

The Long March

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ABSTRACT

On October 16, 1934, 100,000 Chinese Communist troops set out on a 6,000 mile trek from their base in Kiangsi. This trek, later to be known as the Long March, began after Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist armies (the Kuomintang) thwarted the fledgling Communist organization in Southeast China. The Long March was an arduous journey; approximately 90,000 men and women died before it was over. However, communism was not eliminated in China. This paper argues that the Long March galvanized commitment to the communist cause and thus was the key precursor to the eventual victory of the Communist Party in China in 1949. By narrowly escaping defeat and destruction through the Long March, the Communists were able to re-build support to fight the Nationalists once again – and this time they won.

THE CHINESE REVOLUTION AND SUN YAT SEN

The Chinese Revolution began in 1911 with the overthrow of the Manchu government and the establishment of the New Republic of China. Before the Revolution, the Chinese lived mainly in competing clans and were ruled by rival war lords. During China's long history, its people had never functioned as one cohesive unit. Because of the threat of Japan, Great Britain, and the Industrial Revolution, China needed to become a stronger unit. The unification of China was an important development for a number of reasons. Most important was that unification served to defend China against Japanese invasion and also set the stage for a national economy. China was extremely xenophobic, and the bureaucracy did not want to change. Some individuals, however, dreamed of a united Chinese nation, and it was this dream that energized the revolutionaries in China.

Of these individuals, the most important was Sun Yat Sen. The "Father of Republican China," Sun was born on November 12, 1866 in the southern province of Guangdong.¹ At age thirteen Sun went to live with his brother in Honolulu, Hawaii where he attended a missionary school. After four years in Hawaii, Sun moved to Hong Kong where he studied medicine. However, at age twenty-eight Sun returned to Hawaii, and left the medical profession for politics. After the defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Sun returned to Guangdong. During the next sixteen years, he began to develop his revolutionary ideas. He attracted many supporters, financial and otherwise, and staged a number of unsuccessful attempts to overthrow

the Manchu government. Sun realized that the only way to ensure China's survival as a country was to make radical changes inside the government. Sun felt that it was imperative for China to "westernize" in terms of scientific and social progress.² In 1905, Sun established the T'ung-meng Hui (United Revolutionary League) that was based on his "Three Principles of the People." His three principles were:

1. Nationalism: to supersede the narrow provincial and clan loyalties of the Chinese
2. Democracy: to carry into national life the self-governing processes prevalent in the villages
3. People's Well-Being: to improve the material standards of the ordinary man's life.³

Sun Yat Sen's dream of a new republic did not come to fruition until October 10, 1911.

By 1916 Sun Yat Sen was the President of the New Republic of China. During his reign, Sun founded the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), which had support from not only the Soviet Party but the Communist Party in China as well. In 1924, Sun admitted the Chinese Communists into the Nationalist Party. During his career, Sun attempted to unify all of China. Sun Yat Sen died on March 12, 1925 with his dream of unification unfulfilled. With the death of Sun Yat Sen, internal struggles plagued the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. During these struggles Chiang Kai-Shek emerged as chief of the National Revolutionary Army.

²Dick Wilson. *The Long March* New York: Viking Press, 1971, page 10.

³Ibid., page 11.

¹"Sun Yat Sen." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1967 ed., page 430.

CHIANG KAI-SHEK AND THE DREAM OF A UNIFIED CHINA

The dream of a unified China did not die with Sun Yat Sen. Chiang Kai-Shek was heavily influenced by him. Chiang was born October 31, 1887 in the coastal province of Chekiang. Unlike Sun Yat Sen, Chiang was born to wealthy parents. In 1906 he began his military career in Northern China at the Paoting Military Academy. After one year, he began his four year military education in Japan. Chiang served in the Japanese army from 1909-1911, but when he received word of the uprisings in China, he returned home and began to try to overthrow the Manchu government. By 1918, Chiang Kai-Shek was a member of the Kuomintang. Chiang, along with Sun Yat Sen, believed in the unification of China.

