From Revolution to Politics

Chinese Communists on the Long March

Benjamin Yang

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To My Father,
Who Died a Communist

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My personal interest in the political history of the Chinese Communist Party can be traced back nearly twenty years to a period during the Cultural Revolution when I was confined in the First Model Prison of Peking. There, only Mao's writings, not even those of Marx and Lenin or the official *People's Daily*, were allowed to be read by the prisoners. To kill time before meals, I scanned through the four-volume *Mao Zedong xuanji* five or six times. Needless to say, Mao's writings are CCP history and politics.

Between 1973 and 1974, while I was staying in the countryside in Shandong receiving "re-education" from the "poor and lower middle class peasants," I managed to write a lengthy book entitled *Politics and Chinese Politics*. The book was essentially a criticism of the radical revolutionary line running amok at the time; an entire chapter was devoted to the history of the Communist Party. I sent the original manuscript to Chairman Mao, together with a long cover letter. There was no response, of course. I wonder if the manuscript is still kept somewhere in the General Office of the CCP Central Committee.

Three years ago a friend of mine, Ross Terrill, introduced me to Harrison Salisbury, who was then preparing for his own unique Long March through China. It was my acquaintance with Salisbury that eventually aroused my intention to pursue that same subject, although using a somewhat different approach. During my recent visits to China, I conferred with a number of scholars, officials, students, and friends who helped me in various ways—in fact, the majority of them are Communist Party members. I am grateful to all of them, especially to the late Professor Hu Hua, not only for their assistance with my research on specific historical issues but also for the general impression they left me with: that the Communists have indeed been undergoing a profound transformation in line with the central theme that this study attempts to elaborate on.

I have for years benefited from Benjamin Schwartz's benevolent concern as well as from Roderick MacFarquhar's meticulous guidance. A simple "thank you" is not enough to express my deep gratitude to them both. I assume all they expect of me is that I myself work harder and write better,

and here I promise I will try my best not to disappoint them now and in the future.

John Fairbank's works guided me conveniently to literature previously produced in the West on the Chinese Communist movement in the 1930s, and Tatsuo Yamada's writings and personal communications brought to my attention a number of Japanese articles of relevance. At various stages of writing and revising, I showed the manuscript to Parks Coble, Catherine Hartford, Michel Oksenberg, Anthony Saich, John Schrecker, and Frederic Wakeman and received encouragement and suggestions from them. Nevertheless, my own ignorance and stubbornness make me solely responsible for any flaws yet remaining in this book.

To all the authors referred to in the following chapters and notes, I am greatly indebted for their information and conceptions, despite the fact that I may have expressed opinions at variance with some of theirs. Fully realizing the various difficulties in working on Chinese Communist history and politics, I hate to see myself finding fault with other authors. If I have been guilty of this occasionally in this academic study, I can only excuse myself with the following quote from Confucius: "*dangren burang,*" literally, "One should not compromise wherever the principle of humanity is concerned." With the same attitude in mind, I look forward to any possible criticism of this volume.

Benjamin Yang
Cambridge, Mass.

1

INTRODUCTION

How many prominent scholars and politicians have attempted to characterize the essence or *zeitgeist* of the contemporary world? It has been ascribed a host of labels, including "the age of crisis," "the age of reconstruction," "the age of proletarian revolution," and "the age of disorder under Heaven." I would propose that our age should still be understood essentially in terms of the political confrontation between capitalism and communism, despite the archaistic hues the two terms may carry. Indeed, there are few crucial issues in our world that cannot be shown to relate, directly or indirectly, to such confrontation.[1]

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays a particularly conspicuous role in international communism in at least two respects. First, the CCP represents a country with one tenth the land mass, one fifth the population, and one half the organized Communists on earth. More important, the CCP has emerged as a distinctive outgrowth of the Communist movement. It followed a unique path to the victory of revolution, debated sharply with and then split from the Soviet Union, and is now advocating a dramatic reform policy known as "open door to the world" and "two systems in one country." Simply put, it has become an indicator of a fundamental change in the Communist world.

Historical studies serve as one of the most convenient approaches to understanding the CCP's emergence as a unique variant of communism. It is particularly interesting to investigate the mid-1930s—the period of the Long March—in which the CCP went through a process of drastic transformation: hundreds of thousands of Communist troops traveled thousands of miles from South China to North China; and the Communist Party went through a basic change in status and character. The importance of the Long March can hardly be overemphasized, either historically or politically. Older Communist leaders have frequently referred to it as a turning point in CCP history; even now, fifty years later, survivors of the Long March are still in control of China, as I have shown statistically elsewhere[2]; and new Chinese leaders are calling their drive for economic

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modernization the "New Long March." The Long March has become a symbol of CCP history, just as the Great Wall is a hallmark of ancient Chinese civilization. The importance of the Long March as subject matter also stems from the fact that although this extraordinary epic has drawn much admiration from military commentators and journalists (among whom Harrison Salisbury is the latest and most reliable in view of historical accuracy), few serious academic works have yet dealt with it, either in China or the West.[3]

Definitions

While it was under way in late 1934 and early 1935, the Long March had not yet been so named. The Communists called it the "Western Expedition," because the Central Red Army was withdrawing from its Soviet base in Jiangxi province and moving toward the western provinces.[4] In the eyes of the antagonistic Kuomintang (KMT) army, what the Communists were doing could only be mockingly regarded as the "Western Flight."[5] Ironically, the first appearance of the term Long March, or *changzheng*, was in a speech of Chiang Kai-shek referring to his Nationalist troops in pursuit of the Communists. According to Xue Yue—the KMT general who commanded the Second Route Army to have pursued the Central Red Army all the way from Jiangxi in October 1934 to Sichuan in June 1935—Chiang made the following remarks of approbation after Xue had finished his duty: "Throughout Chinese history, no army whatsoever has ever before been recorded as completing such a Long March of more than 20,000 li. Now we have one, and this is achieved by none other than our Second Route Army."[6]

As for the Communists, it was only a few months after the Central Red Army, or the First Front Army, concluded its part of the Long March that Mao Zedong began to adopt the term. In his famous speech after the Wayaobao Conference, Mao said: "Speaking of the Long March, one may ask: What is its significance? We answer that the Long March is the very first throughout Chinese history, that it is a manifesto, a propaganda team, and a seeding machine. . . . A new situation emerged soon after the Long March ended."[7] These statements not only marked the introduction of the term Long March into the Communist lexicon, but also demonstrated that Mao considered the arrival of his own Central Red Army in northern Shaanxi the conclusion of the Long March, even though while he was making this speech in late December 1935, two other Red Army groups were still struggling to complete their own Long Marches.

