China’s United Front

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Rationale: I teach IB (International Baccalaureate) History of Asia, and so I was fortunate to be able to participate in 2014’s Fulbright-Hays Seminar to China. During this month-long experience, many of my understandings about Modern Chinese History were challenged. The result is this lesson, which is a new approach to the topic of the United Front during the Republic of China period.

To the lay teacher who is not deeply immersed in Modern Chinese History or to the teacher who goes strictly by the curricular requirements of the IB, the First and Second United Fronts are historic events that brought the Guomindang Nationalist Party (GMD) together with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), first against warlords (1926-27) and then against the Japanese (1936-41). Understanding the first and second United Fronts means teaching students to understand these events in terms of actors, causes, effects, significance, and context.

My experience in China showed me a different approach however. I realized that the United Front could be seen as a concept used to rally the masses behind Mao’s revolution rather than an event. By examining the United Front as an idea AND as a historic event, students will be able to move beyond the black and white facts of the history to a more nuanced understanding of the topic at hand.

Intended Audience: High school teachers and junior/senior students of IB History of Asia. College teachers/students and AP World History teachers/students may be interested as well.

IB Standards from the 2009 Diploma Programme History Guide: HL Option 4: Aspects of the history of Asia and Oceania:

Section 6: The Republic of China 1912-49 and the rise of Communism.
This section deals with the tribulations of the early years of the Chinese Republic from 1912 until the establishment by Jiang Jieshi of his government at Nanjing in 1928; the conflict between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang until the Second United Front of 1936; the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, beginning what has become known as the Fifteen-Year War with Japan (1931-45); the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45; and the civil war between the Guomindang and the Communists culminating in the victory of the Communists under Mao Zedong in October 1949. Emphasis should be placed on understanding the complexities of governing China, the opposing ideologies of the Nationalists and the Communists and the impact of Japanese aggression upon the domestic struggle for power.

• The 21 Demands (1915); New Culture Movement; the Treaty of Versailles (1919); the May Fourth Movement (1919)
• Yuan Shikai; warlordism; the Northern Expedition; the Jiangsi Soviet; the Long March (1934-5)
• Guomindang, GMD leadership, ideology and policies
• Chinese Communist Party (CCP): leadership, ideology and policies
• The First United Front (1924-7); Second United Front (1936-45)
• The Fifteen-Year War (1931-45) between China and Japan
• Chinese Civil War and the Communist victory (1946-9)

Objectives: Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to write a thesis-driven expository essay that takes into account different ways of understanding the Second United Front and addresses this question: *How did Mao Zedong use the idea of a United Front to consolidate power over China?* (This lesson also could be used as practice for a Paper 1 DBQ-style exam for IB.)

Procedures for a two-day lesson, with 85 minute periods
Context: Students will have learned already about the First United Front, the Jiangxi Incident, the Long March, and the Yan’an Period. Also, they will be in the process of reviewing Japan’s activities in Northern China (they will have already learned this through the lens of Japanese History the previous semester).

DAY 1
Opening Moves:
1. Have students brainstorm what they remember about the First United Front through a whole class brainstorm: What was it and what happened? Who were the key players? What were the causes? What were the effects? (10 min)
2. In small groups, have students outline via annotated timelines what the key events of China were 1928-1936: What happened since 1927 to the Guomindang? What happened since 1927 to the CCP? And, since 1927 what key events were happening in China and in the world? (15 min)

Mainstage: *What was the 2nd United Front?*
3. Have students capture the information in pairs. Each student in the pair gets a different reading, which they then have to compare/contrast with their peer. Pass out the two readings on the 2nd United Front/Xian Incident. One is from the *Access to History* textbook on China, 1900-1949, by Michael Lynch, widely used in Britain, and the other is from Rebecca Karl’s overview on Maoist China. Students read and take notes, capturing the key information in terms of who, what, when, where, cause, effect, significance. Students should take time to compare answers and information. (Texts for Day 1) (25 min)
4. Show students this question from the 2006 IB Paper 3: “*The United Front between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang (Kuomintang), formed after the Xian (Sian) Incident in 1936, was never likely to last.* How far do you agree with this assessment?
5. Students create a T-Chart in their notebooks with the question at the top of the chart, one side agreeing and the other side disagreeing, citing evidence for both positions. At the bottom of the chart, they sketch out their own position for a credible answer. (15 min)

