supernatural forces. The observable and measureable material conditions of the world, particularly economic systems, were the

prime factors that shaped society. Dialectic means an argument, a concept that Marx extended from the philosopher Hegel. Marx believed the world was inherently full of clashing and opposing forces, such as the conflict between workers and industrialists; labour and capital. Dialectical materialism refers to a *thesis*, or given state of things, and an opposing force, the *antithesis*. Inevitably the clash of opposing forces becomes so great that a resolution or *synthesis* will come about. This idea could be applied to social development, Marx argued. In feudal times the thesis was the situation where land was owned by the nobility and farmed by peasant labour. The antithesis was the emergence of new urban classes, made wealthy by commerce and trade and opposing the feudal order. The synthesis was the bourgeois revolution that brought about parliamentarianism. Under capitalism, the thesis was the bourgeois ownership of capital (industry) and exploitation of the proletariat. Marx believed an antithesis would emerge with the growth of revolutionary consciousness amongst industrial workers leading to socialist revolution – the synthesis of this supposed inevitable conflict.

Marxism also holds that a society's economic *base*, meaning those who own the means of production and the ways in which work is done (the mode of production), ultimately determines its *superstructure* such as politics, values, morality and culture. Change therefore cannot be achieved through a reform of laws or the election of a new government. The economic base must be changed, which comes through revolution, so that new social relationships and values can emerge.

Vladimir Lenin, the Russian revolutionary leader, drew on Marx's ideas to form what became known as Marxism-Leninism. One of Lenin's many theories was that revolution in a 'backward' nation with poor industrial infrastructure (such as Russia or China) could inspire urban workers and peasants in other countries. A revolutionary movement in the colonial world would undermine capitalist nations and hasten their demise. Many members of the May Fourth movement embraced this idea.

## Marxism: Stages of History (Historical Materialism)







Li Dazhao.

## FOUNDING OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

**Li Dazhao:** 'The bell has rung for humanitarianism! The dawn of freedom has arrived! See the world of tomorrow; it assuredly will belong to the red flag!'

The Chinese delegates to Versailles had expected fair and equal treatment by those representing Western democracies. They were deeply disappointed. China's humiliation at Versailles was likewise a sore point for the protesters of the May Fourth movement. Disillusioned with the liberal politics of the West, young intellectuals now looked to Soviet Russia for inspiration. Such appeal was strengthened in 1919 when the Soviet government declared in its Karakhan Manifesto of 25 July that it would renounce all imperialist claims in China as a rejection of its tsarist past and in the spirit of fraternal internationalism.<sup>20</sup> The Russian Communists, keen to encourage revolutionary groups abroad, founded the Communist Internationale or 'Comintern' in March 1919. The Comintern would provide the theory and support for the formation of revolutionary groups worldwide. In April 1920, Grigory Voitinsky, an agent of the Comintern, came to China hoping to organise a Chinese communist party. He met with Li Dazhao, who had already formed the Marxist Study Society at Beijing University. Chen Duxiu, who was now living in Shanghai, was also approached to head a Communist Party cell in the south. Voitinsky made favourable reports to Moscow of his Chinese fact-finding mission.

20 Edmund Fung, 'China's International Relations' in Colin Mackerras, ed., *China: The Impact of Revolution*, (Hawthorn: Longman, 1976), 191.

21 Cited in Philip Short, *Mao: A Life*, 119.

Chen Duxiu.



On 3 June 1921, a more senior Comintern agent arrived in China. Dutchman Hendricus Sneevliet, who went by the pseudonym 'Maring,' had already spent five years in Asia working with communist agitators in Indonesia. Agent Maring was a self-assured and domineering man. Li Dazhao was not impressed. He recalled,

This foreign devil was aggressive and hard to deal with; his manner was very different indeed from that of Voitinsky ... He saw himself coming as an angel of liberation to the Asian people. But in the eyes of those of us who maintained our self-respect and who were seeking our own liberation, he seemed endowed with the social superiority complex of the white man.<sup>21</sup>

Maring's organisational drive and the appeal of a functional Chinese communist organisation allowed such concerns to be overlooked. Efforts towards a national organisation continued. On 23 July 1921, twelve delegates representing communist cells in Beijing, Wuhan, Hubei, Shanghai, Jinan, Guangzhou and Japan met in the classroom of a girls' school in the French Concession of Shanghai (the school was closed for summer holidays). This was the First National Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.





Site of the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, Shanghai.

Mao Zedong attended as the delegate from his home province of Hunan and served as note-taker. Zhu De (Chu Te), who would later be a famed general of the Communist Red Army, was also in attendance. The congress had to be convened in secret as local authorities did not approve. Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu were not able to attend for fear of arrest. The congress was nonetheless a success and marked the official birth of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chen Duxiu was elected secretary-general to lead the party.

The CCP was initially very small. The twelve delegates to the First National Congress represented just fifty-seven members. Most were intellectuals. They were a minuscule drop in an ocean of 400 million people. The promise of funds from Soviet Russia and the revolutionary potential of the Chinese people was, nonetheless, a cause for excitement. An official guidebook to the museum that stands on the site of the first CCP Congress describes the gathering as ‘an epoch making event.’<sup>22</sup> In their controversial biography of Mao Zedong, Jung Chang and Jon Halliday claim that the CCP was actually formed in August 1920 under Voitinsky’s guidance, that Mao Zedong was not present and that he had nothing to do with the party’s foundation.<sup>23</sup> Most Chinese and Western historians, however, accept that the CCP officially began at the congress of 1921 and hence that Mao was a central figure in the birth of Chinese communism.



