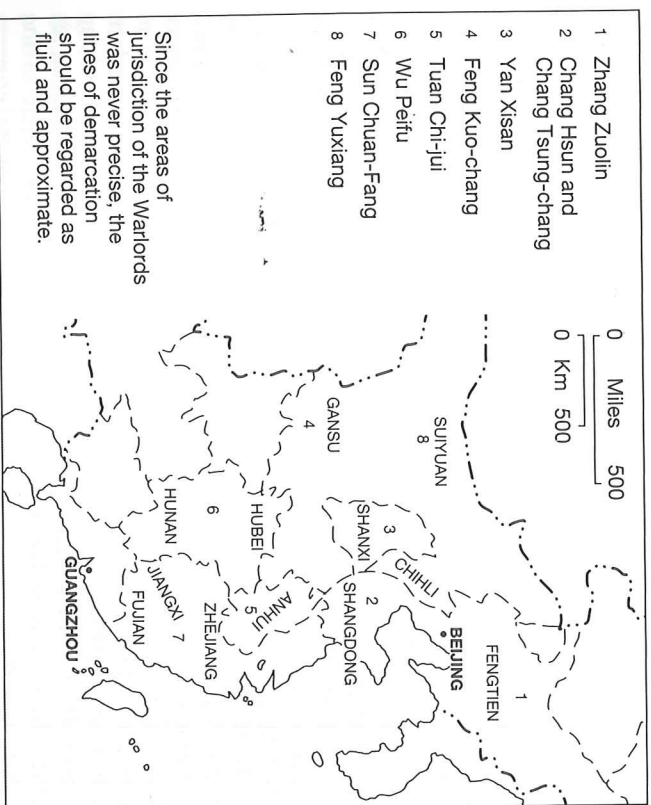


replaced the Manchus was not well served by the mixture of naivety and corruption that passed for politics in that period.

3 The Warlord Era, 1916-27

Whatever Yuan Shikai's failings may have been, he had represented some degree of authority and order. With his passing there was no individual or party capable of preventing China from sliding into further confusion and fragmentation. Nominally, the republican government continued to function in Beijing but it exercised little real power. It was split between rival factions, the most prominent being the Anhui, the Fengtien, and the Chihhi groups. Although they styled themselves parties, none of them represented a clearly defined principle or programme. Save in their personnel and their geographical location they were barely distinguishable from each other. They were no more than cliques bidding for power.

The weakness of the republican government was most evident in its inability to maintain a loyal army. This in turn meant that there was no force strong enough to impose the government's will on the provinces. As it became impossible to sustain civilian government in these areas. As a direct consequence, the local regions fell under the domination of what



Principal warlords and their areas of authority before 1926

were in effect a series of private armies, whose commanders-in-chief took over the reins of civil as well as military authority. The power of the sword predominated. The military commanders, or 'warlords' as they became known, were answerable only to themselves. They created their own laws, issued their own currency and imposed their own taxation systems. In describing the weakness of central authority against the strength of local elites, historians have likened warlord China to England during the Wars of the Roses and to Renaissance Italy in the time of the city states.

Two broad phases are identifiable in the warlord period, pre-1920 and post-1920. The first set of warlords achieved their position largely by default; that is to say, they happened to be holding provincial military governorships at the time the central authority of the republican government in Beijing began to break down. They tended to be strongly conservative in outlook. Although there was continuity after 1920, many warlords holding power well into the 1920s and beyond, there was also a tendency after that date for new military commanders to appear who did not owe their positions to previous republican appointment. They were opportunists who seized power knowing that the central government was incapable of stopping them.

Because of the common military features of their rule, it has been customary to group the warlords together as a single phenomenon, but in reality they represented a wide variety of attitudes and aspirations. The following examples suggest how different the warlords were from each other. Duan Qirui (Tuan Chi-jiu), who became warlord in Anhui in 1916, had been Minister for War under Yuan Shikai. He proclaimed a strong belief in Confucian values and had gained a significant personal following, known as the 'Anfu Club', in the republican parliament. Feng Kuo-chang, who took control of Gansu (Kansu) in 1916, had also been one of Yuan's lieutenants and had played a central role in the 1911 rebellion against the Manchus; he had subsequently risen to become Vice-president of the Republic. In marked contrast was Zhang Xun (Chang Hsun), whose base was in Shandong (Shantung) province. He was a staunch supporter of the Manchu dynasty and was styled 'the pigtailed general' because he continued to wear the queue as a mark of his belief in traditional Manchu forms. In 1917 Zhang made an unsuccessful attempt to restore Pu Yi to the imperial throne.