While visiting the Soviet Union for the first time in 1923, Chiang studied not only the Soviet institutions but the Red Army as well. Upon returning from his visit in the Soviet Union, Chiang became a "commandant of a military academy, established on the Soviet model, at Whampoa near Canton."⁴ The admission of the Chinese Communists into the Kuomintang which occurred during Sun Yat Sen's presidency, later became a great problem for Chiang Kai Shek. There were tensions among the two parties that superseded any positive factors of the alliance. The far right of the Kuomintang and the far left of the Chinese Communists rarely saw eye-to-eye. The collaboration between the two parties was imperative for the overthrowing of the warlord regime during the Northern Expedition in 1927, but as soon as that was over, the two parties did not need one another anymore. According to Wilson:

While the Party Central Committee respected the motion of the Internationale, most of the comrades had only approved a democratic revolutionary united front and were quite doubtful about entering the Kuomintang. [The] Chinese Communist Party was able to pursue its goal of organizing mass support under the Kuomintang umbrella - and retained control of this organization after the united front collapsed."⁵

Tensions mounted between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party until 1927 when Chiang finally expelled the Communists from his party. At this time, Chiang lost the support of the Soviet Union.

While Chiang was struggling to deal with the Chinese Communist Party, he was also working to unify all of China. A large number of warlords maintained control over their lands and the people on them. Facing the imminent invasion of the Japanese, the pressure to quickly unite China into one cohesive unit was immense. In 1926 Chiang began a campaign against the

warlords in the northern part of the country. After two years, the fighting ended when the Nationalist Party entered the capital, Peking. Chiang then established a new central government at Nanking. Although Chiang was the leader of the government he still did not have complete control. The warlords in the northern part of the country and the Chinese Communists were still opposed to Chiang Kai Shek. Facing "certain war" with Japan in 1931, Chiang decided not to resist the Japanese invasion until he defeated the Chinese Communists.⁶ At this time, he launched a number of encirclement campaigns in an attempt to defeat the Communists in their base area on the Kiangsi-Fukien border. The Communists, using guerrilla warfare, successfully fought off the Kuomintang four times. But in 1934, they finally lost their base to the Nationalists. Chiang believed that when the Kuomintang captured the Communist base that the Communists would give up. Instead, they abandoned their base and began a long trek from one side of China to the other.

MAO ZEDONG AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

Mao Zedong, the eventual Chairman of the New Republic of China did not allow the Communists to disappear. This charismatic leader and poet helped ensure the survival of 8% of the 100,000 troops who undertook the Long March. Mao was born on December 26, 1893 in the Hunan Province of China to peasants who had prospered by hard work. Mao was rebellious by nature and left his father's farm early in life to attend school. Upon graduating from normal school in 1918, Mao went to Peking where he worked as a library assistant. He met two men in Peking who influenced him: Li Ta-chao and Ch'en Tu-hsiu. These men, "whose social criticism drew him into their orbit," were the founders of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.⁷ During the next few years, Mao held various positions in the Chinese Communist Party until 1927. He began to realize that the "major force" in China was discontentment of the peasants and he wrote a report "which constituted one of his major contributions to Chinese Communism."⁸ Mao believed that the peasants should own their own land and not be responsible for land that is not theirs. He thought that millions of peasants would "rise like a tornado or tempest - a force so extraordinarily swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it."⁹ Mao organized the Autumn Harvest rebellions hoping that the peasants would be particularly unhappy and angry at their government. He planned a military uprising at Nanchang, and hoped that "the Red Armies under Ho Lung, Yeh Ting and other Communist guer-

⁶ "Chiang Kai-shek." page 479.

⁷ "Mao Tse-Tung." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1967 ed., page 817.

⁸ Wilson, page 29.

⁹ Ibid.

⁴ "Chiang Kai-shek." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 1967 ed., page 478.

⁵ Wilson, page 19.

rilla chieftains [would] then ... march triumphantly on Canton to establish a new revolutionary government."¹⁰ However, the victory and eventual capture of Nanchang never materialized. The peasants did not have the interest that Mao believed they had in revolting against Chiang Kai Shek. Mao was captured and had to bribe his way out of captivity, eventually leading some of his troops to the mountains of Ching kangshan on the border of Hunan and Kiangsi. Because of Mao's unfortunate handling of the Autumn Harvest Uprising he was expelled from the Politburo. Mao began to lose "favour with the Communist Party leadership."¹¹ The intellectuals who ran the party were unhappy with Mao's obsession with, "confiscating the landlords' land in Hunan."¹²

