

Chapter Title: The Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931—1934

Book Title: People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam

Book Author(s): Marc Opper

Published by: University of Michigan Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.11413902.8>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



University of Michigan Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*

JSTOR

The Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931–1934

Established in 1921 by a group of urban intellectuals with the help of the Communist International, by 1923 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was in a United Front with the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) that together sought to establish a political system based on Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People"—nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood. Though both the KMT and the CCP were overwhelmingly focused on urban areas, a significant number of CCP personnel commanded and assisted in the creation of peasant organizations throughout southern China. In 1926, the KMT and CCP embarked on the Northern Expedition, a military campaign designed to unite China under one central government. After taking Shanghai in 1927, the KMT turned on the CCP, brutally suppressing its activities and practically eliminating its presence in urban areas.

In southern China, CCP members established and controlled a number of small peasant armies that fled the cities in the face of the KMT crackdown. These forces, led variously by Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Chen Yi, and He Long, coalesced and initially established a small base at Jinggangshan on the border of Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. After a number of counterinsurgency campaigns waged by the KMT and its local elite allies, the fledgling Red Army abandoned its base area and descended into an area on borders of Jiangxi and Fujian provinces. The area secured by the Red Army, the CCP then began the process of building a new government from the ground up, even in the face of more KMT attacks. By 1931, the base area was sufficiently consolidated that the CCP made the decision to formally proclaim the establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republic (CSR).¹

I. The Ideological Foundations of a Narrow Coalition

When the CCP entered the countryside in 1927, the role of the peasantry in the revolution was no longer an academic question, but one of survival. The CCP's entire approach to politics was based on a Marxist view of society and of politics. In 1925, Mao surveyed the fabric of Chinese society and asked: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?"²

All those in league with imperialism - the warlords, the bureaucrats, the comprador class, and the reactionary intellectual class, that is, the so-called big bourgeoisie in China - are our enemies, our true enemies. All the petty bourgeoisie, the semiproletariat, and the proletariat are our friends, our true friends. As for the vacillating middle bourgeoisie, its right wing must be considered our enemy; even if it is not yet our enemy, it will soon become so. Its left wing may be considered as our friend - but not as our true friend, and we must be constantly on our guard against it. How many are our true friends? There are 395 million of them. How many are our true enemies? There are one million of them. How many are there of these people in the middle who may either be our friends or our enemies? There are four million of them. Even if we consider these four million as enemies, this only adds up to a bloc of barely five million, and a sneeze from the 395 million would certainly suffice to blow them down.³

Turning his attention to the countryside, Mao saw a similar pattern, but was careful to note that there was an inverse relationship between wealth and revolutionary potential. Poor peasants, he wrote, "are the most miserable among the peasants are most receptive to revolutionary propaganda."⁴ Later, the CCP refined its method of class analysis and settled on five rural classes, which were defined based on the extent to which a given person engaged in exploitation of others. Rural society's two wealthiest classes were landlords and rich peasants. The former did not engage in labor and earned a living through money earned renting out their land to peasants. Rich peasants owned at least some land and engaged in some labor, but engaged in exploitation through collecting rent on their lands. Middle peasants derived their income from their own labor and working their own lands. Poor peasants owned a small amount of land and needed to hire themselves out to make ends meet. Finally, farm laborers possessed no land at all and derived their livelihood from working for others. The goal of the CCP's revolution was to put an end to exploitation, and from 1931 to 1934, the CCP's ideological commitment was to the poor peasantry.⁵

The nature of an individual's interaction with the CCP state and other individuals was to be determined not by where he or she lived or which family he or she was from, but by his or her relationship to the means of production. 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. Notwithstanding slight differences in official land laws in the period immediately after their arrival in the countryside, the 1931 "Land Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic" was official CCP policy from its promulgation to the collapse of the CSR in 1934.⁶ 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 feudal landlords, local bullies and evil gentry (*haosben*), 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 [CSR]. The former owners of the confiscated lands shall not be entitled to receive any land allotments.⁷

It was also mandated that "the land, houses, property, and implements belonging to ancestral shrines, temples, public bodies, and associations" were to be confiscated. Monks, Taoist priests, nuns, abstinence ritualists (*zhaigong*), fortune-tellers, geomancers, Protestant pastors, and Catholic priests were, like landlords, ineligible to receive any land.⁸ 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, with their movable and immovable properties redistributed to poor and middle peasants.

A few more words on rich peasants are warranted, as they represented one of rural society's intermediate classes and were seen by the CCP as particularly pernicious. For the CCP, rich peasants were the "rural bourgeoisie" whose "exploitation often carries with it a semifeudal cruelty" and whose interests made them "irredeemably counterrevolutionary." They were seen as opportunists who would oppose landlords during the revolution, but immediately betray the revolution once victory had been achieved. It was said that they would attempt to infiltrate state organs and sabotage attempts by poor peasants to redistribute land. Even the minutiae of land redistribution regulations were formulated with opposition to rich peasants in mind. For example, land was to be redistributed according to the number of persons in a household rather than according to

labor power. This seemingly esoteric distinction had an important logic: by virtue of their surplus capital, farm implements, livestock, and so on, rich peasant households had far greater labor power than poor peasant households of the same size. By confiscating the land and property of rich peasants and mandating distribution be based on household population rather than labor power, the CSR government sought to ensure that dispossessed rich peasants (even those with large families) would not be able to quickly regain their wealth. Furthermore, rich peasants were barred from membership of the CCP or taking any posts in the CSR government.⁹

II. A Narrow Coalition

The CCP declared that the CSR was to be “a regime of all of China’s workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers, and the toiling masses.”¹⁰ That was reflected not only in its approach to land redistribution, but also in other areas of political and social life. Regulations specifically prohibited the following individuals and their families from electoral participation: landlords, rich peasants, merchants, religious leaders, and KMT members.¹¹ Policy in the CSR was carried out by mass organizations (*qunzhong tuanti*), the most important of which was the Poor Peasant League (*pinnong tuan*), a mass organization whose membership (as its name implies) consisted entirely of those classified as poor peasants and farm laborers. Finally, landlords and rich peasants were strictly prohibited from joining the two largest civic organizations in the CSR, the “Anti-Imperialist League” (*fandi datongmeng*) and the “Soviet Protection League” (*yong-Su datongmeng*).¹²

The composition of CSR institutions reflected the social coalition the CCP sought to build. Landlords and rich peasants were barred from membership of the government or civic organizations 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 CSR. The ratio of poor peasants to middle peasants was *at least* ten to one, and in some cases reached as high as one hundred to one. Data on the state of the Party in August 1932 indicates that 81.7 percent of its members were poor peasants against 9.1 percent that were middle peasants; rich peasants and landlords are notable only for their absence.¹³

It should now be clear which groups were not included in the CCP’s coalition, but what of the groups with whom the CCP sought to ally? Groups who received land from the land revolution were to be the CCP’s primary coalition partner.