Among the warlords who took power after 1920 was Feng Yuxiang (Feng Yu-hsiang), the 'Christian general', who baptised his troops *en masse* with a hosepipe. Feng rose from an illiterate peasant background in Suiyuan to become a self-taught upholder of a bizarre synthesis of Confucian, Christian and Buddhist teachings. He would not tolerate 'immoral' behaviour by his troops and made them sing improving hymns in place of the foul ditties they were accustomed to bawl when marching. A strikingly individual feature of Feng's rule was his conviction that the province should be governed by moral values. As

totally different from Feng as it was possible to be was Zhang Zongzhang (Chang Tsung-chang), another of the warlords who emerged after 1922. Zhang was a depraved bandit who fought his way to power in Shandong province by 'splitting melons', his jolly euphemism for smashing open his opponents' heads. He took a pathological delight in terrorising the population and destroying the resources of the province.

Whatever their separate aims and individual quirks, the warlords retained one common characteristic. None of them was willing to give up his private army or submit to outside authority. As long as their rule obtained, China would stay divided. Moreover, notwithstanding the rare warlord who had genuine concern for the people of the region over which he held sway, the prevailing Chinese perception of warlord rule was one of oppression and terror.

1 Poor people of Sichuan, for ten years now we have suffered the scourge of militarism, more destructive than the floods, more destructive than savage beasts. Will it continue until not a single man, not a single hut remains in this wretched land? Ah! these 5 military governors and their officers! ... We must have soldiers, people say, so that the country will be strong. We must have armies



Feng Yuxiang, Chiang Kai-shek and Yan Xishan

to protect ourselves from foreigners. And the armies are continually recruiting men. And the people become poorer and poorer! ... where an army has passed, nothing grows but brambles.¹⁰ This is the case with us, where armies pass through again and again. Our situation has become intolerable.

China's weakness during the warlord era was a commentary on the failure of the Republic to replace Manchu autocracy with effective central government. Regional ties had proved too strong. The belief that the 1911 revolution would lead to the introduction of representative government in China, had turned out to be a false one. The roots of democracy were too shallow for it to take hold. This opened the way for locally powerful individuals to take over the regions. It is true that there was still a strong residual nationalism among the Chinese, which sporadically expressed itself in passionate anti-foreigner demonstrations, but as yet it lacked a clear political focus or direction. Rather than create political stability, the Republic had produced a political vacuum. It thus became the goal of the two leading revolutionary parties, the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party, which was formed in 1921, to fill that void. In their early development what gave both parties appeal and purpose was not so much what they were for but what they were against. Although their ultimate objectives for China might differ, they shared the basic view that an essential first step was the removal of the two evils that characterised the warlord period, warlordism itself and the continued subjection of China to foreign imperialists.

The anomaly was that while the political leaders professed a deep animosity towards the foreigners they were not above receiving hand-outs or protection from them when in need. Sun Yatsen frequently sought help from Japan and took sanctuary in the foreign legations. His attempt to set up a rival Nationalist government in Guangzhou in opposition to Beijing only added to China's divisions. Neither the Republican government in the north nor the Nationalist one in the south could operate independently of the warlords in those regions. Both governments negotiated with local warlords and were quite prepared to enlist their military support in order to sustain their own authority. The strength of Zhang Zuolin (Chang Tso-lin), warlord in the Beijing area, was such that a number of foreign countries chose to deal with him, rather than the official republican government in Beijing. Similarly, the power of Wu Peifu in central China made him independent of the rival government in Guangzhou.

Nevertheless, there were some positive features to the warlord era. Advances were made on the economic front; some of the warlords had progressive ideas regarding agriculture and industry. Zhang Zuolin adopted an industrial development programme with the specific intention of preventing a Japanese economic takeover of Manchuria.

Yan Xishan (Yen Hsi-shan), one of the longest-surviving warlords, maintained his control of the Shanxi (Shansi) region from the first year of the Republic in 1912 until the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949. During that time he introduced industrial training schemes and endeavoured to improve the quality and range of local services in the province.