Whether out of respect for historical reality or simply for political purposes—since the Long March soon became a symbol of honor and glory for the entire Party and Army, and hence for all those involved—the later official account extended the duration of the Long March to October 1936 in order to include the expeditions of the Second and Fourth Front Armies. The starting date of the Long March nevertheless remains the date when the First Front Army set forth from the Jiangxi Soviet. In the official version, therefore, the Long March is now dated from October 1934 to October 1936.[8]

A logical problem, however, must be brought up. If the Long March pertains not only to the First Front Army but also to other Red Armies, then not merely one but several Long Marches were undertaken. The starting date of the Long March, considered as a general historical period, must be accordingly modified. As a matter of fact, Zhang Guotao's Fourth Front Army and He Long's Third Army left their original base areas, the Eyuwan Soviet and the Xiangexi Soviet respectively, and embarked on their military expeditions as early as October 1932 as a result of the KMT's Fourth Suppression Campaign. As some historians have legitimately argued, this should be regarded as the real beginning of the Long March.[9]

The end date for the Long March is no less controversial. The union of the three Red Army groups at eastern Gansu in October 1936 did not necessarily mean the conclusion of the Long March, because simultaneously 20,000 Red Army troops—which constituted two thirds of the Fourth Front Army and almost one half of the entire Red Army—were just crossing the Yellow River and setting forth on the "Western March" toward Xinjiang. After undergoing extreme difficulties and hardships, this Western Route Army was eventually destroyed in Gansu in early 1937. Unless success should be taken as the prerequisite for inclusion, the Long March should not be considered as ended until this moment. For all these reasons, the Long March is defined in this study as a historical event spanning the period from late 1932 to early 1937.

Leaving concrete dates and events aside, the Long March can be defined in a broader and more abstract sense. It can be understood as an event in which the Chinese Communists went through an overall transfer from South China to North China. Not merely a single episode involving a single Communist group for a brief period, it included a complex series of events involving all major Communist forces over an extended span of time. Although the highlight of the Long March is doubtless the performance of Mao's Central Red Army between its departure from Jiangxi and its arrival in Shaanxi, the earlier withdrawals of other Red Armies from their base areas should be included as the indispensable prologue, and the destiny of the Western Route Army as the epilogue to this historical event. In the ensuing chapters, the term Long March will generally be used in this broad sense. It comprises a number of discrete 'Long Marches' conducted by several different Red Army groups from the autumn of 1932 to the spring of 1937.

Themes

Two basic questions, whether explicitly raised or not, can be found in almost all the previous literature on CCP history and politics in general and that of the 1930s in particular: What caused the Communist Party's rise to power in China and Mao Zedong's rise to power within the Communist Party? What made the Soviet movement rise and then fall in the 1930s and Mao, concurrently, fall and then rise? Answers proposed to these questions have been divergent and even contradictory.

Although he is primarily interested in studies of the CCP during the Sino-Japanese War, Chalmers Johnson, in his pioneer work on relationships between peasant nationalism and the Communist Party, attempts to interpret the CCP's earlier defeats and later successes in a general sense. Professor Johnson writes:

> In other words, from 1921 to 1937 Communists failed in China because the Chinese people, in general, were indifferent to what the Communist Party had to offer. After 1937, it succeeded because the population became receptive to one particular kind of political appeal; and the Communist Party—in one of its many disguises—made precisely that appeal: it offered to meet the needs of the people for leadership in organizing resistance to the invader and in alleviating war-induced anarchy in the rural areas.[10]

Ilpyong Kim, another influential author, offers a rather different explanation. In his book on Communist politics in the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s, Kim concludes that "the Communist leaders of the Kiangsi Soviet period were successful in creating and operating an effective political system and in mobilizing the peasant masses under the Soviet rule," and their "evacuation of the Kiangsi Soviet base in 1934 probably was primarily the consequence of military failure, not of a lack of mass support."[11]

Both factual and logical problems can be found in Johnson's argument. It can hardly be taken for granted, first of all, that the entire 1921 to 1937 period was a simple failure for the Communists, either in view of the CCP's periodic upsurges in 1921-1926, 1928-1933 and 1936-1937 or in view of its general growth in strength throughout the period. Moreover, given that the CCP witnessed a steady growth between 1937 and 1949, the Liberation War (1946-49) may not be taken simply as a smooth extension of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45), nor was it simply, as Johnson says, that "as a result of the Communist Party's leadership of the resistance, the Party obtained a mass following that it subsequently used to conquer all of China"—but this discussion will be better supported in the final chapter.[12] Finally, in a war period such as the 1930s, mass support, a vague term in itself, is only an indirect and quantitative factor. It must be transformed into the overall political and military strength, if it is to become decisive for one warring side or the other. Instead of considering it as a direct factor (following this line of inference, one may arrive at an even more provocative notion that the victorious KMT must have enjoyed more mass support than the defeated CCP in the early 1930s), mass support must be seen as playing into the overall military contest with the KMT in deciding the destiny of the CCP.

The Communists' evacuation from the Jiangxi Soviet in 1934 was apparently a consequence of their military failure. Problematically, Kim prefers a clear-cut distinction between political conditions and military affairs. He seems to believe that the Communist leaders of the Jiangxi Soviet succeeded politically but failed militarily. This is actually a position the CCP leaders maintained in early 1935; they later changed their opinion. While granting military affairs due importance, one should not ignore how and to what extent the military process was shaped by Communist policies of mass mobilization, social organization, administrative operations, ideological propaganda, and enemy disintegration. More generally speaking, the relationship between the political line and the military line should be under question.

