

## Impact of the Long March (1934-1935)

### Topic

The Long March from 1934-1935 was an event that acquired legendary significance in the history of modern China, which witnessed a 6,000 mile historic trek from the Communist base in Jiangxi to Yanan in a retreat from Jiang Jieshi's forces.

Political	Military	Social
<p><b>Consolidation of Mao's position</b> The Long March helped to consolidate Mao's position of power and gain absolute control over many aspects of the CCP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mao's power was in decline prior to the Long March</li> <li>• Failure of the Autumn Harvest Uprising in 1927 had discredited his ability</li> <li>• Ideological disagreements with the 28 Bolsheviks involving guerrilla tactics and moderate land reform policies had diminished Mao's prestige in the CCP</li> <li>• Was removed from the Central Committee and was put under probation and barred from Party meetings</li> <li>• Was only released at the start of the Long March</li> <li>• Mao was able to prove his superiority as a leader of the CCP during the Long March</li> <li>• Mao's suggestion of Yanan was seen as pragmatic in contrast to others like Zhang Guotao, whose decision to divert to the Sichuan province would have resulted in certain annihilation of the CCP</li> <li>• Vindication of Mao's strategic judgment and increased his standing in the CCP</li> <li>• During the 1935 Zunyi conference, Mao used the opportunity to deliver a blistering attack on the 28 Bolsheviks and accord them the responsibility of the CCP's defeat during Jiang's 5<sup>th</sup> encirclement campaign</li> <li>• Abandoned Mao's successful guerrilla tactics in the countryside, which enabled the CCP to survive four encirclement campaigns, for a conventional warfare strategy</li> <li>• Mao's political position in the CCP was greatly</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ensured the survival of the CCP</b> The Long March prevented the annihilation of the CCP at the hands of the GMD during Jiang's 5<sup>th</sup> encirclement campaign.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The direct consequence of the Long March was the establishment of a secure base in Yanan for the CCP</li> <li>• Despite the deaths of 80% of CCP members who set out at the start, a sufficient number of members remained together with key leaders</li> <li>• Eg. Mao, Lin Biao, Zhu De and Zhou Enlai</li> <li>• The new CCP base at Yanan was located at a relatively secure geographical position</li> <li>• Far away from Soviet influence and GMD control</li> <li>• Had the remaining members of the CCP and its leaders not succeeded in reaching Yanan, the CCP would have been all but eliminated, thus ending its successful struggle for power in China</li> <li>• Gave Mao an opportunity to develop his own independent political programme based on his theory of peasant revolution</li> <li>• Mao's ideology and pro-peasant policies including land reform and rent reduction during the Yanan years would win the hearts of many Chinese</li> <li>• In face of GMD brutality and indifference to their plight during the Nanjing Decade and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sino-Japanese War</li> <li>• CCP membership grew from 40,000 in 1937 to 1 million in 1945</li> <li>• It was from this expanding membership that the volunteers for the Red Army came</li> <li>• Was vital in defeating the GMD later during the civil</li> </ul>	<p><b>A major propaganda victory</b> Mao manipulated the mythic significance of the Long March to turn the communists into heroes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Long March was portrayed as one of the greatest human feats in the history of the Chinese Revolution</li> <li>• The CCP identified it as a victory and portrayed it as an uplifting tale of the defiance of superhuman odds, of dedication and sacrifice</li> <li>• <b>Lynch:</b> Only 20% of those who set out survived</li> <li>• Those who did were revered and served as an inspiration for those who were not involved</li> <li>• Those who did not were portrayed as martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the cause of the CCP; became enshrined in Communist lore</li> <li>• Key events during the Long March were often played up to highlight the bravery of the CCP</li> <li>• Eg. The Luding Bridge incident</li> <li>• The official account suggested that failure to cross the heavily guarded bridge would have resulted in the demise of the CCP</li> <li>• But they were able to overcome this after fighting Jiang's forces bravely</li> <li>• The heroism attributed to the Long March inspired many young Chinese to join the CCP during the late 1930s and early 1940s</li> <li>• Would eventually form the PLA to fight against the GMD during the Chinese Civil War</li> <li>• According to <b>Meisner</b>, the cult of Mao was born out of the harsh and extraordinary experiences of the Long March</li> </ul>

