

MAO ZEDONG

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PART ONE: THE RISE OF MAO

The Basic Outline



Mao, left, proclaiming the People's Republic¹

The Chinese empire collapsed in 1911, largely as a result of its failure to withstand the challenge of European nations and Japan, who had inflicted devastating military defeats and imposed humiliating treaties which had given them territory and commercial privileges. The country had fallen behind the West both technically and economically. Deep poverty was widespread among the peasantry; communications and financial

institutions were primitive. The dominant political force in China during the inter-war years was the Nationalist Party (or Guomindong – GMD), whose first prominent leader was Sun Yat-Sen, who died of liver cancer in 1925 to be replaced by Chiang Kai-Shek. Although Sun saw the Nationalists as a progressive socialist force, favouring social and economic reform, under Chiang they became more closely associated with middle and upper class elites. China descended into the chaos of the

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warlord era between 1916 and 1926, but even after the successful Northern Expedition of 1926-28, the Nationalists did not secure control over the whole country. Moreover, and just as importantly, the Nationalists failed to establish China as a fully independent power; foreign domination came in the form of the Japanese who took Manchuria in 1931-2. In 1937 full-scale war broke out. Japan was extremely successful – and brutal – at first, but China did eventually emerge victorious, with the help of the USA, during the Second World War. The Nationalists did most of the fighting and were exhausted by 1945.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established in 1921 with the support of Comintern and the USSR. (The Comintern (or Communist International) was an organisation founded in Moscow in 1919 to fight capitalism and the bourgeoisie (middle class) internationally.) Stalin, and later the USA, promoted unity, in the form of successive United Fronts, with the GMD: first in the attempt to establish central authority, and later in the war against Japan. However, relations were nearly always strained. Although the Communists helped the GMD launch the Northern Expedition, Chiang turned on the CCP in the White Terror of 1927 (the Shanghai Massacre of 1927 signalled the beginning of the Civil War which raged on and off until 1949) and in 1934 the GMD attempted to squash the CCP by defeating them in their stronghold in Jiangxi, where the CCP had governed since 1929. The CCP only survived by fleeing to Yan'an in the desert-like northern Chinese plain. During this escape – the heroic Long March of 1934-35 – Mao Zedong emerged as a dominant force and won approval for his concept of a peasant-led revolution. From 1941 he was the undisputed leader and Party Chairman.

At the end of the Second World War both the USA and the USSR believed that the GMD, numerically strong and well-equipped, would become the ruling party. The USA tried hard to bring the CCP and GMD together, but Chiang and Mao were far apart in both personality and philosophy. Civil War broke out again in 1946, and the Nationalists inflicted serious defeats on the Communists. However, Chiang's decision, taken against US advice, to chase the Communists out of Manchuria, proved fatal. The Communists fought a brilliant campaign, first using classic guerrilla tactics, and then launching devastating conventional assaults, as the Nationalist armies deserted in huge numbers. On 1st October 1949 Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China from the balcony of the Gate of Heavenly Peace looking out onto Tiananmen Square.

2. THE CONDITIONS WHICH ENABLED MAO TO ESTABLISH HIS PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC: POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA

a) Economic and social factors

- a) Economically, China was ripe for revolution. The poverty of the Chinese peasantry was deep-seated and long-standing. The Nationalist government had made limited progress, as follows.



Left, The famous seafront (Bund) in Shanghai in 1928²

Confusion about the currency came to an end with the introduction of the silver dollar (yuan) in 1933, which was supplemented by a stable paper currency and decimal coinage in 1935-36. Four strong central banks between them helped stabilise the economy, although Nationalists lost control in the 1940s under pressure of war.

- b) Improved tariff agreements with western powers in 1928 gave China control over collection of customs duties. Some foreign concessions were recovered. For example the British surrendered Hankou and Jiujiang. In 1943 the USA and UK abolished unequal commercial treaties. ('Concessions' were normally ports that were granted to, and governed by, overseas powers after China had been defeated in war. Entry into these concessions was closely controlled, but was not restricted to foreigners. With their superior governmental and commercial structures these concessions were very attractive to Chinese, and residence in them, enjoyed mainly by the emerging Chinese middle class, was much prized.)
- c) Communications were improved. Between 1928 and 1937 the railway network increased from 8000 to 13000 km. Roads increased from 1,000 to 116,000 km between 1921 and 1936. New modern airlines were founded, such as the Chinese National Aviation Corporation and Eurasia Aviation Corporation. Postal services improved: there were 14,000 post offices by 1936. Telegraph and telephone systems expanded - there were 4000km of telephone lines by 1937.
- d) Industrialisation progressed steadily, especially in light industries such as cotton weaving and chemicals.

BUT serious problems remained

The Nationalist government failed to tackle the serious problems faced by the peasantry who comprised 85% of the population. Almost certainly Chiang, described by his most recent biographer as a 'left-Confucianist, who would have been comfortable in the anti-imperialist Comintern,' (Taylor: 2009) would have wanted to achieve more. (Confucianism is explained in the 'religion' section below.)

However, the peasants were desperate: typically 40-60% of crops were paid in rents, with taxes on top. 'The peasant had been exploited to the limit; only a revolution could bring him relief.' (Hsü: 2000) In 1930, the GMD agreed to reduce land rent to 37.5% of main crops, but this was never enacted. Advisers, such as T.V. Soong, were trained in the West and understood little of rural China, as shown by reliance on customs revenue, salt tax and taxes on the sale of goods, but government finances were never balanced. When Japan took Manchuria, the government lost 15% of its customs revenue, the single largest source of income. Income normally covered only 80% of expenditure. When the government printed money to cover the deficit during the final stages of the civil war, rampant inflation was the result. An absence of reliable statistics makes it difficult to estimate the full extent of economic hardship. 'What does seem clear is that by the early 1930s, Chinese peasants were suffering a new wave of crises that forced many of them below the subsistence (survival) level.' (Spence: 1990) 14 million refugees resulted from the Yangtze floods in 1931. Further disruption was caused by Japanese occupation, world depression and higher taxes to pay for military campaigns.

The reality of profound poverty

One of the first western visitors to record visits to local communities in China was American Marxist William Hinton, who visited the village of Long Bow, in Sichuan province, and nearby cities, in 1948. On his return, at the height of the McCarthy-inspired 'Red Scare' era, customs officials confiscated his notes and Hinton fought a long, but ultimately successful, legal battle to recover them. In 1966 he published the book for which he is best known, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, which was based on his experiences.

