

The Nanjing Decade (1928-37): Successes and Failures

Introduction

- Topic: The 10-year period between 1928-37 was known as the Nanjing Decade, during which the GMD under Jiang Jieshi declared itself the new legitimate government of China, ruling from the new capital of Nanjing
- Time frame: 1928 (end of the Northern Expedition) to 1937 (dawn of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War)
- Thesis: The GMD did promulgate various reforms to address China's political, international, economic and social problems
- However, progress record across the different areas was uneven
- SYS: While Jiang's government did make considerable progress in the principle of nationalism, he was largely unsuccessful and uncommitted to the two other principles

Political: Aims	<p>In line with Sun Yixian's Three Principles of the people:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>People's Nationhood or Nationalism</u>: Unifying the nation and consolidating power in the hands of the nationalist government 2. <u>People's Authority or democracy</u>: Establishment of a republican system based on Western constitutional ideas
Political	<p>Warlords</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before: China divided, fractious, plagued with warlordism • Jiang embarked on the Northern Expedition in order to rid China of warlords and unite the nation • Was able to negotiate with several warlords and absorbed them into the GMD system • These "new warlords" would cooperate with the GMD so long as their interests did not collide • Hence, despite several impressive victories, there was still a degree of residual warlordism (Jack Grey) and the warlords the never truly defeated • In 1930, Jiang directly controlled only 8% of China's land area and 25% of the population (Jack Gray) • However, during the civil wars from 1929-31, Jiang's government did make significant gains in reversing the trend toward territorial disintegration by defeating the coalition of Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan • Eastman argues that by 1936, a "new sense of optimism and national unity" suffused China • Nevertheless, while the provinces directly controlled by Jiang increased from 2 in 1928 to 8 in 1936, certain provinces continued to remain essentially autonomous • Apart from the provinces around and nearest the capital, Jiang's hold over China's territory was tenuous and he faced military and political opposition from many quarters for virtually the whole decade (Mackerras) • Thus, the defeat of the warlords (nationalism) was only partially achieved <p>Communist threat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jiang was unable to rid the Communists entirely during his first 4 extermination campaigns from 1930-33, who were able to escape defeat through the use of guerrilla tactics • Moreover, despite Jiang's success during his 5th campaign in 1934, the CCP was able to escape on the Long March and seek refuge in Yenan and consolidate power • Would pose a significant threat to the GMD, served as a foil to the GMD in Nanjing • Were seen as more progressive and liberal where Mao experimented with several policies including moderate land reforms, as reflected in Edgar Snow's account

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed to gain overwhelming support from the peasants, who were alienated by the GMD's neglect of their welfare Thus, Jiang's inability to eradicate the Communist threat was a failure on his part <p>Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before: China suffered from a lack of democratic rule, following the collapse of the Qing dynasty and Yuan Shikai's betrayal of the New Republic Sun intended for China to become a republic through 3 stages: firstly via military rule, secondly political tutelage and then constitutional rule While the GMD proclaimed democracy as a long-range goal, it said that China was not yet ready for such a system and was still in the second stage of political tutelage under a de facto dictatorship Although small advances were made towards democratic reconstruction eg. issuing of a provisional constitution in 1931 which created a five-branch system of government, power was concentrated in the hands of Jiang who ruled autocratically over the Nanjing government under the Organic Law of 1928 Sun's principle of democracy was undermined by Jiang's determination to eliminate Communism Purged the Communists in the 1927 Shanghai Massacre and ended the First United Front Launched the Bandit Extermination Campaigns against the Communists from 1930-34 Oppression during Jiang's rule was endemic; Jiang created a fascist-like organization known as the Blue Shirts, which aim was to elevate Jiang to the position of a dictator Hence, the establishment of a republican system based on Western constitutional ideas was never fully achieved during the Nanjing Decade This, according to Hsu, served to diminish the legitimacy of the GMD, which were seen as attempting to prolong their monopoly of power at the expense of constitutionalism
International: Aims	<p>China's international prestige was greatly tainted since the Qing dynasty and had experienced foreign encroachment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unequal treaties such as the Treaties of Nanjing and Tianjin, extraterritoriality, tariff control, concessions and settlements had hampered its economic development <u>Sun's principle of nationalism</u>: Rid China of foreign domination
International	<p>Tariff autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jiang managed to get rid of foreign domination by achieving tariff autonomy and recovering foreign concessions In 1928, the GMD managed to reverse the fixed tariff of 5% ad valorem, imposed after the opium war, which had been a constant reminder of China's semi-colonial status The Western powers entered into equal and friendly tariff agreements with China and agreed in principle to give up their consular jurisdiction The US, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Britain, France and Japan entered into equal and friendly tariff agreements with China Between 1927-30, Britain agreed to relinquish their concessions at Hankou, Jiujiang, Weihai and Amoy Belgium concession at Tianjin was recovered in 1931 By 1931, foreign concessions in China was reduced from 33 to 15 However, it should be pointed out that Jiang's success in this area was limited The restriction of China's lost rights was not complete until 1943, when the US and Britain took the lead in voluntarily abolishing all unequal treaties with China, thereby finally breaking the shackles of imperialism