<p>strengthened</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Became a member of the Politburo standing committee</li> <li>• Eliminated key opposition and gained supporters such as Zhou Enlai and Zhu De</li> <li>• Gained control of the military, which became his foundation of power</li> </ul> <p><b>Significance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hsu:</b> Was a giant step in his quest for power as Mao emerged from the Long March as the undisputed leader of the CCP</li> <li>• Broke Comintern's hold on the CCP by discrediting the 28 Bolsheviks</li> <li>• Paved the way for Mao as the ruler of Communist China</li> <li>• Moreover, Mao's control of military affairs allowed for a change of tactics in the CCP</li> <li>• Reverted to guerrilla tactics and a "People's War"</li> <li>• Would be crucial in helping the CCP win the Chinese Civil War from 1946-49</li> </ul> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, according to <b>Hsu</b>, the Zunyi conference did not give Mao a complete victory over his intra-party opponents</li> <li>• Zhang Guotao did not attend the conference and refused to accept its decisions</li> <li>• Would challenge Mao's authority later</li> <li>• The developments within the Long March were insufficient to allow the CCP to win the civil war</li> <li>• Required other tactical and strategic developments that occurred after the Long March</li> <li>• Eg. The transformation of the PLA into a conventional army by Lin Biao, with Soviet assistance, during the last stages of the civil war was what allowed the CCP to win</li> </ul>	<p>war</p> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the Yen-an Decade saw the development of Mao's ideology and land programme, they found their roots during the Jiangxi Soviet years</li> <li>• Mao had previously experimented with moderate land reform policies such as land confiscation and redistribution, but allowing rich peasants to keep their land</li> <li>• Thus, the Mao's policies in Yen-an was more of a continuation of his earlier programme than a turning point</li> <li>• Moreover, it was the 1936 Xian incident that prevented the GMD from continuing its encirclement campaigns</li> <li>• Would have likely destroyed the CCP since the GMD was already making inroads into Yen-an</li> </ul> <p><b>Discrediting the GMD</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used the Long March to discredit the GMD and raise its own prestige</li> <li>• Mao was able to skilfully portray what had begun as a military defeat as an epic journey to fight their way to their base in Yen-an to fight the Japanese</li> <li>• The CCP base in Yen-an was close to the Japanese lines and provided it the opportunity to assume its role as the defender of the Chinese people, which the GMD under Jiang seemed unwilling to fulfil</li> <li>• The direct result of this was increased disillusionment with Jiang's rule and the erosion of his support base</li> <li>• Resulted in the 1936 Xian incident and the formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> United Front when Jiang was seized by troops acting under the orders of warlord Zhang Xueliang</li> <li>• Effectively ensured the survival of the CCP from 1936 onwards</li> <li>• According to <b>Johnson</b>, the growth of peasant nationalism in the context of the Japanese invasion was the most important reason for CCP victory during the civil war</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mao having led the CCP to "victory" seemed to be surrounded by a certain mystique and was looked upon as a prophet and saviour</li> </ul> <p><b>Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, the Long March was essentially a military defeat for the Communists</li> <li>• Were driven out of their southern base in Jiangxi and lost 80% of their numbers</li> <li>• <b>Chang and Halliday:</b> The Long March was not remotely heroic as the Maoist legend had made out; details tended to be exaggerated and some battles were simply made up</li> <li>• Hence it may be argued that the CCP's presentation and exploitation of the myth of the Long March had become more significant in the history of China than the event itself</li> <li>• <b>Jack Gray:</b> The Japanese invasion into China saved the CCP from extinction</li> <li>• The CCP was sorely outnumbered by the GMD and were lacking in weapons and supplies</li> <li>• Jiang's order for a final extermination campaign upon the new Communist base was ignored only because of the threat of Japanese invasion</li> <li>• Had the Xian incident and 2<sup>nd</sup> United Front not occurred, the CCP would not have survived</li> </ul>
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