He had found a harsh and unequal society, where the life of the majority was almost insufferable. The gentry of Long Bow (mainly landlords and richer peasants) enjoyed modest comforts such as brick built houses, warm clothing and bedding, adequate fuel and a reasonably varied diet. Many landlords did no manual work. They kept themselves busy with managerial affairs, money lending, religious and clan functions and amused themselves with women, opium smoking and gambling. Hinton became an enthusiastic advocate of the Chinese revolution because he compared the gentry's life with that of the majority and was horrified: 'This world of security, relative comfort, influence, position, and leisure was maintained amidst a sea of the most dismal and frightening poverty and hunger – a poverty and hunger which threatened to engulf any family which relaxed its vigilance, took pity on its poor neighbours, failed to extract the last copper of rent and interest, or ceased for an instant the incessant accumulation of grain and money. Those who did not go up went down to their deaths or at least to the dissolution and dispersal of their families.'

Peasants had to guard their crops against thieves, especially at harvest time. Hinton describes, therefore, a brutal and desperate society in which the need for security was paramount. All peasants had to guard their land day and night from thieves. 'Little shelters mushroomed suddenly on every plot and strip,' he wrote, because if land was left unwatched it would surely be looted - by a starving family desperate to find some means of survival.

Chiang failed to bring about political and economic change. There was no realisation of Sun's ideal of 'land for the tiller' (A tiller was a farmer). Eventually exhausted by war against Japan and faced with further conflict with the Communists, 'there was little time or inclination left to tackle the seemingly less imminent, if more basic, problems of economic justice and social reforms.' (Hsü: 2000) Hanging on to power had absorbed the energies of Chiang's government.

Mao exploited peasant discontent by carrying out land reform (that is the redistribution of land from rich landowners to peasants) in the areas that he controlled, namely Jiangxi and Yan'an. This continued during the Civil War as the CCP captured more land. The generally moderate nature of land reform ensured that support of the richer peasants was not lost to the CCP. That is why many would agree with Michael Lynch's judgement that 'by the time the Japanese war ended in 1945 the CCP had, in effect, won the civil war. What Mao called 'the struggle for the hearts of the people' was effectively over.' (Lynch, 1996)

Key issue: distinguishing between 'economic' and 'social'

'Economic' issues are those that relate to wealth creation: Is a country rich or poor? How effectively are resources, both material and human, being exploited? Are some areas of a country richer than others?

'Social' issues relate to citizens' everyday lives. Are peoples' needs in terms of food and work being met? Is society divided or united?

Reading the above Section 2 (i), what circumstances could be described as either 'economic' or 'social'?

Theory of Knowledge Moment

Friedrich Engels, who co-wrote The Communist Manifesto with Karl Marx, believed that 'the economic situation is the basis' which explains how history evolves. It is not useful to get bogged down in the exact nature of Marxism, because it is immensely complex, but it is safe to say that Marx did not claim that the economy was the only influence on history. In the short term, other factors may be more important. However, over the long term, economic factors were, in his view, the most significant. Marxists believed in the centrality of class, as determined by people's occupations. The industrial working class was called the proletariat; the middle classes, including businessmen, lawyers and teachers, were called the bourgeoisie. Those who worked the land, sometimes owning small landholdings, were the peasantry. The classic revolutionary model (identified largely as a result of observing industrialising societies such as that in Great Britain, to where Engels travelled in the 1840s), predicted that the proletariat would rise up against the bourgeoisie, as they were no longer prepared to suffer exploitation, such as meagre wages, dangerous factories and child labour, while industrialists earned fabulous sums. Thus, Marx and Engels thought that a proletarian revolution was most likely where the proletariat was a numerically dominant class.

- To what extent would Marx have considered China ready for a proletarian revolution?
- Compared with the other factors that are examined below, were economic reasons the most important explanations of Mao's rise to power?
- Marx is, unusually, one of those who attempted to frame laws of History. Is it appropriate for historians to identify laws that attempt to predict the future?
- Would you agree that a preoccupation with identifying such laws normally makes scientists fundamentally different from historians?

b) Nationalism – a political and ideological factor

China had, for thousands of years, led the world in technology, science and medicine, but by the end of the eighteenth century it had been overtaken by Europe, which was on the verge of exploiting new-found technological superiority. Chinese Emperors responded with a mixture of xenophobic (disliking foreigners) contempt, bewilderment and sullen acceptance.

Given that one of Mao's attractions for the Chinese people was his nationalism – namely his

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determination to rid China of interference and domination by foreign powers - an awareness of the depth of humiliation inflicted by European powers is vital to understanding Mao's rise, bearing in mind also the mistakes made by the GMD leadership during the war against Japan, which further improved Mao's standing. Even today Chinese relations with western nations are influenced by the memory of past humiliations, some examples of which are:

i) The Opium War (1839-42) and Treaty of Nanjing

The British sent a force of 16 warships, 4 armed steamers and 4,000 troops to fight on behalf of British merchants, who had been illegally engaged in the opium trade. Just before the conflict, the British had been described in a report to the Emperor as 'an insignificant and detestable (hateful) race.' Chinese junks (a sailing ship) could not match the advanced British ships and Shanghai fell to the invaders in 1842. The Treaty of Nanjing gave Hong Kong to the British until 1997. The Chinese remember the Opium Wars to this day, and they remain a powerful factor in explaining their defiance of the West.

ii) Second Anglo-Chinese War (1856-58)



This war was fought in support of a British ship *Arrow* that had been seized perfectly legally by the Chinese. A British force, assisted by the French, marched on Beijing and burned down the Emperor's Summer Palace and forced the Chinese to agree that British warships could enter any Chinese port in pursuit of pirates.

Left, fighting during the Second Anglo-Chinese War³

iii) Loss of tributary states (these were countries that, while not part of China, were, in effect, controlled by them)

The Chinese had long claimed dominance over Korea and the northern part of Vietnam. This was lost to France, who, after a naval victory at Fuzhou in August 1884, cut all Chinese links with northern Vietnam, and Japan, who defeated China in a short war in 1894. The Chinese not only lost their overlordship of Korea, but even some of their ports, to Japan.

iv) Further extension of western control, 1898-1899

By the end of 1899 the Russians occupied much of Manchuria, the Germans had a foothold in Shandong and the British had seized the port of Weihaiwei.

Anti-foreign sentiment found expression in:

- **The Boxer Rising, 1899**

The long-standing resentment of foreigners, especially Christian missionaries, erupted in 1900, with the killing of Europeans, first in the countryside and then in the cities, with the support of the Empress Cixi. After the murder of the German ambassador, Europeans

retreated to the British Legation (embassy). An international force relieved the siege and huge damages were demanded, amounting to twice the revenue of the state. China had once again been humiliated.