Endgame:
6. Discuss/debate this as a class. What are the different positions? What are the different angles one could take in answering this? (10-15 min)
DAY 2

Opening Moves:
1. Show these questions to the class: How else can the United Front be understood? Is it possible to see it conceptually rather than as two events that took place between 1926-1941? What if the United Front were an idea rather than a historical event? How might Mao have used that idea to create the Communist Revolution? Give the class some time to discuss in small groups. (10 min)

Mainstage:
2. Tell the class that they will see 5 “texts.” They should note in their notebooks how each text shows the United Front as more than a historical event. Additionally, when possible, students should note the origin and purpose of each text: authorship (and author’s background), intention, audience, provenance, agenda.

3. **Text 1/Figure 1 (see below):** Show picture of Chinese Communist flag [Figure 1] – Tell students what the stars signify. (There are two versions here. One says that the small stars are the National bourgeoisie, Workers, Peasants, Petit Bourgeoisie and the large star is the Party; the other says that the big star represents the Han Chinese and the four smaller stars are the largest ethnic minorities.) Ask: What idea is being promoted by the national flag of the PRC? To whom? Who’s the audience?

4. **Text 2:** Show clip from Beijing Olympics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsDY1Ha83M8 (> 2:50) Ask: What imagery is being promoted in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics? To whom? Who’s the audience?

5. **Text 3/Figures 2-7 (see below):** Show pictures (all taken by Amy Schuff and Clara Webb) from the exhibit from the *Museum of the War of Chinese People’s Resistance Against Japanese Aggression* by the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing [Figures 2-7]. (For the ethnic minorities pictures, tell students that after the 1949 Revolution, the CCP officially identified 55 ethnic minorities in addition to the majority Han Chinese.) Ask: What idea is being promoted in this photo? To whom? Who’s the audience? (Please note in Figure 6 the language used in the caption, “compatriots,” is the term used for people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Why might it used for Tibetans? [Thanks to Margot Landman from the National Committee for US-China Relations for this note.])

6. **Text 4 (see below):** 1937 Speech by Chairman Mao: WIN THE MASSES IN THEIR MILLIONS FOR THE ANTI-JAPANESE NATIONAL UNITED FRONT

7. **Text 5 (see below):** 1938 Speech by Chairman Mao: THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT

Endgame/Assessment:
8. Ask the students these questions: How should historians define the United Front? Is it a collaboration between the GMD and CCP, or is it a collaboration between the CCP and all of China? Or, is it something else? Discuss/debate these in small groups so all students
can take advantage of the wisdom in the room. Have students note the different positions and good points to support the various angles. (10-15 min)

9. Finally, ask students to write a short expository, thesis-driven essay that answers this question: *How did Mao Zedong use the United Front to consolidate power over China?* Have students outline their argument using the texts from both class periods.

10. Possible approaches students might take: The United Front truly was an effort to align with the GMD in order to defeat the Japanese; The United Front really was an effort to align the various stakeholders within China with the CCP; The United Front really was used to inculcate a nationalist ideology into the various stakeholders so that the CCP could take power; other ideas.

Resources/Texts for Day 1 of the lesson on the 2nd United Front:


Figure 1: The National Flag of the PRC

Source: http://www.infinitearttournament.com/2012/03/finite-flag-tournament-elite-eight.html
Foreword

The War of Resistance Against Japan was a righteous war fought by the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, including compatriots from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao as well as overseas Chinese, against the Japanese imperialist invaders. The Chinese fought under the banner of the Anti-Japanese National United Front, led by the Communist Party of China (CPC). The war was waged between the 1930s and the 1940s by the joint forces of the Kuomintang and the CPC. The Chinese people’s Anti-Japanese War was an important component of the World Anti-Fascist War and the China theater was the main battlefield in the East. The Chinese nation made tremendous national sacrifices to achieve victory in the World Anti-Fascist War.

