

Sino-US Cooperation and Conflict During Nanjing National Government of the Republic of China (1927-1949)

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Abstract: The relations between China and the U.S. have a long history and are different in different periods, as the Chinese central government has changed many times in the past 200 years. The cooperation and the conflict between the two countries during the Nanjing National Government period had characteristics that differed from other periods. The U.S. gave the Nanjing National Government lots of economic and military support in various forms, especially during and after World War II, such as setting up the American Volunteer Group during the war and providing loans and military materials during and even after the war. However, some incidents and treaties, like the Shen Chong incident and the Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Treaty between the United States and China, hurt the interests of different groups in China and were seen as atrocities and exploitation of many people, intellectuals, and political parties. The conflict could be controlled during World War II but quickly broke out during the civil war because the willingness of the Chinese people become different.

Keywords: Republic of China, Sino-US cooperation, conflict

1. Introduction

Communication between China and the United States of America started in 1784. The initial contact between the two countries was only in the economic field and later expanded to various aspects such as politics and military. The relationship between the two countries continued after the change of Chinese government from the Qing Dynasty to the ROC (Republic of China) and entered a relatively close state during the Nanjing Nationalist government. During this time, the U.S. signed a large number of treaties with ROC and provided important assistance to ROC, especially during World War II. The cooperation was not only limited to the two countries' central governments but also happened between Washington and Yanan during World War II. But, although it seemed like all-round cooperation, it didn't mean there were no conflicts between these two countries. Many ordinary Chinese people and intellectuals were against the 'cooperation'. After World War II, the opposition grew quickly and reached its climax before Chiang Kai-shek withdrew to Taiwan.

Due to the particular international relations during the interwar period and World War II and China's domestic situation, the cooperation and conflict of the economic and military fields were the most prominent in the various Sino-U.S. exchanges.

2. Economic: Cooperation or Exploitation

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After World War I, China and the U.S. didn't get what they wanted in Paris in 1919 but achieved something at the Washington Conference in 1921; for China, taking back Qingdao from Japan was a significant victory in foreign affairs, but there were still many things to do, such as tariff autonomy. After establishing the Nanjing National Government, Chiang Kai-shek needed to deal with the fiscal crisis. Taking back tariff autonomy could increase government revenues and the government's approval rate. To safeguard its interests, the U.S. played a vital role in the process of tariff autonomy of the ROC [1]. Treaty Regulating Tariff Relations Between the United States of America and the Republic of China was signed at Peking on July 25, 1928 [2]. It was the first regulating tariff relation between ROC and another country. And after the treaty was signed, other countries had no choice but to follow. The treaty stated that "all provisions which appear in treaties hitherto concluded and in force between the United States of America and China relating to rates of duty on imports and exports of merchandise, drawbacks, transit dues, and tonnage dues in China shall be annulled and become inoperative [2]." This meant that the U.S. admitted China had complete national tariff autonomy. The U.S. did lose its rights but also gained what it wanted. An MFN (Most Favored Nation) clause was added to the treaty, which would help the U.S. enjoy other privileges it used to have and ensure the open-door policy. After China regained its national tariff autonomy, the trade volume between the U.S. and ROC grew rapidly and became the highest since 1931 [1]. The treaty also improved relations between the two governments and laid the foundation for further cooperation in the future.

During World War II, the U.S. borrowed about \$670 million from China, and \$500 million of that was unsecured and interest-free loans with no term to repay [3]. Although the first loan was approved in 1938, the decisive \$500 million loan was approved in 1942, after the outbreak of the Pacific War [3]. Besides loans, renting military material through the Lend-Lease Act was also essential to economic support. The total value of these supplies was about \$1.6 billion [4]. These supplies did help ROC a lot. However, most of the support came in 1945, and about \$781 million worth was given to ROC after World War II had already finished [4]. So, most of the support was used in the civil war by Chiang Kai-shek's army rather than in the fight against Japan.

The Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Treaty between the United States and China was signed in November 1946. It may be one of the most famous treaties between the U.S. and ROC. Preparations had already begun during World War II, and the two governments negotiated the draft in 1945 before the surrender of Japan, but formal negotiations started six months later in February 1946 [5]. ROC and the U.S. argued mainly on national treatment and the MFN clause, along with other articles on the juridical status of foreign companies, freedom of the press, and so on [6]. In the draft proposed by the U.S., U.S. officials required that all nationals of one country should be permitted to engage in commercial, manufacturing, processing, financial, professional, scientific, educational, religious, and philanthropic work in another in article 3, rights explore for and to exploit mineral resources in article 5, and an unconditional MFN clause on international free trade in article 15 [7]. Due to the requirements of ROC, in the final treaty, Article 15 was rewritten to avoid the details, and requirement on finances were deleted in Article 3. Still, other conditions on these were accepted, or detailed instructions were added [6]. It could easily be found that ROC had taken most of the provisions on national treatment and the MFN clause in the U.S. draft, though some of the articles were adjusted to China's requirements.

