

Mao Zedong and the Strategic Choice of the CPC Central Committee: The Long March Landed—The Historical Logic and Practical Enlightenment of Northern Shaanxi

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Abstract: This study systematically examines the strategic decision-making process between Comrade Mao Zedong and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China during the Long March, analyzing the multiple motivations behind choosing northern Shaanxi as the final destination and its profound historical impact. As an extraordinary strategic relocation in the history of the Chinese Communist Party, the Long March not only demonstrated the tenacious resilience of revolutionary forces but also became a pivotal turning point, influencing modern China's historical trajectory. The decision by Comrade Mao Zedong and the Central Committee to establish northern Shaanxi as the Long March endpoint was a critical choice rooted in profound strategic considerations, laying solid political, military, and popular foundations for subsequent revolutionary victories and the establishment of the New China. Through historical retrospection, this paper aims to reveal the intrinsic logic and practical implications of this strategic decision.

Keywords: Mao Zedong; Long March; Northern Shaanxi; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC); Strategic choice

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1. Comrade Mao Zedong's historical status and great contributions

Comrade Mao Zedong was the great leader of the Chinese people, an outstanding Marxist, and a remarkable proletarian revolutionary, strategist, and theorist. As the principal founder and visionary leader of the Communist Party of China, the People's Liberation Army, and the People's Republic of China, he pioneered the historical process of Sinicizing Marxism, laid the theoretical foundation for Mao Zedong Thought, and became the core of the Party's first generation of central leadership ^[1]. During the stormy revolutionary era, Comrade Mao Zedong, with extraordinary wisdom and unwavering resolve, led the Chinese people through arduous struggles

to overthrow the three mountains of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, achieving a fundamental turning point in the nation's destiny. He was the great leader who spearheaded the people's liberation cause and established the new China. His revolutionary practices spanned all stages of the Chinese revolution—from early peasant movements to armed struggles and base area construction—demonstrating strategic foresight throughout ^[2].

Through decades of revolutionary practice, Comrade Mao Zedong systematically developed a revolutionary ideological system of profound historical significance. By creatively applying Marxist principles, he conducted in-depth analyses of China's unique semi-colonial and semi-feudal social conditions. His scientific examination of the internal logic and objective prerequisites for the existence and development of China's revolutionary regime revealed the revolutionary law that “a spark can start a prairie fire”, while profoundly elucidating its strategic value in the overall revolutionary context. Mao made groundbreaking theoretical contributions to fundamental issues such as formulating land revolution programs, establishing principles for people's army construction, and developing theories for building proletarian political parties. These efforts gave rise to major strategic concepts like “armed agrarian revolution” and “surrounding the cities from the countryside.” Not only did these ideas provide theoretical guidance for China's revolutionary practice, but they also decisively influenced the seizure of national power, steering the Chinese revolution toward ultimate victory. The essence of Mao Zedong Thought lies in its integration of China's realities, emphasizing the unity of practice and theory, thereby providing action guidelines for the Party across different historical periods ^[3].

Specifically, from the winter of 1925 to the spring of 1927, Comrade Mao Zedong applied Marxist class analysis methodology in works such as “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society” and “Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement.” He scientifically analyzed the economic status and political attitudes of various social classes in China, explicitly identifying peasants' issues as the core of the Chinese revolution. Mao highly praised the historical significance of peasant movements as “excellent”, emphasized the historical inevitability of proletarian leadership in peasant struggles, and laid the ideological foundation for the land revolution ^[4]. These early works established the basis for the revolutionary mass line. When the KMT-CCP cooperation collapsed in 1927, at a critical juncture of the revolution, he delivered the groundbreaking statement “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” at the Central Committee's emergency meeting (August 7th Conference), establishing the principle of armed seizure of political power and charting a new revolutionary course. Subsequently, Chinese Communists, represented by Comrade Mao Zedong, grounded in national realities, abandoned dogmatic adherence to foreign experiences. They creatively proposed strategic guidelines for establishing rural revolutionary bases and advancing the land revolution in areas where Kuomintang rule was weak, successfully pioneering a Chinese-characterized revolutionary path of encircling cities from the countryside and seizing political power through armed struggle. This approach enabled revolutionary forces to survive and grow stronger amidst white terror. For instance, the establishment of the Jinggangshan base area became a model practice of this strategy, validating the feasibility of encircling cities from the countryside ^[5].

