

Two Brush Strokes (危机)

onside report by Dave Boundy

This was my Megagame of the Nanking decade in China. I started the game at the end of 1928 and ran 1 hour turns representing a year of real time, so we got to 1934 in the game. The title derives from a speech by J F Kennedy: "The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity."

Background

The period between WW1 and WW2 is, to me, a fascinating period. It was a period of enormous economic and societal change and one that I attempted to tackle in my CLWG game *Maintenance of Peace*. That game led to my *Washington Conference* Megagame which in turn led to a fascination with the history of China at the beginning of the 19th century. Brian and I then developed the *Interesting Times* Megagame which was received well, but was lacking something – maybe call it depth of story: it seemed that the only driver of activity was a lust for power (I might do it differently now, but it still makes that warlord period a bit one-dimensional). Then reading about the following period led me to write the CLWG game *Blood on the Bund* and to start planning a Megagame.

History

The period is extraordinary. After the Chinese overthrew the Qing, the warlord period was a hiatus that was only ended by the Kuomintang, founded by Sun Yat-sen, "unifying" China. I have put that in quotes because it was achieved by a mix of conquest and bribery, but the factions and warlords that the Kuomintang (KMT) dealt with were largely intact, with their leaders professing allegiance to the nationalist government, led by the KMT, but actually paying lip service to different degrees. There was always the threat of rebellion and in 1929 this became a fact – the Central Plains war involved masses of troops from the KMT and allies against a group of factions led by Kwangsi in the south.

The KMT was originally a revolutionary party, supported by the Soviet Union and allied with the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). The KMT split with the CCP in violent fashion in a purge, the central action of which took place in Shanghai. At the time of the game, the CCP is starting to make itself felt again.

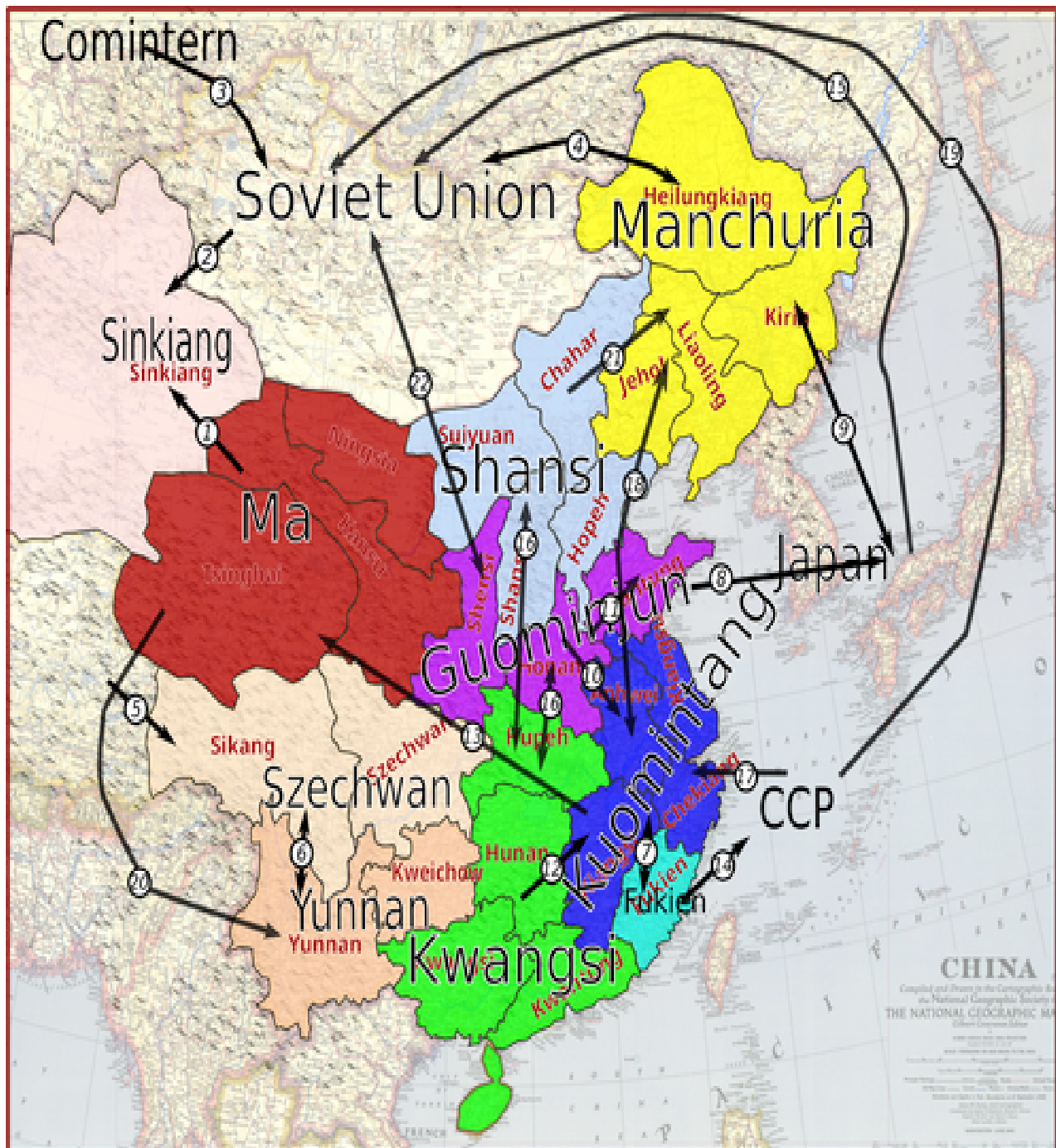
The Soviet Union had a serious dispute with China – specifically Manchuria – because Manchuria took control of the railways there, which had been funded by the Russians and were claimed by both sides in the period at the start of the game. In reality, this led to an invasion of Manchuria by the Soviet Union, after they had agreed their plan, in outline, with the Japanese.