Although most of the articles seemed fair to ROC and the U.S., it could easily be found that China couldn't take advantage of what the treaty brought, but America could. So, it was an unequal

treaty. These were what Chinese ordinary people and intellectuals thought at that time. However, Chiang Kai-shek's government still treated it as a victory because they were engaged in a civil war with the army led by the Communist Party of China. They have to maintain good relations with the U.S. for military assistance. Compared with losing the Civil War, accepting America's economic exploitation was not an unbearable price.

The treaty provoked strong dissatisfaction among the Chinese, and a boycott of American goods broke out [5]. Some intellectuals like Ma Yinchu also wrote articles and books to criticize the treaty, pointing out that it resulted from the combination of bureaucratic capital and foreign capital, and the content is indeed a 100% political problem under an economic surface [5].

Ironically, the United States did not ratify the treaty until June 1948, when the Republic of China's economy was already in serious trouble, and its markets and regime collapsed entirely within a year. Therefore, this treaty neither guaranteed victory in the civil war for Chiang Kai-shek's government nor provided sufficient benefits for the U.S. Perhaps its only effect was undermining the Chinese people's favorable feelings for the U.S.

3. Military: Cooperation and Conflict

During the whole period, ROC and the U.S. had set up practical cooperation in the military, which worked well during World War II. But it later became a burden for the Chinese people after the war and caused great conflict between the U.S. Army and the Chinese people.

During World War II, ROC always lacked an air force compared to Japan. ROC formed an air force before the war, but most pilots were killed in early battles because of the gap in weapons and numerical inferiority. In this situation, the only choice for ROC to rebuild its air force was to seek voluntary aviators and airplanes from another country. The air force formed by American volunteers was one of the most essential in China then. American Volunteer Group, led by Claire Lee Chennault, usually called Flying Tiger, was founded in August 1941 and later became part of the Fourteenth Air Force. The first battle occurred on December 20, 1941, when the voluntary pilots shot down four Japanese bombers [8]. After that, they completed many vital missions, including defending important cities, attacking Japanese airfields, and cooperating with the ROC army to attack. During the war, they shot down more than 2,900 enemy aircraft, sank and damaged 44 enemy warships and 2.23 million tons of merchant ships [9]. This contribution provided significant assistance in the operation of the Chinese battlefield and supported the Sino-British coalition forces in the Burma battlefield.

The Sino-US military cooperation was not limited to the central government during this period. Guerrillas led by the Communist Party of China and civilians in Japanese-occupied areas also united with Chennault's army. In air combat, part of the fighters will inevitably be destroyed. After the aircraft was attacked by the Japanese, some American pilots successfully parachuted into the Japanese-occupied area. Japanese soldiers tried hard to catch the American pilots, but most of the pilots were saved by guerrillas. Civilians and guerrillas worked hard to find allies before enemies, helped them hide in the wild to avoid search, gave them food and water, provided them with medicines, and finally sent them back to their troops. American pilot Donald Kerr was one of the lucky guys saved by guerrillas led by CPC(Communist Party of China). His plane crashed after being shot by the Japanese when he attacked an airport in Hong Kong, but he succeeded in skydiving and was found by a guerrilla, who helped him contact the commander of the partisan [10]. Finally, Kerr was cured by a partisan and was sent back to the Air Force base in Guangxi. Locals presented him with a silk banner, and Kerr wrote down his experience in his diary and drew a series of cartoons to show in the newspaper after he went back. After successful rescues like this, Chennault's army realized the importance of working with those fighting backstage on the battlefield, so they set up a further cooperation system with partisans. Guerrillas fighting in

Guangdong had sent lots of information on the exact situation of the Japanese army's airport and the movement of the Japanese military [10]. Though the two troops had different ideologies, the cooperation was successful.

Although ROC and the U.S. were allies, some conflicts still took place. During training, the U.S. military often mistakenly injured Chinese peasants working in the fields. Some U.S. soldiers did something illegal in China but were not punished for their violations. For most Chinese people, the conflicts during World War II were tolerable because the two countries needed to unite to fight against Japan. So, during this period, the government could control the competition.