- **May 4th Movement, 1919**

News reached China that the Allies at Versailles (where a treaty was signed to settle territorial and other disputes after the end of the First World War) were prepared to let Germany keep their Shandong possessions. Given all the talk of self-determination, many Chinese were furious. (Self-determination, a major theme of discussions at Versailles, meant that people should decide for themselves how and by whom they should be governed.) Beijing University students assembled in Tiananmen Square on May 4 1919 and attacked the government minister most associated with the treaty. A student organisation was founded; it spread across the big cities of China and became known as the May 4th Movement, which was inspirational to many young Chinese, including Mao Zedong. The protest won the day and the Chinese did not sign the Versailles Treaty. However, the demonstrations had no impact on the actions of the Western powers, and the powerlessness of China was once again demonstrated.

May 4th Movement

You are Wang Ling, a student in Beijing, writing home to your family, explaining why you have been out on the streets demonstrating on May 4th. How would you justify to them why you have abandoned your books for the day, and how would you describe your experiences?

There is a good Wikipedia article to help you. You will see references to the 21 Demands. What were they?

c) Collapse of central authority and rise of warlordism

The last years of the empire had been characterised by division and rebellion; the most serious were the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), the Nian (or Nien) Rebellion of 1852-64, the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the Wuchang Rising of 1911. In the Taiping Rebellion, probably the largest civil war of the nineteenth century, an estimated 20-25 million died, and the simultaneous Nian Rebellion resulted in the devastation of large areas of prosperous northern China. The instability and violence of the late Imperial Period undoubtedly strengthened the desire for national renewal. However, Emperors failed to embrace change, most notably when, in 1898, Empress Dowager Cixi squashed the reform movement, which had recommended the ending of the traditional examination system and more popular involvement in politics. There was a brief flirtation with democracy in 1913, when elections were held and Sun Yat-Sen's National People's Party (Guomindong or GMD) won 43% of the vote, which had been cast by 10% of male taxpayers. However, Song Jiaren, who was Sun's choice of Prime Minister, was assassinated at Shanghai's railway station.

The establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was made possible by the disintegration of the empire and by the later failure of the Nationalists (GMD) to establish firm central control. From 1916 until 1926, China had no effective national government and fell largely under the control of warlords, the most notorious of whom was Zhang Zong of Shandong, the 'Dogmeat General' who had so many concubines (a concubine was a woman who was the lover, often one of many, of a wealthy married man but with the social status of an inferior form of wife, often kept in a separate home, especially in imperial China) that he had to call them by number. His troops terrorised the population by splitting open the skulls of opponents. Others included the philosopher, General Wu

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Pei of Wuhan, and the most powerful of all, Zhang Zuolin, the 'Old Marshall' of Manchuria. Wars between rival warlords placed huge demands on the peasantry, who paid enormous taxes to fund the many military campaigns. The dominance of warlords was severely dented when Chiang launched his Northern Expedition in 1926-28. This brilliantly successful military campaign owed much in its early stages to the cooperation of the communists, but in response to concerns from his supporters in the business community, Chiang turned on the CCP in a series of massacres known as the 'White Terror' of 1927 (5,000-10,000 were killed in Shanghai alone). The CCP survived Chiang's assault; a soviet (workers' council) was established in mountainous Jiangxi and later in the even more remote Yan'an. The CCP's government of Jiangxi and Yan'an demonstrated its commitment to land reform and its ability to withstand attacks from the GMD. Much to the frustration of the middle classes and those who wished to see the peasants' problems addressed, Chiang made alliances with warlords as he attempted to tighten his hold over China in the 1930s. In reality China was a 'loose federation of semi-independent provinces' (Whitfield: 2008) and the Japanese later became a barrier to further extension of Chiang's authority.



Theory of Knowledge Moment

Given the political, economic and social conditions which existed in China in the 1920s and 1930s,

- a) Was a revolution inevitable?
- b) What sort of revolution was most likely?

d) THE WEAKNESSES AND MISTAKES OF THE GMD

i) Tactics in war against Japan

Famously, Chiang considered the conflict with the CCP more important than that with the Japanese. He described the CCP as a 'disease of the heart,' whereas the Japanese were a 'disease of the skin.' However, the Japanese humiliated the Chinese. The 1931 Mukden Incident, which involved an explosion on a railway line, was the trigger for the Japanese capture of Manchuria, followed by full-scale war over Shanghai in February 1932, causing \$1.5 billion-worth of damage. In May 1933 China acknowledged Japanese control of Manchuria in the Treaty of Tanggu. In 1935 Chiang accepted Japanese control of parts of Inner Mongolia and withdrew Chinese forces from Hebei Province. His policy throughout this early stage of the Japanese conflict was non-resistance, which was at odds with the aggressively anti-Japanese public mood. Chiang knew full well that the Chinese were in no position to fight the modern, well-trained Japanese army, a judgement that was amply justified when full-scale war broke out in 1937. Chiang was building up his strength with the help of German equipment and military expertise; later the Soviets provided even more assistance, even supplying pilots to fly Soviet-built aircraft during the Japanese War, as well as large amounts of war matériel.

In 1935-36 Chiang was still apparently prioritising action against the Communists; this was unpopular even among the Nationalists – so much so that he was the victim of the infamous Xi'an Incident (12 December 1936) when forces led by the 'Young Marshal' Zhang captured him.

The Xi'an Incident, 1936

Actually, it seems that Chiang was on the verge of reaching agreement with the CCP, but he had not shared the news with the Young Marshal. When he arrived at Lintong, ten miles from Xi'an he was greeted by student protests. Zhang promised to represent the students' views to Chiang, which provoked fury from the commander-in-chief. On the morning of his planned departure from Xi'an Chiang heard the sound of shots; he was advised to flee. Chiang escaped through a window still in his nightclothes and ran up a hill behind the cabins. After scaling a wall and running along a moat, Chiang fell over, injuring his back, lost his false teeth and hid in a cave at the top of a snow-covered mountain. Chiang's biographer Jay Taylor completed the story: 'Early the next morning Zhang's troops found the fugitive – cold, bare-foot, and with only a loose robe thrown over his nightshirt. "I am the Generalissimo," he told his captors. "Kill me, but do not subject me to indignities."

"We will not shoot you," the officer said. "We only ask you to lead our country."
(Taylor: 2009)

Chiang did indeed complete his negotiations with the CCP and agreed to form a new united front.