Poor peasants and rural laborers were at the top of the list and were to receive land according to the principle of equal distribution according to the number of persons in their household. Middle peasants were given the option of participating in redistribution, provided it was according to the same criteria, but it was emphasized that no changes should be made to middle peasant landholdings. The dependents of urban workers and coolies that remained in the countryside were also allotted land.¹⁴

The CCP's political program was intended to serve the interests of the rural poor. Middle peasants occupied a somewhat ambiguous position; they possessed property, did not exploit others, but were a group whose interests may not be served by the confiscation and redistribution of land. The CCP's attitude is best summarized by a resolution adopted by the Sixth Congress of the CCP in 1928:

Uniting with middle peasantry is a prerequisite for the victory of the land revolution. Under the leadership of the working class, poor peasants and the rural proletariat are the driving force of the revolution and uniting with the middle peasantry guarantees the success of the land revolution. The policy proposed by the Chinese Communist Party confiscating all landlord land and redistributing it to peasants with little or no land must have the approval of all of the middle peasant masses because they, too, are part of the masses that are subject to the feudal exploitation of the landlord class.¹⁵

The laws of the CSR were designed to “guarantee the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants” and to “harshly suppress” any attempts by landlords, rich peasants (or any other “native or foreign capitalist elements”) to defend their interests.¹⁶ To ensure the safety of the revolution, the CCP established the Political Security Bureau (PSB), a Checka-style secret police tasked with uncovering counterrevolutionaries. After being uncovered, the suspects were to be handed over to the courts for trial and sentencing, though it was noted that if the “masses” wished to see a suspect executed, he or she should be put to death.¹⁷

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. Patterns of wealth and landownership were the primary means of economic differentiation in the Chinese countryside. Mao's findings on rural landholdings are presented in table 3.1 below.

Data on patterns of landownership elsewhere Jiangxi and Fujian paint a

TABLE 3.1 Landownership by Class in Xunwu and Xingguo Counties, ca. 1927

Survey Location	Class	Population (%)	Land Ownership (%)	Notes
Xunwu	Landlords/Rich Peasants	7.445	70	Includes corporate landholdings
	Middle/Poor Peasants	88.255	30	
Xingguo	Landlords	1	50	Includes corporate landholdings
	Rich Peasants	5	30	
	Middle Peasants	20	15	
	Poor Peasants	60	5	

SOURCE: Schram and Hodes, MRP, vol. 3, 351, 610.

largely similar story. Table 3.2 and table 3.3 are reproduced from work by Huang Daoxuan (2011) and reveal broadly similar patterns across much larger areas of both provinces.

While the broad pattern of landownership indicates that landlords held legal title to most land, landholdings were generally small, a fact that had important implications for both peasant survival and, as will be demonstrated later, the fate of peasants under CCP rule. According to Mao Zedong's investigation in Mukou Village, a self-sufficient middle peasant household of eight that owed no debts had a total of sixty-four *dan* of land, or eight *dan* (roughly two *mu*, one-third of an acre) per member of the household.¹⁸ The data presented in table 3.4 and table 3.5 below show that a vast majority of the population in the Chinese countryside possessed landholdings totaling less than ten *mu*. In the case of Fujian Province, landlords on average held 7.47 *mu* of land per member of the household. Above the subsistence level of two to three *mu*, but far removed from the vast feudal manors of medieval Europe.

Inequality in landholdings led to other forms of economic exploitation. The first of these was the extraction of rent, rates of which averaged 50 percent in most areas of Jiangxi.¹⁹ The fact that most peasants did not possess sufficient land to sustain their households meant that they often took out loans to make up for the shortfall in revenue from agriculture. Loans were made by landlords

TABLE 3.2. Land Distribution in Fujian Province

	6.25	4.81	1.11	Seven Villages in Five Counties, including Fu'an and Shouning	Nanping, Gutian, and Shaxian Counties	Houyu Village, Gushan District, Fuzhou City	Yongding County	Liancheng County	Wuping County	66 Counties in Fujian
Landlord Population							5.73	2.01	3.06	3.17
Landlord Landholdings	47.95	45.85	7.78				6.79	9.82	9.7	13.5
Rich Peasant Population	3.45	6.03	1.81				3.3	2.38	3.66	2.64
Rich Peasant Landholdings	11.38	15.81	7.71				3.64	2.99	6.14	5.17
Middle Peasant Population	18.07	22.23	18.35				34.82	33.46	36.4	39.8
Middle Peasant Landholdings	18.23	26.51	35.54				22.28	17.61	29.3	32.36
Poor Peasant Population	50.33	45.65	37.47				53.45	54.74	51.91	39.99
Poor Peasant Landholdings	20.4	13.32	19.99				17.94	14.73	19.6	13.9

SOURCE: Huang, *Zhangli yu xianjia*, 29. All figures represent percentages, are presented in original, and may not sum to 100.

TABLE 3.3 Land Distribution in Jiangxi Province

	Yinkeng District, Yudu County	Zhangmu Township, Nankang County	Shimen Township, Jiujiang County	Liukeng Township, Ningdu County	All Soviet Base Areas	Six Districts in Ruijin County	28 Villages in Jiangxi	Gonglüe County
Landlord Population	17.8	2.6	4.4	6.14 (includes rich peasants)	3-4	2.18	3.85	
Landlord Landholdings	6.3	13.8	24.44	66.95 (includes corporate land)	20-30	11	17.8	20.1
Rich Peasant Population	2.33	5.6	1.89		5-6	3.7	5.2	
Rich Peasant Landholdings	3.58	10.9	2.39		20	6.6	12.6	15.8
Middle Peasant Population	15.88	25.24	38.67		20-30	20.16	28.8	
Middle Peasant Landholdings	19.86	39.1	36.1		30	16.2	32.2	15.1
Poor Peasant Population	76.63	62.79	42.5	93.86 (includes middle peasants)	30-50	63.3	54	
Poor Peasant Landholdings	38.45	35.18	16.3	33	20	30.5	21	15.5

SOURCE: Huang, *Zhangli yu xianjia*, 30. All figures represent percentages, are presented in original, and may not sum to 100.