However, after World War II, such conflicts became intolerable for most people and intellectuals as the common enemy disappeared. Some famous incidents had exacerbated people's discontent. Shen Chong, a female student from Peking University, was raped by American soldiers, but the participants were acquitted, although Chinese citizens and some officials were firmly against the sentence [11]. Incidents like this quickly raised popular sentiment against Chiang Kai-shek's foreign policies and U.S. privileges in China. The civil war between Kuomintang and CPC exacerbated the discontent because the initiator of the war, Chiang Kai-shek's government, was supported by the U.S. Finally, the Sino-U.S. military alliance built in World War II had lost civilian support.

4. The Reason Why the Cooperation Broke

Through the previous analysis in the article of the changes in the relationship between ROC and the U.S. in the economic and military spheres, it could easily be found that the ROC central government's attitude toward it differed from the people's. The relationship was stable between the two governments, but the support of the Chinese people changed quickly. The cooperation between the ROC and the U.S. governments was built after Chiang Kai-shek ruled the country and continued for a long time. The support rate for collaboration among people rose quickly during World War II but fell even more rapidly after the war. Both governments of ROC and the U.S. needed to take responsibility for it.

For the U.S., the main reason was that the Washington government's decision-making was based on self-interest. This determined that their decisions could only be the same as the views of the Chinese people at a specific time and in some particular fields. The U.S. could always find at least one party that met its demands, but the U.S. could not change what the people thought during the whole period from Chiang Kai-shek setting up the Nanjing National Government till he lost and ran to Taiwan. When the American decision met what the Chinese people supported, the support rate of the cooperation grew quickly, such as what had happened during World War II. But when the situation was the opposite, the support rate of the Sino-US cooperation and even the support rate of the government or party supported by the U.S. would decrease quickly, such as what had happened during the civil war.

For ROC, the main reason was that Chiang Kai-shek's and Kuomintang's approval rate among ordinary people wasn't high enough to establish a one-party government after the war. However, they had control of the government, which led the country to win the war. However, they did not want a multiparty government, so they quickly started a civil war against the CPC. To get enough military support from the U.S. to win the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek's government had some unequal treaties with the U.S., like the Treaty of Friendship, commerce, and navigation between the United States and China, which gave up the independence of the government and undermined the rights of the people. Ordinary people regarded these as treason, and the U.S. was regarded as Chiang Kai-shek's accomplice. What Chinese people needed at that time was peace, so many intellectuals and parties condemned Chiang Kai-shek's initiation of the civil war, together with his accomplice, the U.S. [12]. But Kuomintang didn't respond to the people's opinions and changed its

behavior. Finally, many intellectuals who used to support Kuomintang's line or Middle-of-the Road Line changed their minds and turned to supporting the CPC. In contrast, ordinary people had already supported CPC ideas with their actions [12].

5. Conclusions

The Republic of China and the United States of America set cooperation in economic, military, and some other fields between central governments during the Nanjing National Government period from 1927 to 1949. However, Chinese people and other parties like the Communist Party of China did not always support the cooperation. During World War II, the Sino-US cooperation and its support rate among the Chinese reached its highest level. Economic support in money and materials from the U.S. helped the ROC fight against Japan, and some pilots from the U.S. formed the American Volunteer Group, which provided the ROC with great help in battle. At this time, ordinary Chinese people, intellectuals, and political parties in China basically recognized and supported the cooperation with practical actions, especially in the military. Thousands of ordinary people lived in Japanese-occupied areas, and U.S. partisans were wounded and even killed while helping their Chinese allies during the war.

But the situation changed after the war. The U.S. kept economic and military support to the Nanjing National Government even though the foreign war had already finished, which was considered an act of interfering in China's internal affairs and pushing for the civil war rather than assistance. Although the U.S. government still maintained an attitude that stood with the Nanjing National Government, most people and other political parties didn't support it. The rout of the Nanjing Nationalist government and the beginning of the Cold War all challenged the cooperation between the U.S. government and the newly built government of the People's Republic of China.

Limited by the length of the paper and the author's ability, this paper only provides a brief analysis of the cooperation and conflict between the United States and China during the reign of the Nanjing National government. The paper only discusses economic and military, and the discussion is not deep enough. Many directions can still be studied in depth on this issue, such as the relationship between the U.S. government and CPC, the impact of U.S. aid on China's civil war, and the changes in Chinese people's understanding of the United States.

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