In spite of the Party leaders' disillusionment with Mao, he began to build power among the peasants in Ching kangshan. Mao Zedong and Chu Teh "steadily extended the territory under their control, and the Mao-Chu group began to go by the name of the 'Real Power Faction.'"¹³ In June 1930 the Central Committee ordered the Red Armies "to integrate themselves under Mao's and Chu's command, to leave their rural bases and to launch attacks on a number of nearby industrial cities, notably Wuhan and Changsha."¹⁴ Both Chu Teh and Mao knew that this plan was not best for the Party, but they were unable to reject it. The Red Army was no match for the Kuomintang and Mao and Chu "withdrew their troops and reorganized at Kian in Kiangsi, determined to rebuild the rural base from which they believed they could, over the longer term, erode the power of the Kuomintang."¹⁵

Because of the defeat of the Red Army by the Kuomintang, the leader, Li Li-san was replaced. Morale was very low among the peasants, which eventually led to Mao's leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Mao became Political Commissar of the Fourth Red Army with Chu Teh as Commander-in-Chief. This army was set up in such a way that it was a paid service and had rations. The army also followed Mao's "Three Rules of Discipline (obey orders, don't take anything from workers or peasants, and hand in everything taken from local landlords and gentry) and Eight Additional Rules (put back the doors you use for bed-boards, replace the straw borrowed for bedding, speak politely, pay fairly for what you buy, return everything you borrow, pay for anything you damage, don't bathe in the sight of women, and don't search the pockets of captives)."¹⁶ The troops also had a very famous expression on the "principles of guerrilla warfare":

If the enemy advances, we retreat.

If the enemy halts and encamps, we harass.

If the enemy seeks to avoid battle, we attack.

If the enemy retreats, we pursue.¹⁷

Mao's discipline and organizational habits were instrumental in the success of the Chinese Communist Party. Over the next few years more people began to respect Mao and his beliefs. He gradually gained supporters not only in the Red Army but also in the Chinese Communist Party.

In 1931 Mao ordered the arrest of more than four thousand men because he believed that they were involved secretly with the Kuomintang. Mao wanted to purge his army of anyone that was not with him and the Chinese Communists one hundred percent. Liu Ti, an officer with the Red Army, freed these prisoners who in turn killed approximately one hundred of Mao's disciples. The Politburo did not look favorably on Mao's tough actions during this mutiny and he again fell out of favor with the Politburo and was replaced by Chou En-lai.

During this time of political unrest in the Red Army, Chiang Kai-shek began the first of his five encirclement campaigns to defeat the Chinese Communist Party. The Communists won the first four of these campaigns due to their guerrilla warfare tactics, but by the fifth encirclement campaign in August 1933, Chiang Kai-shek was prepared. There were one million troops, an immense arsenal and four hundred airplanes at Chiang's disposal. The campaign was interrupted, however, after the troops of the Nineteenth Route Army became disgruntled with Chiang and his policy of "pacifying the Chinese interior before turning to deal with the Japanese, even though they had themselves fought against the Communists in the past."¹⁸ This ordeal caused a great lull in the fifth encirclement campaign and fighting did not resume until August of 1934. Mao and Chu Teh both agreed that the

Red Army should break through the ever-tightening Kuomintang circle, split into small units and fight guerrilla campaigns in the areas to the north and east of the enemy lines where there were no blockhouses.¹⁹

Li Teh (also known as Otto Braun), who had the confidence of the world Communist leaders, rejected Mao and Chu Teh's advice and said that the base should be defended using trenches, positional combat and blockhouses. This strategy proved fatal for the Chinese Communist Party. On October 16, 1934 the remaining survivors of the Kuomintang offensives began the "most extraordinary march in human history."²⁰

¹⁰Ibid., page 20.

¹¹Ibid., page 29.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., page 23.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., page 24.

¹⁶Ibid., page 42.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., page 53.

¹⁹Ibid., page 56.

²⁰Ibid., page xiii.

THE LONG MARCH

On November 13, 1934 the *New York Times* reported:

The six-year Communist capital Juichin, in Kiangsi Province, was officially reported today to have been occupied yesterday by government forces. Its capture was more a result of a steady military and economic blockade than of severe fighting. Dislodged from this stronghold, the Reds are now making their way westward toward the Kweichow and Szechwan provincial borders. . . . General Chiang Kai-shek is actively watching developments.²¹

On October 16, 1934, one hundred thousand troops set out on a six thousand mile trek from the southern part of China to the northern part of China. This "long march" took one year and many troops perished. It was clear to Mao and his fellow comrades that they had to leave Kiangsi or face annihilation. As the remaining one hundred thousand troops of Chinese Communist soldiers set out on their long journey, morale was exceedingly low. Twenty thousand troops were injured and had to be left behind in Kiangsi. Many of the people who stayed behind were captured and eventually killed. One of those killed was Mao's brother, Mao Tse-tan.