However, after 1931, Wang Ming's “leftist” dogmatic line dominated the Central Committee. By mechanically following Comintern directives and rejecting Comrade Mao Zedong's correct propositions aligned with China's realities, the Party leadership was marginalized, leading to his removal from both the Party and Red Army leadership. This critical error directly caused the Central Red Army's defeat in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign, resulting in severe losses for the Soviet forces. In October 1934, the Central Red Army was forced to initiate a strategic relocation—the Long March, a monumental historical journey involving tens of thousands of soldiers who traversed treacherous terrain while facing enemy blockades ^[6]. At a pivotal moment in January

1935, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee convened the historic Zunyi Conference, which ended the dominance of leftist dogmatism within the Party and established Comrade Mao Zedong's leadership over both the Party and the Red Army. This decisive move saved the Party, the Red Army, and the Chinese revolution, marking a critical turning point in Party history. By October of the same year, after enduring immense hardships, the Central Committee and the main force of the Red Army successfully reached northern Shaanxi, concluding the Long March. The establishment of the revolutionary base in Northwest China paved the way for the subsequent formation of the Anti-Japanese National United Front^[7].

Examining Comrade Mao Zedong's monumental revolutionary endeavors and profound theoretical contributions—particularly the historic path he led the Chinese people to forge and the enduring ideological legacy he left behind—provides vital historical insights and practical guidance for the new era. These insights help us deeply comprehend the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, strengthen historical confidence, enhance proactive engagement with history, and advance the comprehensive modernization of China to build a modern socialist nation. His revolutionary ethos and methodology—such as the principle of seeking truth from facts, the mass line approach, and independence—continue to serve as powerful motivation driving our progress, offering enduring wisdom for contemporary governance^[8].

2. The strategic choice of the Long March to settle down in northern Shaanxi

The Long March was a monumental strategic relocation undertaken by the Chinese Communist Party during revolutionary setbacks, aimed at preserving revolutionary momentum, seeking strategic opportunities, and forging new revolutionary frontiers. Over the course of a year-long arduous journey spanning 25,000 li (approximately 14,500 kilometers) across 11 provinces, Comrade Mao Zedong masterfully commanded the Central Red Army (First Front Army). Through four historic crossings—the Chishui River, Jinsha River, Dadu River, and the daring capture of Luding Bridge—comrades overcame Nationalist forces' relentless encirclement. They scaled snow-capped mountains, traversed treacherous grasslands, and endured unimaginable hardships, including harsh natural conditions and severe shortages. With unshakable revolutionary conviction and indomitable perseverance, they ultimately achieved their strategic relocation objectives. Despite heavy losses during the march, the Red Army preserved its core strength through tactical flexibility and unwavering resolve, laying crucial foundations for subsequent revolutionary endeavors^[9].

The choice of northern Shaanxi as the strategic foothold was a key decision made by the CPC Central Committee and Comrade Mao Zedong after careful consideration based on three profound considerations:

Firstly, the region boasts remarkable geographical advantages. Situated on the Loess Plateau, northern Shaanxi features a complex terrain with crisscrossing gullies and rugged ridges, creating natural barriers that make it easy to defend but difficult to attack. This terrain provides ideal conditions for establishing a solid base area, enabling the Red Army to conduct strategic defense and prolonged warfare. The densely packed ravines in this region offer natural concealment and ambush advantages, effectively reducing threats from enemy mechanized forces^[10].

Secondly, the revolutionary foundation was deeply rooted and solid. Communist leaders like Liu Zhidan and Xie Zichang persistently fought here for years, establishing and expanding the Northern Shaanxi Red Army and the Shaan-Gan Border Revolutionary Base. They founded Soviet governments, built broad popular support, and developed substantial armed forces – all providing crucial footholds and strong backing for the Central Red Army.

Local farmers who benefited from the land revolution actively supported the Red Army, forming a stable network of grassroots support ^[11].

Thirdly, the strategic value of this region is exceptionally prominent. Situated in the heartland of Northwest China, it lies far from Nanjing—the Nationalist Party’s capital—where reactionary forces were relatively weak. Its proximity to the North China Anti-Japanese Front not only provided the Red Army with a vital base for recuperation and consolidation but also facilitated future expansion into the frontlines. This strategic position established a pivotal hub connecting Northwest, North China, and the entire nation. The geographical advantage enabled seamless coordination with revolutionary forces nationwide, paving the way for the formation of the Anti-Japanese National United Front ^[12].