In his classic study of the Communist Party and the rise of Mao, Benjamin Schwartz attempts to outline the basic strategy by which Mao brought the Communist Party to success. Under circumstances defined by incessant splits and wars within the ruling classes, and given the existence of a mass base, a Communist Party organization, a Red Army, favorable terrain, and sufficient economic resources, an autonomous regime of the Communist Party could not only survive but also grow. These ideas, as expressed in a report by Mao to the Party Center in 1928, are regarded by Schwartz as the main features of Mao's strategy in the Jiangxi Soviet years.[13] Although it underwent some statesmanlike refinement, according to Schwartz, Mao changed little in the basic strategy in later years. Schwartz connects this outline with Communist success in China, saying: "Such, I think, are the main lines of the strategy which, in conjuncture with favorable external circumstances, was finally to lead the Chinese Communists to victory."[14]

Nevertheless, a number of historians hold different views on this issue, believing that the strategy of Mao and the Communist Party between the Jiangxi Soviet period and the Sino-Japanese War changed significantly. Shanti Swarup ascribes the CCP failure in the Jiangxi Soviet to its excessive social programs and its success in the Anti-Japanese War to a combination of social and national revolutions.[15] Similarly, Tetsuya Kataoka attributes the Communist victory in the late 1930s and the early 1940s as much to the previous strategy of conducting a peasant war and employing the countryside to encircle the city as to the later juxtaposition of both rural and urban lines.[16]

Although a more precise definition of Mao's general strategy may be needed, I would agree with Schwartz that Mao's basic opinions on making the Communist revolution in China were already established by the Jiangxi Soviet years, and that there were no fundamental changes after this time. Nonetheless, a few points are worth noting. It should at least be admitted that Mao's position within the Communist Party had risen from that of an ordinary Party and Army leader in Ruijin to that of the dominating figure in Yan'an. Hence, since Mao's strategy became the Party's strategy in the latter period, the Communist Party as a whole must have undergone a shift during the 1930s. Mao's own policy positions, it must be added, had also changed significantly between the early and late 1930s. From rebelling against the KMT to uniting with the KMT, from a slogan of "Soviet government" to a slogan of "people's government," from the policy of land distribution to the policy of rent control—these changes are important enough to be considered strategic. What had not yet changed—and I assume this is also Schwartz's essential argument—was Mao's basic mode of thought, which I would term political realism, in contrast to the revolutionary idealism pursued by the earlier Party leaders. Schwartz alludes to the statesmanlike refinement of the Party's political line in the years following the Long March, and he is certainly right to point out that this change was for the Communists no more than some titular alteration. It was perceived as formal rather than substantive shift.[17]

Historical truth, however, does not always lie in historical actors' own perceptions. This case brings to mind the well-known slogan "Chinese learning for substance and Western learning for function" launched by Zhang Zhidong and his Confucian colleagues a century ago regarding national reform in China. It equally seems that Mao and his comrades' united front policy resembled something like "Communist revolution for substance and Chinese politics for function." But just as the former Confucian slogan rose from the historical imperative presented by the substantially superior Western powers, and later history had proved the very opposite view—Western learning became the substance while Chinese learning was left for function; so the Communist slogan arose from historical necessity presented by the contemporary domestic and international situations, and so too Communist history has also generated the opposing view—politics became the substance and revolution was left for function. The 'statesmanlike' turned out to be the *statesmanship*, without which the Communists could hardly have won their final victory.[18]

The present study attempts to demonstrate that the mid-1930s were a time of transformation from revolutionary idealism to political realism in the general orientation of the CCP leadership or, if one prefers, a time of politicization of Chinese Communism. This shift was contemporaneous with Mao's ascent to power in the CCP Center during the period of the Long March,, and it was this transformation that had provided the subjective strength which, in conjunction with fortuitous and extraneous factors, culminated in the Communist victory in China in the late 1940s.

Historians have attempted to compare the Jiangxi Soviet period with the Yan'an period to see if there were changes in the Communist Party, and if so, of what nature. But the Long March, which linked the two periods, was the change in itself. Of course, the Long March can be taken just as a temporary interlude between two well-defined historical periods in the Communist movement. At the time, it was indeed considered something of abnormality by both the CCP and the KMT—the Communists were all the time attempting to open new base areas and return to their 'normal' revolutionary activities, while the Nationalists were all the time aiming to wipe out the Communists and return to their 'normal' political rule. But normality and abnormality are scarcely distinguishable in modern Chinese history. The Long March may therefore, perhaps more appropriately, be treated as a historical period in its own right.

Sources

Quite a number of monographs on the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s have been produced in Western literature, which led John Fairbank to suggest that "these studies may have wrapped up the subject until new evidence appears."[19] Generally speaking, these studies contain some defects in historical accuracy. They rely in varying degrees on two limited sources: CCP documents obtained by KMT army in the suppression campaigns, and memoirs of ex-Communists who emigrated from China.

It should be recognized that the Communists were defeated but not destroyed in the 1930s and only those documents—newspapers, journals, notices, and announcements and the like—which were widely circulated among local cadres and peasants in the Soviets were likely to have fallen into the hands of Nationalist troops. Such documents may be sufficient for studies of the Communist movement from a social or ideological point of view, but for any historical survey of policy making and power relationship within the Communist leadership, which most previous studies have focused on, more concrete and substantial information is needed. There is, for example, Derek Waller's careful work on the two national Soviet congresses, in 1931 and 1934; but for the two Party conferences—the Gannan Conference of the Central Soviet Bureau and the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee—which immediately preceded the Soviet congresses and actually blueprinted their procedures and resolutions, no adequate and accurate information is provided.[20]

Sources in the form of memoirs are even less adequate: they are all dependent on the memories of old men recalling events several decades earlier and influenced by their concern with their own political positions. In his memoirs entitled *The Red Army and I*, for example, Gong Chu claims to have been the Chief of General Staff in the Red Army Headquarters from May to July 1934. Had this been true, his account of the military situation around the Guangchang Battles in April-May 1934 would have been trustworthy. In fact, Gong never occupied so high a position in the Red Army; his false claim can be explained by anything but a serious concern for historical studies.[21]

As for the Long March period, documentary sources were even more meager until recently. Due to the military situation, no periodicals—like *Red Star*, *Red China* and *Struggle* of the Jiangxi Soviet years—could possibly have been produced. Also as an army group on a military expedition, the Long Marchers were more cautious and efficient in destroying their documents so that few could fall into KMT hands or, one might say, they were less careful and efficient in preserving these papers for future reference.