Conditions on the march were very primitive, causing many of the troops to die of disease. There were no medicines, hospitals or ammunition; a good number of the guns became useless. The troops were forced to fast for days at a time. Despite these horrible circumstances, the troops became very tough and courageous soldiers.

Reports in the United States varied as to the information of the Nationalists' success in Kiangsi. In a November 19, 1934 article in the *New York Times*, the AP reported: "The Chinese Communists continued their slow movement westward, engaging frequently with troops. The Communist strength is estimated at about 50,000."²² In a November 20, 1934 article in the *New York Times* Hallett Abend reported that "The main Communist force, exceeding 100,000 a year ago, has now been reduced to about 10,000."²³

Mao was unable to start the march with the troops on October 16, 1934 due to a debilitating bout of malaria. When Mao was able to join his troops he rode on horseback most of the time. Other than Mao, the only other person who did not walk was Li Teh (Otto Braun). According to Dick Wilson's *The Long March*, "He would never march, and either rode a horse along the route or else, if it were a long stretch, would be carried on a

wooden litter by four carriers."²⁴ It is clear, though, that this grueling journey was not a luxurious time. Every soldier on the march was "dressed and equipped the same."²⁵

"Each man," said the chief artillery engineer afterwards, "carried five pounds of ration rice and each had a shoulder pole from which hung either two small boxes of ammunition or hand grenades, or big kerosene cans filled with our most essential machinery and tools. Each pack contained a blanket or quilt, one quilted winter uniform, and three pairs of strong cloth shoes with thick rope soles tipped and heeled with metal."²⁶

After three horrible months of defeats and deaths, the Chinese Communist Party finally gained the upper hand. In early January 1935, the Chinese Communist Party took control over Tsunyi in the Kweichow Province. The Communist Party decided to rest in Tsunyi while a meeting of the Politburo of the Party Central Committee was convened. It was in Tsunyi that Mao regained his control of the Chinese Communist Party, "thereafter its dominating personality . . . who led it into power fifteen years later."²⁷ This was an important time not only for Mao but for his troops as well. "The Tsunyi Resolutions adopted on January 8, 1935 constitute[d] the most important document to be produced on the Long March."²⁸ This document states that the leadership under Po Ku of the Politburo and Li Teh (Otto Braun) of the Military Commission was condemnable. Po Ku's famous slogan of "Not an inch of soviet territory to be lost" might have been correct politically but applying that to warfare was a mistake.²⁹

The Po Ku policy of 'pure defence' had meant disposing the Communist forces so that they could resist attack from all directions, which meant not being strong enough to resist anywhere and enabling the enemy to destroy the Red units one by one."³⁰

This was just one of the fourteen resolutions and by the end of the meeting, Po Ku was "specifically named for . . . failing to admit criticism of the overwhelming majority" of the conference. Mao Zedong summed up the conference by stating:

The enlarged conference of the Politburo points out that the mistakes in the Party's military leadership in the past were only a partial mistake in the general line of the Party, which was not enough to cause pessimism and despair. The Party has bravely

²⁴Wilson, page 70.

²⁵Ibid., page 67.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., page 91.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., page 93.

³⁰Ibid.

²¹*New York Times* 14 November 1934: Sec. I, page 7.

²²*New York Times* 19 November 1934: Sec. I, page 14.

²³*New York Times* 20 November 1934: Sec. I, page 11.

exposed its own mistakes. It has educated itself through them and learnt how to lead the revolutionary war more efficiently towards victory. After the exposure of mistakes, the Party, instead of being weakened, actually becomes stronger.³¹

During the Red Army's resting period and conference in Tsunyi, Chiang Kai-shek was trying to take back the towns that the Red Army had occupied. According to a January 7, 1935 report in the *New York Times*, "Serious pressure of outlaw troops of the important city of Kweiyang, in Kweichow Province of Southwestern China, was reported relieved today by the arrival of government troop reinforcements rapidly thrust in from Hunan and Kwangsi Provinces."³² As reported in the *New York Times* on January 26, 1935 "A motley horde of Chinese peasants, the curiously armed 'Chinese militia,' streamed into Chungking today to help Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist armies defend Szechwan Province against Communists."³³ There was increasing hostility and fear among the people in the Kweichow Province of China that was reduced when the Kuomintang arrived to take back the towns.