Moreover, the warlord period was important for the reaction it produced. The disunity and distress that characterised the time intensified nationalist feelings in China. This produced a solidarity among Chinese radicals and gave direction and purpose to a revolutionary movement that otherwise might have continued to dissipate itself in factionalism and local rivalries. It was no accident that China's literary and intellectual renaissance reached its high point in the 1920s - the worst years of warlord rule. The humiliation of the nation at the hands of warlords and foreigners gave the Chinese a common sense of grievance. It was this that eventually checked the centrifugal tendencies in republican China by providing a cause around which the Chinese could unite. Ultimately the two major revolutionary parties would engage in a long and violent struggle for supremacy, but in their initial relations what united them was greater than what divided them.

a) The 4 May Movement, 1919-25

The '4 May Movement' refers to the sustained feeling of resentment against Japan in particular and the imperialist occupiers in general. This reaction was most notable among China's intellectuals, who, disillusioned by the failure of the 1911 revolution and the Republic to achieve real advances for the country, were further dismayed by the apparent refusal of the West to extend the principles of democracy and self-determination to China. The 4 May Movement was of central importance in Chinese politics between 1919 and 1927 and played its part in preparing the ground for the reorganisation of the GMD in 1919 and the creation of the CCP in 1921. It took its name from the first day of the violent demonstration in Beijing, which followed the news of China's humiliation at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. In April the victorious Allies, gathered at Versailles, dismissively informed the Chinese delegation that Germany's concessionary rights in Shandong province were not to be returned to China but were to be transferred instead to Japan. This was a direct reneging on the earlier promise made to China by the Allies. Indeed, it had been that commitment that had finally persuaded China at considerable cost to itself to enter the First World War on the Allied side in 1917.

How intense the Chinese sense of nationalism could be when outraged had been shown in 1915 in the disturbances that had followed Yuan Shikai's acceptance of Japan's 21 Demands. China's major cities now experienced the same reaction. In May 1919, Chinese protesters

took to the streets, intent on venting their anger. Government ministers were physically attacked, and anti-Japanese boycotts were organised in Beijing and Shanghai. A Western observer described the turmoil in the capital:

1 All the educational institutions struck, formed processions and marched around the city. They intended to hold a mass meeting in the Central Park, but the police and military drove them back and made numerous arrests. This was the greatest mistake the government could have made, for if the students had been allowed to hold the meeting they would not have had the opportunity of making themselves martyrs.

During the next few days excited students could be seen in small parties in every street, working themselves into a state of delirium¹⁰ by telling the passers-by of the indignities being thrust upon them through the fault of the pro-Japanese members of the Cabinet, whom they rightly stated were nothing more than the paid agents of Japan.

This movement is the strongest move of its kind that the Chinese have made. Not only has it spread all over China, but in Australia, Singapore, Hongkong, Vladivostok, and even as far as America. Already it has caused great alarm in Japan. This boycott is different to all others. On previous occasions it has been the Chinese merchants who have been the mainstay of such attempts,²⁰ but this time it is the consumer who is carrying it on. The students not only shamed the people into a refusal to purchase Japanese goods, but each one of them took a certain part of a street and explained why they should not... Millions of dollars have been collected to start making articles which have heretofore been purchased from Japan. It will not surprise me if this boycott within the next eighteen months does not cost the Japanese four hundred million dollars.

The most significant aspect of all this was the response of Chinese students and intellectuals. The radical thinkers in the universities turned even more eagerly to revolutionary theory to justify their resistance. In the excited atmosphere, the Marxist creed of violent revolution took on an added attraction and relevance. The seizure of power in Russia by the Bolsheviks in 1917 had provided a practical example of a successful popular rising against a defunct ruling class. Moreover, the Bolsheviks had declared to the world that they were adopting a policy of 'peace without annexations', involving the abandonment of any claims to territories beyond Russia's borders. Here before the eyes of the Chinese revolutionaries was a Marxist government which had forsworn the old imperialism which lay at the root of China's present humiliation. It is easy to understand why Marxism captivated Chinese radicals.

Communist cells soon established themselves in the major Chinese cities, and in 1921 some twenty revolutionaries met in Shanghai to found the Chinese Communist Party. Among them was a young librarian called Mao Zedong, who was soon to become prominent as party organiser in Hunan province.