The Japanese also had railway interests which it defended with a small army (known as the Kwangtung army – or Kantō army in Japan). The leaders of this small army were gung-ho militarists who bore more resemblance to samurai with no judgement than to 20th

century military professionals. For various reasons, this became a serious cause, leading to taking over Manchuria and declaring it to be Japanese Manchukuo

Development

In order to design the game, I attempted to summarise this into a diagram that showed the important relationships between different Chinese factions, the CCP, Japan and the Soviets:



key:

1	Ma was tasked by the KMT with replacing the warlord of Sinkiang, but without direct confrontation with the Soviet forces.
2	The Soviet Union had working relations with the warlord of Sinkiang and had worries about the amount of bandit and Muslim activity as well as the large number of white Russians in the area.
3	Stalin and the Comintern set policy for implementation on the ground and set funding/troop limits
4	There was a dispute between Manchuria and the Soviet Union about the ownership of railways, particularly the railway to Vladivostock
5	Tibet was antagonistic to China and likely to send troops to Sikang, to invade
6	Szechwan and Yunnan were historically very close and considered themselves as apart from the rest of China, as a potential independent state in SW China
7	Fukien was very close to the centre of power in the KMT and acted as a close ally
8	Atrocities in previous war had left hatred and distrust of Japanese by the Guominjun
9	Japan had colonial ambitions towards China as a whole, but Manchuria as a start. Historically, they obtained Manchuria, renamed it as Manchukuo and ran it as a puppet state.
10	The Guominjun distrusted the KMT and had little in common ideologically. They also believed in a united China as a priority, so believed that the Japanese threat should be dealt with above all else, while the CCP and even banditry could be prioritised lower. This was at odds with Chiang's ideas.
11	The Guominjun faced internal rebellion from an ex-warlord (the Dogmeat General), who had gathered a substantial force and was himself a very capable general.
12	Kwangsi was very mistrustful of the KMT, as the KMT had moved away from their revolutionary roots which had been developed in the Kwangsi area
13	The KMT had given orders to Ma to replace the warlord of Sinkiang.
14	Historically, the Fukien leader attempted to join with the CCP in 1931, but was rejected.
15	Japan and the Soviet Union were both wary of the other. Both believed that they would, at some point, face off against each other militarily, but both believed that it was too soon to be ready to fight, so attempted to avoid direct confrontation.
16	Historically, Kwangsi had a large army in the field and promoted rebellion, attempting to embroil the Guominjun and Shansi. This resulted in the Central Plains War of 1929.
17	The CCP had an absolute hatred of the KMT because of their betrayal and purging at Shanghai in 1927, when the KMT co-operated
18	Manchuria had informally received permission from the KMT to take over the railways from the Soviet Union, so then was looking to the KMT to provide troops when the Soviets invaded. The Soviet reaction was, however, beyond expected, so the KMT was unsure whether to send support.
19	The Comintern regarded the CCP as a client group, part of global communism. This changed with Stalin's move towards communism in one country, but the CCP still relied on the Soviets for money and equipment and were prepared to take direction from them, to a certain degree.
20	Ma was largely a Muslim grouping and Yunnan had a large Muslim population. There were supportive ties between the two communities.
21	As the closest, geographically, to Manchuria, Shansi could be expected to support them with troops to defend against Soviet invasion, but Shansi is well known to hold back on action until they can be sure they are backing the winner.
22	The Guominjun leader (Feng) was motivated by ideals and morals as much as by power and money. Known as the Christian general, he had links with the Soviet Union and had spent some time studying in Moscow.

