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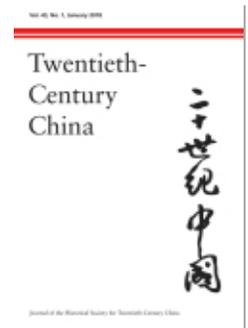
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Twentieth-Century China, Volume 43, Number 1, January 2018, pp. 45-66  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2018.0003>



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# REVOLUTION DEFEATED: THE COLLAPSE OF THE CHINESE SOVIET REPUBLIC

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The impressive success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in northern China against the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD) was in stark contrast to the failure of its revolution in southern China. There, the Communist Revolution ripped through the countryside, tearing down the old order and replacing it with a revolutionary regime: the Chinese Soviet Republic (CSR). The CSR withstood four massive counterinsurgency campaigns and by 1933 stood at the height of its power and influence. In 1934, however, the CSR and the Communist Revolution were defeated by the GMD. This article argues that the collapse of the CSR was a product of the CCP's radical policies and presents new evidence showing that by 1933 the CCP's class coalition effectively excluded most of rural society. After the Red Army's defeat, civilians brutalized by the CCP in the CSR defected to the GMD, bringing about a collapse of the CSR.

KEYWORDS: Chinese Communist Party, Chinese Soviet Republic, insurgency, Jiangxi Soviet

## INTRODUCTION

In the study of the Chinese Revolution, the “Agrarian Revolution period” (土地革命時期 *Tudi geming shiqi*; 1927–1934) is usually relegated to a historical footnote wherein the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was defeated by the overwhelming forces of counterrevolution. On the run from the forces of Chiang Kai-shek, the CCP selected Mao Zedong as its leader, eventually arrived in northern China, and began its ascent to power by first surviving and expanding in the face of Japanese attack and then by defeating the forces of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Guomindang (GMD). The CCP's survival and victory in northern China only serves to highlight the extent of its defeat during the Agrarian Revolution period and begs the question of how such a successful revolutionary movement could be so thoroughly defeated only 15 years before it took over the entire Chinese mainland.

Both the China literature and comparative studies on revolution view the Agrarian Revolution period in isolation from the CCP's revolutionary experience in northern China. Though a rich theoretical and empirical literature exists on why the CCP was able to expand in the face of Japanese attack and why it achieved victory against the GMD in 1949, there are few discussions of why the CCP's revolution in southern China was so thoroughly defeated. This is a question with relevance both to the study of the Chinese Revolution and to the history and politics of internal conflict more generally.

In both China scholarship and comparative works, the CCP defeat in southern China is generally attributed to either external or internal factors.<sup>1</sup> Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* was the only prominent comparative work to examine the Agrarian Revolution period. Skocpol stated that the CCP was defeated by the superior strength and tactics utilized by the armed forces of the GMD.<sup>2</sup> This directly contradicted Skocpol's own explanation of the success of revolutionary movements, to wit, that successful social revolution is a function of (1) international pressure on agrarian bureaucracies and (2) conditions for peasant revolt.<sup>3</sup> As she defined them, these conditions were present both in 1934 when the Chinese Soviet Republic (CSR) collapsed and in 1946 when the Chinese Civil War broke out.<sup>4</sup> So while Skocpol's theory may have explained the *final* success of the CCP in 1949, it did not explain why the CSR collapsed in 1934.

There is no paucity of historical accounts of the Chinese revolution by China scholars. Mark Selden's *China in Revolution: The Yen'an Way Revisited*, one of the most influential, held that the CCP's successful revolution was based on its wartime policies of rent reduction, tax reform, and mutual aid that weakened landed elites and strengthened the position of peasants, while simultaneously allowing it to expand its organizational reach to the village level.<sup>5</sup> However, in explaining the collapse of the CSR, Selden merely stated that the "strength of the forces of counterrevolution, including the landlords, warlords, and Kuomintang" was simply too great for the CCP to overcome.<sup>6</sup> But the CCP's revolution in northern China was at its heart the story of the CCP prevailing over the forces of counterrevolution and, while Selden made a convincing analysis of the CCP's post-Long March successes, his theory did little to explain why the CCP was so thoroughly defeated in 1934.

1 The following is only a review of the scholarship on the collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic. For a more thorough review of the Chinese and Western scholarship on this period, see Wang Caiyou, "50 Nianlai de Jiangxi suqu shi yanjiu" [Research on the history of Jiangxi's soviet areas over the past 50 years], *Jindaishi yanjiu* 6 (2010): 134–49.

2 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 255.

3 Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 154–57.

4 According to the most authoritative recent history of the period, the CCP established a total of 13 base areas during the course of the Agrarian Revolution period. Yu Bolin and He Youliang, *Zhongguo suqu shi* [History of China's soviet areas], vol. 1 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2011), 3. While these base areas operated largely according to the policies promulgated in the Chinese Soviet Republic, the social, economic, and political dynamics of each base area differed. So while ethnic differences among lowlanders and Hakkas were important to the development of the Jinggangshan Base Area, ethnic cleavages were not salient in other base areas and were not salient in the Chinese Soviet Republic. For a discussion of the Jinggangshan Base Area, see Stephen C. Averill, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

5 Mark Selden, *China in Revolution: The Yen'an Way Revisited* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

6 Selden, *China in Revolution*, 76.

The CCP's own 1945 "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Chinese Communist Party" attributed the failure of the revolution in southern China to "leftist errors" in military tactics and strategy. The party was said to have adopted an offensive strategy of "engaging the enemy outside of the gates" (禦敵於國門之外 *yudi yu guomen zhiwai*) and conceding no ground to the enemy in defense of the CSR in a "contest of attrition" (拚消耗 *pin xiaohao*). The GMD's strategy of advancing, holding ground, and constructing blockhouses was designed to force the Red Army into a passive position; the adoption of "leftist" strategies and tactics therefore played into the hands of the GMD's military strategists. The result, according to the resolution, was that the party had no choice but to abandon the CSR.<sup>7</sup>

The 1945 Resolution was itself the product of an earlier debate at the upper levels of the CCP that took place at the Zunyi Conference in 1935. One faction of the party led by Bo Gu (博古 1907–1946)—and in Moscow by Wang Ming (王明 1904–1974)—argued that the objective balance of forces was such that the CCP could not have succeeded against the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign.<sup>8</sup> However, the final resolution adopted at the Zunyi Conference clearly stated—and the 1945 Resolution maintained—that the loss of the CSR was the result of tactical and strategic errors by proponents of a "leftist" military line.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation of the CSR's failure remains in place today both in the scholarship of the People's Republic of China and in the CCP's most recent official history.<sup>10</sup>

Across the political divide, the GMD also posited external factors as being decisive to the collapse of the CSR. The Military History Bureau's *A History of Military Actions Against the Communist Rebellion During 1930–1945* (勦匪戰史 *Jiaofei zhan shi*) held that the collapse of the CSR resulted from the GMD's employment of a comprehensive military, political, economic, social, and logistical strategy.<sup>11</sup> Chiang Kai-shek stated that the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign would be "three parts military, seven parts political" (三分軍事，七分政治 *sanfen junshi, qifen zhengzhi*). Militarily, the GMD constructed blockhouses, "advanced slowly and consolidated at every step"

7 Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected works of Mao Zedong], vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1945), 984–85.

8 Wang Ming, *Xin tiaojian yu xin celüe* [New conditions and new tactics] (Moscow: Sulian waiguo gongren chubanshe, 1935); Wu Baopu, Li Zhiying, and Zhu Yupeng, eds., *Bo Gu wenxuan, nianpu* [Selected works and chronological biography of Bo Gu] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1997), 393.

9 Zhang Wentian, *Zhang Wentian xuanji* [Selected works of Zhang Wentian] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1935), 38.

10 He Ganzhi [Ho Kan-chih], *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution*. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), 129–34; Tan Kesheng, *Zhongguo geming genjudi shi* [History of China's revolutionary base areas] (Fuzhou: Fuzhou renmin chubanshe, 2007); Zhongguo laoqu jianshe cujinhui, ed., *Zhongguo geming laoqu* [China's old revolutionary base areas] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1997); Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi, *Zhongguo gongchandang lishi (1921–1949)* [History of the Chinese Communist Party (1921–1949)], vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2011).