After the Tsunyi Conference, Mao was named Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council and the entire Council was reorganized. It has been written, in retrospect, that Tsunyi

is the point at which the mass flight of the Red Armies was stemmed and the Long March began: when Chu Teh's superb generalship and Mao Tse-tung's political acumen united to turn defeat into victory.³⁴

After Tsunyi, Mao was ready to strike. He set up a new base in Szechuan with the Fourth Front Army which was already established there. In this new location the Communists would be out of the direct control of the Kuomintang. Szechuan was an area rich in "both foodstuffs and minerals."³⁵ Chiang Kai-shek was determined to defeat the Red Army and gain control over the southwestern provinces. Chiang joined forces with the local warlords to try to establish a stranglehold on the Chinese Communists. In order for the Red Army to gain entry into Szechuan, they needed to cross the Yangtze River. Reported in the *New York Times* on February 8, 1935, a special cable from Nanking relayed:

With the receipt of abundant financial aid the government troops sent to Chungking as the vanguard of a large-scale movement against Communists in Szechwan Province finally are on the move ... The Chinese

banks' remittance rates have fallen decidedly following the bolstering of public confidence and the subsiding of the fears of a Communist incursion.³⁶

After five weeks of attempting to cross the Yangtze, the Red Army retreated and recaptured the Luoshan Pass and Tsunyi on February 27, 1935, which they had lost several weeks prior to that. In a poem Mao Zedong expressed his feelings about the Luoshan Pass:

Cold blows the west wind
Far off in the frosty air
The wild geese call
In the morning moonlight
In the morning moonlight
Horses' hoofs ring out sharply
And the bugle's note
Is muted
Do not say that the pass is defended with iron
This very day
At one step
We shall cross over it
We shall cross over it
The hills are blue like the sea
And the dying sun is like blood³⁷

After a few bitter defeats of Mao's Fourth Front Army by the Kuomintang in Szechuan, the First Front Army crossed the Wu River and entered Kweiyang, the capital of Kweichow in April 1935. After Mao's troops arrived at Kweiyang, Chiang sent his Kuomintang troops there. Unexpectedly, Mao pulled his army out and headed to Yunnan. Mao was a strategist; and he divided his troops on the way to Yunnan, causing a diversion. Chiang was confident that he could finish off the Red Army on the banks of the Yangtze, but he underestimated Mao. The Red Army captured seven enemy ferry boats, "crossed the Chinsha River at the Chiaoche Ferry in nine days and nine nights" and "extricated itself from the several hundred thousand Kuomintang troops hot on its heels or trying to intercept and encircle it."³⁸

Articles in the *New York Times* reported over the period of twelve days said, "As predicted, the Communists in Northern Kweichow Province are proving a grave menace, and it is evident that recent Nanking assertions about their elimination are not justified."³⁹ Another April 3rd article stated that "Communists in Kweichow Province who broke through provincial troops captured today the city of Chihshui, swept south and occupied Tungtze and Tsunyi and approached within forty miles of Kweiyang, capital of the province. Although it was believed Kweiyang was in no immediate danger, the populace was highly excited when reports were received that Communists, numbering about 10,000, were again swinging southwest into

³¹Ibid., page 96.

³²*New York Times* 7 January 1935: Sec. I, page 11.

³³*New York Times* 26 January 1935: Sec. I, page 10.

³⁴Wilson, page 109.

³⁵Ibid., page 111.

³⁶*New York Times* 8 February 1935: Sec. I, page 5.

³⁷Wilson, page 115.

³⁸Ibid., page 120.

³⁹*New York Times* 4 April 1935: Sec. I, page 12.

Yunnan Province.”⁴⁰ On April 5th, 8th and 10th it was reported that the Red Army’s advance has been “checked.” By April 15th, the *New York Times* reported that the Red Army had occupied the towns of Tingfan, Changchai, Pingchai and Anshun. Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party were viewed as a group of miscreants who terrified not only the Chinese but other countries as well.

In May 1935 the Red Army faced its most challenging obstacle in the entirety of the Long March: the Tatu River.