On the other hand, there is a monumental stock of Long March tales in the form of reminiscences published in China, such as those included in the numerous volumes of *Red Flags Fluttering* and *A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire*. Most, if not all, articles of this category are short pieces composed in the name of lower ranking Communist cadres and Red Army soldiers of the time, all with the purpose of describing "heroic people and heroic deeds." These sources might work well enough for some journalistic writings, though subject to all kinds of ambiguity and inaccuracy; for historical research, they prove at least as misleading as useful.

Partly for these reasons, among the dozen or so important Party and Army conferences on or higher than the front army level during the Long March, only one or two had become subjects of historical studies in the past. Consequently, all historians could offer their readers was a vague story of the Zunyi Conference, full of flaws, and a mention of the Maoergai Conference—which actually pertained to another occasion, the Shawo Conference, while the real Maoergai Conference was entirely unknown. Referring to Mao's rise in power at the Zunyi Conference, John Rue writes:

> Early in January 1935 they reached Tsun-yi, a small town in northern Kweichow. There Mao, supported by dissident military leaders, insisted that an enlarged conference of the Politburo be called for the purpose of reorganizing the Revolutionary Military Council. The conference was held, and Mao was elected chairman of the Council, replacing Chou En-lai, who remained on it but with greatly decreased power. Yeh Chien-ying was dropped off, as was Teng Fa, the head of the security police. No one was appointed to the new

> Council to represent the police. Liu Po-ch'eng replaced Yeh as chief of staff; Chu Teh continued as commander-in-chief and Wang Chia-hsiang as political commissar.[22]

An almost identical description can be found in other writings at the time.[23] But in fact, the whole story told here is too sensational to be taken as evidence for an appropriate understanding of intraparty power relationships. In this single paragraph, there are as many as a dozen factual errors. Any general conclusions based on such sources can scarcely be expected to be more accurate.[24] What seems problematic here is not merely a matter of inaccuracy stemming from a shortage of documentary sources, but the larger question of historical approach. A Japanese scholar, Noriyuki Tokuda, presents a sharp contrast in his *Political Dynamics of Maoism*. Although it contains no factual discoveries and although it is burdened with the jargon of physics—the terms "collective cohesion force," "primitive accumulation of authority," and "takeoff of charismatic leadership," figure prominently in the book—Tokuda offers a story of Mao's rise to power as a gradual, complicated, less dramatic but more credible, historical process.[25]

Chinese Communists began to work seriously on their own history (in response to Mao's call) during the Rectification Movement at Yan'an in the early 1940s. From the very beginning, their studies had been a mixture of political statements and historical references. In April 1945, on the eve of the Seventh National Congress, the Party Center passed the formal "Resolutions on Several Historical Problems." From that time until Mao's death in 1976, official historians in China strictly followed these resolutions, assuming two basic objectives in their studies: externally, to verify the Communist Party's victorious though painful struggle with domestic and foreign reactionary forces; internally, to confirm Chairman Mao's successful but tortuous struggle with rightist and leftist opportunist trends. Although many episodes in the Party history—such as the Li Lisan line, the five suppression campaigns, and the union and split of the First and Fourth Front Armies—had appeared in various publications, they were without exception couched in vague and abstract terms for immediate propaganda purposes.

After Mao's death and especially in more recent years, as the general political climate in China becomes more tolerant of academic studies, CCP history has gradually come under somewhat more objective scrutiny. A large number of documents, memoirs, and even analytical articles have been produced for both the foreign and Chinese reader. During my summer visits to China in 1984 and 1986, I came across a few thousand original documents on CCP history, most of which were unknown in Western literature. One to two hundred of them are referred to in this study. (By the term "original documents," I mean public announcements, internal instructions and communications, journals and pamphlets, military telegrams, conference resolutions and recordings, individual diaries and so on—any contemporary records of contemporary events.) I regard it as one of the basic purposes of this study to employ these newly available documentary sources to introduce and clarify the most significant historical facts concerning the Long March.[26]

Another group of new sources used in this study are reminiscences and memoirs of veteran Communists in China who participated in the historical events of this study and are recalling their personal experiences. In terms of historical accuracy, memoirs of Communist leaders in China differ little from those of ex-Communists outside China. They are all marred by blurred memories and partisan biases. But since now more than one person addresses the same issue, cross-checking becomes possible. In order to establish some historical occurrence accurately, double or even multiple checks on these memoirs should be made. Where this is impossible, reliance on one piece of evidence is accepted with due reservation.

Plenty of secondary literature on the Long March has recently been produced in China. Although many of these writings still carry a strong propagandistic tone, they are far more academic now than in the Mao era. Comparing some representative works recently published in China with those published outside it, the former have generally been far more accurate and comprehensive than the latter. The obvious reasons are that a large proportion of these works in China are written collectively, and that some official historians may have access to more archival documents than their public acknowledgements indicate. After all, CCP history is their own history.

The main body of this study consists of factual descriptions and interpretations in an attempt to offer a systematic account of the Long March and so provide fresh information on, and analyses of, power relationships and strategic orientation in the CCP. While remaining attentive to any shifts in Communist ideology and practice, this study starts and proceeds by accepting the conventional definition and distinction between revolution and politics: the former represents a drastic mode of change of the social or national *status quo,* and the latter stands for the art or science of running the state power. The concluding chapter is devoted to elaborating the dichotomy between revolution and politics in a broader and less conventional sense and hopefully can illustrate not only some patterns in the CCP history in question, but also in Communist politics in general. As both the establishment of historical facts and theoretical interpretations are in order at the present moment, I am well aware that the study of Chinese Communist history and politics may be among those academic subjects too complicated for anyone to accomplish either objective perfectly. Factual and analytical mistakes may occur in the work of one who realizes this situation, but without such a realization they are even more likely to appear. In this regard, Benjamin Schwartz's recommendation of an approach of "humble agnosticism" seems to me as valid now as it was three decades ago.[27]

2

SOVIET REVOLUTION IN SOUTH CHINA

A brief account of the Communist movement immediately prior to the Long March period seems necessary for two reasons. First, it will provide a background to the Long March which, after all, represents the low water mark of the Soviet revolution's confrontation with the Nationalist government in one sense, and the high drama of it in another. Second, this account will offer a general survey of salient events of the period in itself. Careful readers will find that some points of this survey may differ widely with established ones. In my opinion, quite a number of topics of CCP history in the late 1920s and the early 1930s are also in need of reconsideration due to the recent discoveries in mainland China.