	<p>Failure to engage Japan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jiang's largest failure towards nationalism was when he showed great deficiencies over the defence of national sovereignty during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 • Following the Mukden incident in 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria and set up a puppet state • The invasion of Manchuria was allowed to happen as Jiang did not take concrete steps to ensure the territorial integrity of China • Jiang adopted a policy of passive resistance in trading space for time and viewed the Communists as a greater threat than the Japanese up until 1937, which made him appear to be persecuting political opponents for partisan objectives • Was too preoccupied with the struggle against internal enemies and putative opponents to resist the Japanese seriously • Jiang's lack of concern for the Japanese invasion and inability to prevent the fall of Manchuria eventually culminated in the 2nd Sino-Japanese War in 1937, which saw China's defeat • Thus, although Jiang made some progress in liberating China from imperialism, he failed to protect the nation against the Japanese threat
Economic: Aims	<p>The GMD had inherited a country plagued with substantial economic problems; need for financial and economic reform</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem of vast debts arising from the various indemnities imposed on China, unsustainability of China's currency (the silver dollar) exacerbated by the Great Depression in 1929 2. Need for infrastructural development and industrial growth
Economic	<p>Financial reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before: China was faced with the sharp rise in value of the silver dollar, causing an outflow from China, resulting in problems such as inflation and high interest rates • Caused economy to stagnate • The GMD boldly nationalized silver and replaced it with the <i>fabi</i>, while establishing 4 national banks to regulate the currency • Prevented the collapse of the Chinese economy • According to Hsu this was one of the outstanding accomplishments of the GMD <p>Infrastructure and industrial growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before: Feeble growth and lack of infrastructure • China emerged stronger from the Nanjing Decade with the growth of infrastructure and industry • There was an improvement of transport and communication systems – Ministry of Railways established in 1928 • GMD built a further 5000 miles of railways and increased the length of motorable roads to 69,000 miles • Postal services and telecommunications were much improved on and expanded, facilitating work and investment vital to economic growth • Progress was made in light industries such as cotton, cement and petrochemicals • Impressive advances in industries eg. electricity generation and coal output grew at 9.4% and 7.0% per annum respectively • However, progress was limited • In 1933, the whole of China's modern industrial sector contributed only 7.4% to gross domestic production • Nanjing government did little to spur industrial growth; growth attributed to merchant class in treaty ports and foreigners (Jack Gray)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern industry was heavily concentrated in treaty ports and almost entirely unknown in the interior provinces • Unequal industrial development
Social: Aims	In line with Sun Yixian's Three Principles of the people: 1. <u>People's Livelihood or Socialism</u> : Equalizing land ownership in China and improve the welfare of the people, notably the peasantry
Social	Agrarian reforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China had been predominantly rural since the imperial Manchu dynasty • The peasants, who comprised 85% of the population, bore the brunt of poor harvests, landlordism, natural disasters and war, while living standards remained abysmal • The GMD made several attempts to resolve the agrarian crisis that had plagued China for decades, but were ultimately unsuccessful • Tried passing a land law in 1930 which restricted rent to three-eighths of the main crop, but was never enforced • Set up a National Agricultural Research Bureau in 1932 and attempted to extend credit to farmers through an agricultural co-operative movement • However, most of the loans went to landlords and little of what was borrowed was invested in the land • Eastman noted that China's death rate was among the highest in the world and observed that "farmers lived in appalling poverty" • Furthermore, the education record during the Nanjing decade was very uneven as the provision for education was much greater in the urban cities than in the countryside • Thus, serious social inequalities and poverty continued under Jiang's rule and he failed to carry through Sun's declared policies of land reform and equitable rents

Conclusion

- The challenges facing Jiang and the GMD during the Nanjing Decade were by no means small
- Jiang was burdened by the weight of a fractious political landscape, the lack of democratic tradition, economic distress and foreign incursion
- While Jiang's regime made considerable progress in the area of nationalism, its success was limited as the warlords remained a force in China and Jiang failed to defend China's sovereignty in face of Japanese aggression
- While there was some advance toward democratic reconstruction, Jiang continued to run China as a de facto military dictatorship
- In the economic sector, Jiang showed little interest in agricultural matters and failed to equalize land ownership; problems of landlordism and tenancy still persisted
- Hence, Jiang was relatively successful in some areas but failed in others