Full-scale war with Japan broke out in 1937, resulting in, at first, defeat and humiliation of Nationalist China: Chiang was forced to retreat to Chungking, which became his capital. Japanese actions during the war made them hugely unpopular in a country that was desperate to be free from the domination of foreign powers. The Rape of Nanking of 1937-38 was especially brutal even by Chinese standards. Civilians were hung up by their tongues, buried alive, sprayed with acid or used for bayonet practice. There may have been as many as 300,000 victims. In a desperate attempt to stem the Japanese advance Chiang ordered, without warning, the blowing up of the dykes holding the Yellow River in June 1938. 4,000 villages were destroyed and hundreds of thousands drowned, thus dealing a serious blow to potential support after the war. The behaviour of Nationalist troops contrasted sharply with that of the Communists, who observed a strict code of conduct. Nationalist looting and vandalism were common. One US officer reported: 'Whatever they (the Nationalist troops) could not haul away they (made) useless. They had mixed corn, wheat and millet with manure to (make) the grain inedible. Deep-water wells...were filled with earth. In a village school, the nationalist soldiers had defecated, as they had done elsewhere, and had splashed human excrement on the walls. A young woman reported to me that she had been dragged from one blockhouse to another and raped for many days.' (Quoted in Short: 1999) By 1941 the Japanese had extended their control from Beijing to include most of the coast, including Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong.



The Chinese head, beheaded by Japanese, pictured left, is wedged in a barricade near Nanking, during the Nanking massacre.⁴

But it has been claimed the Communists kept quiet about their limited role in fighting the Japanese, especially after 1940-41. Soviet adviser Petr Vladimir observed in 1942 that the Communists had 'long been abstaining from both

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active service and passive action against the aggressors.' (Quoted in Fenby: 2008). During the retreat from Jiangxi Mao had decided to portray the CCP as the truly patriotic movement, the main opponents of the Japanese. He even claimed that the Long March went north so that the CCP would be in a better position to fight the Japanese and the CCP's university in Yan'an was called the 'Resist Japan' University. In Fenby's view Mao continued 'to proclaim this mission from Yan'an, knowing that its geographical location meant the Party was in no position to do any such thing.' (Fenby: 2008). However, other scholars highlight the seven years of brutal fighting 'all across northern China' (Cheek, quoted in Benton and Chun (eds): 2010) and that the Nationalist strategy of full conventional assault on the Japanese (by armies much better equipped than the Red Army) failed; Nationalist armies 400,000-strong were almost totally wiped out in the 1937 battle for Shanghai at a time when communist forces only numbered 60,000. The Communists were successful in growing their forces and established bases behind enemy lines; the base at Jinchaji alone, only 80 km from Beijing, controlled an area containing 20 million people (Jin Xiaoding, from Benton and Chun (eds): 2010).



Class Debate

Chiang's Resistance to the Japanese

Hold a class debate on Chiang's record in opposing Japan, compared with that of the CCP. The motion could be: 'This class believes that no other national leader could have done better than Chiang in the 1930s.'



Extended Essay opportunity

A fertile area of study would be the character and rule of Chiang. A recent biography by Jay Taylor has attempted to rescue a tarnished reputation. Did he mishandle what he inherited from Sun? Did he make the best of a bad situation? Was he arrogant and unapproachable? To what extent was his reputation damaged unfairly by communist propaganda and the unreliable testimony of an eccentric American officer? How much did he care for the Chinese people? Did the need to hold on to power, which was threatened from many quarters, divert him from helping China to reform itself? Taiwan seemed to fare pretty well under him and has now become a prosperous modern country. How much was this down to Chiang, showing the mainland Chinese what might have been?

Two biographies are:

Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the struggle for modern China*, Harvard/Belknap, 2009

Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China he lost*, Free Press, London, 2003

Joseph Stilwell's papers can be read in:

Joseph Stilwell and Theodore White (ed), *The Stilwell Papers: Iconoclastic Account of America's Adventures in China*, Da Capo, New York, 1991

ii) Treatment of recruits

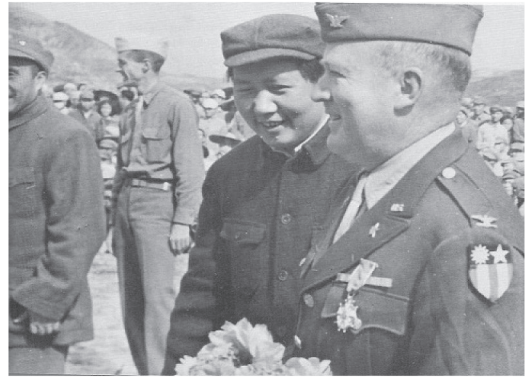
Many members of the Nationalist forces were conscripts who were appallingly treated. This contributed to the high desertion rate during the Civil War. The corrupt conscription system was based on quotas for each province. The poorest, who could not buy their way out and could least afford to leave their families, were the most defenceless. Even passers-by were seized and press gangs (military personnel whose job was to find people to force into military service) were used. Some starved to death even before they reached their first camp. There was no authorised holiday; long marches and harsh training camps were suffered and mail was rarely received. Malnutrition, beriberi (a tropical disease caused by lack of vitamins) and tuberculosis were widespread. Recruits often slept naked in overcrowded accommodation; they were chained together and marched hundreds of miles to the front. Desertion rates were commonly 6% a month. 'Going into the army was usually a death sentence.' (Fenby: 2008)

iii) Failure to develop support beyond the ruling elite

While Marxists liked to portray the period of Nationalist government as one of bourgeois (middle class) domination, the reality was more complex. Fenby pointed out that 'the bourgeoisie...was treated ruthlessly, squeezed for money and excluded from real power,' but Hsü added the perspective that 'living in the treaty ports or operating in the villages as loan sharks (lenders of money at excessive rates of interest), they were the beneficiaries of the existing order and hardly desired any change which rocked the boat. It was these people –the warlords, the generals, the officials, the merchants, the traders, and the money-lenders, upon whom the Nationalist government relied for support.' (Hsü: 2000) Nevertheless, Chiang, like the emperors, was not interested in sharing power beyond a central-military power group. A Democratic League had developed in the 1940s, but Chiang regarded it as an enemy and turned his secret police onto its members; many joined the Communists. Even among the army Chiang was reluctant to share power beyond his most loyal officers, and appointments were based more on loyalty than competence. For example, he failed to use experienced Red Army defector Zhang Guotao to resist the PLA in Manchuria, and the southern generals who were employed there were unpopular. Officers stole funds and kept dead men on their books to boost their pay.

e) US attitudes

The USA became increasingly disappointed with Chiang. 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell, the almost blind, argumentative US Chief of Staff, who himself was regarded with contempt by the British, referred to Chiang as 'Peanut' (later 'Rattlesnake') and was dismayed at the incompetence of the Nationalist officers. His priority was to recapture northern Burma and improve supply routes. US air power arrived under Claire Chennault and by 1944 included B29 super-bombers. Stilwell's successor, Wedermayer, organised the training of 39 divisions, but distrust of Chiang mounted, and contacts with the CCP via the Dixie Mission (1944) led many to be impressed by the Communists' aggression and energy.