11 Guofangbu shizhengju, *Jiaofei zhan shi* [History of military actions against the Communist rebellion 1930–1945] (Taipei: Zhonghua dadian bianyinhui, 1967), vol. 6, 1088; Wang Jianmin [Wang Chien-min], *Zhongguo gongchandang shigao* [Draft history of the Chinese Communist Party], vol. 2, *Jiangxi shiqi* [Jiangxi period] (Hong Kong: Zhongwen tushu gongyingshe, 1974), 623–24.

(步步爲營 *bubu weiying*), sought to advance steadily and struck sure blows (穩紮穩打 *wenzha wenda*), and made use of divergent advances and converging attacks (分進合擊 *fenjin heji*). The logistical element referred primarily to the construction of new roads and communication networks throughout Jiangxi to help facilitate the Nationalists' objective of defeating the CCP.<sup>12</sup>

The political work that Chiang referred to and that the GMD military undertook consisted of strengthening Nationalist political control over local society. Part of the Nationalist political strategy was the employment of education and propaganda to reach the local populace and inform them about the virtues of the Nationalist cause and the evils of the CCP. The local agents of these policies were intended to be an area's "[virtuous] gentry" (紳士 *shenshi*) rather than "local bullies and evil gentry" (土豪劣紳 *tuhao lieshen*), and *baojia* (保甲) regulations forbade anyone accused of "the conduct of local bullies and evil gentry" from being the head of a *bao* or *jia*.<sup>13</sup> Although *Jiaofei zhan shi* gave a far richer account of the GMD's Fifth Campaign than that provided by other sources, it nevertheless failed to explain *how* these "political" elements of the strategy combined with the military elements to produce the collapse of the CSR. Indeed, all these extra policies could merely have been epiphenomenal, and the CCP might have been defeated because of their losses on the battlefield.

While the majority of works have stressed the external causes of the CSR's collapse, some argued that the collapse of the CSR came about because of internal factors. *The Rise and Fall of the Jiangxi Soviet* (江西蘇維埃之建立及其崩潰 *Jiangxi suweiai zhi jianli jiqi bengkuai*) by Tsao Po-i (曹伯一 Cao Boyi) remains one of the most comprehensive studies of the history of the period. Tsao argued that the "indifference" (冷漠 *lengmo*) and "disdain" (鄙棄 *biqui*) of civilians toward the CCP were decisive in producing a collapse of the CSR. The CCP's calls to "protect the Soviet Union" in the wake of the Mukden incident, its transplanting of the alien-sounding "soviet" (蘇維埃 *suweiai*) onto Chinese soil, the party's contempt for what he called Chinese "traditions," the levies it placed on the peasantry, and intense class struggle in the CSR were the reasons Tsao cited for the CSR population's reluctance to take part in CCP organizations or campaigns and the population's tendency to flee the CSR for GMD-controlled areas. Tsao concluded his account of the CSR by stating that when the Nationalist military arrived in Jiangxi and had sufficient strength to guarantee security to those within the CSR who wished to defy the regime, the two combined to form "an irresistible tide" that overtook the CCP.<sup>14</sup>

To these problems, Chen Yung-fa (陳永發 Chen Yongfa) in *The Chinese Revolution at Seventy* (中國共產革命七十年 *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian*) added punitivism (懲罰主義 *chengfa zhuyi*) and overmobilization (過度動員 *guodu dongyuan*). The decision to "engage the enemy outside the gates" was a far more resource-intensive strategy than conventional guerrilla warfare and created needs for men and material that the CSR

12 William Wei, *Counterrevolution in China: The Nationalists in Jiangxi During the Soviet Period* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 112–15.

13 Guofangbu shizhengju, *Jiaofei zhan shi*, vol. 6, 1191.

14 Cao Boyi [Tsao Po-i], *Jiangxi suweiai zhi jianli jiqi bengkuai (1931–1934)* [Rise and fall of the Chinese soviet in Jiangxi (1931–1934)] (Taipei: Guoli zhengzhi daxue dongya yanjiusuo, 1969), 633–45.

was not capable of producing. Cadres at every level used any means they could to wring resources out of the local peasant populations. Chen notes that in some areas roughly 80% of the able-bodied male population between the ages of 16 and 45 were drafted into the service of the Red Army. The result was cadre resentment (怨懟 *yuandui*) of the regime, and peasants of all stripes, even poor peasants, gradually became alienated (離心離德 *lixin lide*) from the regime. Outside of the CSR, the GMD's superior military resources and ability to "correct its [previous tactical and strategic] shortcomings gave the CCP no choice other than to break through [the GMD's] encirclement and abandon the base area."<sup>15</sup>

A final recent addition to the literature on the Jiangxi Soviet is Huang Daoxuan's *Tension and Limits* (張力與限界 *Zhangli yu xianjie*). More so than any other historian, he detailed the military, economic, and political strategies the CCP employed from the late 1920s to 1934, with special attention to mistakes the party committed, many of which he attributed to the immaturity of the CCP and its leaders. Though he did not advance an explicit hypothesis to explain the collapse of the CSR, his presentation of evidence leaves little doubt that he believed the collapse of the CSR was a function of internal and external factors, namely the shortcomings of CCP policies and military strategy and the power of the GMD.<sup>16</sup>

These three accounts, as well as Johnson's *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*, stressed the civilian alienation in the CSR and argued that it contributed to the collapse of the CSR.<sup>17</sup> Such an argument requires advancing the thesis that the CCP did not enjoy the support of the civilian population and that the absence of such support had behavioral implications for civilians and broader political implications for the CSR. Despite the stress Tsao and Chen placed on civilian disaffection, even in the last days of the CSR the CCP was able to effectively govern the area over which it still had control. The CCP's recruitment figures from this period indicate that, even as late as June 1934, the CCP was recruiting men well in excess of its normal monthly totals; in some areas it was able to draft 80% of the male population into the military.<sup>18</sup> It is important to stress that CCP rule brought political, economic, and social reform that was unprecedented in Chinese history. From the establishment of the CSR to its collapse, the power of the gentry was destroyed, land was redistributed to peasants who had never before possessed it, and the position of women was elevated (if not necessarily equalized) as the CCP sought to provide education and new rights to women and girls. How, then, was the CSR defeated?

This paper argues and documents what has heretofore not been systematically demonstrated: that widespread civilian dissatisfaction with the forcible implementation

15 Chen Yongfa [Chen Yung-fa], *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian* [The Chinese revolution at 70], 2nd ed. (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 2001), 287, 292–94.

16 Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie: zhongyang suqu de geming (1933–1934)* [Tension and limits: revolution in the central soviet base area (1933–1934)] (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 247–351.

17 Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962), 19.

18 Chen, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian*, 292–93. The 80% statistic Chen used was originally cited by Cao, *Jiangxi Suweiai*, which in turn cited Mao's 1933 "Investigation of Caixi Townships." See Mao Zedong, "Investigation of Caixi Townships," repr. in Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, eds., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*, vol. 4, *The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931–1934* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 629–30.

of a radical land reform policy espoused by the CCP's leadership from 1933 to 1934 brought about a massive and overwhelming defection of civilians from the CCP to the GMD, bringing about a complete collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic. Politically, the CCP pursued an increasingly radical policy that produced support from a base of poor peasants but gradually alienated groups other than poor peasants, a deeply problematic strategy given that the CCP's revolution had transformed most civilians in the CSR into middle peasants by 1932. From 1933 to 1934, the revolution consumed its own as the CCP determined that middle-peasant levels of wealth made civilians unreliable partners in the revolution. This political strategy produced a highly coercive form of CCP rule that alienated civilians from the CSR government. Militarily, as long as the CCP could maintain territorial control and physically prevent the defection of civilians, the CCP was free to pursue its policy agenda and punish civilians as it saw fit. Prior to the Fifth Campaign, the CCP made use of guerrilla warfare and evacuated civilians and supplies from contested areas to ensure that, even as the GMD contested territory, it could not contest the civilian population. However, when the Red Army was defeated in 1934, GMD forces were able to contest not just territory but also the civilian population. CCP policy was so radical by this time that a restoration of the preconflict status quo had become preferable to CCP rule, and civilians defected to the GMD and refused to provide any assistance to the CCP forces that remained in the area.