The current is too rapid for navigation, and ferrying across is extremely risky. The water roars like thunder and throws up rainbow mists as it crashes against the cliffs. Where the main roads cross the Tatu there are usually bridges made of iron chains or ropes.⁴¹

If the Red Army did not cross successfully, the Long March would be over. From May 26th to 28th, 1935 the Red Army ferried their troops across. On the third day the troops were slowed down and the Kuomintang began to bomb the Red Army from above. At Luting, with the Kuomintang waiting for them on the other side, the Red Army began to cross the iron chain suspension bridge. All of the planks had been removed, yet miraculously the Red Army was able to cross it; only seventeen people perished.

After crossing the Tatu River the Red Army was now less than a hundred miles from their Fourth Front Army in northeastern Szechuan. On the way to the Kansu province, the Red Army had to traverse seven ranges of high mountains. One of these was the Great Snow Mountain (Chiachinshan). Before the troops made their ascent, they ran into Tibetan warriors where some fighting occurred. The Red Army troops disarmed and took the Tibetan’s clothing in order to stay warm during their ascent of the Great Snow Mountain. Mao, who was sick with malaria again, had to rest after ascending sixteen thousand feet, while Lin Piao, the official historian of the Long March, had both of his legs amputated due to frostbite. After the Long March one survivor said of the Great Snow Mountain:

Chiachinshan is blanketed in eternal snow. There are great glaciers in its chasms and everything is white and silent. We were heavily burdened because each man had to carry enough food and fuel to last ten days. Our food was anything we could buy – chiefly corn, though we had a little buckwheat and some peppers. We carried our food in long cloth pouches over our shoulders. General Chu carried his food like everyone else. He had a horse but he gave it

to sick or wounded men to ride.⁴²

The troops were exhausted, but they needed to reach the other side in order to connect with the Fourth Front Army. The troops would march late in the evening so as to avoid enemy bombing. The rain, snow and fierce wind caused more men to die of exhaustion and cold. After days of severe weather the Red Army finally reached the sunny summit. Later Mao recalled some of his memories of climbing the Great Snow Mountain in a poem:

Towering aloft
Above the earth
Great Kunlun
You have witnessed all that was fairest
In the human world
As they fly across the sky, the three million
dragons
Of white jade
Freeze you with piercing cold
In the days of summer
Your melting torrents
Fill streams and rivers till they overflow
Changing men
Into fish and turtles
What man can pass judgment
On all the good and evil
You have done
These thousand autumns?
But today
I say to you, Kunlun
You don’t need your great height
You don’t need all that snow!
If I could lean on the sky
I would draw my sword
And cut you in three pieces
One I would send to Europe
One to America
And one we would keep in China.
Thus would a great peace
Reign through the world
For all the world would share our warmth
and cold⁴³

After the Red Army arrived safely in Moukung and reunited with the Fourth Front Army, there were feelings of uncertainty. During all of the fighting with the Kuomintang there was some infighting between the First Front Army led by Mao Zedong and the Fourth Front Army led by Zhang Guotao.

Between Zhang and Mao there were also separated yet aligned interests: their individual political interests, the interests of the armed forces to which they belonged, and the interests of the Communist Party and Red Army in the face of their general

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Wilson, page 151.

⁴²Ibid., page 177.

⁴³Ibid., pages 182-83.

Nationalist enemy.⁴⁴

Zhang believed that his army was the strongest, most viable army and deserved to be shown the appropriate amount of respect. On June 25, 1935 the Politburo held a conference in Lianghekou trying to plan the tasks (i.e. military maneuvers) of the Communists after the conference. After the Lianghekou conference was over there were five resolutions, three of which are as follows:

1. After the union of the First and Fourth Red Front Armies, our strategic policy is to apply our main forces to attack at the north, to destroy the enemy in large numbers in mobile warfare, to take over southern Gansu first and then to create the Sichuan-Shaanxi-Gansu Soviet Base. Thus, we will put the Chinese Soviet movement on a firmer and broader base foundation or foothold in order to strive for victory in the northwestern provinces and eventually in all China.
2. To realize this strategic policy, tactically, we must concentrate our main forces to destroy Hu Zongnan's troops, to capture Songpan and control the region north of Songpan in order to achieve a successful march to southern Gansu.
3. One part of the Red Army – a minor part of the Red Army – should be dispatched to the Yao and Xia Rivers to control this region so that we can back on the vast area of Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang provinces, which would be to the benefit of development toward the east.⁴⁵