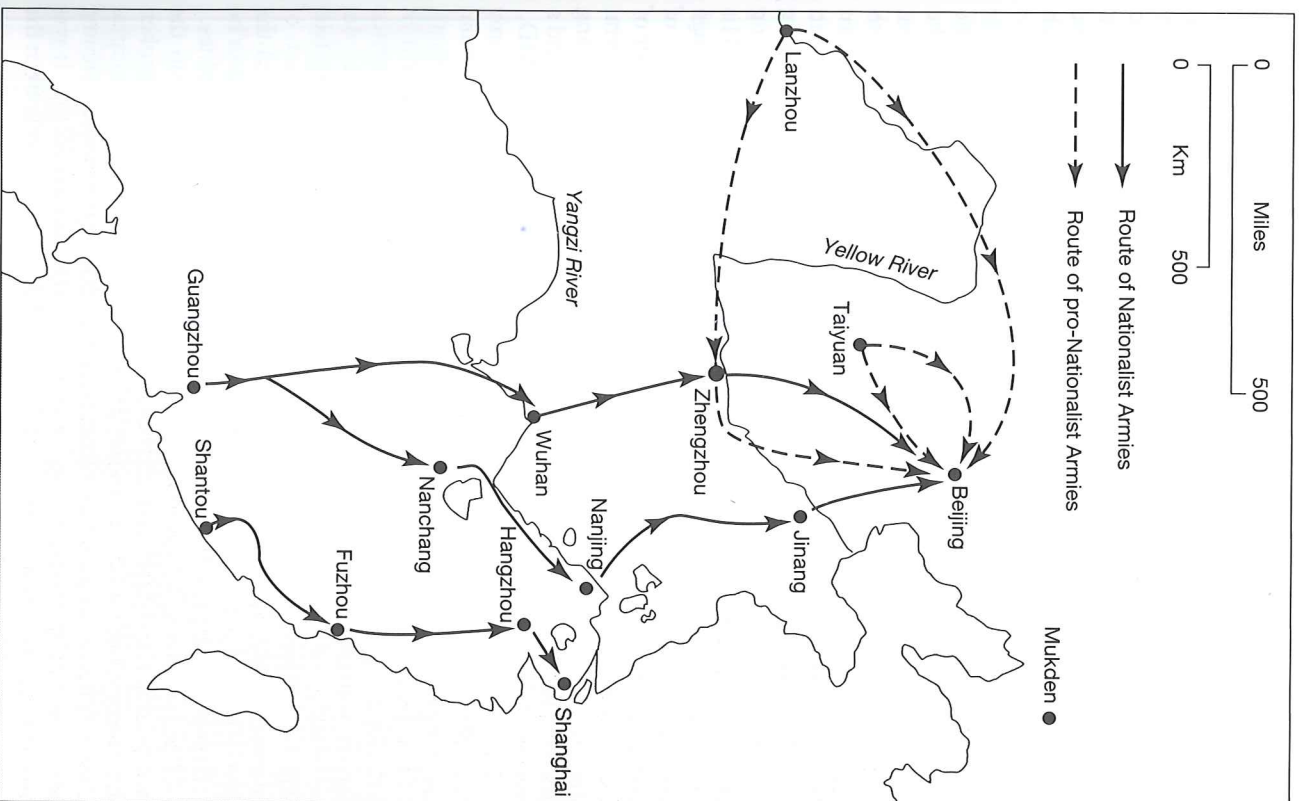
What the 4 May Movement did in the 1920s was to give a sense of direction to radicals and revolutionaries who looked to the ejection of the foreigner as a necessary stage in China's regeneration. Anti-Western and anti-Japanese demonstrations continued to occur throughout the early 1920s. The authorities managed to contain the unrest but it provided fertile opportunities for radicals to spread their propaganda. The CCP and GMD, sometimes acting together, were invariably involved in the organisation or exploitation of the protests.

b) The United Front and the Northern Expedition, 1923-7

Since its reformation in 1912 the GMD had undergone a number of internal disputes over policy, but it had remained loyal to two essentials: the leadership of Sun Yatsen, and 'the 3 Principles of the People' as its basic political programme. The third of these principles, 'the people's livelihood', was often referred to as socialism. Even though this term lacked a precise definition in its Chinese context, it convinced the Comintern that the GMD merited being considered a truly revolutionary party with which the young CCP must co-operate. The result was that by 1923 the two parties had come together under Comintern instructions to form the United Front. There were sceptics in both parties who were suspicious of the other side and doubted that the alliance could survive, but in the short term the affinity between the CCP and the GMD over the need to destroy the warlords and drive out the foreigners held the Front together.