The Conclusion of the Communist-Nationalist Collaboration

In view of partisan relationships, 1923-1927 was the period of collaboration between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party. From the national point of view, the last two years of the KMT-CCP collaboration saw the Great Revolution or the Northern Expedition against the northern warlord regime. As the Northern Expedition was successfully proceeding in 1927, bloody conflicts erupted between Communists and Nationalists and brought their collaboration to an unhappy end. The whole process can easily be understood as a repeated pattern of power struggle commonly found throughout the history of Chinese politics: Collaboration makes possible a joint action against the common enemy, whereas completion of the project renders the collaboration unnecessary.[1]

Even now, Nationalist historians generally recall the Northern Expedition as a great success and propose that it would have been a still greater, if not perfect, victory, if not for the sabotage of the Communists.[2] Official historians in the People's Republic, however, regard the Northern Expedition as a disastrous failure as a result both of the KMT's betrayal of the revolution

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on the one hand and the CCP Center's rightist line on the other.[3] While any detailed treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this study, some general observations seem in order.

That the KMT won great successes during the Northern Expedition seems indisputable. When the campaign started in July 1926, the KMT controlled no more than a small base area centered around the city of Canton in Guangdong province and a few armies amounting to less than 100,000 men. In early 1927, the KMT military forces had expanded to four army corps, each consisting of about 100,000 soldiers, and their dominion included most of the provinces of South China. By the end of the campaign in late 1928, all the major warlords in China were either defeated or had bowed to KMT rule; the Nanking government was legitimately established throughout the country and its military forces swelled to eighty armies with total forces of more than 2,000,000 men.[4]

But a deeper investigation of this period unearths points of divergence from the Nationalist line. Though the Northern Expedition was carried out under KMT leadership, it should be remembered that the CCP played an indispensable role in its success. Besides the high morale among the expeditionary troops created by Communist propaganda during these years, there are more concrete forms of Communist contribution. The fermenting peasant movement in Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Hunan provinces, for example, supplied the expedition with an inexhaustible source of recruitment; and the uprising workers made the seizures of big cities such as Changsha, Wuhan, and Shanghai look more like political demonstrations than military engagements. All these mass organizations were largely due to Communist efforts.[5]

Moreover, the abrupt unification of the country proved little more than a superficial success and created for the KMT government, many substantial problems, which quickly flared up after the alleged national unification. The admission and pacification of warlords through peaceful negotiations helped the KMT with a smooth takeover of state power in 1928 but left intact numerous autonomous domains all over the country. In reality, only about a fourth of the military forces and five or six provinces in the Yangtze Valley were directly controlled by the Nanking government; the others remained under the influence of various military cliques, like those controlled by Li Zongren, Yan Xishan, Feng Yuxiang, and Zhang Xueliang. As a result, Chiang Kai-shek faced one civil war after another between 1928 and 1930.[6]

At the social level, its shift in attention from mobilizing the worker-peasant masses to cooperating with the capitalist-landlord elite in order to bring the state under normal political rule alienated the KMT from the masses. Particularly in the countryside, the Chiang government never succeeded in establishing any regular administration below the county level and could not achieve, as Sun Yat-sen had hoped, any significant agrarian reforms.[7] Thus, the CCP became the revolutionary spokesman of workers and peasants and the most potent challenger to the KMT regime in the following decade.

Official Communist historians who consider the first CCP-KMT collaboration and the Northern Expedition a failure can find substantial evidence to support their views as well. From April 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek started the Shanghai Coup and the Purification Campaign, until December of the same year when the Canton Commune was smashed, tens of thousands of Communists deserted or were executed. The labor unions and peasant associations sponsored by the CCP, which at one time claimed to have several millions of members, were virtually extinguished in a few months. Above all, these events contradicted the Communist leaders' expectations and left the Party Center headed by Chen Duxiu in a state of helpless confusion, so that the Communist failure was graphically depicted even in their own behavior.[8]

Viewed more broadly, however, the years from 1923 to 1928 cannot be labeled a total failure for the Communist Party. Even a simple calculation shows their general growth in strength and influence. In 1923 at the Third Congress, the CCP had just over 400 members; two years later in 1925, its membership had increased to 1,000. Mainly during the first phase of the Northern Expedition, the CCP membership swelled to 57,900, according to the records of its Fifth Congress in early 1927. The collapse of the alliance with the KMT diminished CCP membership to about 40,000, as reported at the Sixth Congress of the CCP in mid-1928. Notwithstanding temporary ups and downs, the entire period of the CCP-KMT collaboration and the Northern Expedition was still one of obvious Communist upsurge.

Less apparent but more important was a potential change in the character and orientation of the CCP brought about by its participation in the Nationalist revolution. Before the collaboration started in 1922, the CCP was "only a small group of intellectuals who knew little of Marxism and social movement," as Henricus Sneevliet, the Comintern agent in China at the time, scornfully noted.[9] After joining the Nationalist Party, and particularly after the reorganization of the KMT in 1924, the CCP became a force in the national political arena. A number of Communists assumed high positions in governmental administration and military functions. Unlike the Communist leaders of the first generation, such as the former Peking University professors Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, younger Communists like Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were groomed as professional politicians and military leaders in the mid-1920s. The political experience and interests accumulated during the CCP-KMT collaboration and the Northern Expedition transformed the Communist Party and developed in it the capacity to compete with the Nationalist Party in bidding for state power.