FOUNDING OF  
THE CCP

### HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Why do historians debate who founded the CCP and when? Why does it matter? To what extent was it true that the founding of the CCP was an ‘epoch making event’?

ACTIVITY

### INTERNAL DEBATES

From the outset, the CCP proved to be far from the disciplined and ideologically-unified organisation advocated by Lenin. The relative importance of the peasantry

22 Ni Xingxiang, *Picture Album of the Site of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: 2001), 91.

23 Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 19.

The pleasure boat on which some meetings of the First Congress of the CCP were held.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

To guard against police agents attending the First Congress of the CCP in Shanghai, Maring arranged for some meetings to take place on a pleasure boat.



was one important point of difference. Chen Duxiu, from Shanghai, was an orthodox (traditional) Marxist who believed the proletariat, urban workers, would be the chief revolutionary class in China. Peasants, he argued, were too tied to traditional customs and would be hard to unify. According to Chen,

The peasants are scattered and their forces are not easy to concentrate, their culture is low, their desires in life are simple, and they easily tend toward conservatism ... These environmental factors make it difficult for the peasants to participate in the revolutionary movement.<sup>24</sup>

By contrast Li Dazhao, from Beijing, advocated a central role for the peasantry. Li offered both a romantic celebration of the long-suffering rural people and a pragmatic assessment of Chinese conditions:

In economically backward and semi-colonial China, the peasantry constitutes more than ninety per cent of the population; among the whole population they occupy the principal position, and agriculture is still the basis of the national economy. Therefore, when we estimate the forces of the revolution, we must emphasize that the peasantry is the most important part.<sup>25</sup>

Differences were so pronounced that the Communists coined the expression, 'Chen in the south, Li in the north.'<sup>26</sup> (Mao, a member of Li's study group and his former assistant in the Beijing University library, was deeply influenced by his mentor.) Relations between the Chinese Communists and the Comintern agents were also tense. Chen Duxiu had a fiery temper and exploded in rage on a number of occasions when he felt the Russians were being overbearing; Maring called him 'the volcano.'<sup>27</sup> Despite Chen's outbursts and Li's unorthodox Marxism, of which the Russians thoroughly disapproved, the Comintern held sway over the CCP. Money from Moscow provided almost all of the Party's funds, and Soviet Russia, as the sole socialist nation, remained the original source of revolutionary wisdom. Such was the influence of Russian communism that Sun Yixian would soon also accept Soviet guidance and support. The spirit of revolutionary China was rising.

24 Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 242.

25 Cited in Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 517.

26 Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 517.

27 Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, 27.

#### ACTIVITY

##### BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

1. Explain the allure of Marxism and Marxism-Leninism for young Chinese intellectuals at the time of the May Fourth movement.
2. The Chinese Communist Party was founded with just fifty-seven members. Yet Li Dazhao declared, 'See the world of tomorrow; it assuredly will belong to the red flag!' What gave the CCP leaders such hope for a Marxist future?

## THE UNITED FRONT

**Sun Yixian:** 'The Republic is my child. It is in danger of drowning. I am trying to keep it afloat and we are being swept down the river.'

The death of Yuan Shikai by no means made things easier for Sun Yixian. In 1917, Sun returned to China where he again involved himself in politics, basing himself in Shanghai. With little influence over the Beijing government, Sun spent most of his time writing and lecturing. Prime Minister Duan Qirui (Tuan Ch'i-jui) and President Li Yuanhong squabbled continuously, to the effect that actual power was dispersed amongst the various regional warlords. According to one commentator, power was 'based on force in a meritocracy of violence.'<sup>28</sup> In August and September 1917, members of the old National Assembly gathered at the southern city of Guangzhou (Canton) in Guangdong Province under the protection of a local warlord. There Sun was elected grand marshal of a new military government on 10 September 1917.

Sun's government allied itself with a number of southern warlords and, as the self-proclaimed true representatives of the republic, stood in opposition to the government in Beijing. Sun even sent delegates to attend negotiations at Versailles in 1919, even though his government was not recognised by world powers. Foreign governments continued to negotiate their own advantageous agreements with both regional warlords and the official government in Beijing. Factional in-fighting kept Sun's government weak and divided; he fell out with his warlord backers and was forced to leave Guangzhou for Shanghai, where he spent the next few years writing and lecturing. Sun returned to Guangzhou in 1921 and, in alliance with Chen Jiongming (Ch'en Chiung-ming), the Hakka General, established yet another government on 5 May. Sun dreamed of building up a military force to march north and re-establish the republic. General Chen was more inclined to consolidate his position in the south.<sup>29</sup> A series of failed military expeditions, which Chen did not support, led to a breakdown in their alliance and Sun's exile, first to Hong Kong, then Shanghai. Sun attributed his lack of success at this time to poor organisation and discipline within the Guomindang, as well as a lack of proper indoctrination in the party.<sup>30</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Chinese warlords often had nicknames, such as Philosopher General, Dog-Meat General, Old Marshall, Young Marshall, Model Governor and Pig-tailed General. The Dog-meat General, Zhang Zongchang, was known for his brutality but preferred the title Great General of Justice and Might. He once described himself as a 'big, round-faced, long-legged overfed ruffian.'