The argument for the existence of the Front was given increased validity by the incident in 1925, which may be regarded as marking the climax of the 4 May Movement. In Shanghai on 30 May, a large crowd marched in protest against an earlier shooting of Chinese workers by Japanese factory guards. Frightened by the scale of the march, the British commander of the international settlement in the city ordered his forces to disperse the protesters with rifle fire, an overreaction that resulted in twelve deaths. The revolutionary parties immediately exploited the ensuing outrage among the Chinese to organise further strikes and riots. Attacks were made on foreign legations amid scenes reminiscent of the Boxer Rising. For days Guangzhou and Shanghai became impossible to govern. An uneasy peace was eventually restored but the incident had revealed how intense anti-foreigner sentiments had become.

For Chinese revolutionaries the 30 May affair re-emphasised the need for military strength; the internal and external enemies of China's



The Northern Expedition 1926-8

revolutionary progress could not be overcome except by force. This was a truth which all realists accepted. The chief beneficiary from this stress upon the role of the military was Chiang Kaishek, who shortly before the 30 May incident had become the leader of the Nationalists. In 1924 he had been appointed Commander-in-Chief at the Whampoa Military Academy at Guangzhou, the GMD's military headquarters. Chiang had used his leadership of the National Revolutionary Army, which that position gave him, to overcome his rivals within the GMD in the succession struggle that followed the death of Sun Yatsen in March 1925.

Sun Yatsen's passing was a significant moment in Chinese politics. It had the effect of releasing the anti-Communist elements within the GMD which Sun had held in check. Chiang Kaishek's success in the GMD power struggle was a victory for the military wing, the element that had close relations with the Chinese middle class and which was opposed to the social revolutionary policies of the CCP. Chiang had not shared his predecessor's belief that the CCP could be easily absorbed into the GMD and then rendered impotent. Although Chiang, along with nearly all the leading members of the GMD, had received training in Moscow in the early 1920s, he had acquired no love for Marxism. His conviction was that the Communists represented an internal challenge that had to be crushed. Chiang's determination to purge his party of Communism was soon evident. During 1926 he dismissed a number of CCP officials from their posts in the Guomindang, arrested several Comintern advisers, and pushed out of office his closest rival, Wang Jingwei (Wang Ching-wei), who had been on the left of the GMD and a civilian. This reinforced Chiang Kaishek's military control of the GMD.

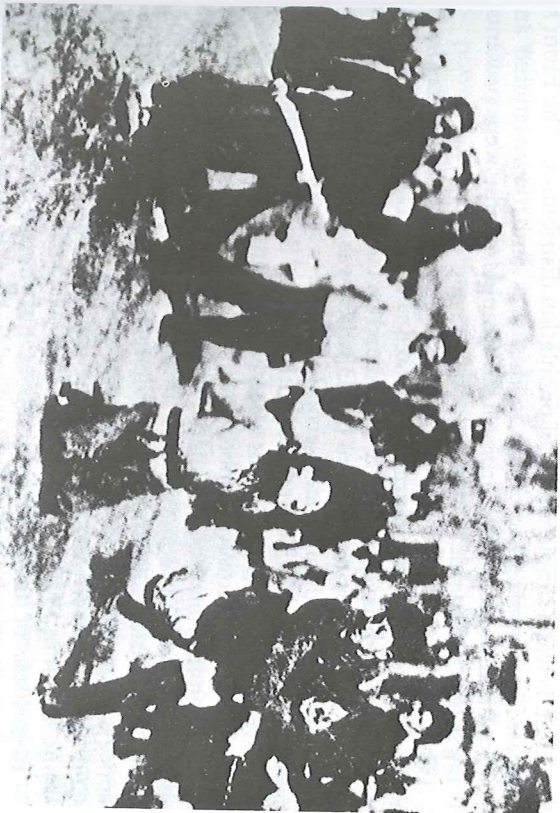
However, Chiang knew that the Communists were not the only obstacle. Before he and his Nationalists could take full power in China, the warlords, who still controlled large areas of central and northern China, had to be broken. The time was ripe; the 30 May incident in 1925 had created a mood of national anger that could now be turned against warlordism. Chiang planned to combine his two objectives, the destruction of the warlords and the annihilation of the Communists, into one major campaign - the Northern Expedition. He could not, of course, openly declare his second objective until he had achieved the first. Until the warlords were defeated the GMD-CCP Front had to be preserved; he still needed the CCP and the Comintern as military allies.