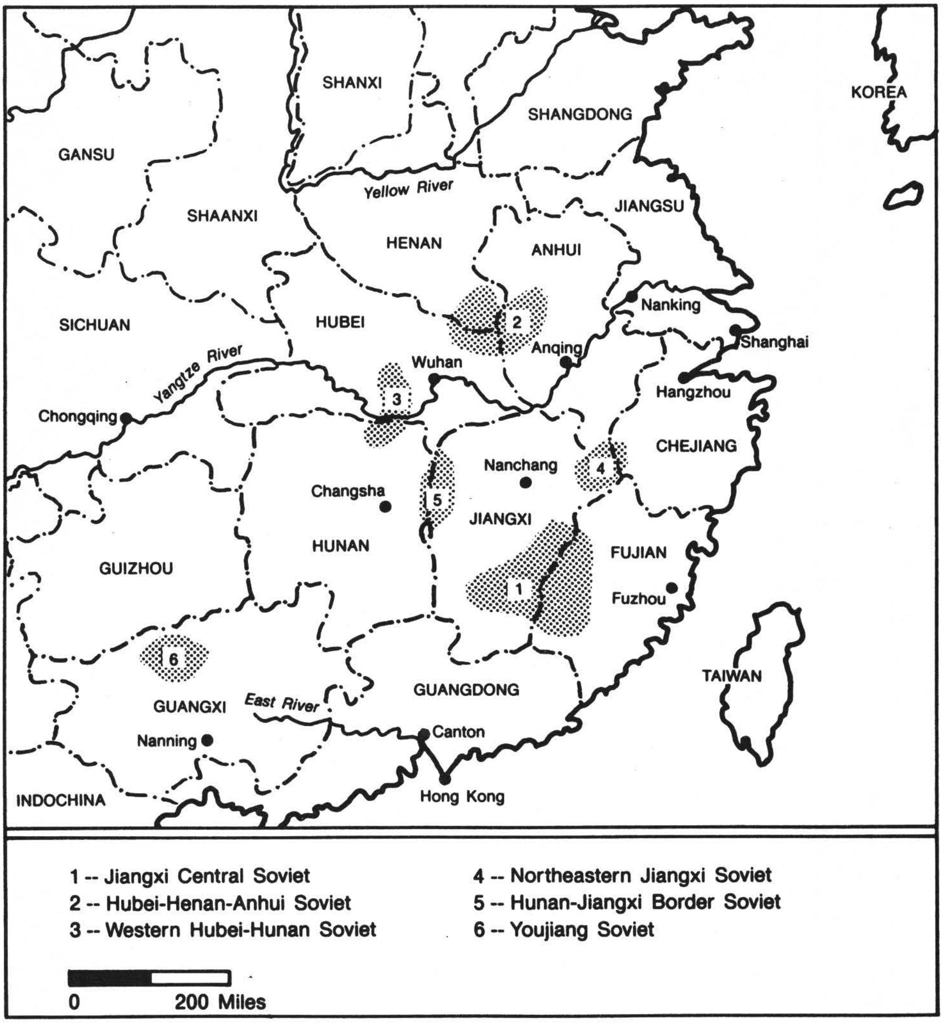
If a relative assessment may help comprehension of the impact of the first CCP-KMT collaboration and the Northern Expedition upon the Communist and the Nationalist Parties—each side may be understood as successful in some ways and unsuccessful in others—then definite judgments can be formulated concerning some other political forces and individual politicians. The northern warlord regime, as represented by Duan Qirui, Wu Peifu, and others were clearly the losers of the period. Although the influence of old warlords would continue for years and new warlords would reappear in less obvious forms, warlordism as a transitional phase between traditional imperial monarchy and modern republican government ended by 1927. In this regard at least, there is a sense of progress in modern Chinese history.[10]

The assumption that the destruction of its collaboration with the Nationalist Party was for the Communist Party but a downward curve along a general line of growth would by no means excuse Chen Duxiu, the Party's General Secretary, from being a lost politician. Chen gave up his leading position soon after the KMT left-wing government at Wuhan adopted an anti-Communist stance in July 1927. Later, he more openly expressed his protest against the Comintern mandating of CCP cooperation with the KMT. He went even further in the following years by refusing to attend the Sixth Congress of the CCP at Moscow and publishing a statement bitterly attacking Stalin's brutal bureaucratism in the Soviet Union and the CCP's reckless strategy of armed rebellion in China.[11] All these actions may be justified from a personal and moral point of view, but not from a political one. Following this line of argument, Chen could only arrive at the conclusion that he himself should not have taken part in political activities and become the sponsor of the Communist Party from the very beginning. At any rate, after 1927 Chen resigned from the CCP leadership and concluded his political career.[12] The political maturity of the CCP—which may be understood as its primary achievement of that time—was obtained through Communist Party's abandonment of Chen or Chen's abandonment of the Communist Party.

Armed Rebellions and Soviet Establishments

As soon as the "banning cover" of the KMT-CCP alliance was lifted, the organizational and ideological influences the Communists had built up among workers, peasants, and soldiers naturally burst out in the fierce confrontations with the KMT. The later months of 1927 and the next two years (1928 and 1929) witnessed a dozen armed rebellions organized by the Communists, mainly in South China. Although most of them suffered defeats or setbacks at the hands of the superior KMT troops and although none could have achieved its goal of winning back a nationwide revolution

Territory Bases of the Communist Party in South China, 1930–1932


SHANXI
KOREA
SHANGDONG
GANSU
Yellow River
SHAANXI
JIANGSU
HENAN
ANHUI
Nanking
SICHUAN
HUBEI
2
Shanghai
Anqing
Yangtze River
Wuhan
Hangzhou
3
Chongqing
CHEJIANG
Nanchang
4
Changsha
5
JIANGXI
HUNAN
FUJIAN
GUIZHOU
1
Fuzhou
6
TAIWAN
GUANGDONG
GUANGXI
East River
Canton
Nanning
INDOCHINA
Hong Kong
1 -- Jiangxi Central Soviet
2 -- Hubei-Henan-Anhui Soviet
3 -- Western Hubei-Hunan Soviet
4 -- Northeastern Jiangxi Soviet
5 -- Hunan-Jiangxi Border Soviet
6 -- Youjiang Soviet
0
200 Miles

immediately, these rebellions can be understood as modestly successful in the sense that they brought forth to the CCP an entirely new prospect: the creation of military forces led by the Communists and of revolutionary bases held by the Communists. Space allows only a brief introduction of some most outstanding armed rebellions and establishment of Soviets which had strategic impacts on the Communist movement at the time of their inception or in the years to follow.

