

# The Kuomintang (KMT) during the war with Japan

Chiang and the Kuomintang emerged weaker as a result of the war with Japan. Chiang was seen as unpatriotic in his initial reaction to the Japanese threat and his later lukewarm acceptance of the United Front. Moreover, many people in Kuomintang controlled areas did not like Chiang's rule. Read the following notes and answer the questions on the back of the sheet:

## Why did the KMT lose support during the War?

- Chiang retreated before the Japanese & gave up the capital of **Nanjing**. He moved the government to Sichuan province. In **Sichuan** Chiang was **cut off** from the industrialised areas of China, which were his main power base. The KMT could do little to fight back. The KMT appeared to be unwilling to attack the Japanese.
- The KMT government became increasingly **corrupt** as officials competed for personal power and influence. Inflation grew rapidly and the power of Warlords increased.
- Chiang governed like a military dictator with the name of the 'Generalissimo' with a private army of '**Blueshirts**', led by **Tai Li**, which hunted down and tortured enemies of the Kuomintang, especially the communists.
- Chiang did little to improve China's **welfare problems**. There was a lack of medical care, poor housing and a shortage of schools.
- He did nothing to reduce the **rents** paid by peasants or to increase peasant ownership. The KMT had little support in the countryside from peasants. It was seen as the party of bankers, businessmen and landowners.

*"Nearly everyone in the KMT army was on the make. Officers fiddled their accounts, drawing pay for twice the men they really commanded and keeping the extra for themselves. Army stores were sold on the black market. The only things the KMT seemed to think of were food, drink and women."*

**Source A: By a KMT officer who left to join the CCP in 1945.**

*"On 12<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the city of Changsha was destroyed by fire, not started by the Japanese but by the KMT themselves. Their stupid scorched earth policies laid waste all about them. This was more harmful to their own people than to the enemy. In the Spring the Yellow River dykes had been breached by order of Chiang Kai-Shek to flood the land and stop the Japanese. It had not stopped them, though it did flood the land, and a million Chinese peasants were drowned."*

**Source B: Written by Han Su-yin, who was a nurse in China in the late 1930s.**

## The Japanese Occupation

The Chinese people were meanwhile suffering terribly from the effects of the war. Those who lived in areas held by the Japanese were treated brutally. The Japanese took all the food. They used the Chinese as slave labour, forcing them to work in dreadful conditions in the mines and factories to produce materials for the Japanese war effort. They controlled every aspect of Chinese life, and torture, beatings and murders became commonplace punishments for even the smallest of crimes.

*'My grandparents were on the verge of starvation. Much of what was produced locally was forcibly exported to Japan. The large Japanese army took most of the remaining rice. The main food was acorn meal which tasted and smelled revolting...*

*When local children passed a Japanese in the street they had to bow and make way. Japanese children would often stop local children and slap them for no reason at all...*

*The Japanese set up a system of neighbourhood control. They made the local big shots the heads of these units and these neighbourhood bosses collected taxes and kept a round-the-clock watch for lawless elements. It was a form of gangsterism. The Japanese offered large rewards for turning people in...*

*[One of her mother's 11 year old school friends had been caught with a book by a banned Chinese writer]. 2 days later the whole school was marched to a barren snow-covered stretch of ground outside the west gate. Local residents had also been summoned there. The children were told they were there to witness 'the punishment of an evil person who disobeys great Japan.' Suddenly my mother saw her friend being hauled by Japanese guards to a spot right in front of her. The girl was in chains, and could hardly walk. She had been tortured and her face was swollen so my mother could barely recognise her. The Japanese soldiers lifted their rifles. There was a crack of bullets and the girl's body slumped into the snow.'*

**Source C: Four extracts from Wild Swans, written by Jung Chang in 1991.**