The Chinese people’s War of Resistance Against Japan was the first national liberation war. China won the complete victory in fighting against foreign aggression in modern times. The victory in the Chinese people’s War of Resistance Against Japan became an important turning point for the Chinese nation, rising from its steady decline to revitalization, laying a significant foundation for the CPC to lead the people of all ethnic groups in China towards national independence and the people’s liberation and founding of New China. It was a tremendous influence on the people of all the countries of the world to win the anti-Fascist war, and strive for world peace.

This commemoration of the victory in the Chinese people’s Anti-Japanese War and the World Anti-Fascist War, is the time to promote patriotism and to further carry forward the national spirit, strengthening national dignity, confidence and pride. It is the time to inspire and mobilize all the Chinese people, from home and abroad, to strive for the rejuvenation of the nation and contribute to world peace and development.

Figure 2: Intro to the Exhibit
Figure 3: Rickshaw Drivers Help

Wheelers donated their hardly-earned money to the war of resistance.
Figure 4: Li and Mongolian Ethnic Groups Help
Figure 5: The Women of Sichuan Help
Figure 6: Tibetans Help
Source 4: WIN THE MASSES IN THEIR MILLIONS FOR THE ANTI-JAPANESE NATIONAL UNITED FRONT  May 7, 1937

[This was the concluding speech made by Comrade Mao Tse-tung at the National Conference of the Communist Party of China, held in May 1937.]

UNITY IN THE CONFERENCE AND IN THE WHOLE PARTY
...[O]ur Party is very solidly united. This unity provides the most important basis for the present national and democratic revolution, because it is only through the unity of the Communist Party that the unity of the whole class and the whole nation can be achieved, and it is only through the unity of the whole class and the whole nation that the enemy can be defeated and the national and democratic revolution accomplished.

WIN THE MASSES IN THEIR MILLIONS FOR THE ANTI-JAPANESE NATIONAL UNITED FRONT
The aim of our correct political policy and of our solid unity is to win the masses in their millions for the anti-Japanese national united front. The broad masses of the proletariat, the peasantry
and the urban petty bourgeoisie need our work of propaganda, agitation and organization. Further efforts on our part are also needed to establish an alliance with those sections of the bourgeoisie which are opposed to Japan. To make the policy of the Party the policy of the masses requires effort, long and persistent effort, unrelenting and strenuous, patient and painstaking effort. Without such effort, we shall achieve nothing. The formation and consolidation of the anti-Japanese national united front, the accomplishment of the task incumbent on it and the establishment of a democratic republic in China are absolutely inseparable from our effort to win over the masses. If we succeed in bringing millions upon millions of the masses under our leadership by such effort, our revolutionary task can be speedily fulfilled. By our exertions we shall surely overthrow Japanese imperialism and attain complete national and social liberation.

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Source 5: THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE AND INITIATIVE WITHIN THE UNITED FRONT  November 5, 1938  
[This is part of Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s concluding speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party. At the time, the issue of independence and initiative within the united front was one of the outstanding questions concerning the anti-Japanese united front.]

THE IDENTITY BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE
To sustain a long war by long-term co-operation or, in other words, to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan--such is the fundamental principle of the united front. Subject to this principle, the independent character of the parties and classes and their independence and initiative within the united front should be preserved, and their essential rights should not be sacrificed to co-operation and unity, but on the contrary must be firmly upheld within certain limits. Only thus can co-operation be promoted, indeed only thus can there be any co-operation at all. Otherwise co-operation will turn into amalgamation and the united front will inevitably be sacrificed. In a struggle that is national in character, the class struggle takes the form of national struggle, which demonstrates the identity between the two. On the one hand, for a given historical period the political and economic demands of the various classes must not be such as to disrupt co-operation; on the other hand, the demands of the national struggle (the need to resist Japan) should be the point of departure for all class struggle. Thus there is identity in the united front between unity and independence and between the national struggle and the class struggle.

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