CHINESE REACTIONS  
TO VERSAILLES

## THE SUN-JOFFE DECLARATION

Sun Yixian called for support from the West and Japan but he was consistently rebuffed. He had more luck when the Soviet Comintern gave its attention to China. In August 1922, Sun met with Comintern agents Hendricus Maring and Adolph Joffe to discuss the re-organisation of the Guomindang and conditions for Soviet aid. Moscow had concluded that the prestige of the GMD would be useful in furthering the revolutionary movement and hoped to foster ties between the CCP and Sun Yixian. The Comintern, despite objections by a number of Chinese Communists, began negotiations for a United Front, in which CCP members could take up individual membership in the GMD. The national revolution was to come before the socialist one; in other words, it was seen as more important to find common ground as Chinese before tackling class divisions. Chen Duxiu, head of the CCP, grudgingly accepted the alliance, but given the tiny membership of his party, could also see advantages in working with the far-larger GMD. On

28 Jonathan Fenby, *Modern China* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 145.

29 Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 194.

30 Immanuel Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 519.

26 January 1923, a joint manifesto by Sun and Joffe outlined the urgent goals of the new alliance: 'national independence' and 'national unity.' The Sun-Joffe Declaration also made clear that China was not yet ready for communism.

Although Sun expressed admiration for the organisational structures of the Soviet government, he admitted that his alliance with the Comintern was one of desperation.

## DOCUMENTS

### THE SUN-JOFFE DECLARATION, 1923

Dr Sun is of the opinion that, because of the non-existence of conditions favourable to their successful application in China, it is not possible to carry out either communism or even the Soviet system in China. M. [Mr] Joffe agrees entirely with this view; he is further of the opinion that China's most important and most pressing problems are the completion of national unification and the attainment of full national independence. With regard to these great tasks, M. Joffe has assured Dr Sun of the Russian people's warmest sympathy for China, and of willingness to lend support.<sup>31</sup>

### SUN YIXIAN ON THE REPUBLIC AND SOVIET RUSSIA, 1923

The Republic is my child. It is in danger of drowning. I am trying to keep it afloat and we are being swept down the river. I call for help to England and America. They stand on the bank and jeer at me. There comes a Russian straw. Drowning I clutch at it. England and America, on the bank, shout at me, on no account to clutch the Russian straw. But they do not help me. No. They jeer themselves and at the same time tell me not to clutch that Russian straw. I know it is a straw, but it is better than nothing.<sup>32</sup>

## ACTIVITY

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. From the sources, find two reasons why Sun Yixian turned to Soviet Russia for assistance.
2. Identify from the sources two objectives of the Russian Comintern in supporting Sun.
3. Using the sources provided and your own knowledge, explain the impact of the United Front on the Chinese revolutionary movement.
4. Evaluate the significance of Soviet revolutionary ideas and organisations in China up to 1923. In your response, refer to the sources provided and other views.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Sun Yixian shocked Maring by saying there was 'nothing new in Marxism.' He declared that it had all been said 2000 years ago in the Chinese classics.

## FORMING A COALITION

Sun's fortunes were nevertheless improving. A base was re-established once more at Guangzhou on 16 January 1923 after a mercenary (paid) force funded by Sun captured the city from General Chen. Sun returned on 21 February. The Comintern lent further support to Sun by sending Mikhail Borodin to assist the GMD to re-organise itself; General Vasily Galen was sent as a military adviser.

Sun meanwhile sent his leading military man, Jiang Jieshi, on a three-month visit to Moscow, where he received further training, met with leading Bolshevik Leon Trotsky and reviewed the Soviet military.

Borodin was more tactful, easy-going and persuasive than the overbearing Maring. He calmed disquiet among the Communists and Nationalists. As Sun's adviser, Borodin overhauled the GMD. The first National Congress of the re-organised Guomindang was held on 20–30 January 1924. The Congress formally approved a new Leninist-style party structure, governed by democratic centralism,<sup>33</sup> and re-affirmed the United Front – a three-way

31 Cited in *China in Revolution 1850–1976*, eds. Colin Mackerras *et al* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1993), 40.

32 Cited in B. Martin and Shui Chien-tung, *Makers of China* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 211.



alliance between the GMD, CCP and Comintern. Sun's Three Principles, the *Sanminzhuyi* (Nationalism, Democracy and People's Livelihood; see Chapter 1), were acknowledged as the party's guiding ideology. The principles were slightly amended to emphasise the need to rid China of warlord and imperialist rule, and to articulate the crucial role of workers and peasants. There remained some concerns about the relationship between the Communists and Nationalists, but Li Dazhao, a leading Communist, declared that the CCP was not a 'bloc' or faction within the GMD seeking only to further its own needs:

To complete successfully this revolution, we have to have a united, all encompassing revolutionary party for the simple reason that in the process of conducting this revolutionary movement we cannot afford to have our revolutionary forces divided ... . We want to become part of the Guomindang and to be organised as one of its armies, so that we can fight for the successful completion of our national revolution shoulder to shoulder with other comrades, under the same leadership and abiding by the same discipline ... . We join the Guomindang because we believe that we can contribute to its strength as well as provide an additional rationale for promoting our national revolution; we are not the opportunists who merely wish to use the Guomindang label in order to advance the Communist movement.<sup>34</sup>

Many long-time GMD activists were impressed by the passion of the (mostly) younger Communists. After the Congress, GMD veteran Wang Jingwei (Wang Ching-wei) said, 'The young people of the May Fourth movement are something to be reckoned with, after all. Look at the enthusiasm with which they speak, and their energetic attitude.'<sup>35</sup> Three of the twenty-four seats on the new Guomindang Central Executive Committee (CEC) were given to Communists, including Li Dazhao. Mao Zedong was one of seven Communists given a place on the sixteen-place alternative CEC membership (non-voting positions). Communists were assigned the task of rallying support amongst workers and peasants. Galen and Borodin had meanwhile proven their value by pulling together an effective militia that repulsed a campaign to re-take Guangzhou by General Chen.