Landing in northern Shaanxi has great and far-reaching strategic significance:

It provided a valuable rear area for the Red Army to recuperate, reorganize, and grow stronger after suffering hardships, ended the mobile state of the ten-thousand-mile war, and gave the Chinese revolution a stable strategic foothold. The Red Army recovered its strength here, reorganized its troops, replenished its troops, and prepared for the subsequent Anti-Japanese War.

Building on the Central Soviet Area’s extensive revolutionary experience, the region achieved rapid consolidation and expansion of its base areas by intensifying land reform efforts and establishing robust Soviet governments at all levels. This garnered heartfelt support from impoverished farmers across northern Shaanxi and surrounding regions, reestablishing a solid mass foundation for the Chinese Revolution. Land reform policies such as rent reduction and interest relief not only improved rural livelihoods but also strengthened revolutionary cohesion ^[13].

The military-civilian integration model of “military-civilian unity as one” developed through the Shaanbei practice became the core driving force for revolutionary forces to survive, grow, and strengthen. This model successfully explored a path to establish and consolidate revolutionary bases in underdeveloped regions, laying a solid political, military, and popular foundation for the Communist Party of China’s transition from regional separatism to nationwide governance. Emphasizing shared hardships between the army and people, this model forged a bond of trust that strengthened their unity ^[14].

History has powerfully demonstrated that during critical revolutionary transitions, maintaining close unity and high cohesion among the Party, military, and people serves as the fundamental guarantee for overcoming all adversities and achieving victory. Through initiatives like the Zunyi Conference, Comrade Mao Zedong and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China strengthened intra-Party solidarity and ideological alignment. By strictly enforcing the “Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention” and addressing the hardships of the masses, they fostered a close bond between the army and civilians, forging an ironclad resolve across the entire Party and military. This ultimately enabled them to overcome severe challenges during the Long March and their initial arrival in northern Shaanxi. For instance, in the later stages of the Long March, rectification campaigns corrected erroneous ideologies and ensured troop unity ^[15].

In the face of extreme difficulties in the northern Shaanxi region, such as poor soil, poor people, and a backward economy, the CPC Central Committee and Comrade Mao Zedong did not retreat, but creatively inherited and developed the economic construction experience of the Soviet areas:

“We will implement the economic policy of ‘combining military and civilian affairs and combining peacetime and wartime’, encourage the military to participate in production, develop the public economy and cooperative economy, and ensure wartime supplies. The military will cultivate wasteland and grow grain to achieve self-

sufficiency.”

The leaders launched a vigorous campaign of mass production, “do it by ourselves, have enough food and clothing”, and cultivated land, and set up factories to achieve self-sufficiency in food and daily necessities. The development of Nanniwan became a model and alleviated the shortage of materials ^[16].

Establish a sustainable material security system, including taxation, trade, and finance, to break the enemy’s economic blockade. Obtain necessities through fair trade policies and trade with merchants in the white zone.

This initiative not only effectively alleviated the immense survival pressures faced by military and civilian personnel in the base areas, significantly reducing the burden on local communities, but also deepened the solidarity between the military and civilians through joint labor and struggle. It laid a solid material foundation for sustaining revolutionary endeavors over the long term. Furthermore, it provided valuable organizational experience for leading large-scale economic development after assuming national governance, while cultivating a substantial pool of economic management cadres—particularly financial professionals—who became talent reserves for New China’s construction ^[17].

3. Conclusion

This article systematically elucidates the profound historical logic and practical significance of the CPC Central Committee’s decision to establish the Shaanbei base area through analyzing Comrade Mao Zedong’s historical status, theoretical contributions, and the pivotal historical event of the Long March’s final destination in northern Shaanxi. This strategic choice demonstrated Mao Zedong’s tactical wisdom and deep understanding of China’s national conditions, becoming a critical turning point for the revolution’s survival ^[18]. As people fully implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the CPC and embark on a new journey toward building a modernized China to advance national rejuvenation, revisiting Mao Zedong’s brilliant ideological legacy and revolutionary practices offers vital insights: Whether it be victories in revolutionary times or achievements during the construction period, people must steadfastly uphold correct political direction, focus on the grand goal of national rejuvenation, unwaveringly adhere to the Party’s correct line, and vigorously carry forward the fine traditions of self-reliance and hard struggle ^[19]. Mao Zedong’s practice teaches that facing challenges requires adhering to seeking truth from facts and following the mass line. Only by doing so can people effectively address various risks and obstacles on the path forward, overcome difficulties in historical endeavors, continuously write glorious new chapters for socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and contribute Chinese wisdom and solutions to the world.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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