Chiang, Madame Chiang and Joseph Stilwell⁵ and Dixie Mission Commander Colonel David D. Barrett and Mao Zedong in Yan'an, 1944.⁶

The Dixie Mission (1944-1947)

The Dixie Mission, initially 8 servicemen and diplomat John Service, followed by a party of American journalists, was not unlike the Herbert Matthews visit to Castro: the Americans were housed half a mile from Yan'an, and saw nothing of the rectification campaign or the opium fields on which CCP income partly relied. Service reported that CCP were democrats looking to reform China. Such reports reinforced Roosevelt's wishful thinking about the future.

This Mission could prove to be a fruitful topic for an extended essay, supported by Carolle Carter's book, *Mission to Yanan [Yan'an]: American Liaison with the Chinese Communists, 1944 – 1947*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1997.

Nevertheless, when civil war broke out after the Japanese defeat, US marines assisted Nationalist forces. Even the USSR was undecided, as Stalin believed that the Nationalists were going to defeat the Communists.

American suspicions of the USSR in Manchuria helped indirectly to rescue the CCP. At the end of 1945 the Nationalists were in a strong position, as the PLA had lost control of the entrance to Manchuria, and Russians had ordered Chinese troops out of Manchurian cities. In December 1945 American George C Marshall arrived to negotiate peace. It was short-lived, and the Nationalists inflicted a potentially disastrous defeat at the second battle of Sze ping kai (Sipingjie) (May 1946). Marshall's patching-up of the cease-fire gave the PLA vital breathing space. Marshall also decided at this point, as the US administration still insisted that there was a possibility of a renewed United Front, to stop supplying Nationalists with ammunition. 'At the very moment when (the Nationalists) had the advantage in Manchuria, Marshall was giving the Communists a chance to recover and rearm their battered formations. Inevitably it was not long before some Nationalist units ran out of the vital .30 ammunition. Chiang had to disband several divisions – and some went over to the Communist side. General Marshall was paying a dangerously high price for his (neutrality).' (Catchpole: 1976) His Political Consultative Conference, designed to patch up the United Front, did not last long.

US public opinion was increasingly reluctant to support further aid to Chiang as the war progressed. There was no question of direct military involvement. In 1948 a Currency Stabilisation Loan was refused, and the Senate vetoed a further \$1.5 billion loan in 1949. Distrust of Chiang, rather than Communist influence in the State Department, explains this lack of support.

Hsü argues that the USA could have done much more to stabilise the Chinese economy during the Japanese war, thus preventing the collapse that occurred in the latter stages of the Civil War. Also, if the US had used the Chinese mainland to attack the Japanese, as originally intended, then China would have assumed much greater significance for the Americans. His argument that more effective mediation by Marshall could have delayed hostilities is less convincing, given the level of distrust between the two sides (Hsü: 2000).

2. THE WINNING OF THE CIVIL WAR, 1946-49

i) Economic factors

Severe economic problems accompanied the final stages of the Civil War. From 1945 prices rose ever more steeply: between September 1945 and February 1947 the Shanghai price index rose by 30 times, triggering a wave of industrial unrest which continued until the revolution despite attempts to control the unions and peg wages to price rises. By the summer of 1948 shopkeepers had to increase prices several times a day, and the government tried one last tactic, the Financial and Emergency Measures of August 1948, which involved the calling-in and re-issuing of the currency with a fixed limit of 2 billion yuan. A prices and wages freeze was supported by stern measures against those accused of profiteering. But by November 1948, shops were emptying, restaurants were closing and inflation was rocketing again; the Chinese republic had become, for all practical purposes, a barter economy, one where goods are obtained by swapping one item for another, rather than through the payment of money. The Shanghai cost-of-living index had risen from 100 in August 1948 to 52,100 by February 1949. 'In 1940, 100 yuan bought a pig; in 1943, a chicken; in 1945 a fish; in 1946, an egg; and in 1947 one-third of a box of matches.' (Lynch: 2004)

ii) Behaviour of Nationalist officials

'The obnoxious (hateful) conduct of Nationalist officials did permanent damage to Nationalist prestige.' (Hsü: 2000) They monopolised (took over for themselves) businesses and commodities and publicly auctioned relief materials. For example, blood plasma donated by the Red Cross was on sale in Shanghai for \$25 per pint (Fenby: 2008). The Japanese puppet currency was compulsorily converted at ridiculously high rates, with devastating consequences for savings, which had fallen by 400% since the Japanese occupation. 'These citizens within occupied territories, who had waited eight years for the return of Nationalist rule, were so mercilessly milked (exploited) and so contemptuously treated that they wondered whether life would not be better under the Japanese. The net result of the misbehaviour of the Nationalist officials was the alienation (hostility) of the millions of suffering people.' (Hsü: 2000)

iii) The Tactics of the PLA contrasted with errors by Chiang

After the desperate first stage of the war was ended with the visit of George Marshall and the failed attempt to form a national unity government, PLA tactics were in line with previous campaigns such as the Long March. The role of Mao as military planner is dealt with later. In brief, Communist forces were masters of the strategic retreat and avoidance of conventional warfare (that is, full-scale battles)

until they were able to smash the enemy with overwhelming force. From the end of the war against Japan the communist Red Army was renamed the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Chiang decided to mount an all-out assault on the communist positions in Manchuria, far away from his strongest support in the centre and south. At first it looked as though the Nationalists, who began the War with enormous numerical superiority, support from the USA and international recognition, were in control. But Mao's policy was to avoid full-scale confrontation, draw out the enemy, weaken them and then encircle them. He was even prepared to withdraw from Yan'an. 'We give Chiang Yan'an. He will give us China.' (Quoted in Lynch: 2004) Steadily, during 1946-47, Nationalist forces were cut off by the blowing up of railways and by depriving urban garrisons of supplies. The Manchurian campaign cost 470,000 Nationalist troops. The decision to take Yan'an and pursue the Communists into the strategically unimportant North West was also a bad mistake and cost a further 400,000 men.

The PLA switched to conventional warfare in May 1947: a brilliant campaign led by Lin Biao (below, left⁷) isolated the Nationalists in Shenyang and Jinan. Chiang refused to withdraw and used up almost his entire budget on air support for his isolated troops. Manchuria had been lost by November (after a 31-day battle at Mukden/Shenyang). Lin Biao was able to take Tianjin and then Beijing by January 1949.