## THE REVOLUTION IN THE CHINESE SOVIET REPUBLIC

The Communist Revolution was based on an analysis of rural Chinese society that posited the existence of five socioeconomic classes, defined vis-à-vis their relationship to the means of production and the extent to which they derived wealth and income from exploitation. According to a formula invented by Mao and later adopted by the party, rural society included five classes: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and farm laborers.<sup>19</sup> The Central Executive Committee of the Chinese Soviet Republic described the CSR as a regime made up “of the broad, exploited, and oppressed toiling worker, peasant, and soldier masses.”

It is a regime established under the banner of toppling imperialism, exterminating the landlord class, overthrowing the GMD warlord government, establishing a soviet government in all of China, fighting in the interests of millions of oppressed and exploited workers, peasants, and soldiers, and fighting for the genuine peaceful reunification of China. It is built upon the foundation of the wishes and support of millions of oppressed and exploited workers, peasants, soldiers, and the poor in soviet areas and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

19 Mao Zedong, “How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 137–39.

20 Mao Zedong, Xiang Ying, and Zhang Guotao, “Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui bugao (di yi hao)” [Chinese Soviet Republic central executive committee proclamation no. 1], in Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan and Zhonggong Jiangxi sheng dangxiao dangshi jiaoyanshi, eds., *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* [Selection of historical materials on the central revolutionary base area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 202.

A central part of the CCP's political program was a land revolution designed to completely destroy the existing rural order and replace it with a more equitable system of land ownership. CCP land laws and statements on class relationships provide the most concrete theoretical statements on the coalition and institutions that it wished to establish in the countryside. This poor-peasant class line was advocated most forcefully by the CCP's leadership, trained in the Soviet Union and known as the 28 Bolsheviks, a group of idealistic young men who sought to realize a socialist proletarian revolution. Mao Zedong and other local leaders were the principal advocates of a moderate class line but were sidelined in the leadership of the CSR.<sup>21</sup> Only after the collapse of the CSR when Mao took control of the party was a moderate class line put into practice.

The 1931 "Land Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic" (中華蘇維埃共和國土地法 "Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo tudi fa") was official CCP policy from its promulgation to the collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1934. Those who gained from the exploitation of others were the primary targets of the revolution. The first article of the land law mandated that:

All lands belonging to feudal landlords, local bullies and evil gentry, warlords, bureaucrats, and other large private landlords, irrespective of whether they work the lands themselves or rent them out, shall be confiscated without compensation. The confiscated lands shall be redistributed to the poor and middle peasants through the Soviets. The former owners of the confiscated lands shall not be entitled to receive any land allotments.<sup>22</sup>

Rich peasants' lands were to be confiscated as well, though they were entitled to receive land of poorer quality provided they tilled the land themselves. It was further mandated that these groups were to be dispossessed of their assets and that their movable and immovable properties were to be redistributed to poor and middle peasants. Beyond its land laws, other CCP statements and policies in the Agrarian Revolution period (as in the War of Resistance and Chinese Civil War) emphasized the importance of relying on the poor peasantry and uniting with the middle peasantry to attack and destroy the landlord and rich-peasant classes.

The nature of the CCP's class coalition is evident in the CCP's mass organizations (羣衆團體 *qunzhong tuanti*) and its governing institutions. Rather than relying on pre-existing social structures to establish its institutions, such as surname-based lineages, the CCP created its own based on socioeconomic status. The most important and influential mass organization was the Poor Peasants League (貧農團 *Pinnong tuan*), which (as its name implies) consisted entirely of those classified as poor peasants. Landlords and rich

21 John E. Rue, *Mao Tse-Tung in Opposition, 1927–1935* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966).

22 Hsiao Tso-liang, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930–1934: A Study of Documents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 186; "Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo tudi fa" [Land law of the Chinese Soviet Republic], in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 3, 459.

peasants were strictly prohibited from joining the two largest civic organizations in the Chinese Soviet Republic, the Anti-Imperialist League (反帝大同盟 Fandi datongmeng) and the Soviet Protection League (擁蘇大同盟 Yongsu datongmeng).<sup>23</sup>

Landlords and rich peasants were barred from holding positions in government and, while there was no explicit ban on middle-peasant membership and no formal quota system, poor peasants formed the absolute majority of those in every organ, association, and organization in the Chinese Soviet Republic. The ratio of poor peasants to middle peasants was at least 10 to 1 and in some cases reached as high as 100 to 1. Data on the state of the party in August 1932 indicated that 81.7% of its members were poor peasants and 9.1% were middle peasants; rich peasants and landlords are notable only for their complete (or near-complete) absence.<sup>24</sup>

The CCP's coalition in the countryside was based on its estimation of which groups would be most receptive to its revolutionary program. Economic stratification in the Chinese countryside represented an important crosscutting cleavage that affected every village and every kinship organization throughout China. Mao Zedong's five-class criteria provided the CCP with a tool it could use to classify various members of rural society and determine whether they were friends or enemies of the revolution. But what did landholding patterns in southern China actually look like? Rural investigations carried out in the early twentieth century painted a picture of a rural political economy characterized by considerable inequality, in which landlords had land far in excess of their numbers as a proportion of the population.<sup>25</sup> But while the broad pattern of land ownership indicated that landlords held a majority of land, landholdings were generally small, a fact that had important implications for how CCP policy operated on the ground.

According to Mao Zedong's investigation in the village of Mukou, a self-sufficient middle-peasant household of eight that owed no debts had a total of 64 *dan* (擔) of land, or 8 *dan* per member of the household, which is roughly equivalent to 2 *mu* (畝), or almost one-third of an acre, or just over one-eighth of a hectare.<sup>26</sup> The vast majority of the population in the Chinese countryside possessed landholdings totaling less than 10 *mu*. In the case of Fujian Province, landlords held on average 7.47 *mu* of land per member of

23 "Fandi datongmeng zhangcheng" [Regulations on the organization of the Anti-imperialist League], in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 3, 734–35.

24 Zhongyang dang'an guan and Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan, eds., *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji: 1932* [Compilation of historical materials on the revolution in Jiangxi: 1932] (Beijing: Zhongyang dang'an guan, 1992), vol. 1, 441. Records of discrimination against nonpoor classes of peasants abound in archival materials. Data for 1932 is most abundant and, given that CCP policy radicalized considerably after 1932, a ratio of 10:1 is likely a conservative estimate of the ratio of poor peasants to nonpoor peasants in CSR institutions. Examples pervade the most comprehensive collection of documents on the period, *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji: 1932*, vol. 1.

25 Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, eds., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949*, vol. 3, *From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927–December 1930* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 351, 610; Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 29–30. Landlords were seldom more than 10% of the population and held title to between 50% and 80% of land.

26 Schram and Hodes, *Mao's Road to Power*, vol. 3, 692. *Dan* is a dry measure of volume, and also a unit of land equal to the area required to produce one *dan* of unhusked rice, which is about 60 kg (133 lb.). *Mu* is a unit of land area. Both the CCP and KMT used the units almost interchangeably; some reports on land utilization/distribution used *dan* while others used *mu*.