## THE NATIONALIST ARMY

With the founding of a military school in Huangpu, steps were taken to prepare a professional military force for the new Nationalist coalition. Situated on an island in Guangzhou's Pearl River, the Soviet-financed Huangpu Military Academy began training and arming officers for a new Nationalist army. Having returned from the USSR, Jiang Jieshi was appointed head of the academy and commander-in-chief on 3 May 1924. Galen worked closely with Jiang. In addition to military training, Huangpu cadets were indoctrinated in Nationalist ideology and most developed a strong loyalty to Jiang. Simple living, initiative and bravery were encouraged at Huangpu.<sup>36</sup> Communists also attended; amongst those who would later rise to prominence was Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai), who served as the chief political commissar (advisor) of the Academy until 1927.

## THE DEATH OF SUN YIXIAN

In late 1924, following a conflict between northern warlords, a new government in Beijing seemed likely. Sun Yixian, as one of the nation's best-known political leaders, set out for the capital to engage in talks with those competing for power.



Mikhail Borodin.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

At the beginning of the United Front, the Chinese Communist Party had just 420 members.

33 In democratic centralism, favoured by Lenin, issues could be debated and suggestions made by ordinary members, but once a decision had been made by party leadership everyone must abide by it. A disciplined, hierarchical model.

34 Cited in Margot Morcombe and Mark Fielding, *The Spirit of Change: China in Revolution* (Sydney: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 53–4.

35 Cited in Philip Short, *Mao: a Life*, 146.

36 Jonathan Fenby, *Modern China*, 163.



Sun Yixian's mausoleum, Nanjing.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Sun Yixian's body was laid to rest in an elaborate mausoleum in the hills just outside Nanjing (above). His last words were said to be, 'Just as Christ was sent by God to the world, so God also sent me.'

He hoped to gain agreement for a proper representative government, thus averting a military campaign from the south. Upon arriving in Beijing, Sun was stricken with stomach pain and taken to hospital; he was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer.

The Father of the Republic died in Beijing on 11 March 1925, at the age of fifty-nine. Sun's final testament urged his followers to continue the struggle for national reunification. In a letter to Stalin and the Soviet government, Sun wrote, 'I leave behind a party which, as I always hoped, will be allied with you in its historical task of liberating China and other suppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism.'<sup>37</sup>

#### ACTIVITY

##### CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

Write an extended answer (approx. 150 words) on one of the topics below. Use evidence to support your response.

- Explain how the difficulties faced by Sun Yixian between 1917 and 1922 constituted a long-term cause of the revolution.
- Explain how the formation of the United Front constituted a long-term cause of the revolution.

37 Cited in Robert C. North, *Chinese Communism* (London: World University Library, 1966), 60.

38 The left faction of the GMD was more radical and favoured continued cooperation with the CCP. The right faction was more conservative and had close ties with the military. Many on the right were suspicious of the Communists.

39 Cited in Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China He Lost* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 68.

## CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Not all Nationalists felt so sure that working with the Communists was for the best, but Sun had kept the various factions and interests in the United Front together. His death destabilised this fragile union. Sun also left behind a party unsure of its leadership and prone to factionalism. The mantle of leadership fell to



Wang Jingwei and Liao Zhongkai (Liao Chung-k'ai), who headed the left faction of the GMD, and Hu Hanmin (Hu Han-min), who dominated the right.<sup>38</sup> None carried the prestige or authority of Sun. A further source of power was the military under Jiang Jieshi; Jiang told his wife, 'If I control the army, I will have the power to control the country. It is my road to leadership.'<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Sun Yixian's death was the first of a number of dramatic events in the mid-1920s that shaped the course of the Chinese revolutionary movement. On 30 May 1925, protesting textile workers in Shanghai – who had been locked out of their factory by Japanese management – were fired on by British guards. Eleven men were killed. In Guangzhou, a protest in solidarity with the 'May 30 Martyrs' was also violently dispersed by British soldiers, resulting in fifty-two deaths. The 'May 30 Atrocious Incident,' as it was called, inflamed anti-imperialist feeling and renewed the protests of the May Fourth movement. Rebecca Karl argues, 'The May 30th Incident and its aftermath helped usher in a new hope for social mobilization and revolutionary upsurge.'<sup>40</sup> Support for the CCP swelled as workers and students were increasingly attracted to the message of Communist agitators and strikes spread throughout the country. By the start of 1927, the Communists had 57 000 members.<sup>41</sup>

While the more radical elements of the United Front increased their influence after Sun's death, the first challenge for leadership appeared from the right. On 20 August 1925, Liao Zhongkai, a leading member of the GMD left faction, was assassinated. An investigation pointed to the involvement of Hu Hanmin of the GMD right. Hu was subsequently packed off to Moscow to 'study communism.' A three-man leadership team of Wang Jingwei, Jiang Jieshi and Mikhail Borodin was established. On 20 March 1926, a confused plot to kidnap Jiang, involving a gunboat commanded by a Communist officer, allowed Jiang to further consolidate his authority, this time against the left. (The left Communists were blamed for the failed coup.) Soviet advisers were placed under 'protective custody.' At Jiang's urging, in May the Guomindang CEC resolved to remove a number of Communists from senior positions and restrict their involvement in committees: 'comrades on the left ... should retire for a while.'<sup>42</sup> There was little Borodin could do to moderate Jiang's measures. As Jiang still needed Soviet support, relations between the two, while tense, were maintained. When Wang Jingwei was suspected of association with the plot against Jiang, he prudently decided to retire from politics and leave for France.