TABLE 3.4 Household Landholdings (by Area) in a Sample of Soviet Base Areas in Jiangxi

	Anyuan, Xunwu, and Xinfeng Counties (%)	193 Households in Qinting Village, Lianhua County (%)	393 Households in Longzhou Village, Xinfeng County (%)
Less than 5 <i>mu</i>	70	74.6	72.77
5–10 <i>mu</i>	20	19.2	11.45
10–20 <i>mu</i>	5	3.6	3.56
More than 20 <i>mu</i>	2	-	-
Landless	3	2.6	12.22

SOURCE: Huang, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 27.

TABLE 3.5 Average Landholdings in a Sample of 68 Counties in Fujian Province

Class	Average Land Holding (in <i>mu</i>)	Percentage of Total Population
Landlord	7.47	2.23
Rich Peasant	3.44	1.84
Middle Peasant	1.43	35.24
Poor Peasant	0.61	43.95
Farm Laborer	0.24	3.68

SOURCE: Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui tudi gaige weiyuanhui, *Huadong qu tudi gaige chengguo tongji* [Statistics on the Results of Land Reform in Eastern China], 4. The percentage of total population does not sum to 100 because other classes such as handicraft workers (*shougongye gongren*) and small peddlers (*xiao shangfan*) are omitted.

and rich peasants to middle peasants, poor peasants, and peasant laborers at high (sometimes extremely high) interest rates.²⁰ In addition to land rents and repayments of loans, peasants were subject to all forms of official and unofficial taxes and levies (*kejuan zashui*) by landlords, local governments, bandits, and government soldiers that imposed additional burdens on their already stretched finances.

The cornerstone of the CCP's revolutionary program was the confiscation

and redistribution of land. As the tables above indicate, the number of landlords and rich peasants in the Chinese countryside was relatively small as a proportion of the population. The initial period of the land revolution from 1931 to 1932 saw the implementation of a policy of equal redistribution of land (*pingfen tudi*) that was carried out in much of the CSR. By 1932 the CCP had overseen a vast equalization in landholdings in the countryside. The statistics summarize the results of the land revolution in Jiangxi.

As table 3.6 indicates, by 1932, the CCP had, by and large, distributed land according to the number of people in the household and equalized landholdings to an extent never before seen in these areas.²¹ Landlordism and debt were eliminated and a majority of the CSR's population either had sufficient land to farm and sufficient food to eat or were in a position to achieve that status in the near future. The CCP achieved in the course of roughly two years what the KMT government could not achieve in the course of its entire existence: land to the tiller.

However, the leadership of the CCP was unsatisfied with the result of its land revolution, as were the newly empowered members of the Poor Peasant League. The CCP leadership sought a socialist revolution, not the creation of a rural society of peasant smallholders who 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 the revolution. What the CCP wanted was not equalization of property, but a complete elimination of all inequality. In the CCP's estimation, "feudal forces," such as landlords and rich peasants were blunting the impact of the revolution and preventing a more thorough equalization of wealth.

Persisting inequality and a perception that "class enemies" were preventing the revolution from moving forward led the CCP undertake a "Land Investigation Movement" (*chatian yundong*) designed to uncover and destroy all remnants of landlord and rich peasant influence. 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

TABLE 3.6 The Land Revolution in Jiangxi, 1932

County	Total Land (dan)	Population	Population (dan/person)	Actual Per Capita Land Distribution (dan/person)		
				High	Average	Low
Ganxian	1,199,966	160,000	7.500	11.25	9	3.75
Gonglue	342,911.5	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	11	7	6
Yudu	698,600	191,000	3.658	10	7	4
Wantai	572,241	80,000	7.153	10	-	3

SOURCE: Marc Opper, "Revolution Defeated: The Collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic," *Twentieth-Century China* 43, no. 1 (2018): 53. Data on total land and per capita landholdings among landholding households comes from JGLWH 1932, vol. 1, 198, 205. Population data is drawn from "Jiangxi suqu Zhonggong shengwei gongzuo zongjie baogao (yi, er, san, si yue zongbaogao)" [CCP Jiangxi Soviet Area Provincial Committee Comprehensive Work Report (January, February, March, April Comprehensive Report)] (1932), in ZGGSX, vol. 1, 454. Landholdings per person were calculated based on the data in these two sources. All other data is original.

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.²²

In its search for landlords and rich peasants, the CCP and Poor Peasant League found them in spades. Even given the potential inaccuracies in land quantity and population, by 1932 the CCP had, by and large, achieved not only the equal distribution of land, but had effectively transformed most people in the CSR into middle peasants. Data compiled from *Red China (Hongse Zhonghua)*,

the official organ of the Provisional Central Government of the CSR, and from *Struggle (Douzheng)*, the official organ of the Central Bureau of Soviet Areas reveal the true nature and extent of the Land Investigation Movement: those targeted during the movement were in possession of between forty *dan* and thirteen *dan* per household.²³ The average middle peasant (one who rented out no land and owed no debt) family possessed roughly seven *dan* of land per member of household. Even the smallest households in CSR areas had at least four members, meaning that for subsistence they would require at least twenty-eight *dan* of land.²⁴ As table 3.6 above indicates, by 1932 per capita landholdings were roughly at subsistence level.

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 CSR 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 CSR law.

III. The Nature of CCP Rule in the Chinese Soviet Republic

The CCP entered the Chinese countryside with an ambitious political program that amounted to nothing less than a fundamental transformation of rural society. The CCP’s ideology drove it to seek out rural society’s poorest members and attempt to mobilize them in pursuit of a social revolution. In this it succeeded; perhaps more than it would have imaged or liked. Mao once said that a “single spark can light a prairie fire.” The fire that the CCP ignited in southern China eventually consumed nearly all of rural society. Middle peasants and even poor peasants became rich peasants as the CCP’s ideology drove it to classify possession of nearly any amount of property as evidence of being a counterrevolutionary. Overall, the social distribution of compliance and enforcement was consistent with the coalition established by the CCP: landlords and rich peasants complied with CSR laws only with the extensive application of coercion. Poor peasants and farm laborers, by contrast, not only obeyed CSR law, but were also sometimes enthusiastic in their support of the regime, joining civic organizations, volunteering for the Red Army, and contributing resources to the CCP.