After all the discussions, the conference concluded with no decisive resolution. Mao asked Zhang, "How about leaving the matter for further consideration?"⁴⁶ This did not placate Zhang for long, though. It has been shown that at the time of the union between these two armies that there were ten to fifteen thousand troops in the First Front Army and sixty to seventy thousand in the Fourth Front Army. Zhang was displeased with the conference in June because he believed that it favored the Central Red Army and Mao Zedong. A battle plan called "Operation of the Songpan Battle" stated that the Red Army in its entirety needed to march north to capture the city of Songpan in order to pass to Gansu.⁴⁷ Zhang was extremely reluctant to follow these orders because he had not voted for these plans and did not wish to sacrifice his own men. Mao's troops rushed to Songpan but, as he did not want to fight the battle alone, he had to stop and renegotiate with Zhang. In mid July, Zhang and Mao met in Luhua where there was another conference. This conference was more about who could assert the most power rather than about finding a viable solution to their problem. The result of the Luhua conference was as follows:

Zhang Guotao obtained the de facto control of the Army leadership . . . The Front Headquarters was in charge of combat operations; its commander and political commissar were both from the Fourth Front Army.

As for Mao, his membership in the Three-Man-Group was automatically dropped, his assistantship to Zhou in military affairs was even more out of the question, and his former position as Political Commissar of the Front Headquarters was given to Chen Ghanghao. In other words, Mao lost all his titles and power in the Red Army.⁴⁸

Mao was extremely uncomfortable with his loss of position in the Red Army, but he was still very influential in the Party Center and was considered the spokesman for the First Front Army. Zhang was unhappy with this because he could not assert control over the First Front Army with Mao still as influential as he was. Zhang and his men also had designs on positions in the Party Center, so another conference was called to discuss these issues.

On August 5th and 6th, 1935 a Politburo conference convened at Shawo. This meeting has been considered the "most important event in the reunion of the First and Fourth Front Armies."⁴⁹ The conference at Shawo was the first conference since Tsunyi to seriously deal with political issues. A part of the final Resolution of the Shawo Conference reads as follows:

The fraternal solidarity of the First and Fourth Front Armies is a necessary condition for fulfilling our historical mission of creating the Sichuan-Shaanxi-Gansu Soviet and establishing the Chinese Soviet Republic. All those tendencies, intentional or unintentional, toward breaking the solidarity of the First and Fourth Front Armies can only be harmful to the Red Army and beneficial to the enemy.

It should be made clear to each individual comrade that both the First and Fourth Front Armies are constituents of the Chinese Worker and Peasant Red Army, and both were under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. There are only class love and aid between us, not divergence and contradiction. Only in this way can the union of the First and Fourth Front Armies be firm and lasting, can we combine into one unit to defeat our class enemy.⁵⁰

While all of this infighting was going on, Chiang Kai-shek was slowly encircling the Red Army to prevent it

⁴⁴ Benjamin Yang. *From Revolution to Politics; Chinese Communists on the Long March* Boulder: Westview Press, 1990, page 143.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, page 145.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, page 148.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, page 149.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, page 151.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, page 152.

from re-entering eastern Sichuan. The Red Army was surrounded on every side, except to the west due to limiting terrain, and the Kuomintang patiently waited. Mao took the "First and Third Army Groups of the First Front Army and the Fourth and Thirtieth Armies of the Fourth Front Army" on the eastern route, while Zhang took the "Ninth and Thirty-first Armies of the Fourth Army and the Fifth and Ninth Army Groups of the First Front Army" on the western route.⁵¹ This began the historic crossing of the Grasslands of Chinghai.

The land known as the Grasslands of Chinghai is a part of the Songpan plateau. It is between six and nine thousand feet above sea-level, but it is not mountainous. In the summer months "green grass grows everywhere and makes excellent pasture for the Tibetans' yaks and horses. But it rains for eight or nine months in the year, and the drainage is poor."⁵² Because of the excessive amounts of rain, the land becomes marshy. August was the worst month in the Grasslands for rain and mosquitoes and because the Red Army's medical supplies were low and basically non-existent, many succumbed to "black malaria."⁵³ The Red Army had great difficulty procuring food during this part of the Long March. Because the land was so marshy, the troops were unable to make fire, making it impossible to cook what provisions they did have. The troops ate grain and vegetables raw, causing some men to become violently ill. "On emerging from the Grasslands the depleted Red Army encountered the Nineteenth Division of Hu Tsung-nan at Paotso, but was able to scatter it without too much difficulty."⁵⁴ Chiang Kai-shek had only one more opportunity to defeat his enemies before they landed in the northern provinces of China.