Thus, less than eighteen months after Sun Yixian's death, Jiang Jieshi had secured his position in Guangzhou and sidelined most of his leadership rivals. One Soviet adviser recorded the following assessment of the self-proclaimed generalissimo (commander-in-chief): 'We consider Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi] a peculiar person with peculiar characteristics, most prominent of these being his lust for glory and power and craving to be the hero of China.'<sup>43</sup>



Wang Jingwei.

40 Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 29.

41 Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1999), 70.

42 Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 93.

43 Cited in Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 95–6.



Jiang Jieshi, commander-in-chief at the Huangpu Military Academy.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Jiang Jieshi described the warlords to his wife, Jennie Chen: 'They are willing to ally with me or anyone else, just so they save their skins. They are stinking opportunists!'

## THE NORTHERN EXPEDITION

**Jiang Jieshi:** 'To protect the welfare of the people we must overthrow all warlords and wipe out reactionary power so that we may implement the Three People's Principles and complete the National Revolution.'

It was not long before Jiang did indeed have an opportunity to pursue personal glory, as well as to fulfil one of Sun Yixian's long-held dreams. On 1 July 1926, Jiang announced the mobilisation of the Northern Expedition: 'To protect the welfare of the people we must overthrow all warlords and wipe out reactionary power so that we may implement [Sun's] Three People's Principles and complete the National Revolution.'<sup>44</sup> On 6 July, Jiang was elected chairman of the Guomindang CEC, giving him full control of the party's military and political organisations.

The Nationalist Revolutionary Army, with Jiang as its commander-in-chief, began its march north on 27 July, with a total of 85 000 troops led by 6000 Huangpu officers. The China correspondent for the *New York Times* wrote, 'the expedition appeared to be a hopeless folly.' The combined forces of 'Philosopher General' Wu Peifu (Wu P'ei-fu), 'Old Marshall' Zhang Zuolin (Chang Tso-lin) and 'Nanjing Warlord' Sun Chuanfang

(Sun Ch'uan-fang) amounted to 750 000 troops. The Nationalists had some advantages, however. Whereas southern China was relatively united under the Guomindang, the north was more divided than ever.<sup>45</sup> There was little chance that northern militarists could mount a coordinated defence, partly because their troops were often poorly trained and equipped. By contrast, the Nationalist Army was a disciplined, professional fighting force with high morale. General Galen and his Soviet experts continued to advise Jiang. The Nationalist government was in a good financial situation after the appointment of T.V. Soong (Soong Ziwen; Sung Tzu-wen) as finance minister. Soong was Western-educated and a brilliant financier. He built up a silver reserve for the Nationalist government, which brought stability to the currency, and increased tax income considerably.

Travelling ahead of the Nationalist Revolutionary Army were Communist and left-GMD agitators, who mobilised support amongst the peasants and rallied workers' organisations. Strikes and other acts of sabotage by ordinary people played an important part in destabilising the warlords. The Nationalist Army, against expectations, enjoyed victory after victory as it swept into central China. Wuhan was captured on 10 October – an auspicious date in Republican history – and Nanchang fell a month later. By 1927, Jiang's army, enlarged with defections from warlord forces, was advancing on Nanjing and Shanghai. Despite success on the battlefield the Nationalists and their United Front allies were far from harmonious. Tensions, suspicions and jealousies were mounting.

44 Cited in Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 114.

45 Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions*, 220.



#### KEY EVENTS

Using the map and information above, summarise the Northern Expedition in your own words. Then comment on how the end of the 'warlord era' changed China politically. Who filled the gap left by the warlords?

#### KEY PEOPLE

Discuss the questions below.

1. What were the consequences of the death of Sun Yixian for the Nationalist movement?
2. How accurate is Sun Yixian's popular title, 'Father of the Republic'?
3. How did Jiang Jieshi increase his political influence during the United Front period?

#### ACTIVITY

# THE WHITE TERROR

**Jiang Jieshi:** 'I have never taken the view that I cannot cooperate with the Communists ... But I have also made it clear that while I was opposed to the oppression of the Communists, I would check their influence as soon as they grew too powerful.'

## DID YOU KNOW?

Journalist Arthur Ransome described Justice Minister Xu Qian as 'unbalanced' and 'obstinate'; he was 'a brilliant man with something seriously wrong with his brain.'

## DID YOU KNOW?

The warlord Zhang Zuolin, who ruled Beijing, launched an anti-communist purge in April 1927. His troops attacked the Soviet embassy and executed many Chinese Communists who were sheltering there, including Li Dazhao.

On 1 January 1927, the Guomindang CEC and Comintern adviser Borodin relocated to Wuhan, central China, and established the city as the new seat of government. The Nationalist government, under the influence of its left faction, now tried to lessen Jiang's authority. The extraordinary powers granted him at the start of the Northern Expedition were revoked and Jiang was made answerable to a committee headed by one of his old rivals, Justice Minister Xu Qian (Hsu Chien). Wang Jingwei returned from France and further bolstered the Wuhan government. Jiang was furious and insisted that the government be based at Nanchang, a city he had captured shortly before. For the moment the dispute remained unresolved and the two opposing elements vied for control.

