
LESSON III: THE SALT MARCH AND THE LONG MARCH

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To understand why Gandhi undertook the Salt March and broke the British ban on making salt from seawater.
- ◆ To understand why Mao and his Red Army undertook the Long March and why some soldiers survived.
- ◆ To compare the motivation for, strategies during, and results of these two events.
- ◆ To evaluate the predicted long-term significance of these two events and speculate whether that has been so.

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the early 1930s both Mao and Gandhi had the opportunity to test their philosophies and methods of resistance by leading mass movements against their respective oppositions, the Guomindang in China and the British in India. Each of these dramatic events not only crystallized their leadership and world view, but served as kind of symbolic and almost mythological touch stone for each leader's subsequent efforts to shape his nationalist movement as well as his program for social reform.

Mao's success in organizing peasant movements in Kiangsi motivated Chiang Kai-shek to attempt to put an end to the communist party stronghold. Beginning in 1931, Chiang launched the first of five military campaigns designed to surround and defeat the Kiangsi forces. In the first three engagements, Mao was able to defeat the Guomindang armies and to capture valuable weapons and ammunition. During this period, Zhou Enlai, one of the three major leaders of the Communist revolution, came to Kiangsi and took over as field commander of the Communist base. Under Zhou the Kiangsi army was able to repel the fourth Guomindang attack in 1933 as members of the communist party left Shanghai to join the Mao inspired Kiangsi soviet. However, in August 1933, Chiang Kai-shek launched an all out offensive mobilizing a million men against the communist forces.

Despite some major defections in Chiang's army, the Guomindang was able in 1934 to push the Communist army to the brink of defeat. However, in late summer several of the communist units were able to break through the Guomindang lines and begin the famous "Long March" to Hunan province. In January 1935 the beleaguered Communist army arrived in Yunnan to begin the formidable task of building a new Kiangsi-style base of power. By October, 1934, after four earlier "encirclement" campaigns launched by the Guomindang against Mao's major power base

in Kiangsi, the Red army was nearly defeated. However, a hundred thousand Communist soldiers broke through Chiang Kai-shek's lines and commenced a 6,000 mile march to Yenen where they hoped to join another of the Red Armies in an area where the local peasants were sympathetic to the Communist cause.

Some 20,000 wounded veterans of the five encirclement campaigns in Kiangsi were left in the care of villagers. Breaking into small bands of guerrillas, the Red Army, relentlessly pursued by Chiang's armies, made their way over thousands of miles of mountains and other inhospitable terrain to Yenen in northern China.

During the "Long March" the various divisions of the Red Army endured not only the attacks of warlords, hostile ethnic minorities, bandits and the pursuing Guomindang army, but high altitudes, snow blizzards, torrential rains, the infamous "Grasslands," where they had to sleep standing up, and constant sickness and lack of food. On the way they crossed 24 rivers and 18 mountain ranges. Those who survived the march and arrived at Yenen numbered only about 20,000. Four-fifths of the army had perished along the way. Yet from this small band of survivors, Mao was able to build a new base founded in no small extent on the great legend of the Long March.

Gandhi intended his Salt March to be the focal point of his 1930s Civil Disobedience campaign. He conceptualized the march in an atmosphere of growing violence all over India. Police officers were being assassinated, labor strikes often turned violent, and Subhas Chandra Bose, the charismatic nationalist leader, was counseling violent political action and telling his mostly young followers, "Give me blood and I promise you freedom."

Despite the new British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald's sympathy with moving India toward some independent status, the Indian nationalist hopes were dashed when the British parliament failed to support MacDonald's position. The British reversal only spawned more unrest and violence among Indian nationalists. People all over India waited to see what Gandhi would do. "Nothing, but organized nonviolence" Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, "can check the organized violence of the British Government." Gandhi further explained that if the British decided not to move forward with basic reforms and take steps toward India's freedom, he would lead a march from his ashram to the sea, a distance of 241 miles, and deliberately make salt from ocean water in direct defiance of the laws granting the British government a monopoly on salt manufacture.

On March 12, 1930, Gandhi, true to his word, set out with seventy-eight members of his ashram, whose names were given to the police in advance, for the twenty-four day march to the sea. During the march, which covered about 12-15 miles each day, Gandhi spun for an hour each morning and faithfully kept his diary. As the marchers progressed, they stopped two or three times a day for meetings with villagers along the way. Gandhi urged the villagers to spin, stay away from drink and drugs, boycott child marriages, and to try to live more purely.

On April 5th, the day they reached the sea at Dandi, the marchers, whose ranks had now swollen to the thousands, stayed up all night and prayed. As the sun rose the next day, Gandhi led a small band of followers into the water as he picked up a pinch of salt washed onto the beach by the waves.