Compliance on the part of poor peasants with CCP policy was extensive. They were the most enthusiastic participants in land redistribution and were the most willing to join the CCP's civic institutions. But it was in their reaction to the state's extractive and military policies that the poor peasants made their support for the regime clearest.

One of the means by which the CSR financed its expenditures was the sale of government bonds. From 1931 to 1934, there were a total of three series of bonds sold by the government. The second series of debt provides a particularly illustrative example of genuine poor peasant support for the regime. The total amount of debt to be sold was 1.2 million *yuan*. Of these funds, 986,000 *yuan* was to be sold to the general public with the remainder assigned to the Red Army, merchants, and government personnel.²⁵

This series of public debt issuance is unique because in March 1933 a movement emerged (supposedly spontaneously) that encouraged citizens of the CSR to voluntarily return bond notes they had purchased without requesting repayment of the principal. The results of this movement provide insight into how enforced compliance and popular support operated in the Chinese countryside. As would be expected, the purchase of government bonds was widespread among poor peasants and, indeed, reports of the voluntary purchase of bonds by poor peasants and farm laborers abound in official CSR organs and CCP documents. The use of coercion, especially against those in possession of property was sufficiently widespread and serious that Mao Zedong himself came out publicly in opposition to the use of such tactics.²⁶

It is important to emphasize that the *purchase* of public bonds was spread over the entire population and it was for that reason that voluntarism coexisted alongside coercion. The return of public debt, however, was not mandatory. Those who voluntarily surrendered their bonds were almost always poor peasants or farm laborers. From March to July, a total of 321,500 *yuan* in bonds was voluntarily returned.²⁷ Unlike the sale of public debt, there was only one report from this period of any coercion to get individuals to return public debt.²⁸ The question of how many people actually returned their bonds still stands. The bonds were issued in notes in the amounts of 0.50 *yuan*, one *yuan*, and five *yuan*.²⁹ Evidence from *Hongse Zhonghua* indicates that bonds returned (or monetary contributions other than bonds) were usually in the amount of one or two *yuan*.³⁰ This being the case, it is likely that the number of people voluntarily contributing to the CCP was at or below three hundred thousand, which represented roughly 8 percent of the population of the CSR.³¹

Analysis of voluntary return of public debt is convenient because it is a readily

quantifiable measure. Nevertheless, it bears emphasizing that the 8 percent figure above is not meant to represent the true amount of popular support rendered to the CCP regime. Rather, it is meant to illustrate that, in reality, even a movement that is ostensibly based on voluntary popular support of civilians draws on the enthusiasm of a relatively small handful of activists.

There were two other important ways in which poor peasants contributed to the CSR: foodstuffs and manpower. As with all rural governments, the CSR derived most of its income from taxes on grain or rice. In addition to the standard agricultural taxes, the CCP often asked for voluntary contributions from the peasantry. Yet again, poor peasants were in the vanguard, leading the movement and making the most voluntary contributions to it. Even as a draft was in effect, there were instances of poor peasants volunteering for military service. Yet again, though, the absolute number of volunteers was small relative to the number of soldiers overall and the number needed by the CCP to fight the KMT.

It was not just poor peasant adults whose service to the regime exceeded the minimum required, but their children as well. They volunteered to carry supplies to Red Army soldiers,³² encouraged parents to return public debt,³³ helped gather grain for the government,³⁴ searched for metal that could be used for the war effort,³⁵ expanding the Red Army,³⁶ encouraged people to return public debt, and helped uncover “counter-revolutionaries,”³⁷ even those to whom they were related.³⁸ They were also charged with helping to locate Red Army deserters and landlords and rich peasants who fled into the mountains.³⁹

After 1932, the CCP’s leadership radicalized considerably and largely negated the achievements of the revolution in the CSR, noting that the continued presence of economic inequality and the inability of the CSR government to fully implement all of its programs was evidence of the influence of class enemies. The CCP was not wholly wrong in its assessment. For example, in the Anfu District of Ningdu County, a rich peasant was detained by a mass organization and turned over to the local government, which then transferred the prisoner to the county government. The chairman, a relative of the rich peasant, treated the prisoner to a meal and promptly released him.⁴⁰ It was found after some investigation in 1932 and 1933 that landlords and rich peasants had been allotted land, kept their original lands by utilizing kinship ties, and by threatening the recipients of redistributed land.⁴¹ For these and other reasons, the CCP launched the Land Investigation Movement, which should be seen as a campaign of coercion waged by the Chinese Communists through the Poor Peasant League to force a redistribution of property and power from practically all nonpoor peasant groups to poor peasants and farm laborers.

The formal legal apparatus of the CSR was almost exclusively concerned with uncovering and punishing “counterrevolutionary” crimes which in practice meant any attempts by those classified as landlords or rich peasants from protecting their interests using either peaceful or nonpeaceful means. In 1932, for example, statistics reported by the Jiangxi Provincial Public Security Bureau (PSB) indicates that landlords and rich peasants were executed at more than twice the rate of middle peasants or poor peasants. Of the 858 prisoners released by the PSB, 58 (about 7 percent) were landlords and rich peasants, while 711 (about 83 percent) were middle peasants, poor peasants, hired farm hands, or urban workers.⁴² The actual content of the crimes committed varied, but of the nearly sixty cases reported in *Hongse Zhonghua* between 1932 and the end of 1934, all of them were concerned with the punishment some form of counterrevolutionary activity ranging from cooperation with KMT-backed local militia to spreading counterrevolutionary propaganda (in the form of rumors or painting slogans onto buildings).⁴³

The fate of those classified as landlords or rich peasants was often bleak. If they were lucky enough to be given land, it was often in mountainous or other inaccessible areas.⁴⁴ Even after their land and property were confiscated they continued to be the targets of levies, taxes, and fines.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ Those arrested and lucky enough to avoid execution were put to work cultivating wasteland.⁴⁷

The pattern of compliance and coercion under the CSR was a product of the CCP’s coalition and political institutions. The relatively enthusiastic support rendered to the regime by the poor peasants and their children discussed above were the most obvious form of poor peasant compliance with the CCP’s policies. CCP records indicate that the vast majority of the CCP’s formal and informal legal apparatuses were concerned with policing those classified as rich peasants and landlords to ensure that they complied with the laws promulgated by the CSR.