Factors that I wanted to include:

- Japan: it's not possible to consider this period without considering the Japanese. They became more and more assertive with respect to China and took over part of China during this period, creating Manchukuo. The Japanese position is, however, far from simple. There were two distinct movements: pro and anti militarism. Stationed in Japan, the Kwantung army was a reckless group of hotheads that manoeuvred towards war, including lying, misleading senior officials and carrying out covert military operations against orders.
- Soviet Union: the issue of railways led to a Soviet invasion, but they were also involved in supporting the CCP and trying to influence via Chinese factions
- CCP: the communists were at a low point at the start of this period, but gained strength, largely through zealous recruiting efforts. They were given orders by the Soviet Comintern, but found their own Chinese way of revolution.
- KMT: the Kuomintang became fascist and totalitarian during this period, but had to be wary of other factions. With a population over 400 million and a country the size of Europe, it would not have been possible to administer the country from the centre without relying on others to collect taxes. It would, however, have been possible to combine all military forces into one national army and the KMT training and organisational ability was high
- Chinese Factions: warlords from the previous era were largely still in place and felt a need for independence. They were (some more than others) distrustful of the KMT and largely had their armies intact although removal of tax income from them would have seriously endangered this.
- Bandits: as a 95% rural population, if the harvest was bad or conflict affected farming, then there was little available to support a living. Banditry was the way a lot of people survived. Bandits also came from any combat: a defeated force would disperse – often into bandit groups (in fact, bandit groups became a major source of recruits for the armies – but I did not build that into the game)
- Bribery: the entire structure was corrupt. Massive bribes had been used by the KMT to deal with other factions in order to unify China – in place of combat. Senior commanders were bribed by opponents at the time of combat and then switched sides, with their troops.
- Loyalty: a striking feature of Chinese troops was that they were loyal to their unit and their commander. This seemed to come out at a divisional level, although I suspect that it would depend on the commander. When a commander was bribed – that meant that the entire unit switched sides.
- Taxation: negotiation about taxation comprised of decisions about what type of taxation would go to the national government and what stay local. This seemed to be at least as important as the level of taxation to be agreed. Tax levels would vary and were often much higher than could be coped with. Practices were rife such as taxing an area when a troops took it over, then opposing troops who defeated them would impose further taxes on the same area.
- Economy: despite all the problems, this period saw substantial growth in society – the arts, culture and, importantly, the economy. Investment improved things quickly. Economic growth was often funded through foreign investments and I think it could also be linked to infrastructure improvement by way of roads and railways.

Design Decisions

1. Turns would be 1 hour = 1 year, separated into 30 minutes of operational time, 20 minutes of admin time and 10 minutes of team time. I wanted a good length of time for team time as the situation was complex and there would be separate things going on which would need co-ordination within the team. The operational time was split into 3 10-second segments to give a good amount of manoeuvre time. The admin time was necessarily long in order to allow a lot of activity on taxes, troops, railways as well as time for all to be involved in political discussion. This led to admin = winter and the 3 operational segments being spring, summer, autumn.
2. Teams would be formed for each faction, for the Soviet Union, for Japan and for the CCP. I decided to go with historical factions and to size the team by the number of provinces under control. This meant that each player was given the historical character who was in charge of that province at the time. I had hopes of introducing the possibility of a province (and thus player) being able to defect to another faction, but I dropped that idea as too complex for little advantage and for introducing splits into teams, where I think teams are an enjoyable part of Megagames
3. All economic improvement would be represented by railways. A feature of this period under the Kuomintang was accelerated economic and cultural development, but economic development went hand-in-hand with new railways so I decided that railways could act as a proxy.
4. Movement and combat was designed to be very simple to run, but included bribery as a combat mechanism. The system was designed to allow for the difficulty of eradicating the CCP and the need to carry out encirclement campaigns to deal with them. It was also designed to reduce the impact of surprise, as this lack of surprise was a feature of Chinese combat.

Problems

The problems observed when running the game were:

- Too much money sloshing around. This seemed to be the result of over-generous allowances in the game plus a suspected set of mistakes by different factions. The result was largely self-correcting, but Japan and the Soviet Union had different ways of raising money. The result was a mismatch between Chinese factions and Japan (the Soviet Union largely operated as a puppet-master to the CCP).
- Japanese divisions were subject to large combined forces every season. With 3 seasons, this proved to be too much for the Japanese. This was made worse by troop spending by Chinese factions able to raise large armies.
- Railways were too easy to build, therefore exaggerated the money problems later
- Equipment for troops was largely irrelevant, except for CCP who had difficulty raising the money to equip the divisions inevitably raised from cadres.
- Too many cadres. With a recruit action every season, cadre numbers grew quickly. They were also very mobile and moved around a lot.

- The map was too crowded. It was possible that 17 people at a time would be allowed at the map and this caused congestion. The map was as large as it could be and still reach the centre.
- The pace of action at the map table was too high. The Control team managed to keep time largely to track, but a less able team would have struggled.
- Hindsight led to more cohesion in the nationalist forces and the Japanese divisions seemed not as strong as in history.

Towards version 2

The problems identified can be tackled by:

1. keep cadre actions the same, but make it a separate part of winter (only) for the CCP
2. change 3 operational phases to 2
3. railways to cost 5 or 6 to build
4. railway tokens to be a faction flag on a railway token and then a blank token for a second year build
5. cadres to be split into urban and rural?
6. Do away with unequipped divisions and equipment rules
7. Japanese troops increased from 7 to 8
8. Korea to be part of the map, so Japan can consider massing troops there
9. no 5 yuan personal money
10. District income to be reduced to 1 opium
11. clearer rules about obtaining money: tax and loans from finance Control, rail from railway Control
12. lower available money from starting war chests
13. Split map into
 - Manchuria
 - Ma, Sinkiang, Yunnan, Szechwan
 - the rest