The Northern Expedition proved a remarkable success. Within the two years 1926-8 the forces of the United Front had effectively broken the power of the warlords in the key provinces of eastern and central China. When Zhang Zuolin, the warlord who had controlled the Beijing area, was finally driven out in 1928, the GMD announced that it was now the legitimate government of China and that it would rule from the new capital of Nanjing.

c) The White Terror, 1927

As soon as it became clear that the Northern Expedition would be ultimately successful against the warlords, Chiang renewed his attack on the Communists. This reached its climax in the 'White Terror' in Shanghai in April 1927. Shanghai had witnessed the growth of a powerful trade union movement under the direction of Zhou Enlai, and the formation of a workers' army that was so effective that it had been able to undermine the local warlord's attempt to prevent the advance of Chiang's Nationalist forces. Only days after entering the city, Chiang turned savagely on the very people who had earlier given him a hero's welcome. Backed by Shanghai's industrialists and merchants who were eager to crush the trade unions, and by those living in the international settlements, who were fearful of the growing tide of anti-foreigner demonstrations, Chiang's troops went on the rampage. Using the information passed to them by the city's triads and underworld gangsters, they rooted out and shot 5,000 known Communists and their sympathisers. Similar anti-Communist coups were carried out by Chiang's GMD armies in a number of other cities, including Guangzhou.

Despite attempts to resist, including the unsuccessful Autumn Harvest Rising led by Mao Zedong in September, the CCP was in a



Execution of Communists during the White Terror in Shanghai, 1927

desperate plight by the end of 1927. Its members survived only by fleeing to the sanctuary of the mountains of Jiangxi (Kangsi), this in rejection of the Comintern's orders to stay and maintain the Front. The GMD forces pursued the Communists into Jiangxi. For the next seven years the remnants of the CCP were to be engaged in a struggle to survive against continual Nationalist harassment.

4 The Jiangxi Soviet, 1928-34

Mao Zedong arrived in Jiangxi with certain advantages over his CCP rivals. His denunciation of the now discredited United Front had added greatly to his political reputation, while that of leaders such as Chen Duxui (Chen Tu-hsiu), who had advocated maintaining the Front, had correspondingly diminished. According to Mao's own writings, the White Terror had confirmed a judgement to which his experience as party organiser among the workers and peasants in Hunan province had already led him; namely, that co-operation with the GMD would destroy the Chinese Communist movement. He resolved that the CCP must revert to being a separate independent force. This was not merely because of Chiang's murderous intentions, but because the United Front's revolutionary policy was based on a false reading of the situation in China. The GMD under direction from the Comintern had adopted a strategy of urban revolution, which the CCP had then sanctioned by its willingness to form the Front. Yet for Mao the real China was not urban but rural. It was a simple matter of population distribution. The Front's policy of fomenting insurrection in the cities and towns ignored an essential reality - the great mass of the Chinese people were peasants living in the countryside.

The official CCP line has always been to accept Mao's statements regarding his opposition to the United Front at face value. His prescience has been customarily lauded on two counts: first, that he saw through the machinations of the GMD which was simply concerned to establish its own dominance; second, that he was committed to the furtherance of revolution in the countryside not the towns, calculating that in the prevailing conditions effective resistance in the urban areas was impossible. However, more recent analyses suggest that Mao's description may have been a matter of *post facto* self-justification. Mao did not become fully committed to rural revolution until the late 1920s, after his experience of the CCP's failure in the towns. Moreover, he appears to have been fully supportive of the Front until its threat to the CCP became clearly evident with the launching of Chiang Kaishek's White Terror in 1927.