Chiang also insisted on making a stand at Xuzhou, (November 1948-January 1949) where 600,000 soldiers faced each other. The Nationalist position was weak and could be attacked from 3 sides. Zhu De's forces emerged triumphant after 65 days. This was a further tactical disaster for the Nationalists. After these crucial victories it was a matter of securing control of most of the rest of the country before declaring the People's Republic (PRC) in October 1949.

iv) The Role of Spies

A vastly superior spy network assisted the PLA. Chiang's assistant chief of staff, Liu Fei, was a communist spy: so too was head of GMD's War Planning Board, Goo Rugui. The CCP's counter-espionage was very successful indeed: even low-level communist units were immune from penetration.

v) Weaknesses of the Nationalists compared with the strength of the Communists

At the beginning of the war Chiang could call upon 2.8 million troops, outnumbering the Communists by a ratio of nearly 9 to 1, and they enjoyed air support from the B24 Liberator bombers supplied by the USA (although most of the US Marines stationed in China left during 1946), whereas the Communists had no aircraft at all. The Nationalists apparently controlled much more of China: the CCP's strength was concentrated around Yan'an and only extended to areas where 90 million of 600 million Chinese lived. But Nationalist superiority was to some extent deceptive.

Many Nationalist weaknesses were of long standing and dated back to the Japanese War.

- Poor treatment of recruits meant that resources of manpower were not fully exploited. Morale was so low that desertion rates were very high.
- Officer quality was poor. Wedemayer, the US commander in China, described them as 'incapable, inept, untrained and altogether inefficient.' Chiang admitted, 'I have to lie awake wondering what fool things they may do. They are so dumb that you must imagine everything they can do that would be wrong and warn them against it.' (Quoted in Short: 1999)
- The army was exhausted. 'Japan's surrender gave the troops a sense of relief and a feeling of having accomplished a mission, and they longed for a rest. The thought of fighting another civil war was (hateful) to them.' (Hsü: 2000)

In contrast, Communist forces

- Had not undertaken the bulk of the fighting against Japan. They were 'fresh, vigorous, and confident of the future.' (Hsü: 2000)
- Were led by some great generals such as Lin Biao, who were largely left by Mao to conduct battles without interference.
- Grew dramatically in number during the Civil War. Recruits generally came from local militia forces and as deserters from the GMD armies. By 1948 up to 50% of the PLA had fought for the other side.
- Were better clothed and fed than the Nationalist armies. The PLA was also superior in minimising injuries and rescuing the injured – 'both issues of vital importance to troops in the field.' (Westad: 2003)
- Were ideologically committed – they knew what they were fighting for. The divisions of the past were over under Mao's strong leadership.
- Had gained weapons from a wide variety of sources: 700,000-900,000 rifles, 14,000 heavy and light machine guns, artillery, mortars, anti-aircraft weapons, boats and 700 vehicles, including tanks, formerly Japanese, were given to them by the Russians. 'These weapons were of crucial importance for the PLA's survival in the face of GMD offensives of late 1946 and early 1947.' (Westad: 2003) Pre-war Czech machine-guns were seized from the Nationalists, along with American jeeps, cannons and bazookas (a tube-shaped weapon, fired from the shoulder, that launches a missile that can disable a tank). American observers were amazed at the quantity of American equipment paraded through Beijing to celebrate the Communist victory.
- Enjoyed the support of many Chinese. Peasants were impressed with land reform that continued during the war: 'This was a masterly stroke.' (Catchpole: 1976) The high standard of conduct of the PLA impressed many: 'The people liked the way the soldiers tidied up their billets, (accommodation that was temporarily taken over by the army), put right any damage they caused, and treated civilians with respect.' (Catchpole: 1976) The CCP's style of government, which allowed local people to take part in 'revolutionary committees' to discuss, for example, education, health and land reform, also helped to boost popularity.

The Decisive Role of the Peasantry and their Expectations of a Communist Government

Dongping Han is another historian who has illuminated our understanding through his study of local history, namely the county of Jimo in Shandong province. He points out that, given the initial superiority of the Nationalists in weapons and manpower, the support of the rural population was critical. They brought supplies to the PLA and evacuated the wounded. In Shandong alone, he estimated, 3,500 stretchers and 7,600 wheelbarrows were mobilised. The women of Jimo made 5,000 pairs of shoes and provided 650,000 *jin* of grain. Several millions were involved in supporting the PLA: 'without the rural people's support there would have been no Communist victory at all,' he claimed.

The rural poor were hugely attracted by the Communists' policy of land reform, and promises of free universal education. 'In the poor peasant's mind,' reported Han, 'the lack of access to education was an important factor contributing to their being exploited and oppressed by the rich and powerful in China.' The preparedness of Communist forces to share hardships with the poor was a key aspect of their strength among a population used to exploitation and oppression from the ruling classes.

Essay Topic

The role of foreign powers

How far did foreign powers play a part in the outcome of the final stage of the Chinese Civil War, 1946-49?

3) THE ROLE OF MAO AS LEADER

a) Early Years and the evolution of his political and philosophical thought to 1920

Mao was born in 1893 into the family of a relatively well-off peasant farmer who had been able to buy up enough land so that his wealth was 'considered a great fortune' (Mao, quoted in Snow: 1937) in his village. A rebellious youth, he refused to accept the marriage which his father had arranged for him, and during his formative years – he went to college in Changsha in Hunan and later worked in the library at Beijing University - he read widely in Chinese and western philosophy and history. As a young man he felt driven to bring about change in his native province, Hunan. He had played a leading role in coordinating opposition to the local warlord, which was only partly successful; one warlord was removed, but was replaced by one who was almost as repressive. While he was convinced, like Confucius, of the need for strong enlightened government to lead people along the road of righteousness, he explored a wide range of ideas, including anarchism, during his early adulthood. Like many of his generation he was bitterly resentful of the domination of China by foreign powers. Although he was absent from Beijing in 1919 owing to his mother's terminal illness, Mao was deeply affected by the May 4th Movement, which had been sparked by the decision at Versailles

to hand German territories in China to the Japanese. He had launched a newspaper, the *Xiang River Review*, to champion 'the newest currents of thought.' In the years before he became a communist, a common theme emerges from Mao's developing political philosophy, namely a determination to enable China's re-birth, independent of foreign domination, as a united country, free of warlordism. In his early writings Mao comes across as intensely inquisitive, self-critical and serious. In order to study peasant life first-hand he had travelled extensively throughout Hunan – a trip which he said prepared him for the hardships during the Long March – and as a student he was obsessive in discussing the social and political issues of the day with a multitude of student groups, one of which, the Problem Study Society, he founded himself. Mao had trained as a teacher and became a primary school head at the age of 27; by 1920 he also ran a profitable bookselling business, and could have settled for a comfortable life. However, Mao was a visionary, driven to bring about change. He saw that his career in politics, journalism and discussion had brought little reward. It was time for action.