IV. The KMT Strategy and Alternative

As with most counterinsurgents, the KMT government was fighting to restore its authority in areas under CCP control. Victory for the KMT meant a restoration and reinforcement of the power of the pre-CCP rural political economy.

The Jiangxi Local Reorganization Committee (*Jiangxi difang zhengli weiyuanhui*), the government organ set up by the central government and tasked with the elimination of the CCP in Jiangxi, promulgated a regulation titled “Methods for Handling Property Seized by Bandits” (*Chuli bei fei qinzhan caichan banfa*) which mandated that all property in areas recovered from the CCP should be returned to its original owners.⁴⁸ So while landlords and rich peasants did not necessarily dominate the KMT and its armies, the net effect of its policies was support for and a reinforcement of the power of local elites.

In its quest to eliminate the CCP, the KMT patronized militia forces led by local elites, furnishing them with both arms and supplies. Writing at the end of 1934, one high-ranking CCP member noted that “wherever the [KMT] goes it arms and organizes local bullies and evil gentry, landlords, rich peasants, capitalists, vagabonds (*liumang*), and all reactionary elements. In [counties at the heart of the CSR, including] Xingguo County, the KMT raised Anti-Communist Volunteer Corps (*fangong yiyongdui*), in Ruijin County militias (*mintuan*), and in Huichang County, Communist Extermination Corps (*changong tuan*). This leads to, on the one hand, reactionary forces using their strength to help the KMT attack [the CSR] and on other hand oppressing the masses and trying to eliminate CCP armed forces.”⁴⁹

The leaders and soldiers of these militia were often former residents of areas under CCP control. When the CCP initially came to power, those with the resources to do so fled to the cities. As the CCP revolution widened to include ever more people classified as rich peasants or landlords, people fled the CSR. Elites and civilians who fled the CSR and shared geographic and kinship bonds often formed paramilitary organizations known as “Refugee Corps” (*nanmin tuan*). Even those who never became part of a militia acted as guides for KMT troops operating in and around the CSR.

The story of Guo Mingda illustrates the kinds of local elites that became the KMT’s partners in counterinsurgency. Born in 1898 in Wan’an County, Guo attained a middle school education and then returned to his village, where he established a school and worked as a tax collector on the side. When the CCP took over his village in 1927, he fled to a nearby city and joined a KMT unit fighting against the CCP. After about a year, he requested and was granted command of about seventy men in an effort to exact revenge on the CCP. He returned to his village and attempted to purge it of CCP influence, but was unsuccessful. He eventually raised more than thirteen thousand *juan* to purchase weaponry for a militia and later fought in defense of several cities that came under CCP attack. After the defeat of the collapse of the CSR, he became an administrator,

a position from which he profited immensely, and was a bulwark of the KMT order in the countryside until the establishment of the PRC in 1949.⁵⁰

The KMT would eventually launch a total of five counterinsurgency campaigns (which it called “encirclement and suppression campaigns,” *weijiao*) against what it called “red bandits” (*chifei*) or “Communist bandits” (*gongfei*), each of which fielded well over one hundred thousand soldiers against the CSR.⁵¹ In spite of its overwhelming military advantage, the KMT was unable to defeat the CCP in the first four of these campaigns. From 1931 to 1934, the CCP’s military adopted Mao’s dictum of guerrilla warfare: “The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue,” a strategy that the KMT and its local elite partners were manifestly unable to challenge.⁵²

After four unsuccessful attempts to destroy the CCP by sending large armies in pursuit of the CCP’s main forces, Chiang Kai-shek decided in 1933 that subsequent operations against the CCP would be “Three Parts Military, Seven Parts Political” (*sanfen junshi, qifen zhengzhi*). The political work that Chiang referred to and that the KMT military undertook consisted of strengthening local government’s control over the civilian population. This meant the reorganization of the neighborhood security system (*baojia*) and what Chiang called the “militarization of politics, society, education, and even industry” in which all activities would be organized with a military spirit and in which “everything could, at any time and in any place, directly or indirectly, discernibly or indiscernibly, be put to use in military development.”⁵³ Accordingly, the *baojia* system was to be used by the Nationalists not only to control the flow of people and goods, but also to raise and reinforce local militias; regulations were put in place to ensure that in the event CCP units appeared, the Nationalist military could take immediate control of the *baojia* units.⁵⁴ The final piece 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. Education would be done through local schools. The local agents of these policies would be an area’s “[virtuous] gentry” (*shenshi*) rather than “local bullies and evil gentry”; indeed, *baojia* regulations forbade anyone accused of “the conduct of local bullies and evil gentry” from holding being the head of a *bao* or *jia*.⁵⁵

It bears emphasizing that no part of the KMT’s counterinsurgency agenda involved any significant amount of socioeconomic reform designed to substantially improve lot of the peasantry. As William Wei (1985) summarizes, “In order to gain the support of the rural elite for their struggle against the Communists,

they decided to institute conservative socioeconomic reforms that sidestepped the issue of tenancy and failed to reduce the tax burden on the people. Rural credit was the only thing that the Nationalists dealt with in any appreciable way during the Soviet period.”⁵⁶

The “three parts military” part of the “Three/Seven” strategy was centered around the adoption of number of new military tactics: “advancing slowly and consolidating at every step” (*bubu wei ying*), “advancing steadily and striking sure blows” (*wenzha wenda*), and “making use of divergent advances and converging attacks” (*fenjin heji*),⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