The Kuomintang constructed trenches and bunkers and installed its guns at the Latzu Pass, between the waters of the Pailung and Min Rivers. The only way the Red Army could cross the Latzu Pass was to climb the single-plank bridge over the river, which the Kuomintang controlled. The Red Army sent three companies of climbers to scale the right bank, and they made it possible for the Communist force to capture the bridge and defeat the Kuomintang.

At the end of October 1935, the troops that survived the Long March arrived in the town of Wuchichen in the northern Shensi soviet area. After the troops settled down, Mao "led a party over to Hsiashihwan, the seat of government of the soviet area and headquarters of the Shesni-Kansu Provincial Party Committee. Membership totalled less than forty thousand upon entering Shensi in October 1935."⁵⁵ Professor Howard L. Boorman sums up the Long March best by stating:

When Mao Tse-tung and his threadbare band arrived in the loesslands of Shensi, they represented a force, which, even on an optimistic estimate, was only a marginal element in Chinese political life viewed on a national basis. Sustained principally by discipline, hope and political formulae, Mao's group had, however, fortuitously garnered several hidden assets which were later to prove of major significance.⁵⁶

THE IMPACT OF THE LONG MARCH

The commitment and sheer determination that enabled the remaining troops to survive the Long March helped the Chinese Communists establish themselves as the future leaders of China. Had the Long March never occurred, it is quite possible that China would be today under Japanese rule.

Mao Zedong's strategic genius helped establish the Chinese Communist Party as indestructible. Because of his guerrilla warfare tactics during the encirclement campaigns and his innate ability to know what the Kuomintang and Chiang Kai-shek were going to do, he brought a sense of mystery and power to his Party.

When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, Chiang Kai-shek realized that he needed the assistance of the Soviet Union in order to survive. In order to gain the assistance of the Soviet Union, Chiang needed to amend the tense, combative situation with the Chinese Communist Party. Mao had wanted to unify China for years and he looked upon this opportunity as a way to "break the ice in their relations with the KMT as a whole."⁵⁷ On February 10, 1937 the Chinese Communist Party sent a telegram to Chiang Kai-shek with five conditions that needed to be met in order for the alliance to occur. Chiang and the Kuomintang needed to:

1. Stop the civil war and unite all forces to fight the Japanese
2. Grant freedom to the people and release all political prisoners
3. Hold a national conference of all parties and circles
4. Prepare for an anti-Japanese war
5. Improve the people's welfare.⁵⁸

If these conditions were met the Chinese Communist Party would fulfill four promises. It would:

1. Abolish the CCP rebellious policies against the KMT government

⁵¹ Wilson, pages 201-02.

⁵² Ibid., page 204.

⁵³ Ibid., page 206.

⁵⁴ Ibid., page 222.

⁵⁵ Ibid., page 233.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pages 234-35.

⁵⁷ Yang, page 239.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

2. Change the Soviet into a special region of the Republic and Red Army as a part of the Nationalist Army
3. Realize a democratic government of the people in a general election
4. Abandon the land distribution policy⁵⁹

After making amendments to these requests the two parties came to an agreement for unification on September 15, 1937. This collaboration "proved to be a great success for the CCP as a political party and for Mao as an individual person."⁶⁰

The Sino-Japanese War took place from 1937 until 1945. During these years, the Chinese Communist Party honed its ability to persevere. The Red Army was extremely disciplined and organized, allowing it to strengthen its influence during this time. Had the two parties not been aligned with one another, it is doubtful that the invasion of Japan could have been ended. Mao Zedong and his troops were underestimated not only by the Nationalists but also by the Japanese. The Japanese never "expected that the Communist guerrillas could become their most potent enemy and that all the territory they took over from the hostile Nationalists in North China would become the kingdom of the even more hostile Communists."⁶¹ Although the Communists and Mao Zedong did not come into

power until 1949, it is clear that the Long March galvanized commitment to the Communist cause and was thus the precursor to the eventual victory of the Communist Party in China. Mao's ability to negotiate and make decisions enabled him to take over China in 1949. Mao knew that in order for the Chinese Communist Party to survive he needed to "stress three magic wands: Party organization, military struggle, and the united front."⁶² Mao's determination during the Long March solidified his eventual position as Chairman of the New Republic of China.

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⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., page 242.

⁶¹Ibid., page 251.

⁶²Ibid., page 257.