**Table 1. Land Distribution by County in the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1932, after the Initial Period of Land Revolution in Jiangxi**

County	Total Land ( <i>dan</i> )	Population	Total Land Divided by Population ( <i>dan/person</i> )	Per Capita Land Holdings among Landholding Households ( <i>dan</i> )		
				High	Average	Low
Gan	1,199,966	160,000	7.500	11.25	9	3.75
Gonglue	342,911	114,000	3.008	7.5	5	3.5
Yongfeng	660,000	160,000	4.125	8	6	4
Ningdu	2,054,537	204,651	10.039	16	8	3.5
Shengli	858,078	153,330	5.596	13.5	5	3.7
Xunwu	170,000	41,000	4.146	4+	4	3+
Xingguo	1,473,197	230,626	6.388	8.5	6	4
Shicheng	594,791	136,000	4.373	11	10	5
Nanguang	450,000	150,000	3.000	11	7	6
Yudu	698,600	191,000	3.658	10	7	4
Wantai	572,241	80,000	7.153	10	-	3

Sources: Total land and per capita land holdings among landholding households, *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji: 1932*, vol. 1, 198, 205; population, *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 1, 454. Total land divided by population was calculated by the author by dividing the total land area in the second column by the population in the third column.

the household: above the subsistence level of 2 to 3 *mu*, but far removed from the vast feudal manors of Europe.<sup>27</sup>

The cornerstone of the CCP's revolutionary program was the confiscation and redistribution of land. The number of landlords and rich peasants in the Chinese countryside before the arrival of the CCP was relatively small as a proportion of the population, meaning that the CCP stood to antagonize a few powerful elites while gaining the support of a great many poor and middle peasants. The initial period of the land revolution from 1931 to 1932 saw the implementation of a policy of equal redistribution of land (平分土地 *pingfen tudi*) that was carried out in much of the CSR.

As Table 1 indicates, the CCP had, by and large, achieved something close to an equal redistribution of land in Jiangxi by 1932. However, the leadership of the CCP was unsatisfied, as was the newly empowered poor peasantry. The CCP leadership sought a proletarian revolution, not the creation of a rural society of peasant smallholders that cherished private property. To the CCP, the continued existence of inequality in landholdings, however small, suggested that poor peasants were still not being served by

27 Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 27; Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui tudi gaige weiyuanhui, *Huadong qu tudi gaige chengguo tongji* [Statistics on the results of land reform in eastern China] (n.p.: 1952), 4.

the revolution. What the CCP wanted was not equalization of property but a complete elimination of inequality.

Inequality in land distribution and perception that “class enemies” were preventing the revolution from moving forward led the CCP to undertake a Land Investigation movement (查田運動 *Chatian yundong*) designed to uncover and destroy all remnants of landlord and rich-peasant influence. Mao was initially optimistic about the movement and undertook preliminary work for it in the summer of 1933. The goal of the movement was “to involve the majority of the masses in the struggle against the remnants of feudalism.”

First of all, by means of widespread propaganda and agitation, an investigation should be conducted on the class status of all landlords and rich peasants. On the basis of this class status, the land and property of the landlords and rich peasants should be confiscated. All this should be done with approval from, and with the involvement of, as many of the masses as possible. It is advisable that everything collected through confiscation, except cash, should be allocated to the poorest among the masses and in particular to impoverished family members of Red Army men. It is also advisable that the greater part of the property should be distributed to the masses from whose villages these things were taken.<sup>28</sup>

In their search for landlords and rich peasants, the CCP and Poor Peasants League found them in spades. Even given the potential inaccuracies in land quantity and population, by 1932 the CCP had not only achieved the equal distribution of land but had effectively transformed most people in the Central Soviet Republic into middle peasants. While Mao wanted to eliminate landlords and rich peasants as a class, he never went as far as the CCP’s Moscow-trained leadership, who sought to physically exterminate them.

Though leftist excesses have been acknowledged even in official party histories, the true extent of the Land Investigation movement has never been clear, nor have civilian reactions to it. A detailed examination of reports from *Red China* (紅色中華 *Hongse Zhonghua*), the official organ of the Provisional Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic, and from *Struggle* (鬭爭 *Douzheng*), the official organ of the Central Bureau of the Soviet Areas, reveals the true nature and extent of the Land Investigation movement: households targeted in the movement had on average 40 *dan* of land, and half of targeted households possessed fewer than 24 *dan*.<sup>29</sup> The average middle-peasant family (one that

28 Schram and Hodes, *Mao’s Road to Power*, vol. 4, 396.

29 Based on data from 1933 and 1934 in *Hongse Zhonghua* [Red China] (hereafter abbreviated HSZH), nos. 76 (May 5, 1933), 95 (July 23, 1933), 96 (July 26, 1933), 104 (August 22, 1933), 106 (August 28, 1933), 107 (September 3, 1933), 111 (September 21, 1933), 113 (September 27, 1933), 118 (October 6, 1933), 123 (November 2, 1933), 125 (November 14, 1933), 127 (November 20, 1933), 144 (January 16, 1934), 181 (April 28, 1934), 185 (May 7, 1934), and *Douzheng*, no. 72 (September 23, 1934). The areas from which these reports came were all located in the heart of the CSR, including Ruijin, Ningdu, Guangchang, Yudu, Ninghua, Changting, Huichang, Xingguo, Gonglue, and Gan Counties. HSZH and *Douzheng* can both be found on reels 16, 17, and 18 of the 21-reel set of microfilm known as the *Shisou ziliaoshi Gongfei ziliao* [Materials on the Chinese Communists from the Shisou Archive] or Ch’en Ch’eng Collection.

rented out no land and owed no debt) possessed roughly 7 *dan* of land per household member. The smallest households in the CSR had at least four members, meaning that for subsistence they would require at least 28 *dan* of land.<sup>30</sup>

The “landlords” and “rich peasants” “uncovered” by the Land Investigation movement were in reality middle peasants by their then-current levels of property and wealth who were doing their best to protect their interests in the face of an increasingly radical and resource-hungry Jiangxi Soviet government. Regardless of its intent, the net effect of the movement was a declaration of war by the CCP and its poor-peasant allies against rural society’s propertied classes. Landlords and rich peasants emerged everywhere because middle-peasant levels of wealth were sufficient for one to be classified as a “rich peasant” or “landlord” and because any defense of one’s private property was considered an attempt to undermine the law of the CSR. The result, as Mao conceded in a report in 1933, was that the land of the rich and middle peasants was often completely expropriated and the rich peasants were sometimes physically exterminated.<sup>31</sup>

The fate of those classified as landlords or rich peasants was bleak. If they were lucky enough to be given land, it was often in mountainous or inaccessible areas.<sup>32</sup> Even after their land and property were confiscated, they continued to be the targets of levies, taxes, and fines.<sup>33</sup> The extent of extraction from this group was at times so intense that landlords and rich peasants committed suicide. Those who refused to provide the CCP with the resources it demanded on the grounds that they had nothing more to give were sometimes put on trial and executed.<sup>34</sup> Those arrested and lucky enough to avoid execution were put to work cultivating wasteland, while the vast majority of those targeted by the movement did what they could to comply with the demands of the CCP so as to avoid further violence.<sup>35</sup>

Some civilians sought to avoid the movement by fleeing into mountainous areas of the CSR or, when possible, to GMD areas. Instances of civilian flight (羣衆逃跑事件 *qunzhong taopao shijian*) began in the latter half of 1933 and affected central areas of the CSR such as Ningdu, Xunwu, Huichang, Changting, and Yudu Counties.<sup>36</sup> These were not isolated incidents; they were sufficiently widespread for the government to note the problem and to attribute it to reactionary elements attempting to avoid punishment.<sup>37</sup> Even in Ruijin County, seat of the Jiangxi Soviet’s capital, civilians fled their villages.<sup>38</sup> Particularly large instances of civilians fleeing the CSR were also reported by the Nationalist press.<sup>39</sup> As the movement progressed, still more civilians from other counties in

30 HSZH, no. 106 (August 31, 1933), 6.

31 *Douzheng*, no. 24 (August 29, 1933), 9.

32 HSZH, no. 84 (June 11, 1933), 2.

33 HSZH, no. 63 (March 21, 1933), 2.

34 HSZH, no. 201 (June 12, 1934), 2; HSZH, no. 206 (June 23, 1934), 3; HSZH, no. 211 (July 7, 1934), 1; HSZH, no. 227 (August 20, 1934), 4.