While other approaches to understanding the Communist rebellions in the late 1920s are possible, here their relationship with the CCP leadership is taken as the criterion by which to classify these rebellions into one of two groups: either the early, large-scale uprisings directly organized by the Party Center or the later, smaller ones sponsored by local Communist cadres. Generally speaking, the results of both types of rebellion were more or less the same: the formation of military bases in the countryside. However, if success or failure of a political action is defined on the basis of agreement or disagreement between its original objective and its final achievement, then the uprisings of the first type failed because they were intended to produce a national revolution and none achieved such a goal. Uprisings of the second type, on the other hand, were often a modest success since they were designed simply to create power and influence on the local level, which some of them indeed did. In other words, the 'Communist rebellion' of the late 1920s was just transformed into the 'Soviet movement' of the early 1930s, no more and no less.

The Nanchang Uprising, the first and biggest, started in August 1927, involving three armies of about 20,000 men in total. In October on their way to Swatow—a port city on the southeast coast from which the Communists thought they could easily receive Russian aid and create their own Northern Expedition—the insurgent troops were fatally defeated by the combined forces of the Guangdong and Guangxi armies. Most rebel leaders who were closely related to the Party Center abandoned their troops and fled to either Hong Kong or Shanghai. Of the survivors, 2,000 retreated westward under the command of Zhu De. After several months of humiliating but necessary affiliation with Fan Kaisheng—commander of a local army and a friend of Zhu—at Shaoguan in Guangdong, Zhu eventually moved to join forces with Mao Zedong in the Jinggang Mountains at the Hunan-Jiangxi border in April 1928.[13] The united efforts of Zhu and Mao resulted in establishment of a Red Army and a rural military base, from which the later Jiangxi Soviet eventually grew. As for Mao, he brought to the Jinggang Mountains the remnants of the Autumn Harvest Uprising in Hunan in September 1927. Before his union with Zhu, Mao had owed the preservation of his troops in the Jinggang Mountains in large part to an alliance with two local peasant troops led by Wang Zuo and Yuan Wencai. Thus, an affiliation with local military forces helped both Zhu and Mao survive, but only subsequent Soviet construction would provide the dynamic power for their rapid rise in the future.

Another group of the Nanchang Uprising survivors—less than 1,000 men—entered the Dongjiang area in Guangdong in early October 1927, under the guidance of division commander Dong Lang. Encouraged by the arrival of strong reinforcement troops, the native Peasant Revolutionary Army headed by Lin Daowen rose up in their third attempt at rebellion and immediately captured two county seats—Haifeng and Lufeng—in late October. Soon afterwards, the Party Center appointed Peng Pai as the secretary of the CCP Special Committee of Dongjiang Prefecture and proclaimed the founding of the Haifeng and Lufeng Soviets.

With the arrival of another defeated division from the Canton Uprising in December 1927, the Dongjiang Soviet had become, in the eyes of the Party Center, the most precious and promising achievement of the movement until the final destruction of this base in February 1928. In its heyday, this base area possessed two divisions of armed forces and controlled a territory of four counties. Partly because of its unfavorable geographic location—sitting on the east coast, it proved more easily attacked by the Nationalists than aided by the Russians, and partly because of its poor leadership—Peng Pai was a Communist veteran experienced in social organization but unversed in military leadership—the Soviet was crushed. Peng fled to Shanghai, passing the Party secretary position back to Lin Daowen and leaving a small contingent of guerrillas commanded by Gu Dacun to fight in the mountains. Despite the heroic effort of Lin and Gu, the Dongjiang Soviet permanently lost its vigor and vitality in the Communist movement.[14]

Just as the Party Center's military confidence was dampened by the debacles of the Nanchang Revolt, the Autumn Harvest Uprising, the Canton Commune, and the Dongjiang Soviet, interest in armed struggle was aroused among local Communist cadres. A new group of Communist uprisings, less ambitious but more appropriate, occurred from late 1927 onwards. These uprisings were organized by native Communists in response to the general call, but not under the direct leadership, of the Party Center. Fang Zhimin's uprising in northwest Jiangxi was among the earliest. Contrary to some historians' allegations, Fang did not work in any salient Party capacity until he became the secretary of a 'five-county committee' in charge of a peasant uprising in his native county Yiyang. The uprising broke out at the end of 1927 and, after the initial dislocations in early 1928, the peasant rebels created a regional Soviet government headed by Fang and a regiment of the 'worker-peasant revolutionary army' under Shao Shiping. From middle 1928 to early 1930, the Northwest Jiangxi Soviet underwent slow but steady expansion under the close scrutiny of the CCP Jiangxi Provincial Committee but with only minimal involvement of the Party

Center.[15] Shielding the Jiangxi Soviet from KMT attacks seems to have been one reason for Fang's slow growth, but being familiar with the local conditions ensured his continuous survival.

Another significant uprising initiated by local Communist cadres occurred in Huangan and Macheng, both in eastern Hubei. Led by native Communists Fu Xiangyi, Pan Zhongru, Wu Guangjie, and Wang Shusheng (among others), the insurgent peasants captured the two county seats and formed a Soviet government and a revolutionary army in late 1927. The rebels were put down as quickly as they rose up. Less than a hundred men survived to flee and hide in the Dabie Mountains until May 1928, when they came out to rebuild a Soviet base in Guangshan with a division of armed peasants. A year later, when this division grew strong enough to assume the title of the 7th Red Army, it aroused the Party Center's interest. Army commander Xu Xiangqian was sent down to assume leadership. In the adjoining regions of southern Henan and western Anhui two more peasant rebellions arose, respectively in Shangnan in May 1929 and in Liuan and Heshan in January 1930. Each uprising produced one division subordinate to Xu Xiangqian's army. Thus in the two years between 1928 and 1930, the Hubei-Henan-Anhui border area—or the Eyuwan Soviet—rose to become a major strategic base of the Communist movement.[16] Its potential for future growth proved even greater. From a defensive point of view, this area standing between North China and South China could possibly mitigate military pressures from both the KMT Central Army and the northern warlords, while offensively it could seek expansion in the vast northern and eastern regions and attack in the western and southern directions along the Peking-Hankou Railway and the Yangtze River Valley.