As Nationalist troops advanced on Shanghai, Communist-led workers' unions, under the direction of Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai), formed militias and staged a huge strike, which paralysed the city. The Nationalist Revolutionary Army breached Shanghai's defences on 18 March and, thanks to the workers' efforts, faced little resistance. The Nationalists held the city by 22 March. Yet the success of the Communist labour agitators presented a problem for Jiang: 'This could be portrayed either as fifth column<sup>46</sup> aid for the Nationalists,' argues Jonathan Fenby, 'or as a bid to set up a Soviet, or both. It was a major threat to Jiang since the strikers would greatly outnumber his troops.'<sup>47</sup> On his arrival Jiang sought the help of Shanghai's leading businessmen, bankers and foreign diplomats. All were keen to do away with the militant workers' movement. Jiang's first meeting, though, was with 'Pockmarked Huang' (Huang Jinrong) and 'Big Ears Du' (Du Yuesheng) – the leaders of Shanghai's notorious Green Gang criminal network.<sup>48</sup> The Green Gang (*Qingbang*) ran drug smuggling and distribution, gambling dens, prostitution and protection rackets. Huang also happened to be boss of the Chinese detectives in the French Concession. The power and connections of the Green Gang were called upon to deal with Jiang's Communist 'problem,' in return the Gang was promised immunity from the law and exclusive rights to sell opium in Shanghai.

In early April 1927, Wang Jingwei (GMD) and Chen Duxiu (CCP) issued a joint statement reaffirming the relationship between their two parties and reassuring the public that there were no plans for a Communist uprising in Shanghai. Their statement created a false impression of unity. At the outset of the Northern Expedition, Zhou Enlai had warned Borodin that some leading Nationalists 'may not be as friendly as you think they are.' Zhou's assessment proved prophetic.

## THE SHANGHAI MASSACRE

With assistance from the French consul-general, Big Ears Du armed a 2000-man militia with the somewhat ironic title of China Mutual Progress Association. Early on the morning of 12 April, the Green Gang militia fanned out through Shanghai's working-class districts. They wore blue denim overalls and white

46 A 'fifth column' is a subversive group within an organisation that appears to be loyal but quietly works towards its own interests, or those of an enemy group.

47 Jonathan Fenby, *Modern China*, 176.

48 Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 146.



armbands with the Chinese character for ‘labourer’ printed on them. Just before dawn the militia began a massacre. Communists and union activists were rounded up and executed. Nationalist troops joined in the slaughter. Somewhere between 5000 and 10 000 Communists and unionists were killed. Maurice Meisner argues that Jiang had brought about ‘a bloodbath that virtually destroyed both the CCP and the workers’ movement in China’s largest city’: it was ‘an orgy of counter-revolutionary violence.’<sup>49</sup> The White Terror spread to other cities under Nationalist control.<sup>50</sup> The eventual death toll numbered in the hundreds of thousands – nobody kept an official record. In disarray, Communists discarded their trademark red-neckties and tried to evade capture. Zhou Enlai went into hiding and was one of the lucky ones who escaped. American Vice-Consul Frederick Hinke described the fate of many less fortunate radicals:

Execution squads patrolled the streets and on finding a suspect, they questioned him, examined his neck for the tell-tale red. If found, they ordered the victim to open his mouth, thrust a revolver into it, and another coolie came to the end of his Communist venture. I, myself, saw a rickshaw stopped, the coolie grabbed by the police, his shirt jerked from his neck disclosing the red stain. He was rushed to the side of the road, compelled to kneel down, and unceremoniously shot while the crowd of people in the street applauded.<sup>51</sup>

Jiang had been vastly underestimated by Stalin’s Comintern. A week before the Shanghai Massacre, Stalin said, ‘We are told that Chiang [Jiang] is making ready to turn against us again. I know that he is playing a cunning game with us; it is he that will be crushed. We shall squeeze him like a lemon and then be rid of him.’<sup>52</sup> Wang Jingwei’s Wuhan government accused Jiang of a ‘massacre of the people’ and on 17 April expelled him from the GMD. Jiang didn’t care – he had a powerful army and his own government, now based in Nanjing (which he captured on 24 March). The CCP leadership were, meanwhile, bewildered by confusing orders from Stalin. On a number of occasions in the past they had asked Moscow to allow them to split from Jiang, to work only with the Guomindang left, pursue revolution in the countryside and raise their own military force. Their proposal had been repeatedly vetoed (rejected) by Stalin. After the Shanghai Massacre the CCP leadership cut ties with Jiang but continued to work with Wang Jingwei. The CCP was instructed by the Comintern to adopt the very strategies that had been refused in previous weeks. Chen Duxiu said it was ‘like taking a bath in shit,’ another Communist said he didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.<sup>53</sup> The arrival of new Comintern advisors, headed by Mahendranath Roy, made matters worse for the CCP. Borodin and Roy disagreed over policy. Roy made a terrible blunder in showing Wang Jingwei a confidential telegram from Stalin that proposed the formation of an exclusively Communist army. Roy had hoped to reassure Wang with his openness but he instead aroused suspicions. On 15 July the left Guomindang expelled the CCP and Comintern representatives from its government. The leading Russian advisors were sent home by the end of the month. ‘It’s all over,’ despaired Borodin.<sup>54</sup> Before he left, Borodin urged his Chinese comrades to continue their struggle and defy Jiang’s ‘counter-revolutionary’ regime. Borodin later described the Guomindang as ‘a toilet which, however often you flush it, still stinks.’<sup>55</sup>