35 HSZH, no. 168 (March 29, 1934), 1.

36 HSZH, no. 94 (July 14, 1933), 6; HSZH, no. 96 (July 26, 1933), 6.

37 HSZH, no. 95 (July 23, 1933), 1.

38 HSZH, no. 107 (September 3, 1933), 6.

39 *Ta kung pao* (hereafter abbreviated TKP), December 25, 1934, 4. TKP was one of the most authoritative and influential newspapers of the Republican period.

the CSR fled to GMD areas.<sup>40</sup> Wantai County was singled out in December 1933 because between 1,800 and 2,300 people fled to GMD areas.<sup>41</sup> The CCP and mass organizations did not let such incidents stand and dispatched personnel to locate those who fled. Where they were found, they were put to death as counterrevolutionaries.<sup>42</sup> Zhu Kaiquan (朱開銓 1901–1993), secretary of the Rentian District in Ruijin and later of Changsheng County, reflected years later: “We forced them into a position where they had no way out. How could they not do something to resist?”<sup>43</sup>

The Land Investigation movement was effective in mobilizing the poor peasantry because it promised immediate distribution of confiscated goods. The provenance of these goods, however, was deeply problematic, coming as they did from all property-owning groups. As a result, these groups became thoroughly alienated from the CCP and, while they did not actively rebel, their victimization at the hands of the Jiangxi Soviet regime gave them significant incentive to seek a restoration of the pre-CCP status quo. Even if they had not prospered under GMD rule, they enjoyed far more security of person and property than under the CCP. The CCP was not wholly unaware that its policies were creating a fifth column in its base areas; in May 1934, the premier of the Chinese Soviet Republic, Zhang Wentian (張聞天 1900–1976), called for the evacuation from war zones of all landlords, rich peasants, and others who might harbor anti-CCP views in order to prevent them from engaging in subversive activities in advance of the Nationalist military’s advance and from defecting to the GMD.<sup>44</sup>

The cycle of CCP incursion and attack and local reaction led to an ever-deepening rift between CCP-controlled areas and GMD-controlled areas; the political leadership in CCP areas regarded all people in GMD areas as reactionary, and the citizenry and political leadership in GMD areas regarded the Communists and their forces as a mortal threat. In his memoir, Nie Rongzhen (聶榮臻 1899–1992) recalled that during the Jiangxi period rich peasants and landlords who were not killed were often driven out of the base areas and took up residence in adjacent areas while, presumably, colluding with the GMD. The result, he tells us, was the creation “of a Great Wall that served not to protect us, but that isolated us and protected our enemies.”<sup>45</sup>

The CCP’s political strategy resulted in the development of what can only be described as an insurgency in which the CCP military’s repeated use of guerrilla warfare tactics ensured that the CSR remained in existence, but only with the extensive application of coercion against those it deemed class enemies. As long as the CCP could prevent civilians from defecting to the GMD, the CSR stood. With the advent of the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign, however, civilians would be given the opportunity to choose their regime, and most would eventually choose the GMD.

40 HSZH, no. 124 (November 11, 1933), 3.

41 *Douzheng*, no. 39 (December 19, 1933), 12.

42 HSZH, no. 119 (October 15, 1933), 3; HSZH, no. 235 (September 18, 1934), 2.

43 Zhu Kaiquan, *Liushiliu nian zhi geming shengya* [My 66-year revolutionary career], rev. ed., (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2011), 69.

44 Hsiao, *Land Revolution in China*, 121.

45 Nie Rongzhen, *Nie Rongzhen huiyilu* [Memoirs of Nie Rongzhen] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986), 461.

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE CHINESE SOVIET REPUBLIC

On the eve of the GMD's Fifth Campaign, landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and even some poor peasants all had some reason to support (or acquiesce to) a restoration of the pre-CCP status quo. The GMD thus found ready support for its reconquest of the area, not necessarily from an absolute majority of the population but from those in control of a majority of the productive resources and administrative expertise in a given area, not to mention the wealthy exiles who had fled the CSR when the CCP established the regime in 1931.<sup>46</sup>

The GMD launched a total of five major counterinsurgency campaigns against the CCP, each of which fielded well over 100,000 soldiers against the CCP's base areas.<sup>47</sup> The GMD, in spite of its overwhelming superiority of men and materiel, was unable to remove the CCP in the first four campaigns. The CCP, however, was not in a position to greatly expand the areas under its control. The result was a stalemate in which neither side could dislodge the other. As long as the CCP stuck to its guerrilla tactics, it would not be defeated, but it would not be able to expand beyond the confines of the Jiangxi Soviet either.

Until the Fifth Campaign, the CCP relied on luring GMD units into areas under its control (誘敵深入 *youdi shenru*) and engaging them on its own terms. Prior to military action, it would "strengthen its defenses and clear the fields" (堅壁清野 *jianbi qingye*), evacuating most civilians from the area and leaving only those who would provide no information or misinformation on its activities. The CCP also removed food or livestock that could be of use to the GMD and destroyed infrastructure of use to the GMD's military.<sup>48</sup> Because it was able to control both the population's movements and those it left behind, this strategy served the CCP well. Even where the CCP was not able to so completely control the population, the fact that the GMD's military would leave the area shortly after its initial occupation meant that locals were generally unwilling to cooperate with the Nationalist military.<sup>49</sup>

Histories of the Fifth Campaign, be they sympathetic to the CCP, the GMD, or neither, inevitably make reference to the Nationalist army's use of blockhouses to slowly consolidate its hold over areas it conquered in the course of its advance on the Jiangxi Soviet. Elaborate as the network of blockhouses was, the collapse of the CSR did not follow from their construction nor from the economic blockade imposed on the CSR. As to the latter, smuggling was rife even in the lead-up to the Fifth Campaign, and Wu Liangping (吳亮平 1908–1986), the Chinese Soviet Republic's minister of economic affairs, stated that lack of economic intercourse with neighboring areas was in no small part a result of the CCP's own policies that discouraged the import and export of goods between the

46 Philip C. C. Huang, Lynda Schaefer Bell, and Kathy Le Mons Walker, *Chinese Communists and Rural Society, 1927–1934* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1978), 20.

47 Wang Duonian [Wang To-nien], ed., *Guomin geming zhan shi (di si bu): fangong kanluan* [History of the national revolutionary war (part 4): suppression of the Communist rebellion], vol. 1 (Taipei: Liming wenhua shiye gongsi yinxing, 1982), 175, 201, 227; Xiaobing Li, *China at War: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 310.

48 Guofangbu shizhengju, *Jiaofei zhan shi*, vol. 1, 119–20.

49 Guofangbu shizhengju, *Jiaofei zhan shi*, vol. 1, 245–47.

CSR and neighboring areas.<sup>50</sup> The CCP's habit of raiding surrounding areas and attacking anyone it deemed a class enemy ensured that commerce dropped even before the GMD blockade was tightened. The blockhouses themselves did not propagate the political power of the GMD. What made them powerful was not the height of their walls or the quality of the arms inside but the active cooperation of the population *outside* the blockhouses and their refusal to provide any support or assistance to the CCP.

It should be emphasized that, despite all the credit the "Three/Seven" strategy has been given in the literature, its provisions were far from revolutionary and simply codified a restoration of the preconflict status quo. The political component of the GMD's Three/Seven strategy was designed to reinforce extant rural institutions, which in turn relied on the participation of local elites and their control over villages. The GMD promulgated a regulation titled "Regulations for Handling Property Seized by the Communists" (處理被匪侵佔財產辦法 "Chuli beifei qinzhan caichan banfa"), which mandated that all property in areas recovered from the CCP should be returned to its original owners. The GMD's return gave the countryside's former economic and political elite an opportunity to regain their property and authority. But the narrowness of the CCP's coalition meant that rich peasants, middle peasants, and even some upwardly mobile poor peasants all stood to gain from a restoration of the status quo ante.