b) Mao's role in the CCP and GMD and the further development of his philosophy and strategy



Mao's conversion to communism can be dated accurately, and can be partly explained by his contacts with Li Dazhao and, pictured left, Chen Duxi,⁸ Marxist editors of *New Youth*, the journal of the May 4th Movement. Mao was especially attracted by the perception of the Russian Revolution as a triumph over a western capitalism. As a result of his promotion of Marxism in Hunan he was invited to the first Communist Party Congress in Shanghai in July 1921 and was appointed secretary to the central committee. Committing to overthrowing the bourgeoisie, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of private capital, the CCP, few in number, campaigned to increase class-consciousness among the industrial working classes. Mao proved to be a highly successful organiser of strikes in support of improved pay and conditions, although the cruel defeat of railway

railwaymen in February 1923, resulting in the deaths of 35 workers, convinced Mao that the CCP had to work alongside other, larger, radical groups, which included the GMD. Mao was also quickly coming to the conclusion that a Chinese revolution must involve the vast rural proletariat, a group considered by orthodox soviet Marxists to be incapable of playing a sufficiently dynamic role. As early as the 3rd CCP Congress in 1923 Mao proposed that the party should 'gather together small peasants and farm labourers to resist the imperialists who control China, to overthrow the warlords and corrupt officials, and to resist ruffians and bad gentry, so as to protect the peasants and to promote the national revolutionary movement.' (Quoted in Lynch: 2004)

In 1923 Sun Yat Sen accepted the Russian revolutionary model, which regarded the industrial proletariat as central and more important than the peasantry. This meant that, while the GMD moved towards Leninism, it was also loosening its ties with the peasants just as Mao was recommending the opposite. (Leninists believed that revolution could be accelerated by a determined, small leadership so that it would occur before the industrial proletariat had become the dominant class. Classic Marxism stated that revolution should wait until society had reached the stage when class conflict was chiefly between the industrial proletariat and the bourgeois business class.) Mao nevertheless joined the GMD, the policy recommended by Comintern. He told his fellow-communists that he was well aware that the bourgeoisie supported the GMD but that, once the GMD had been used to bring about revolution, it could be discarded. Already well known because of his role in organising strikes and his articles attacking imperialism, Mao was elected to the central bureau of the GMD, and

Three Dictators

therefore held leading positions in both revolutionary parties. Mao continued to work for the GMD until 1927, even though the party was increasingly divided by differing views of the relationship with the CCP, especially after Chiang, who rejected Marxism and Leninism, replaced Sun in 1925. Mao took time out of politics during 1925 to study further the peasants of Hunan. His research, delivered to the Central Committee of the CCP in 1927 under the title *Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, was meticulously detailed and led him to the conclusion that the situation of Chinese peasants was uniquely wretched. Unlike industrial workers, who could strike, peasants had no way to improve their conditions except through revolution. Mao noted, with approval, that some peasants had already taken the law into their own hands, dealing severely with 'bad landlords'; there was a growing revolutionary spirit that could be developed. 'It is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area,' he wrote: 'to right a wrong it is necessary to exceed the proper limits.' (Quoted in Lynch: 2004)



Left, Communist prisoners rounded up in Shanghai, 1927⁹

Despite the misgivings among the CCP leadership, Mao played his part in helping the United Front's successful Northern Expedition by rallying peasants to the anti-warlord campaign. When the United Front shattered as Chiang turned his troops against the CCP, Mao was appalled at the impact of this 'White Terror' in Hunan, where up to a quarter of a million were killed, including 6,000 in Changsha alone. In the unsuccessful CCP retaliatory campaign Mao led the Autumn Harvest Rising in Hunan in October and November. His force, 3,000 strong, was easily defeated; Mao learned the lesson that a peasant-led revolution required a powerful, well-organised army if it was to triumph.

When the United Front ended in 1927 with the Shanghai massacre, Mao's view that 'in a very short time, several hundred million peasants in China's central, southern and northern provinces will rise like a fierce wind or tempest, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to suppress it' (quoted in Lynch, 2004) was briefly accepted. In Jiangxi Mao stood for the moderate implementation of land reform in order not to offend the richer peasantry, but, as in-fighting became ever more bitter and the name-calling more extreme, (Mao was even dubbed a 'rightist') Mao was over-ruled in favour of the orthodox, more extreme, Soviet Model. In Yan'an Mao reverted to his moderate line, which proved popular and successful.

Land reform before 1949

Land reform had been carried out already on a substantial scale well before the success of the 1949 revolution. There was friction about its extent and severity. Mao was on the side of moderation and continued to be so even after he had taken power. The promise of land reform was a crucial part of the CCP's appeal. But the danger was that radical reform would create too many enemies and destabilise the economy. Mao won the argument in favour of a moderate policy. Land reform was only implemented in 25% of territory held by the CCP before 1949, and, in general, the 'middle peasants' were left alone. But there were times when pressure for extreme policies was difficult for Mao to resist, both within the leadership and among party cadres. Mao beat off Liu's radical plan during the Manchurian campaign and reintroduced a more moderate policy; in Henan in 1949 villagers disobeyed instructions and 'carried off and divided everything that could be moved. In spite of instructions, beating and killings were widespread and not all the victims were landlords. Land reform in Henan was halted abruptly.' (Gray: 2002) Mao's known preference for moderation succeeded in retaining a broad base of support for the revolution, and explains in part the welcome that it received right across social classes.

The Long March and the establishment of the CCP soviet in Yan'an confirmed Mao's dominance over his party. His views of peasant revolution and his version of the concept of General Will (all ideas came from the masses, but it was the party's job to identify and express them) became the CCP orthodoxy, officially confirmed at the politburo meeting in September 1941. ('Politburo' was a term commonly used in communist governments to describe the inner cabinet of senior government ministers.) Shaun Breslin summarises as follows: Mao's idea 'was to create unity between the people and the party: to spend time talking to the people to find out what their interests really were and to turn these ideas into practical policies that the people would accept and embrace. The party must place its faith in the ideas and wishes of the people whom it was supposed to represent.' (Breslin: 1998) Thus, party policy was not to be determined by elite revolutionaries or, even less, by Moscow. Harmony with the people was in sharp contrast to the approach of the GMD.