Regardless of the arguments about the precise timing of Mao's conversion to the notion of peasant revolution, what is true is that the statistics undeniably bear out the accuracy of his judgement. The figures for 1933 show the following:

Total Population of China - 500 million			
distribution:	urban centres larger than 50,000	- 30 million (6%)	
	areas between 10,000 and 50,000	- 30 million (6%)	
	rural areas	- 440 million (88%)	
Total Work Force - 259 million			
distribution:	205 million	- agricultural workers	
	51 million	- non-agricultural workers	
	3 million	- industrial workers	

Mao, unimpressed by Soviet Marxist orthodoxy and in defiance of Comintern instructions, made the peasants the dynamic of the Chinese revolution. In his own words: 'If we allot ten points to the revolution, then the urban dwellers rate only three points, while the remaining seven points must go to the peasants'. It was Mao's belief in the truly revolutionary potential of the peasantry that inspired his organisation of the CCP's Jiangxi base between 1928 and 1934. In this period he taught his small but growing band of Reds that there was no necessity to wait for the growth of an industrial proletariat in China. Genuine revolution would be achieved by the peasants.

- 1 Within a short time, hundreds of millions of peasants will rise in Central, South, and North China with the fury of a hurricane; no power, however strong, can restrain them. They will break all the shackles that bind them and rush towards the road of liberation.
- 5 All imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, and bad gentry will meet their doom at the hands of the peasants. All revolutionary parties and comrades will be judged by them.

He told his CCP followers that it was their task to unleash the huge potential of the peasantry: 'The peasants are the sea; we are the fish. The sea is our habitat'. Mao had already begun the process of shaping Marxism to fit the Chinese situation. This put him at variance with the orthodox urban Communists, such as Li Lisan and Chen Duxui, who continued to follow the Moscow line in asserting that revolution was a dialectical progression whose stages could not be skipped at will. Frequent attempts were made by the hardliners to make Mao conform. He was accused of 'reckless adventurism'. Yet, Mao as leader of the Jiangxi soviet was recruiting peasants into the ranks of the party at a rate unmatched in any other CCP-held areas. He was winning the argument in a very practical way. The truth was that it was not in the cities but in the countryside that the CCP was making its gains. The urban

Communists began to be appear increasingly out of touch with the real situation in China. Their orthodox theories counted for little in the face of Mao's heretodox but manifestly successful approach.

In insisting on the correctness of his interpretations and in fighting for his position within the party, Mao showed a ferocity of purpose which remained a key feature throughout his career. A striking example of this was the 'Futien incident' in 1930 when he conducted a two-month campaign against a rival unit within the Jiangxi Red Army whom he suspected of being either GMD agents or supporters of Li Lisan. In the course of crushing what he regarded as a military and political revolt, Mao Zedong ordered the execution of nearly 3,000 officers and men. Maoist sympathisers have argued that rather than being an example of Mao's vindictiveness, Futien illustrates his grip on realities and his willingness to take hard decisions, qualities without which he could not have survived in the desperate circumstances within which he operated. Less sympathetic commentators regard Futien as an expression of Mao's ruthless determination to eliminate rivals who blocked his path to personal power. They point to a particularly sinister aspect of Mao's tactics - his use of secret police to root out and expose the ringleaders of the revolt.

The CCP's internal rivalries took place against the background of the GMD's constant effort to crush the Jiangxi base. Chiang, who was similarly troubled by factional difficulties within his own party, was nonetheless resolute in his pursuit of the Communists. Beginning in the late 1920s, he adopted, on the recommendation of his German military advisers, a series of encirclement campaigns aimed at denying resources to the Reds until they finally broke. The basic tactic was to blockade the Communists into an ever-shrinking area by means of pillboxes and manned road blocks across the approaches to the CCP strongholds. This massive siege began to work. By 1934 a succession of serious defeats for the Reds convinced Mao that to continue to defend the Jiangxi base would prove suicidal. He was no more prepared to take heed of those in the party who argued that they should stay and die as revolutionary heroes than he had been at the time of the White Terror seven years earlier. The decision was taken to transfer to a safer region, but since the only viable base lay at Yanan in remote Shaanxi province, thousands of miles to the north, the Reds had to undertake what proved to be one of the great odysseys of history, the Long March. In a pretence that the decision to flee Jiangxi was made freely rather than being forced upon them by the GMD's encirclement, the CCP announced that 'the Chinese Red Army of workers and peasants has chosen to march North to resist the Japanese'. The main body of marchers set off in October 1934.