The CCP strategy of evacuating unreliable civilians into the core of the CSR meant that the CCP enjoyed complete control over the CSR's population from 1931 to mid-1933. All of that changed during the Fifth Campaign. Mao Zedong, long the principal CCP advocate of guerrilla warfare and of luring the GMD into CCP-controlled areas, lost power and influence in the CCP and was replaced in his military command capacity by Zhang Wentian, Bo Gu, and a German military advisor in the CSR named Otto Braun (1900–1975). The three of them concluded that the Chinese Soviet Republic had reached a point at which it was both advisable and desirable to switch from guerrilla warfare to positional warfare.

Just as the GMD established blockhouses throughout areas under its control, so too did the CCP. Red Army units were instructed to garrison their own versions of blockhouses and create "supporting points" (支撐點 *zhicheng dian*) and adopt a tactic that called for making "a series of short, swift thrusts" (短促突擊 *duancu tuji*). This strategy called for holding territory, for building blockhouses, ditches, and other defensive structures, and for engaging the enemy only when he was within easy striking distance of the CCP's "supporting points" and not undertaking pursuit if he fled. The Red Army soldiers who survived recalled that the blockhouses, often made of earthen bricks, were sitting targets for the GMD military and provided no protection to the soldiers manning them. One veteran asked in retrospect, "How could 'blockhouses' made of wood and sandstone have held up against bombardment by artillery?"<sup>51</sup>

50 HSZH, no. 230 (September 6, 1934), 2.

51 Zhang Zongxun, "Guangchang baoweizhan" [Battle for Guangchang], in Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun lishi ziliao congshu bianshen weiyuanhui, ed., *Hongjun fan "weijiao" huiyi shiliao* [Collected reminiscences of the Red Army's counterencirclement campaigns] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1994), 192; Fang Qiang, "Huiyi wuci fan 'weijiao' zhong de nanxian zuozhan" [Reminiscences of the campaign against the fifth encirclement and suppression campaign on the southern front], in *Hongjun fan "weijiao" huiyi shiliao*, 220–21; Zhou Xuan et al., "Yi di wu ci fan 'weijiao' zhong de xixian zhanzheng"

The result of this change in strategy was catastrophic. Large units were concentrated and thrown into battle against GMD units for cities and towns. As Red Army soldiers fell on the front lines, CSR local defense militia were drafted to the front. The result of the change in strategy meant that the GMD could bring the full power of its conventional forces to bear against the Red Army. The GMD eliminated Red Army forces garrisoned in major cities along the outer edge of the CSR, and by the end of 1934 most major Red Army units had been defeated in battle or had departed on the Long March.

As the Red Army crumbled on the battlefield and the GMD advanced into the CSR, the CCP's poor-peasant coalition was exposed to a rival with a political program that catered to the interests of groups excluded and victimized by the CSR regime. As GMD armies made their way into the CSR, there were widespread defections among the groups that had been excluded by the CCP's coalition with poor peasants. The CCP attempted to stem the tide of defections by instituting a "Red Terror" (紅色恐怖 *Hongse kongbu*) in areas under its control. In April 1934, the government promulgated the "Legal Procedures of the Chinese Soviet Republic," which imposed the death penalty for any kind of collaboration with or defection to the GMD.<sup>52</sup>

The CCP's concerns were well placed, for civilians in the CSR did not just take to the mountains to hide from the CCP but proactively sought out the GMD. Problems in Waitai County, discussed above, persisted; by the spring of 1934, it was singled out by the CCP leadership yet again because of the flight of 2,600 civilians to GMD areas.<sup>53</sup> Other instances of mass flight to GMD areas numbered in the hundreds.<sup>54</sup> Before and during the battle for Guangchang in April 1934, tens of thousands of civilians fled to the GMD.<sup>55</sup> Instances of mass flight were not confined to Shengli and Wantai; other places, such as Changsheng (part of Ningdu), Ruijin, and Xijiang, all experienced mass flight. Li Weihang (李維漢 1896–1984), a high-ranking CCP member, stated that practically all districts of Yudu were affected.<sup>56</sup> As the CCP's war effort floundered and it increased violence against civilians, even more sought to flee to GMD areas. One civilian targeted by the CCP spoke for many when he said that "it's better to flee to [GMD] areas than to wait for [the GMD] to arrive" and risk being killed by the CCP.<sup>57</sup>

In its drive to prevent defection to the GMD and to ensure continued compliance, the CCP engaged in a widespread campaign of violence against civilians. The CCP detained those it suspected of being unreliable, confiscated their property, and organized them into hard labor brigades.<sup>58</sup> Yet others were killed because they were regarded as suspect by the CCP because they criticized the CSR's enormous extraction of manpower and resources.<sup>59</sup>

[Recalling the western front of the fifth "encirclement and suppression" campaign], in *Hongjun fan "weijiao" huiyi shiliao*, 234.

52 HSZH, no. 176 (April 17, 1934), 5–6.

53 HSZH, no. 173 (April 10, 1934), 2–3.

54 HSZH, no. 168 (March 29, 1934), 5.

55 TKP, May 1, 1934, 3.

56 HSZH, no. 236 (September 21, 1934), 5.

57 HSZH, no. 233 (September 13, 1934), 3.

58 HSZH, no. 192 (May 23, 1934), 1.

59 HSZH, no. 211 (July 7, 1934), 1; Gong Chu, *Wo yu hongjun* [The Red Army and I] (Hong Kong: Nanfeng chubanshe, 1954), 244.

But by far the greatest amount of violence was against those the CCP suspected of being sympathetic to the advancing GMD. In the southern part of the CSR, a local government declared in an open letter to Red Army soldiers tasked with recovering Menling from the GMD and protecting Huichang that they should:

*Carry out a Red Terror.* Swiftly capture and kill all counterrevolutionaries, suppress all counterrevolutionaries in soviet areas. Kill those who spread rumors and create disturbances! Kill those who serve as the enemy's spies! Kill those who assassinate and sabotage the revolution! Kill those who lead others to defect!<sup>60</sup>

Mass killings took place throughout the CSR in anticipation of the GMD attack, as well as prior to the CCP's evacuation of territory.<sup>61</sup> Mass executions of civilians were reported in Ruijin and Ningdu, and relief work by the Red Swastika Society, a religious charity, gave proper burials to thousands of bodies in Ningdu and Guangchang.<sup>62</sup> The scale of the killing was so extensive that the then-leader of the CCP, Zhang Wentian, called for moderation, but only once and only briefly.<sup>63</sup>

Civilians also actively assisted the GMD in their counterinsurgency campaigns. Reflecting on the victory over the CCP, GMD commander Luo Zhuoying (羅卓英 1896–1961; also known as Lo Cho-ying) observed that the attitude of civilians in CCP areas toward the GMD changed “from one of fear to one of cooperation” after the start of the Fifth Campaign.<sup>64</sup> On the ground, civilians acted as guides for the GMD military, helping them locate both Red Army forces and CCP cadres in the villages.<sup>65</sup> When the GMD arrived in formerly CCP areas, civilians welcomed them, sometimes enthusiastically.<sup>66</sup> CCP members had never been immune from violence, and the purges that took place within the party, combined with the mass killings, also drove Red Army commanders and soldiers to defect to the GMD.<sup>67</sup>

As GMD forces occupied the CSR at the end of 1934, they organized communities into *baojia* units and established local militias designed to defend villages against Communist infiltration or attack. The burden for paying for these fell squarely on the peasants, as did the cost of the GMD's other counterinsurgency programs like the construction of

60 HSZH, no. 188 (May 14, 1934), 2. Emphasis is original.

61 TKP, November 12, 1934, 3; TKP, November 13, 1934, 3.

62 TKP, December 18, 1934, 10; TKP, December 22, 1934, 3; Shijie Hong wanzi hui jiuji Ganzai Shanghai zong banshichu, ed., “Gan zhen zong baogao” [General report of relief work in Jiangxi], in *Minguo wenxian leibian* [Collection of documents on the Republic of China], by Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo and Minguo shiqi wenxian baohu zhongxin, vol. 15 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan chubanshe, 2015), 21–22; TKP, April 10, 1935, 10; Shao Hongji, *Jiehou de Ningdu* [Ningdu after the plunder] (n.p.: 1935), 10.