Following Gandhi's deliberate violation of a British law, hundreds of thousands of people all over India walked into the various bodies of water and proceeded to make salt also. The British arrested thousands, including Gandhi himself. In Bombay the Congress Party leaders made salt on the roof of their office and when arrested a crowd of some 60,000 gathered to protest their jailing. Altogether the British sent between 50 and 75 thousand nationalist protesters to jail.

Following Gandhi's arrest, another contingent of his followers was assigned to march on the Dharsana Salt Works, 150 miles from Bombay. This time Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, affectionately called the Indian nightingale, led the 2,500 marchers. They carefully followed Gandhi's instructions not to resist, fight back, or even "raise a hand or ward off a blow" from the police.

The Salt March galvanized mass support for the Indian nationalist movement and gave the people the realization that they could indeed face down the British and ultimately gain their independence. The march also moved Gandhi to the height of his political influence. From then on he remained the undisputed leader of the nationalist movement and the "father of the country."

C. Long March Reference Sites:

1. Chen, Chang-Fang. On the Long March with Chairman Mao
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/CHINAAlong.htm>
2. "The Long March-70 Years On."
<http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/changzheng/175679.htm>
3. "Long March." Review PowerPoint. <http://www.kgv.edu.hk/history/Y10-11/China/Long%20March%20Edwards%20Game.ppt>

READINGS ON THE LONG MARCH

Reading 1

The communists had a firm belief in the power of one man to win a battle. They sent a single soldier over at night after they had silenced the enemy guns with mortars. The solitary swimmer managed to capture one of the boats hidden against the shore, and this single boat was afterward sent backward and forward across the river crammed with Red soldiers until a beachhead was established. Later all the boats were captured. The Guomindang forces, who had not expected the Communists to turn back and attack the shore they had just left, were routed by a surprise maneuver—one which looked ludicrously simple when P'eng The-huai drew a map of the small campaign for me in the dusty loess soil outside his cave. It was by such ruses that they won their battles; and more and more they were forced to regard themselves as guerrilla forces, dedicated to ruses, to the endless game of cunning and surprise.

Source: Robert Payne, *Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969) pp. 149, 152.

Reading 2

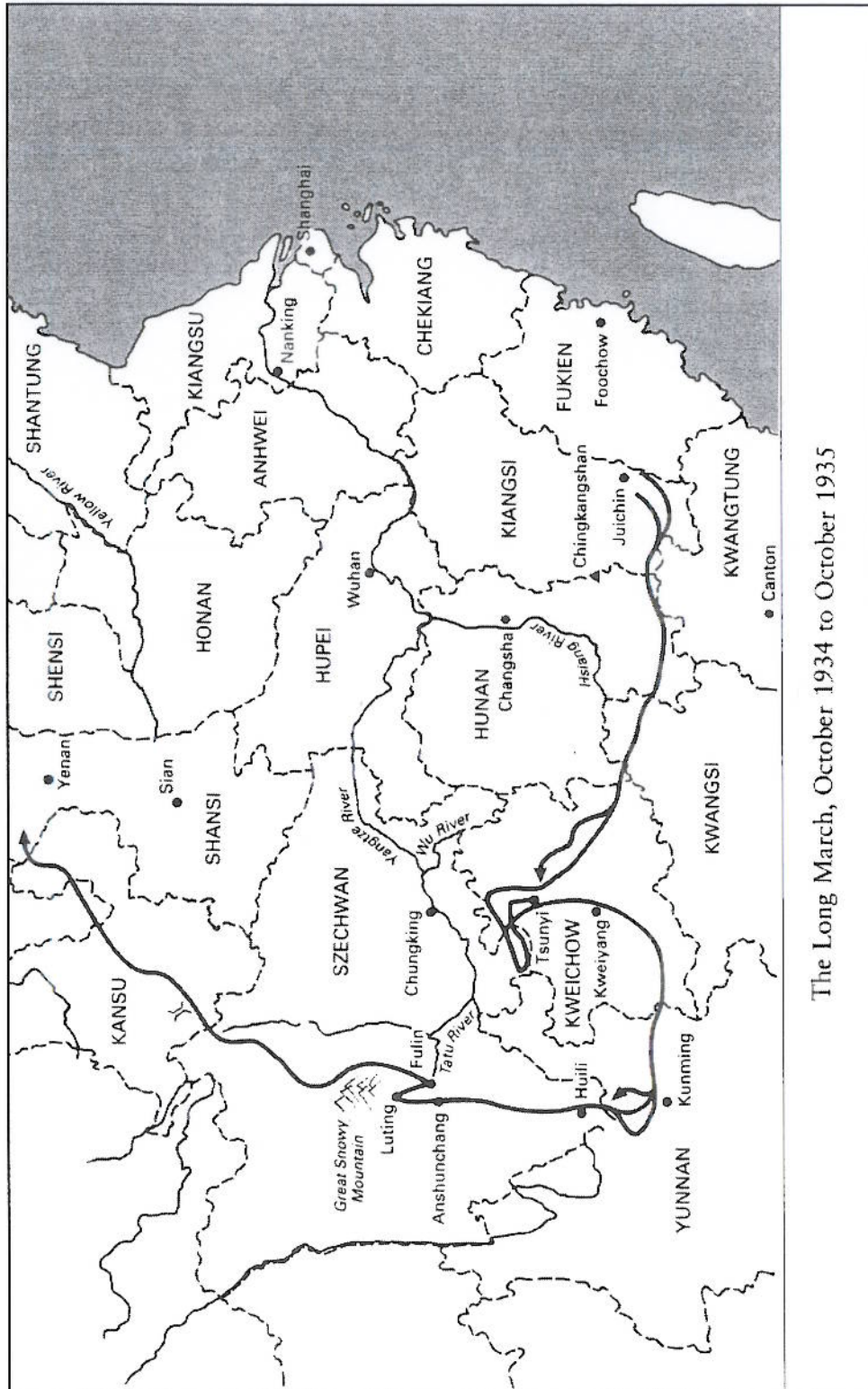
Speaking of the Long March, one may ask, What is its significance? We answer that the Long March is the first of its kind in the annals of history, that it is a manifesto, a propaganda force, a seeding machine. Since Pan Ku divided the heavens from the earth and the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors reigned, has history ever witnessed a Long March such as ours? . . .