In January 1928, Zhou Yiqun and He Long retreated to their home towns on the Hunan-Hubei border to promote a peasant rebellion. They arrived at Jianli in western Hubei and gathered together a few local forces scattered in the countryside but failed to capture the county seat. They led the troops to western Hunan, where He Long was born and had stayed as an army officer for several years before the Northern Expedition. Helped by former subordinates and acquaintances, He expanded his troops to 3,000 men and captured the county of Sangzhi in March 1928. In the face of local army and police attacks, however, the patched together Communist forces lost two consecutive battles. Zhou escaped east to return to Hubei alone, while He led the remaining troops of about 100 men west to the Hunan-Hubei border, where he fought back and forth for the next two years. In May 1929, the Hunan-Hubei border base covered two entire counties and parts of others. The troops were named the 3rd Red Army. In the meantime, Zhou managed to establish another Soviet base in Honghu of Hubei and the 6th Red Army.[17] Up to mid-1930, this broad area was regarded as an important Soviet domain, second only to Mao's Jiangxi

Soviet. The creation of the Western Hunan-Hubei Soviet (Xiangexi Soviet) should be largely credited to He Long's personal relations and influences in the area. And yet, as a Nationalist officer newly converted to Communism, He seemed too much accustomed to both abiding by old military norms and ignoring political work on the one hand, and too ready to comply with Party Center directives without adequate independent initiatives on the other. Such a situation probably contributed to this base area's lacking the vitality and momentum of some other Soviets.

The Pingjiang Uprising, led by Peng Dehuai and Deng Daiyuan in July 1928, revitalized an old strategy of Communist rebellion: to incite mutinies within the KMT armies. Peng was a regiment commander in a KMT local army and, through the agitation of Deng, a Communist agent, he led his entire regiment of 3,000 men to join the Communists at the city of Pingjiang in Hunan. A three month-long clash with the government troops reduced Peng's 5th Red Army to no more than 2,000. In November, Peng and Deng decided to transfer their main force to unite with Mao and Zhu in the Jinggang Mountains. The remaining troops were placed under Huang Gonglue's command to conduct guerrilla warfare; later they established the Hunan-Hubei-Jiangxi Soviet.[18]

Further to the South, two more mutinies occurred in Baise and Longzhou of Guangxi under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, Zhang Yunyi, Yu Zuoyu and Li Mingrui. The Baise Uprising brought about the Youjiang Soviet and the 7th Red Army in late 1929, while the Longzhou Uprising set up the Zuojiang Soviet and the 8th Red Army in early 1930. For a short while, the two Red Armies totalled about 8,000 men occupying a vast territory of a dozen counties. But because the whole area was isolated from other Communist forces and thus countering Nationalist pressures on all sides—and perhaps also because Deng Xiaoping was the special commissioner entrusted by the Party Center with the general responsibility and thus appeared more interested in bringing the troops north to the Communist mainstream than maintaining a single base area in the distant south, the Youjiang and Zuojiang Soviets were from the beginning in a state of flux.[19]

Exceptionally and yet reasonably, two peasant uprisings occurred in Shaanxi province, one in Qingjian in November 1927 and another in Weinan and Huaxian in April 1928, and constituted some rare cases in North China. These rebellions were thoroughly defeated and did not result in formation of any enduring Soviet bases or regular Red Army units until after 1930. The early Communist leaders in this province included native Shaanxians Du Heng, Yang Guodong, Liu Zhidan, Xie Zichang and others. Their local acquaintance with people and armies sustained their continuous guerrilla activities in a few rural spots, though geographic isolation from the central Communist movement hindered rapid expansion.[20]

Features and Patterns of Soviet Revolution

Contemporary Communist politicians and later historians have discussed a variety of factors justifying the formation and expansion of the Soviet movement in China in the 1930s. By consensus, these factors can be assigned to one of two categories: objective conditions and subjective efforts. The first category may include the jealousy and rivalry among various military factions in the Nationalist government, and the political vacuum and autonomy of the Chinese countryside. Of these conditions, the latter seemed less apparent but more portentous. For much of Chinese history, the rural society remained a domain independent of the state government and one offering various possibilities for peasant rebels, secret associates, local despots, bandits and warlords to challenge the government's authority. These possibilities were turned—through the sophisticated agitations of Communists—into the dazzling reality of a mass revolutionary movement.

The Chinese Communist Party was never a monolithic entity, and Chinese Soviet movements in different areas might vary widely in nature. In a different sort of study, these divergences within the Soviet movement might be a subject matter of focal attention. More interesting for the present study, however, are the common features that can be found in the Soviet movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s in general.

Party Leadership. The need for exclusive leadership of the Communist Party over the Chinese revolution was one of the basic lessons the Communists had learned in the late 1920s, and would stress throughout the 1930s.[21] The leaders of the Nanchang Uprising were scolded after its failure for continuing to apply the name of KMT Revolutionary Committee; Mao Zedong upheld only the banner of the Communist Party at the Autumn Harvest Uprising; the Canton Uprising called for establishment of a municipal Soviet or Commune—all these gestures marked a process of ever increasing emphasis on the CCP's independent leadership. By 1928, this phase had already left a clear mark on Communist jargon: freshly converted Communist officers He Long and Peng Dehuai would need to recite such amiable remarks as "Listen to the Party's words" and "Follow the Party's steps." Apart from showing a strong determination to separate from and fight against the KMT, the emphasis on the CCP's sole leadership intensely stimulated Marxist-Leninist type ideological propaganda, social and economic reform, mass mobilization, militant organization, and strict discipline—especially among military leaders and local cadres.

The terms 'Communism' and 'Communist Party' were in the vocabulary but beyond the comprehension of ordinary peasants and soldiers. The Communist Party was an association of the poor, and Communism meant each poor man could get a piece of land—this might be the extent of their understanding.[22] Nonetheless, even this limited understanding could be a