In its drive to defeat the CCP, the KMT undertook a massive expansion of fortifications and checkpoints throughout the Chinese countryside intended to strangle the CSR. In all, more than fourteen thousand of these were constructed and were intended to be manned by local militia. The quality of these fortifications was highly variable, as were the forces manning them. More importantly, supplies for them were gathered from local communities, which produced no end of problems for civilians in areas under KMT control. The KMT “borrowed” supplies from local populations and drove up the price of basic foodstuffs.⁵⁹ In one instance, bones were scattered about after graves and tombs were destroyed so headstones could be used to pave a road.⁶⁰ More importantly, the labor for constructing the fortifications and the funds used to pay for their maintenance were extracted from the local community in the form of a head tax and a 30 percent levy on rice and great amounts of corvée labor.⁶¹

Although all soldiers the KMT were supposedly subject to political indoctrination, their behavior toward the civilian population was not much different than most warlord armies. The most frequent offenses for which soldiers were punished were “insufficient effort in bandit suppression.” Though other punishable offenses included embezzlement, gambling, desertion, smoking opium, not providing backup in a timely manner, inappropriate relations with minors under 21, frequenting prostitutes, and the theft of military property, only rarely were soldiers punished for injuring civilians or abusing civilians.⁶² Soldiers requisitioned civilian homes, stole crops and livestock, and forced merchants to sell them goods at depressed prices.⁶³

There is no denying that the KMT coalition was itself narrow, but it was broad relative to that of the CCP. The discussion of the Land Investigation Movement in the preceding section makes clear that the CCP’s radical policies eventually drove it to attack practically anyone in possession of private property.

The KMT was defending the preconflict rural status quo, part of which was the right to hold private property. The CCP governance program was simply so radical that it effectively pushed landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and even some poor peasants into opposition to the CSR. In CCP-controlled areas, that translated into highly coercive institutions; in contested areas it eventually translated into a complete collapse of the CCP's institutions.

V. CCP Territorial Control: From Guerrillas to Soldiers

Up to the Fifth Encirclement and Suppression Campaign in 1933–34, the CCP relied on luring KMT units into areas under its control (*youdi shenru*) and engaging them on its own terms. Prior to military action it would “strengthen its defenses and clear the fields” (*jianbi qingye*), evacuating most civilians from the area and leaving only the CCP's most ardent supporters who would provide no information on the CCP's activities or provide misinformation to the KMT, removing any food or livestock of which the KMT could make use, and destroying infrastructure critical to the KMT war effort such as roads and bridges.⁶⁴ Because the CCP had removed all foodstuffs and most people from the combat area, KMT soldiers were without food, supplies, and intelligence.

Under these circumstances, the KMT had to rely on long supply lines vulnerable to CCP attack. Cut off from large supply centers, KMT forces often searched in vain for supplies and exposed themselves to CCP attack. One KMT prisoner of the CCP recalled that KMT forces went days without food and that even when they got their hands on food, they could not find cooking implements or firewood, which forced them to eat uncooked rice. KMT forces were often without food and water. The stresses of long marches and restive sleep resulted in many of them getting sick with blisters, heatstroke, diarrhea, and malaria. The KMT units had high rates of attrition, some of them losing as many as half of their members. The prisoner also recalled that the men in his unit often said, “If the enemy doesn't kill us, exhaustion or disease will.”⁶⁵ The KMT forces that were not defeated retreated back to areas of KMT control.

Up to 1933, KMT units adopted a number of strategies familiar to any counterinsurgent. It would advance into CCP-held areas and capture major towns or cities and then radiate outward in search of CCP units. KMT units were not self-sufficient and relied on long supply lines that required further dispersion of available forces. The Red Army, adopting guerilla tactics, would wait for KMT units to split up and would wait for the right moment to launch a surprise attack, using familiarity with the terrain and advantageous geography to rout KMT

forces.⁶⁶ The CCP's armed forces in the CSR can be divided between full-time, centrally controlled regular armed units (the Red Army) and a host of part-time, irregular, local armed units that included local militia (*difang wuzhuang*), guerilla detachments (*youjidui*), and Red Guards (*chiweidui*). These units operated both in defense of their communities and in tandem with the Red Army, aiding with logistics, medical care, intelligence gathering, and with operations against the KMT armed forces.⁶⁷

In addition to direct, kinetic attacks on KMT forces, the Red Army and the CCP's irregular forces adopted a number of methods to make the KMT's advances both difficult and time-consuming. For example, KMT forces would set up camp in a village for the evening. When night fell, CCP forces would open fire with large, loud cannons on the KMT's positions. KMT forces directed machine-gun fire toward what they thought were CCP positions, but would remain firmly within the village. In the morning, the CCP's forces would retreat to a nearby hill or mountain as the KMT sent a few small units out in search of CCP forces. Unable to locate any of them and concerned that they were being surrounded, the KMT forces would usually retreat back to areas under KMT control.⁶⁸ When KMT forces were marching they were often the targets of far-off sniper fire. At other times red flags would appear in the distance and the KMT, not knowing whether they were small local forces or large Red Army forces, were forced to give chase. The KMT forces were "led by the nose" and found nothing as the CCP's forces disappeared into the mountains and forests. As one CCP veteran recalled many years later, when the KMT entered areas under CCP control "they found no food to eat, they could not get any rest, they could not gather any intelligence, and they could not find guides. They were drowning in the ocean of our people's war."⁶⁹

These tactics, combined with the strategy of evacuating civilians deemed unreliable into the heart of the CSR allowed CCP to enjoy complete control over the CSR's civilian population from 1930 to 1933. All of that changed during the final Encirclement and Suppression Campaign that began in 1933. Mao Zedong, long the principal CCP advocate of guerilla warfare and luring the KMT 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. The three of them concluded that the CSR had reached a point where it was both advisable and desirable to switch from guerrilla warfare to positional warfare.

Just as the KMT established blockhouses throughout areas under its control, so too did the CCP. Red Army units were instructed to garrison their

own version of blockhouses and create “supporting points” (*zhicheng dian*) and adopting a tactic that called for making a series of “short, swift thrusts” (*duancu tuji*). Concretely, this strategy called for holding territory, building blockhouses, ditches, and other defensive structures and 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 that survived recalled that the blockhouses, often made of earthen bricks, were sitting targets for KMT air assaults and provided no protection to the soldiers manning them. One veteran asked in retrospect “how could have ‘blockhouses’ made of wood and sandstone held up against bombardment by artillery?”⁷⁰

The adoption of conventional tactics brought about a shift in how the CCP gathered and deployed resources. Previously dispersed CCP units were concentrated, as were their supplies. Building large, conventional forces and establishing blockhouses required an incredible amount of resources and the CSR government sucked the countryside dry, mobilizing as much manpower and as many supplies as it could. Local militia and armed forces were folded into conventional units, concentrating all of the CCP’s military strength on the front lines.