Many argue, though, that Mao was a Nationalist first and Communist second. He was a keen student of Chinese history. Like many of his generation he was inspired by a desire to put China back where she belonged, before western domination. 'If there is one constant element that stayed with Mao throughout his entire political life, it was the desire to see China returned to its rightful place as a powerful nation.' (Breslin: 1998) This explains Mao's participation in the May 4th Movement, which was founded in protest against the Versailles settlement. Mao increasingly realised that nationalism represented a powerful appeal to the Chinese. He ruthlessly exploited the apparent half-heartedness of Chiang's war against Japan, and, later, the unpopularity of Chiang's links with the USA. (In power, the priority of national interest over politics was best seen in his mending of relations with the USA during the Cultural Revolution).

c) Mao the military strategist

Mao believed in avoiding conventional full-scale confrontation unless he was absolutely certain of victory: guerrilla tactics were his chosen method. Well before the 1946-49 stage of the Civil War Mao had made himself almost indispensable to the CCP as a military commander. Although his Autumn Harvest Rising in Hunan against the White Terror had failed, his leadership of the Fourth Army alongside Zhu De and Peng Dehuai in 1928 enhanced his reputation. In 1931 Mao's army

successfully resisted the encirclement of Jiangxi by 200,000 troops. It broke through enemy lines to raid Nationalist bases far to the east. The pro-Soviet group, led by Zhou Enlai, Otto Braun and Bo Gu, who preferred orthodox warfare fighting from fixed positions, which had dominated during the final months in Jiangxi and the early stage of the Long March, were discredited owing to the near disaster in crossing the Xiangjiang River in November 1934 at a cost of 50,000 lives. Mao had written a handbook on guerrilla warfare for the CCP and his favoured tactic of fighting a war of movement was adopted after the Zunyi meeting in January 1935. The outrageously daring crossing of the lethal swamps of Qinghai and Gansu in appalling weather on the last major stage of the Long March confirmed Mao's military leadership.

How did the Communists survive the Long March (October 1934-October 1935)?

The Communists embarked on their Long March to escape Nationalist encirclement of the Jiangxi soviet. By most measures it was a defeat. They had to leave most of their women behind, along with almost all of those aged 50 or over who were too frail to undertake the escape. Approximately 90,000 set out, of whom approximately 20,000 survived to set up the new soviet in Yan'an. Nevertheless, if the communists had not survived the Long March, Mao could not have continued on his road to power. Within a year from the end of the March, Mao was once again a highly significant player in the anti-Japanese struggle, as clearly shown in the Xi'an Incident of 1936.

What were the keys to the survival of Mao and his movement?

a) After early defeats, the Red Army, influenced by Mao, adopted guerrilla tactics, avoiding full-scale conventional warfare. The near-disastrous engagement on the Xiangjing River showed the leadership that the army needed to be more mobile and less heavily-laden. At the Zunyi Conference the change of tactics was confirmed.

b) The routes taken by the Marchers enabled them to wrong-foot their GMD pursuers. For example, after the Xiangjing River battle, the army moved west into Guizhou, avoiding the most powerful GMD forces. The Red Army divided and scattered; many different routes were followed, so that Chiang could not take best advantage of the 500,000-750,000 troops at his disposal.

c) Daring and successful manoeuvres enabled the army to escape the GMD and also bolstered morale. The most famous examples were:

i) The defeat of Nationalist forces on the Loushan Pass in Guizhou

Paul Noll retells the story: 'As they approached the Loushan Pass blocking Zunyi, Peng Dehuai set his men off at the double (running). Peng's troops reached the pass minutes ahead of the GMD who arrived about 200 yards down the pass on the other side. In the next two days, they smashed the enemy forces, knocking out two divisions and eight regiments, killing or driving into the mountains some 3,000 GMD troops and taking 2,000 prisoners. They captured 1,000 rifles and 100,000 rounds of ammunition. The Nationalist press admitted "extremely great losses." At the River Wu, GMD General Wi Qiwei was caught with half his army on the wrong side of the river. More than 1,800 men surrendered and handed over their weapons. About 800 signed up to serve in the Red Army.' (from www.paulnoll.com, 8 March 2011)

ii) The crossing of the Luding Bridge

This was the most celebrated of all battles on the Long March. In order to continue the march north to rendezvous with the rest of the Red Army it was critical that Mao's forces seize this bridge across the Dadu River. The exact details are unclear, but it seems that some 20 volunteers managed to cross this bridge even though most of its wooden planks had been destroyed. Despite almost continuous attacks from Nationalist forces, the bridge was secured and repaired using wooden doors from the nearby town. Mao considered this triumph to have been the single most critical incident on the march.

iii) The crossing of the Snowy Mountains

This proved to be a terrible ordeal as marchers gasped for air in the rarefied atmosphere of the 16,000 foot mountains. Thousands died, along with up to two-thirds of their pack animals.

iv) The crossing of the grasslands of Qinghai and Gansu

These deadly swamps were so dangerous that the Nationalist armies dared not follow. Not only were there bottomless bogs to avoid, but also the weather was appallingly hostile. Driving rain and hail caused many to die of exposure.

d) The Communists were well led. Mao's authority grew during the Long March, and divisions were largely overcome. Before the Long March Mao had followed an independent line, while others had obeyed Moscow. Early defeats, while the pro-Moscow leaders were in charge, played to Mao's advantage, as he became increasingly dominant, first at Zunyi, and later when he was able to outsmart his rival, Zhang Guotao. Although he had differences with them, other military leaders also played their part, for example the plain-speaking Peng Dehuai, famed for his furious frontal assaults, and the more shy and reserved Lin Biao, who had a reputation for imagination, daring and deception.

The exact detail of what happened during the Long March has become the subject of dispute, inflamed by the work of Chang and Halliday in their 2005 biography of Mao, who claim, for example, controversially, that the Dadu River crossing was nothing like the heroic action described in CCP propaganda. Most historians believe such claims to be mistaken, although there is no doubt that events have been exaggerated. The Long March became one of the great heroic myths of the Revolution, similar to Hitler's Munich Putsch and Castro's attack on Moncada.

Mao's tactics came fully into their own during the Civil War campaign against the Nationalist forces in Manchuria, when the PLA picked on isolated units, encircled them with overwhelming force and eliminated them one by one. 'We should concentrate a force six, five, four or at least three times larger than that of the enemy, concentrate the whole or bulk of our artillery, select one (not two) of the weak spots in the enemy's positions, attack it fiercely and be sure to win.' (Quoted in Short: 1999) The PLA became expert at drawing the Nationalist forces further and further away from their support. Sidney Rittenberg, an American marching with Mao, reported that 'at every encampment he would wait until the scouts brought him the news that the enemy was only an hour's march away before he would methodically put on his coat, mount his horse and lead his little headquarters column off down the trail... Then, when the GMD troops were exhausted..and sick of the whole campaign, Peng Dehuai selected the most vulnerable cul-de-sac.. and hurled his men against them.' (see Short: 1999)