

MODERN HISTORY

Research the role and importance of Sun Yixian in China from the 1911 Revolution until his death. What were his Three Principles? Identify the forces which may have contributed to unity or disunity in China. Include differing perspectives.

Sun Yixian has often been referred to as the Founding Father of China and the great forerunner of the democratic revolution. Under his leadership, several revolutionary groups unified patriots all of China. It was nationalism and patriotism that became a powerful force in uniting the whole nation. According to Deng Mao Mao, Sun Yixian “devoted all his life to the national revolution and the democratic revolution and proposed the Three Major policies – alliance with Russia, cooperation with the Communist Party and assistance to the peasants and works.” This opinion of Sun however, is contradicted by Jonathan Spence, whose view is that “almost none of his [Sun’s] cherished schemes came near to fruition” and that he “failed in his dream of unification”. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some of Sun’s role and achievements instigated future events that ultimately bring about unity in China.

Sun developed The Three Principles which formed the background to the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party). He also revised the Three Principles in 1924 that contained the ideas of the USSR’s democratic centralism. The original principles were formed on the basis of Sun’s strong belief that “an individual should not have too much freedom. A nation should have absolute freedom” – Sun Yixian.

The first principle was nationalism and was felt very strongly amongst the Chinese. The principle involved the expulsion of the imperialist Manchu Qing government. The discontent for the Manchus grew rapidly, which led to the 1911 Revolution, during which Sun was elected as the Provisional President of the Chinese Republic. Sun helped several rebellions to start, though they failed, which shattered some enthusiasm. He constantly appealed for help from the West, in ousting the Manchus. In the midst of the Wuhan Uprising, Sun travelled to London to persuade the British government to suspend loan negotiations with the Qing government. It was the bitterness towards the Manchus that united the revolutionary movement and China.

In 1912, a Republican government was formed to oppose the imperial government and negotiations were made between the two. Since the revolutionaries were not militarily strong enough to defeat the imperialist army, Sun negotiated with Yuan Shikai, a former Qing general, which led to the abdication of the throne by the Emperor on the condition that Yuan was made the President of the Republic in place of Sun Yat-sen. Reflecting his belief that the nation was more important than the individual, the agreement was made. However, though the imperialist government was removed from power, conflicts arose between Yuan and the Kuomintang, the party that Sun co-founded. In 1915, Yuan declared himself Emperor, which caused instant widespread riots in the southern provinces. The negotiation between Sun and Yuan created more unity, when considering the overthrow of the Manchus, but also created some disunity because of Sun’s negotiation with the corrupt Yuan.

With the absence of a central government and after the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, China was divided, and as a result, many warlords began to control different provinces. Without a unified national government, a disintegrated China was more prone to foreign involvement. Warlords were conspiring with foreign imperialists in order to borrow money to finance continuous civil wars to gain more privileges. In 1921, with the consent of the local warlords, Sun became the president of an established republican government at Guangzhou, which lacked military power and support and was unable to achieve much. Because of the weak military force, he was dependent on his supposed warlord allies who expelled him in 1918 and 1922. The Warlord Era remarkably disunited and demoralised followers of Sun Yat-sen and revolutionaries. Hence, the second principle came to

be rather important in the unification of China. Sun wished for a democracy in terms of a strongly led and united country, with an elected president and parliament. It strived to achieve the Four Rights for the People – initiative, referendum, election and recall, and the Five Powers for the government – executive, legislative, judicial, control and examination. A stable central government with a democratic system seemed to be necessary for a unified and harmonious China.

The third principle of People's Livelihood was associated with state socialism and thus, land equalisation. Implementing a tax system on the land would make private ownership unprofitable, so the land would gradually fall into government ownership. This socialist theory was different from the Marxist communist theory.

Following Sun's reorganisation of the Kuomintang in 1914 and due to his disappointment in the lack of Western support for his new republic, he began to look to the Soviet Union, who eliminated much Western imperialist influence. Despite the tensions between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, Sun accepted the communists as allies to fight against the warlords in China in order to achieve the common purpose of unity. Consequently, the First United Front alliance was formed in 1922, which involved the policy of 'alliance with the Soviets; admission of the Communists'. Between 1922 and 1925, Sun made the beliefs of the Kuomintang more acceptable to the Chinese Communist Party. Conciliatorily, Russia sent Michael Borodin to Guangzhou to create a more effective structure there and to reform the Kuomintang army into a more effective military, that was needed to defeat the warlords and to expand the Kuomintang's power base to other parts of China. In addition, Chiang Kai-Shek was sent to the USSR for study, who later became the first commander of the Huangpu Military Academy.

Huangpu Military Academy was founded to train Kuomintang officers. It taught the army about modern warfare and soldiers were indoctrinated with the Kuomintang's ideals. The Soviet Union supplied financial aid to run the academy and the Central Bank of Guangzhou was established by Sun Yat-sen to also finance the movement. The army grew from 960 in 1924 to 30 000 in 1925 and were renowned as the best troops in southern China. Its graduates formed the forefront of the army that achieved much success in the Northern Expedition (1926-1928) and helped the Nationalist party and Chiang Kai-Shek lead a unified country between 1928 and 1937.

By 1925, before Sun Yixian's death, the Kuomintang's philosophy had been refined, finances and political structure ordered, and its army was now modernised. Historian Marie-Claire Bergère believes that his 'utopias' of the Three Principles "at which his contemporaries heartily jeered, now seem to be so many prophecies". Sun had a rather accurate vision of how to achieve a united China and laid the foundation for it.