63 HSZH, no. 205 (June 21, 1934), 1–2.

64 TKP, January 25, 1935, 4; TKP, February 19, 1935.

65 TKP, December 18, 1934, 10.

66 TKP, November 2, 1934, 3; TKP, November 3, 1934, 3; TKP, November 15, 1934, 3.

67 TKP, November 8, 1934, 4; TKP, January 25, 1935, 4; TKP, February 16, 1935, 4; Gong Chu, *Wo yu hongjun*, 449–50.

roads and blockhouses. Traditional social structures such as local, elite-run lineages were restored and tasked with establishing schools, providing for the defense of villages, and managing village disputes.<sup>68</sup> The GMD also provided relief to the people in areas that formerly made up the CSR and enlisted the help of local elites in doing so.<sup>69</sup> Confiscated lands were returned to their previous owners, and peasants who tilled land for landlords were forced to pay back rent, sometimes with interest.

The GMD counterrevolution succeeded because it was actively supported by civilians in former CSR areas. In Ruijin, the former capital of the CSR, small groups of CCP forces remained even after the Long March. However, the CCP had so thoroughly alienated civilians in the area that they found practically no support from civilians. In one instance, in a village not far from the county seat of Ruijin County, 20 or so CCP guerrillas entered a village and ordered the peasants to attend a meeting. Local members of the GMD-organized militia (義勇隊 *yi yong dui*) took it upon themselves to arrest the guerrillas, tie them up, kill them, and take their weapons.<sup>70</sup> Most civilian reactions were not as extreme, but civilians were broadly in compliance with the GMD regime because they sought protection from the Communists.<sup>71</sup> Though the GMD was certainly not a defender of the poor and downtrodden, its provision of protection was credible because of the radicalism of CCP policy.

In a preview of what would characterize CCP-GMD conflict after the collapse of the CSR, a small group of poor peasants provided support for the CCP guerrillas who remained behind. They provided food to the guerrillas and provided cover when needed. In one area, peasants were instructed to fire a cannon when CCP guerrillas entered the area so as to alert GMD authorities. Poor peasants sympathetic to the CCP would ensure that cannons across several villages sounded simultaneously and only after the CCP had entered the area, taken what it needed, and left.<sup>72</sup> But these token acts of compliance with CCP forces were confined to an extremely small minority and remained the exception rather than the rule. By early 1935, the old regime had been restored and reinforced in the countryside. Gregor Benton concluded in his masterful work on the Three-Year Guerrilla War that it was in areas most thoroughly sovietized that the guerrillas were least successful, underlining the longer-term effects of the CCP's radicalism.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In *Soviet Russia in China* (蘇俄在中國 *Su'E zai Zhongguo*), Chiang Kai-shek stated that the Nationalist approach to combating the CCP was based on the principles of a “national revolutionary people’s war” (民族革命的國民戰爭 *minzu geming de guomin zhanzheng*), which were demonstrated most clearly and implemented most

68 *Junzheng xunkan* [Journal of military and administrative affairs] (hereafter abbreviated JZXX), no. 19–20, 1291–99. *Junzheng xunkan* was the official organ of the GMD’s Nanchang field headquarters.

69 JZXX, no. 16, 811.

70 TKP, February 3, 1935, 4.

71 JZXX, no. 13–14, 543–50; Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army’s Three-Year War in South China, 1934–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29.

72 HSZH, no. 240 (October 3, 1934), 3.

73 Benton, *Mountain Fires*, 498–501.

thoroughly in the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign, and it was for that reason that the GMD was able to defeat the CCP.<sup>74</sup> Playing on Mao's dictum that in guerrilla war the people are the water and the guerrillas the fish, Tsao Po-I concluded that the Fifth Campaign drained the "water" that sustained the "fish," bringing about the collapse of the CCP fledgling state.<sup>75</sup> However, the success of the GMD over the CCP was more than a story of GMD strength and CCP weakness.

The structure of the rural political economy of southern China was fundamentally different from that envisioned by the CCP's Moscow-trained leadership. CCP policy to 1932 equalized landholdings and transformed most people in the CSR into middle peasants. The radicalization of CCP policy after 1932 dispossessed middle peasants and brought the full weight of the CSR's coercive apparatus down on them and later on practically any other property owners. It was not an inherent dislike of the CCP's political program or, contra Zhang Baohui, the influence of lineages that prevented the success of the revolution.<sup>76</sup> Had the CCP continued with the policies in place before the Land Investigation movement, peasant loyalty to the CCP would have remained even in the face of a military setback.

Despite the success of the CCP in establishing a sophisticated, mass-based polity, the radicalization of CCP policy in 1933 significantly increased levels of violence against civilians, inhibited the growth of the Chinese Soviet Republic, and paved the way for its collapse. The case study and data presented above show that the scope of the CCP's attack on rural society was extremely broad. Communities around the CSR armed themselves against the CCP both independently and with the aid of the GMD. This phenomenon, which Huang Daoxuan called "opposition of Red and White areas" (赤白對立 *chibai duili*), made allies of rich and poor alike in areas outside of the CSR.<sup>77</sup> Inside the CSR, the CCP's policies rendered the preconflict (GMD-supported) rural political economy preferable to that established by the CCP. Through its radicalism, the CCP created a massive fifth column in the CSR that was ready and willing to defect if the opportunity presented itself. Such an opportunity appeared with the defeat of the Red Army during Chiang's Fifth Campaign in 1934.

When it came, the GMD's victory was so complete because the CCP's class coalition left only a small group of the poor peasantry as supporters of the movement. The CCP battlefield defeat provided an opportunity for rural society's property-owning classes to defect to the GMD, an opportunity they readily seized, providing either active support or passive compliance to the GMD and, more importantly, refusing to provide assistance to the CCP. The establishment of a narrow coalition produced a highly coercive government

74 Chiang Kai-shek, *Su'E zai Zhongguo: Zhongguo yu E'gong sanshinian jingli jiyao* [Soviet Russia in China: an account of 30 years of encounters between China and the Russian Communists] (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongyingshe, 1957), 208. The same sentence is also featured on the inscription page of the GMD's official history of its military campaigns against the CCP. Guofangbu shizhengju, *Jiaofei zhan shi*, vol. 1, front matter.

75 Cao, *Jiangxi Suweiai*, 570.

76 Zhang Baohui, *Revolutions as Organizational Change: The Communist Party and Peasant Communities in South China, 1926–1934* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015).

77 Huang Daoxuan, "Suqu shiqi de 'chi-bai duili': jieji geming zhong de fei jieji xianxiang" [Opposition between red and white areas: a nonclass phenomenon amid a class revolution], *Shixue yuekan* 11 (2005): 38–46; Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 339–51.

in the Chinese Soviet Republic. However, that by itself was not a sufficient condition for the collapse of the regime. It was only after the CCP's battlefield setbacks that its narrow coalition was exposed to competition with a more broadly based rival in the form of the GMD. A military defeat, by itself, need not have spelled the end of the CSR either, and the CSR would have survived had the CCP defeated the GMD's Fifth Campaign. However, together, the establishment of a narrow coalition and a military defeat were jointly sufficient causes for the collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic.

The role of popular support in the Chinese Revolution has been an object of considerable debate among historians, and previous scholarship noted at least some degree of civilian alienation in the Chinese Soviet Republic.<sup>78</sup> Only Tso Po-i argued that civilians defected to the GMD, but he did not show it systematically, and his anti-CCP bias is reason to treat some of his findings with caution.<sup>79</sup> Huang Daoxuan's recent contribution to the scholarship of the Chinese Soviet Republic provides a rich description of widespread civilian victimization under CCP rule, but he does not discuss the result of CCP coercion as the GMD entered the CSR or the result of CCP rule after mid-1934.<sup>80</sup> This article shows that the civilian alienation produced as a result of the CCP's radical policies brought about mass defections from the CCP to the GMD that precipitated the collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic and prevented the CCP's guerrilla forces in southern China from reestablishing the CSR during the Three-Year Guerrilla War.

