Second United Front, 1937-1945
War of Resistance against Japan, 1937-1945
WWII in Europe, 1938-1945; U.S. involvement in WWII, 1941-1945
Chinese Civil War, 1947-1949
Founding of the People’s Republic of China, October 1, 1949
Korean War, 1950-1953

Guomindang 國民黨 (Nationalist Party): founded in 1912; led by Sun Yatsen and then later by Chiang Kai-shek.

Chinese Communist Party 共產黨 (CCP): founded in the French Concessions area in Shanghai in 1921; encouraged to work within the Guomindang party structure during the years of the First United Front; after the purge of the leftists in 1927, the party switches to a rural approach to revolution; CCP decimated in Shanghai by 1931; undertakes in the Long March from 1934-1935, which becomes a formative experience for the Party leadership; enters the Second United Front with the GMD to fight the War against Japan; emerges victorious from the Civil War in 1949.

Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-1944): Helped found the Tongmenghui in Japan during his student days in 1905; close associate of Sun Yatsen; represented the more moderate (left) wing of the GMD; accepts appointment as the head of the Japan-controlled puppet government in Nanjing from 1940-1944; in that capacity, with urging from Japan, the Wang government re-occupies the foreign concessions settlements in Shanghai, effectively ending extraterritoriality for the Western powers in China; condemned by Nationalists and Communists alike for being a traitor; dies in Japan in 1944.

Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: a concept created and promoted by the Showa government in the 1930s and 1940s to justify Japan’s growing military empire and imperialist aggression in China and other parts of Asia; was conceived of as a new international order that could “protect” other Asian countries and stand up to the domination and colonialism of the West; in the name of this co-prosperity sphere, puppet governments were established throughout the areas under Japanese colonial control; within this conceptual framework, Japan assumed superiority to the other Asian peoples, which served to justify Japanese domination and brutality during the war years.

Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石) (1887-1975): Military and political leader of the Guomindang following the death of Sun Yatsen; joined the Tongmenghui as a student in Japan prior to the 1911 Revolution; studies military training in the Soviet Union in 1923; later named leader of the Whampoa academy; launches the Northern Expedition to rid China of warlord control in 1926; by 1928 sets up a new political regime with its capital in Nanjing; following defeat in the civil war with the CCP in 1949, retreats (with his army) to Taiwan; remains leader of the Guomindang on Taiwan until his death in 1975.

Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1976): son of a rich peasant from Hunan; became an early member of the CCP under the influence of Li Daozhao; worked at the Library at Peking University; after 1927, he advocated a peasant line of revolution; rose to leadership in the party in the 1930s during the formative experience of the Long March; established the People’s Republic of China in 1949; the supreme political leader in China until his death in 1976.
Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976): Important figure in the CCP; begins his political and military training at the Whampoa Academy; worked in the propaganda department of the Guomindang during the years of the First United Front; headed up CCP in intelligence work in Shanghai from 1927-1931; joined the Jiangxi Soviet movement in the 1930s; became one of the most respected leaders of the CCP.

Chongqing 重慶: a city on the Yangzi River in Sichuan Province; serves as the wartime capital for the Nationalist government from 1937-1945; government bureaus, schools, businesses, etc. are relocated en masse to Chongqing after the Japanese invasion in 1937.

Yan’an 延安: communist base area in Shaanxi Province; the survivors of the Long March make this their headquarters; they set up schools and army training facilities here; the Eighth Route Army (balujun 八路軍), one of the two regiments of the Red Army, operates out of Yan’an. (The other Red Army Regiment is known as the New Fourth Army (xin sijun 新四军), which is active in the Jiangxi/Yangzi River delta region.)

February 28 Incident 二二八事件: In 1947 in Taipei, Taiwan a GMD policeman from the Monopoly Bureau struck a woman who was being arrested for illegally selling cigarettes; when a crown gathered in protest, another person was shot; this spilled over into widespread protests throughout the island; Taiwanese elites use this as an opportunity to present a list of grievances and recommendations for greater local participation in government to Chen Yi, the GMD commander of the Taiwan Garrison; in response, Chen Yi launches (with mainland GMD backing) violent suppression of the protests; an estimated 10,000 Taiwanese were killed in the aftermath of this event, wiping out a whole generation of potential Taiwanese leaders; to this day, memory of this episode continues to fuel Taiwanese resentment against GMD/mainlander-descendent rule in Taiwan and independence movement politics in Taiwan.