We were encircled and pursued, obstructed and intercepted by a huge force of several hundred thousand men; yet by using our two legs we swept across a distance of more than 20,000 li [6,000 miles] through the length and breadth of eleven provinces. . . . Well, has there ever been in history a long march like ours? No, never. The Long March is also a manifesto. It proclaims to the world that the Red Army is an army of heroes and that the imperialists and their jackals, Chiang Kai-shek and his like, are perfect nonentities. It announces the bankruptcy of the encirclement, pursuit, obstruction and interception attempted by the imperialists and Chiang Kai-shek. The Long March is also an agitation corps. It declares to the approximately two hundred million people of the eleven provinces that only the road of the Red Army leads to their liberation. Without the Long March, how could the masses have known so quickly that there are such great ideas in the world as are upheld by the Red Army? The Long March is also a seeding-machine. It has sown many seeds which will sprout, grow leaves, blossom into flowers, bear fruit and yield a crop in future. Without the Communist Party, a Long March of this kind would have been inconceivable. The Chinese Communist Party, its leadership, its cadres and its members fear no difficulties or hardships. . . . To sum up, the Long March ended with our victory and the enemy's defeat.

Sources: "On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism" Dec 27, 1935, in Jerome Ch'en, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press), pp. 199–200.

Bruno Shaw, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), pp. 53–54.

THE LONG MARCH



The Long March, October 1934 to October 1935

Reading 4: “Political Power Grows out of the Barrel of a Gun”

Every Communist must understand this truth: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Our principle is that the Party commands the gun; the gun shall never be allowed to command the Party. But it is also true that with the gun at our disposal we can really build up the party organizations; the Eighth Route Army has built up the Party organization in North China. We can also rear cadres and create schools, culture and mass movements. Everything in Yenan has been built up by means of the gun. Anything can grow out of the barrel of a gun. Viewed from the Marxist theory of the state, the army is the chief component of the political power of the state. Whoever wants to seize and hold on to political power must have a strong army. Some people have ridiculed us as advocates of the ‘theory of the omnipotence of war’: yes. We are, we are advocates of the theory of the omnipotence of revolutionary war. This is not a bad thing. With the help of guns, the Russian communists brought about socialism. We want to bring about a democratic republic. Experience in the class struggle of the era of imperialism teaches us that the working class and the toiling masses cannot defeat the armed bourgeois and landlord except by the power of the gun; in this sense we can even say that the whole world can be remoulded only with the gun. As advocates of the abolition of war, we do not desire war; but war can only be abolished through war—in order to get rid of the gun, we must first grasp it in hand.

Source: Mao’s Concluding Remarks at the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee, Nov., 1938, in Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 290–91.

Reading 5: Chairman Mao Has Given Me a Gun

(by Hsiang Yang)

Chairman Mao has given me a gun
To guard our red political power;
Clear what I love and hate, firm in my stand,
Holding my course through densest clouds and mist.

Chairman Mao has given me a gun
To guard our red political power;
The skies may fall but I shall never falter,
Determined to consolidate proletarian dictatorship.

Chairman Mao has given me a gun
To guard our red political power;
I shall support the Left, make revolution,
Ready to shed my blood or lose my head!

Chairman Mao has given me a gun
To guard our red political power;
If the enemy dare attack
They will meet their doom!

Chairman Mao has given me a gun
To guard our red political power;
All my life I shall follow Chairman Mao
To make our land impregnable for ever.

Source: Hsiang Yang, "Chairman Mao Has Given Me a Gun," in Leon Hellerman and Alan L. Stein, eds., *Readings on the Middle Kingdom* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1973), pp. 240–41.