The conclusion of this article that the Chinese Soviet Republic collapsed as a result of a lack of popular support does not mean that the regime completely lacked support from civilians. The CCP's social revolution up to 1932 elevated many peasants out of poverty and reduced the power of local elites, producing a highly egalitarian society. Throughout the CSR's existence, poor peasants were at the forefront of the revolution, benefiting from the CCP's economic, social, and political programs. The CCP's educational programs brought literacy and an understanding of national and international politics into the villages of the CSR.<sup>81</sup> Poor peasants also benefitted from the creation of cooperatives, took part in new social associations, and engaged in public works and sanitation projects.<sup>82</sup>

The problem with the CCP's revolutionary strategy was not that it did not attract the support of poor peasants. Rather, the problem was that the revolution did not attract the support of anyone other than poor peasants. The Land Investigation movement of 1933 effectively destroyed the support the CCP had enjoyed among rural society's intermediate classes, leading a great many of them to flee to GMD areas and many more to live

78 Johnson acknowledged the dangers of a radical agrarian policy but is unique among scholars in arguing that civilian dissatisfaction with the CCP was a result of the insufficient implementation of its land reform policies. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*, 19. Other scholarship and the evidence presented in this article show that Johnson's contention was incorrect.

79 Cao, *Jiangxi Suweiai*.

80 Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*.

81 Di Luo, "Villagers into Comrades: Literacy Education in the Jiangxi Soviet," *Twentieth-Century China* 41, no. 1 (January 2016): 81–101.

82 He Youliang, *Zhongguo suweiai quyu shehui biandong shi* [History of social change in China's soviet areas] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1996).

in fear of being labelled a rich peasant or a landlord.<sup>83</sup> At a minimum, this led peasants to be skeptical of producing too much. Interviewed after the fall of Guangchang to the GMD, one peasant mused aloud that if tilling a few *mu* of land was enough to be labelled a rich peasant, “who would want to till their fields? If you can’t gain from your work, why work?” The choice was even starker for most: to produce too much or to possess too much could be a death sentence. That the CCP enjoyed the support of poor peasants was important and helpful, but in alienating all of rural society’s propertied classes, the CCP created a narrow base of support that could (and was) overwhelmed by rural society’s intermediate and propertied classes.<sup>84</sup>

The collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic and the CCP’s other base areas in southern China marked a thorough defeat for the CCP. Though elements of the Red Army fought on, at no point did they exercise control over anything approaching a substantial number of people. Benton’s comprehensive study on the Three-Year Guerrilla War makes clear that, although CCP guerrillas showed impressive bravery, devotion, and ingenuity, they were relegated to the margins of southern Chinese society. When the Three-Year Guerrilla War ended, it was not because the CCP had achieved victory but because the 11,000 or so guerrillas involved had been redeployed to central and eastern China to become part of the New Fourth Army.<sup>85</sup> The next time the CCP controlled the area formerly home to the CSR was after the GMD’s defeat in 1949.<sup>86</sup>

The Communist Revolution in China overturned a traditional and deeply unequal rural political economy and replaced it with a new political system intended to put the poor and marginalized firmly in control. The CSR was a bold experiment and one that showed some impressive successes, including the development of an unmediated state, compulsory education, literacy campaigns, public works projects, and the redistribution of land. Despite these achievements, the CCP leadership’s policies inherently limited the reach of the CSR and ultimately paved the way for its destruction. Although the success of the CSR was short-lived, it had a profound effect on those in the CCP who survived the defeat and served as a powerful negative example for future CCP policy. Though Mao assisted the CCP’s Moscow-trained leadership in the implementation of their radical policies from 1931 to 1934, his approach to revolution was fundamentally different and based on the idea that the revolution must include not just the CCP’s natural allies but a class coalition sufficiently large to overwhelm the existing social structure and ensure

83 On mass flight, see the discussion above and in Huang Daoxuan, “Taopao yu huihui: suqu qunzhong dui Zhonggong shizheng fangzhen de huiying” [Flight and return: soviet area civilian responses to the implementation of CCP policies], *Shehui kexue yanjiu* [Social science research], no. 6 (2005): 124–32. In addition, many civilians in the CSR did not want to engage in production out of fear of being labelled a rich peasant or landlord. He Youliang, *Suqu zhidu, shehui, he minzhong yanjiu* [Regime, society, and people of China’s soviet areas] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 399–400.

84 TKP, June 24, 1934, 9.

85 Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance Along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

86 Zhu Kaiquan returned to Jiangxi in June 1949 and resumed his work as part of the revolution. Zhu Kaiquan, *Liushiliu nian zhi geming shengya*, 218–28.

that peasants do not defect to the incumbent when the latter is able to effectively contest territory controlled by the CCP.<sup>87</sup>

This article has implications for the study of the Chinese Revolution and for civil wars and insurgencies more generally. The study of base areas has been the focus of scholarship on the Chinese Revolution since Selden's study of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Base Area,<sup>88</sup> and this article shows that there is still work to be done to understand the broader contours of the Chinese Revolution. Additionally, the Chinese Revolution is unique among civil wars and insurgencies for having left behind an enormous amount of contemporaneous documentation; future work can and should examine how the revolution unfolded in and between particular localities.<sup>89</sup> Literature on revolutions, insurgencies, and counterinsurgencies would benefit from a more holistic view of insurgents and incumbents. Analysis of an incumbent's attempts to defeat a revolution should not assume that reliance on extant social, economic, and political institutions will be sufficient to defeat an opposition movement. Rather, there should be a focus on how the incumbent's strategy interacts with the strengths and weaknesses of an insurgent movement. The collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic owed far less to the inherent attractiveness of the GMD government than to popular dissatisfaction with the CCP's alternative.

This article also points to the decisive role of leadership and ideology in explaining the outcomes that occur over the course of a conflict. The decision to establish a poor-peasant coalition in the Chinese Soviet Republic was determined not by local geographic conditions or the nature of the local rural political economy but by a group of CCP members trained in the Soviet Union who believed that revolutions were made, and succeeded, by mobilizing the poor against the wealthy. Likewise, it highlights the role of strategic decisions made by military commanders. The decision to adopt conventional warfare tactics was made by the CCP leadership because of their belief that their revolution had reached a point at which such a strategy was both desirable and potentially effective. Likewise, in northern China later in the Communist Revolution, the decisions made by Mao and his contemporaries on the class composition of the revolution and on military tactics were decisive in producing victory for the CCP.

Finally, the experience of the CCP in the era of the Chinese Soviet Republic highlights the unique constellation of factors that must come together for a revolution or insurgency to be defeated. The GMD's use of superior firepower and the building of roads and blockhouses did not by themselves defeat the CCP. Rather, the CCP was defeated

87 Mao Zedong, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966); Philip C. C. Huang, "Mao Tse-Tung and the Middle Peasants, 1925–1928," *Modern China* 1, no. 3 (1975): 293–94; Brantly Womack, "The Party and the People: Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary Politics in China and Vietnam," *World Politics* 39, no. 4 (July 1987): 479–507.

88 Mark Selden, *The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). The 1995 edition (Selden, *China in Revolution*) includes a new foreword and epilogue.

89 Pauline Keating undertook just such a study by examining the Communist Revolution in the Suide and Yanshu subregions of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. Pauline B. Keating, *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

because it pursued policies that ran counter to the interests of a majority of groups in rural society, making the GMD regime more attractive in comparison. The GMD did not win the conflict so much as the CCP lost it. It was for this reason that, in spite of its myriad defects, the GMD achieved victory over the CCP. The CCP's subsequent adoption of the United Front and the expansion of its class base ensured that the failure of the Chinese Soviet Republic was not repeated during the War of Resistance or the Chinese Civil War.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research for this article was supported by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and the Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University. An earlier version of the article was presented at the 2013 Southeast Conference of the Association for Asian Studies. My most sincere thanks go to Brantly Womack for his feedback and to Kristin Stapleton and two anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful comments.

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