The result of this change in strategy was catastrophic. Large units were concentrated and thrown into battle against KMT units for cities and towns. As Red Army soldiers fell on the front lines, CSR local defense militias were drafted to the front. The result of the change in strategy meant that the KMT could bring the full power of its conventional forces to bear against the Red Army. The KMT 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.

VI. The Collapse of the Chinese Soviet Republic

As KMT armies made their way into the CSR in mid-to late 1934, there were widespread defections from the groups that had been excluded by the CCP’s coalition with the poor peasantry. The CCP attempted to stem the tide of defections by instituting a “Red Terror” (*hongse kongbu*) in areas under its control. In contested areas, this strategy produced widespread violence against civilians and even more defections. The extent of the problem is evident in central government policy, in judicial procedures, and in events that took place on the ground.

The first indication of the scale of the problem is to be found in the “Legal Procedures of the Chinese Soviet Republic,” promulgated in April 1934. Following the particularly violent purges that accompanied the establishment of the

first base areas from 1927 to 1930, the right to declare or carry out death sentences was removed from local courts and transferred to the central government. Cases of “counterrevolution” sufficiently serious to warrant the death penalty were to be handled by higher organs of government in order to limit the use of capital punishment and ensure that it was adopted only after extensive review. As levels of defection increased, legal provisions were changed to ensure that sufficient coercion could be applied to defectors. No longer was it required that district-level authorities attain the permission of higher organs prior to the arrest, trial, sentencing, and punishment of “counterrevolutionaries.” Authorities at the lowest levels of the CSR government, “with the agreement of the masses” (that is, the Poor Peasant Leagues) were now allowed to dispense revolutionary justice. In areas taken back by the CCP and areas near KMT lines, local authorities could, with the consent of the masses, put “local bullies,” “evil gentry,” and landlords to death, though they were instructed to report the execution to higher organs after the sentence was carried out.⁷¹

The revision of the legal code also saw the addition of a laundry list of capital offenses, including any form of collaboration with or defection to the KMT, refusal to pay CCP taxes or levies, insubordination in carrying out CCP directives, desertion from the Red Army, or refusal to sell goods at CCP-mandated prices. For poor peasants or workers, sentences were lighter (jail time or hard labor), but still severe.⁷²

Not long after the promulgation of these regulations, a local government in the southern part of the CSR declared in an open letter to Red Army soldiers tasked with recovering the city of Menling from the KMT and protecting the city of 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!”⁷³

Less than one month later on May 23, 1934, Zhang Wentian promulgated a directive titled “On the Organization of Landlords and Rich Peasants into Hard Labor Brigades and the Confiscation and Requisition of Property.” In it he stated that “Landlords are to be organized into permanent hard labor brigades (*yongjiu de laoyi dui*) and rich peasants should be organized into temporary labor brigades (*linshi de laoyi dui*). In war zones where military circumstances necessitate it, landlords and rich peasants were drafted into the same labor brigade. In all war zones any landlords or rich peasants engaging in counter-revolutionary activities were to be killed on the spot, all of their property and

possessions confiscated, and their dependents expelled from the CSR or moved elsewhere within it. Rich peasants were to have their grain and cash requisitioned. In uncontested areas in the heart of the CSR (*jiben qu*), all landlord property was to be confiscated and rich peasants' grain requisitioned.⁷⁴

An additional set of regulations promulgated two days later elaborated on more measures to stop the defection of those classified as landlords and rich peasants by expanding the attack against them and their property. In response to widespread defection to the KMT, the CCP mandated that in contested areas that

all counterrevolutionary activities should be addressed in the swiftest manner possible. Any local bullies and evil gentry, landlords, rich peasants, merchants, capitalists, managers [of shops], and vagrants (*liumang*) should be immediately arrested and their leaders subject to intense investigation. The rest should not be subject to detailed interrogation (*xiang shen*) and should be killed on the spot. If someone is suspected of a counterrevolutionary crime they should be arrested and killed on the spot. Those who have committed minor offenses can be imprisoned. If workers or peasants are leading such activities they, too, shall be killed on the spot.⁷⁵

In areas under full CCP control, the CCP drafted those classified as landlords and rich peasants into hard labor brigades and sought to confiscate their land and possessions, down to “every last piece of grain and every last copper coin (*tongpian*).” As for the wellbeing of those concerned,

requisitioning rich peasant grain may create difficulties for rich peasants, but [under the present circumstances] it is beneficial that landlords and rich peasants go hungry to ensure that the Red Army has enough food and does not go hungry or that the families of Red Army soldiers in the rear have enough food and do not experience hardship.⁷⁶

A little over one month later, Zhang Wentian reported on the results of the Red Terror. As all those classified as landlords and rich peasants were suspected of harboring the intention to undertake counterrevolutionary activities, they all became targets of state and mass violence; “the policy of annihilating landlords as an exploiting class had degenerated into massacre.”⁷⁷ Zhang stated, “When we say we need to eliminate the landlord class, it means we must eliminate *the property and land that makes them an exploiting class*, not *that we must kill all landlords*. Opposing rich peasants means only that we weaken their economic position, not eliminate them economically and certainly not killing all of them.

