ZELEK Sebastian 27/01/2014

History – Geography essay

“'Chiang Kaishek's government of 1927 to 1936 largely failed because of his preoccupation with crushing the Communists.' How far do you agree?”

After seizing the control over the Guomindang after Sun Yatzen's death in 1925, Chiang Kaishek works towards the unification of China and it's liberation from the warlords rule, aided by the CCP, a Communist party lead by Mao Zedong. He achieves success in 1928, when he takes control over China after a lengthy campaign of the United Front, GMD and CCP's united forces that had for objective an overthrow of current government and the pacification of the local warlords. Only that once he becomes the leader of China, Chiang Kaishek ceases to co-operate with the CCP and lets his anti-communist thoughts surface, beginning a new campaign, this time against his former allies: the Communists. He sets on fully completing his new campaign, to drive every single communist out of China, preoccupying him to a point that he starts to ignore Chinese problems and just focuses on his maniacal goal of getting rid of the Reds in China.

The primary point that shows Chiang's government failure is his primary goal: crushing the Communists. Beginning with the Shanghai's White Terror in 1927, where Chiang Kaishek strikes on the Communists for the first time, the campaign against the Reds was fuelled with many resources that China had. Using entire armies, attacking it's own population and even ignoring the growing presence of foreign nations in China, Chiang Kaishek set out fully to crush the Communists, which he nearly managed to do. But the Reds managed to break out of the siege that the GMD's forces laid upon the CCP's base in Jiangxi and evaded the fate that Chiang prepared for them. After the CCP's Long March of 1934-35, during which the Reds lead by Mao Zedong relocated from Jiangxi to Yanan, the Communists took control over several provinces that the GMD's troops could not take back. This military failure, alongside the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, largely ignored by the government, can be shown as a primary example of Chiang's government failure between 1927 and 1936: Chiang Kaishek wasn't even capable of achieving his primary objective of crushing the CCP, even with the expense of the majority of China's resources. And in the meantime Chiang's government has let Japan occupy a major part of China and interfere with the Chinese government.

Chiang's government also lacked on other fields: the GMD couldn't control more than a third of the Chinese territory, and 2/3 of the population in China. The rest was divided up between foreign powers, the communists and the warlords that survived and remained in power even after the United Front's campaign. The GMD was effectively failing to control the integrity of the Chinese territory, and the remaining warlords were a prime example of this incapability. Also, in order to initiate his fight against the Reds, Chiang asked the Chinese underworld, mainly in Shanghai, to help him fight the CCP. That co-operation with criminal organisations left a deep scar in GMD's public image, and effectively undermined Chiang's claims in the New Life Movement, the movement to Chiang's moral leadership of China, consisting of the return to Confucianism. But the government's dealings with gangsters sabotaged their claim of being China's new moral guide, same as did his research of finding a middle way between communism and capitalism. Having to constantly deal with his limited resources, both political and financial, Chiang Kaishek could never abandon capitalism. The need to deal with western powers, as well as the dependence on their loans, was also striking at Chiang Kaishek's credibility of leading China morally and economically. The government's economical and political credibility was also undermined by the GMD's supporters and members: mainly merchants, businessmen and other powerful figures. Because of them, the Guomindang couldn't apply one of Sun Yatsen's “Three Principles of the People”: people's welfare. These men had little regard to the rural peasants and their life conditions when compared to their interest in improving their welfare in urban areas. This disregard of rural areas caused the problem of poverty throughout the whole China, as well as the widespread famine of 1934-35, that the government was powerless to stop and prevent. All of these situations show that Chiang Kaishek's government was not only incapable militarily, but also politically and economically, unable to alleviate poverty, depending on westerners and their concessions and lacking trust from the Chinese people.

Judging only on these points, we could conclude that Chiang's government was a complete failure, incapable of doing anything productive in China. But what saves him and his government are the facts that the GMD has overthrown the majority of the warlords, as well as having gained international recognition through Chiang's dealings with the West. But what truly saves Chiang's government is the fact that they have taken steps towards the creation of workable governmental and legal systems, alongside multiple reforms of the Chinese military, economy, politics and social life, like the improvement in Chinese education and the centralisation of Chinese banks.

We can conclude that Chiang Kaishek and his government largely consisted of failed measures and actions, mainly caused by the campaign against the CCP. The military, economic and political failures were due to Chiang's preoccupation with the Communists, and they lead him to the verge of a total disaster. But his government is somewhat saved by the little achievements that they managed to do during their reign. While not being a total catastrophe for China, Chiang Kaishek and his reign from 1927 to 1936 was close of being one.