After the expulsion of the Communists the left faction of the Guomindang ‘remained a house divided against itself ... Its revolutionary ardour was broken, its unity shattered, and its leaders had become rivals for power.’<sup>56</sup> The right GMD at Nanjing was similarly unsettled. In late 1927 Jiang made the surprising but



## THE SHANGHAI MASSACRE

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the Horse Day Incident of 21 May 1927, the Nationalist commander in Changsha ordered the deaths of 10 000 Communists.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Borodin and Galen were killed in Stalin’s purges during the 1930s and 1940s in Russia.

49 Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China: a History of the People’s Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 27.

50 The term ‘White Terror’ derives from the Russian Revolution where the forces that opposed the Communist ‘Reds’ during the Russian Civil War were known as ‘Whites.’ Chinese Communists used the term to imply that Jiang Jieshi and his allies were ‘counter-revolutionary.’

51 Cited in Robert C. North, *Chinese Communism*, 104.

52 Cited in Rius, *Mao For Beginners* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), 69.

53 Philip Short, *Mao: a Life*, 190.

54 Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge*, first volume (Frogmore: Panther Books, 1976), 213.

55 Cited in Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 158.

56 Helmut G. Callis, *China: Confucian and Communist* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), 254–5.

clever move of taking a break from the leadership struggle. Pretending to give up his ambitions, Jiang travelled to Japan and married his third wife, Soong Meiling (Sung Meiling). 'This cleared the way for his rivals to tear at each other's throats.'<sup>57</sup> By the end of the year many in the Guomindang were yearning for a strong leader and hoped for a reconciliation of the party's factions. The Wuhan government dissolved and joined with the government at Nanjing. Jiang was asked back and on 1 January 1928 he returned to the Nationalist capital. He once again took the role of commander-in-chief and the Northern Expedition resumed. In alliance with the warlord 'Christian General' Feng Yuxiang (Feng Yu-hsiang), Nationalist troops had taken Beijing by June. The city was renamed Beiping, meaning 'northern peace,' as Nanjing remained the centre of power. On 10 October Jiang Jieshi was elected chairman of the Nationalist government of China.

The Northern Expedition achieved a semblance of national unity and the Guomindang government was recognised by world powers. Whilst some areas remained outside the government's immediate control, China was now under its first unified government since the death of Yuan Shikai. The Nationalist flag flew throughout north, south and central China, as well as Manchuria. The man of the moment was Jiang Jieshi, who enjoyed enormous power and prestige. He held the positions of chairman of the Central Executive Committee and State Council, secretary general of the GMD and head of the Military Council. Under his leadership China embarked on a decade of modernisation and national reconstruction. Behind the impressive new façade, however, many cracks remained. After the White Terror, the story of the revolution became a tale of two Chinas: Communist and Nationalist.<sup>58</sup>

## ACTIVITIES

### KEY PEOPLE

- Draw a concept map or flow chart showing Jiang Jieshi's role in the Chinese Revolution up to 1928.
- As a class, debate the following topic: 'The Shanghai Massacre showed that Jiang Jieshi was morally bankrupt.'

### CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

Write a paragraph on each of the topics below. Use evidence to support your response.

1. Explain how the actions of the CCP contributed to a growing revolutionary situation in China up to 1927.
2. Explain the impact of the Shanghai Massacre and White Terror on the Chinese revolutionary movement.
3. Explain the extent to which the Northern Expedition contributed to the fulfilment of Sun Yixian's revolutionary vision.

57 Sterling Seagrave, *The Soong Dynasty: The Extraordinary Story of the Richest and Most Powerful Family in Modern China* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), 263.

58 Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions*, 229.



## JIANG JIESHI AND THE SOONG DYNASTY

Jiang Jieshi to Jennie Chen: 'I am desperate. Ailing has struck a hard bargain, but what she says is true. Her offer [of support from Chinese bankers] is the only way for me to achieve my plans to unite China. I now ask you to help me. I beg you not to say no. After all, true love is measured by the sacrifice one is willing to make.'

On 31 December 1927, while temporarily out of office, Jiang Jieshi married the youngest daughter of Charlie Soong (Soong Jiashu), one of Shanghai's wealthiest businessmen. Soong Meiling was a woman of great beauty and intelligence. She was educated in the United States and spoke fluent English with a slight American accent. She also had considerable 'connections.' Meiling strengthened Jiang's ties with Shanghai's business elite. Her elder sister, Ailing, who had arranged the marriage with Jiang on behalf of her family, was married to Shanghai's leading banker, H.H. Kung (Kong Xiangxi). The youngest brothers of the family – Tse Liang 'T.L.' Soong (Soong Ziliang) and Tse An 'T.A.' Soong (Soong Zian) – were also influential financiers. T.V. Soong, their eldest brother, was already Jiang's finance minister. Meiling's other sister, Qingling, was the widow of Sun Yixian. On marrying Meiling, Jiang Jieshi became one of the Father of the Republic's in-laws. Jiang's ties to this so-called 'Soong dynasty' represent shrewd political manoeuvring and the importance of family 'connections' in Chinese culture.

