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THE TWO CHINAS: COMMUNIST AND GUOMINDANG

At the end of the war in 1945, two groups got ready to take back control of China from the defeated Japanese: the Communists in their 'liberation areas' and the Guomindang in Chongqing. Both intended to take control by renewing the civil war between them and fighting for power. What was each side hoping to achieve? What did they have to offer the Chinese people? We can get some answers to these questions by looking at the ways in which they each ran the areas under their control during the war.

Life in Guomindang China

Chiang Kaishek governed his area as a military dictator. Like the Fascist dictators in Europe, Hitler and Mussolini, he believed that a country was best governed by a single supreme leader. He said:

- A. 'I believe that unless everyone has absolute trust in one man, we cannot reconstruct the nation and we cannot complete the revolution.'

So, just as Hitler was the 'Fuehrer' of Germany and Mussolini was the 'Duce' of Italy, Chiang Kaishek was called the 'Generalissimo' by his supporters. And while Hitler had an army of 'Brown-shirts' and Mussolini an army of 'Blackshirts' to deal with opponents, Chiang Kaishek had a political police force of 'Blueshirts' which specialised in hunting down Communists and in kidnapping, spying and torture.

What was the purpose of Chiang Kaishek's dictatorship? Where was he intending to take China?

First, he aimed to modernise the country. Great efforts were made to unify China by improving the railways, the postal services and telecommunications. Powerful foreign companies such as ICI and Standard Oil were encouraged to build factories in China to help develop its backward industry. A new paper currency was introduced in 1937.

Chiang Kaishek's second aim was to create a sense of national unity among the people. To achieve this he started a **New Life Movement** in 1934. It was based on four ancient ideas – *Li*, *I*, *Lien* and *Chih*. His wife explained what this meant in an essay she published in 1934:

- B. 'If the national spirit is to be revived, there must be recourse to stable foundations. In the four principles of ancient times we have these foundations. '*Li*' means courtesy; '*I*' means service towards our fellow men and towards ourselves; '*Lien*', honesty and respect for the rights of others; and '*Chih*', high-mindedness and honour.'

The New Life Movement put great stress on public health, self-discipline and honesty. Posters and slogans encouraged people to be clean and hygienic – for example, to blow their noses into handkerchiefs instead of on to the street. The Movement did not, however, try to deal with China's basic welfare problems – lack of medical care, poor housing, ignorance and poverty, so it soon earned a reputation of being trivial.

Another movement started by Chiang Kaishek was the **Rural Service** – a government organisation which sent students into the country during their vacations to help peasants harvest their crops. However, he did nothing to reduce the land taxes which took around half a peasant's income. Nor was he able to prevent a famine in 1929–32 from killing more than three million people. The Rural Service, like the New Life Movement, was criticised as a triviality which did nothing to tackle China's deep-rooted poverty.

Chiang Kaishek and the Guomindang never gained the support of the peasants – who were the majority of the people. The areas where the Guomindang was strongest were the towns and cities of eastern China, where they were supported by bankers, merchants, businessmen and landowners – anybody who stood to benefit from strong government. In the countryside, however, the Guomindang was weak. Few peasants belonged to it, and none of them had any reason to support a government which took their taxes but did little to solve their problems.

A Chinese woodcut showing Guomindang tax collectors seizing the last food and animals from a starving family