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to a popular Chinese saying, one Soong sister loved money (Ailing), one loved power (Meiling) and one loved China (Qingling).

Once Jiang came to power, Soong Meiling proved to be a valuable political asset. She made a number of speaking tours to Europe and the United States to rally support for Jiang's government. She was a hit with the American public and

regularly featured in magazines. Her eloquence and beauty were much admired. As a Methodist she was popular with the anti-communist Christian right in America (Jiang also became a Methodist

after marrying Meiling). In 1937, Jiang and Meiling made the front page of *Time* magazine as 'man and wife of the year.' Photographs from World War II show Meiling linking arms with her husband and his American adviser, General Joe Stilwell. She was Jiang's literal and symbolic link to the West.



'Generalissimo' Jiang Jieshi and Soong Meiling.

In order to marry Meiling, Jiang had to work out what to do with his other wife, Jennie (Chen Jieru). Jiang promised Jennie that he was only marrying Meiling for political convenience. He arranged for Jennie to go to the United States for a five-year 'study tour,' after which he promised he would send for her and their married life would resume. Jennie eventually agreed to the arrangement. Jiang made a vow in Jennie's presence before a Buddhist shrine, 'Should I break my promise and fail to take her back, may the Great Buddha smite me and my Nanjing government.'<sup>59</sup> Once in America, Jennie learnt from articles in the press that Jiang denied their marriage, claiming he had paid for a former 'concubine' to move to the States. She was shattered. (It was not the first time Jiang had dealt Jennie an awful blow. He infected her with syphilis on their wedding night; the treatment used to cure the infection left her infertile.)

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo*, 167.



# CONCLUSION

While it seemed that a bright new future lay on the horizon following the downfall of the corrupt and inept Qing dynasty, China's woes were just beginning. The idea of a republic floundered while military strongmen came to rule over a divided, embittered land. More radical visions were embraced by a young China yearning for social equity, political stability and international respect. New learning and philosophies, such as Marxism-Leninism, inspired mass protest movements and revolutionary approaches to changing society. From this radicalism emerged the Chinese Communist Party. The prospect of revolution also brought much-

needed assistance from Soviet Russia to the Guomindang (Nationalists). A brief period of cooperation between the GMD and CCP, the so-called United Front, came to a violent end when Jiang Jieshi turned on his Communist allies. The Shanghai Massacre forced the CCP to flee from the cities and attempt to re-group in the countryside. Meanwhile, Jiang's political fortunes were on the rise. Ending the rule of warlords with the Northern Expedition and outmanoeuvring his rivals, not to mention making valuable connections with the powerful Soong family, Jiang Jieshi emerged triumphant as the leader of Nationalist China by 1928.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

### BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

Imagine you are a young Chinese student who writes articles for a university newspaper. You were involved in the May Fourth protests and are interested in the Chinese Communist Party. You are lucky enough to meet with Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu and Hendricus Maring. They each tell you of their beliefs and attitudes about the CCP. Write up your interviews in a short article for the student newspaper (500–600 words).

### KEY IDEAS

In small groups, act out a meeting of the Chinese Communist Party shortly after the First National Congress was held in 1921.

Represent the following figures: Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Hendricus Maring.

The meeting should discuss:

- The key ideas of the party (e.g. Marxism, Marxism-Leninism)
- Tensions between north and south China
- The political objectives of the CCP
- The relative importance of peasants and urban workers in the revolutionary struggle.

The meeting should go for about 10 minutes and each person should speak at least three times.

### KEY PEOPLE

Write a paragraph on how each of the following people changed Chinese society between 1912 and 1927:

- Sun Yixian
- Jiang Jieshi
- Yuan Shikai.

### CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

Write an essay of 600–800 words on one of the topics below. Your essay should include an introduction, paragraphs supported by evidence from primary sources and historical interpretations, a conclusion and a bibliography. Topics:

- Jonathan Fenby describes the United Front as ‘a marriage of convenience.’ To what extent do you agree with this interpretation?
- Explain the significance of the the May Fourth movement as a revolutionary turning point.
- Evaluate the extent to which the Northern Expedition was successful in creating national unity.
- Explain the extent to which the New Culture movement ‘changed what it meant to be Chinese.’

## FURTHER READING

Patricia Buckley Ebrey. *China: A Cultural, Social and Political History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

An innovative and assessable textbook written for higher level students. Feature boxes on material culture and lesser-known figures are fascinating.

Jonathan Fenby. *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China He Lost*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

A detailed and engaging biography of Jiang Jieshi. Students would find Fenby useful for further research and extension reading.

Jack Gray. *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

An interesting and accessible general reference book. Gray's analysis of the Chinese Communist movement

provides a good counterpoint to more critical interpretations.

Rana Mitter. *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Mitter brings together cultural, social and political history in this examination of how the May Fourth movement and its ideals shaped modern China.

Edwin Moise. *Modern China: A History*. London: Longman, 1994.

An illuminating academic text. Useful for its discussion of key individuals and movements.

John E. Schrecker. *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective*. London: Praeger Publishers, 2004.

An innovative and interesting text that analyses the history of China through Chinese sociological concepts rather than Western approaches.

Sterling Seagrave. *The Soong Dynasty: The Extraordinary Story of the Richest and Most Powerful Family in Modern China*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985.

A detailed and lively account of the significant members of the Soong family.

Jonathan Spence. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.

A detailed but accessible general reference book.