As for those who resolutely carry out counterrevolutionary activities, those who attempt to overthrow the Soviet government, we should resolutely arrest and physically eliminate them.”⁷⁸ Zhang noted that the Red Terror had driven landlords and rich peasants to unite and had, furthermore “sown panic among the masses” and led to them being “used by landlords and rich peasants to oppose the Soviet regime.”⁷⁹

On the ground, as the KMT moved further into the CSR, landlords and rich peasants organized and took part in Refugee Corps and various other paramilitary organizations led by local elites.⁸⁰ Instances of organized mass flight to KMT areas and collaboration with KMT forces also increased.⁸¹

Civilians also actively assisted the [KMT] in their counterinsurgency campaigns. Reflecting on the victory over the CCP, [KMT] commander [Lo Cho-ying] observed that the attitude of civilians in CCP areas toward the [KMT] changed “from one of fear to one of cooperation” after the start of the Fifth Campaign. On the ground, civilians acted as guides for the [KMT] military, helping them locate both Red Army forces and CCP cadres in the villages. When the [KMT] arrived in formerly CCP areas, civilians welcomed them, sometimes enthusiastically. 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 [KMT].⁸²

Defection hit even areas that had traditionally been in the CSR heartland. Speaking on the subject, Li Weihai noted that such incidents were “very common,” citing examples from counties at the center of the CSR. He said that the situation in Yudu County was particularly serious: “There is not one district unaffected and the situation is very serious; mass flight is [not spontaneous], but organized.” The reaction from local authorities, he noted, was usually to send armed squads after those attempting to flee and kill them on the spot, producing numerous mass graves throughout the CSR that would later be uncovered by the KMT and its allies.⁸³

When KMT forces occupied practically the entire CSR at the end of 1934, they began the task of organizing local communities into *baojia* units and establishing local militia that were designed to defend fortified villages against Communist infiltration or attack. The burden for paying for these fell squarely on the peasants, but rather than seek out the CCP, they complied as they sought defense against the Communists.⁸⁴ Traditional social structures returned to the area and the KMT tasked lineage organizations (all of which were run by local

elites) with establishing schools, providing for the defense of villages, and managing internal village disputes.⁸⁵ The KMT also provided relief to the people in areas formerly part of the CSR and enlisted the help of local elites in doing so.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, confiscated lands were returned to their previous owners and peasants who tilled land for landlords were forced to pay back rent, sometimes with interest.

In a preview of what would characterize CCP-KMT conflict after the collapse of the CSR, a small group of poor peasants provided the Red Army with supplies even in areas under KMT occupation. They provided food to the Red Army and provided cover when units of the Red Army attacked recently returned local elites. In one area, peasants were instructed to fire a cannon when CCP guerillas entered the area so as to alert KMT authorities. Civilians sympathetic to the CCP would ensure that many cannons across several villages sounded simultaneously and only after the CCP had entered the area, taken what it needed, and left.⁸⁷ 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 late 1934 and early 1935, the old regime had been restored and reinforced in the countryside as the vast majority of civilians defected to the KMT's local governments and refused to comply with any of the demands of the small CCP forces that remained behind.

VII. Conclusion

The theoretical framework I advance in this book predicts that when insurgents establish narrow coalitions, compliance with their institutions is low and can be elicited only with the extensive application of coercion. Those institutions persist only as long as insurgents are able to maintain complete control over the population. If incumbents contest areas held by such an insurgent group, the latter's institutions will collapse. That was precisely the experience of the Chinese Communist Party in the CSR.

In southern China, the CCP's revolution not only failed, but also failed miserably. Motivated by a radical Marxist ideology, the CCP established a coalition with rural society's poorest groups. Its considerable achievements to 1932 were insufficient for the CCP leadership and it came to the conclusion that the continued existence of inequality was a product of a landlord and rich peasant plot. The only solution in their eyes was the massive application of coercion in the form of the Land Investigation Movement.

The reality of the rural political economy of southern China was fundamentally

different than that envisioned by the CCP's Moscow-trained leadership. The Fujian and Jiangxi countrysides were not populated with vast estates or plantations, but with smallholding peasants. CCP policy to 1932 equalized landholdings and transformed most people in the CSR into middle peasants. The radicalization of CCP policy in and after 1932 dispossessed middle peasants and brought the full weight of the CSR's coercive apparatus down on them and all other property owners. While this may have been well in accord with the ideological inclinations of the CCP leadership, it meant that a restoration of the preconflict (KMT-supported) rural political economy was preferable to that established by the CCP.

From the establishment of the CSR to late 1933, the CCP was able to maintain complete control over the territory of the CSR and the institutions established by the CCP persisted, violent as they were. It became evident only after the defeat of the Red Army that the CCP adopted a fundamentally flawed political strategy. When areas previously under the CCP control were contested by the KMT, rural society's property-owning classes defected to the KMT. The groups that defected represented the overwhelming majority of social groups in the southern Chinese countryside. Though a few poor peasants continued to support the CCP, providing it with sporadic support, after 1934 the CCP's institutions no longer structured the lives of civilians in the area former known as the CSR.

The evidence I've presented in this chapter provides support for the theoretical framework I advance in this book. However, before moving forward it is important to consider a number of alternative hypotheses that are supposed to explain the outcome of insurgent conflicts. It should firstly be noted that although the KMT's counterinsurgency operations against the CCP never achieved the notoriety of the British campaign against the Malayan Communist Party, the KMT's victory was almost as extensive as that of the British nearly thirty years later.⁸⁸ The outcome of the KMT's counterinsurgency campaign in 1934 is, on its face, every counterinsurgent's dream. The incumbent government located insurgent forces, engaged them in conventional battle, and thoroughly routed them, and all the while received help from the local population. It was a crushing defeat for the CCP and by the end of 1934 it was no longer in possession of any territory and its forces were on the run.

Turning first to scholarship on the military aspects of irregular conflict discussed in chapter 1, Nagl (2005) argues that organizational learning and the adoption of flexible, small-unit tactics can bring about the defeat of insurgents.

The experience of the KMT in southern China completely refutes this hypothesis. The KMT did actually make an effort to learn, but its conclusions were that it needed to become an *even more conventional* fighting force, not a less conventional one.

The “conventionalization” of the Nationalist military and defeat of the CCP is also contrary to the expectations of Lyall and Wilson’s (2009) finding that modern, mechanized forces have difficulty defeating insurgents because of the “identification problem.” The “conventionalization” of the CCP’s military goes a long way in explaining why this was not a problem for the Nationalists and also provides empirical support for Arreguin-Toft’s (2005) argument that when insurgents adopt conventional tactics against a more powerful incumbent they will be defeated. But this framework goes further than Arreguin-Toft’s because it provides an explanation of why a military defeat produced a political defeat.

Turning to the politics-centric literature, there is an interesting parallel between the experience of the CCP in southern China and that of the Tamil Tigers as described by Mampilly (2011). Mampilly describes the many and varied ways in which the Tamil Tigers provided public services to civilians in areas under their control. The CCP, too, provided public goods and public services including land, an education system, community defense, and public works. However, the distribution of these services in the CSR was stacked too greatly in favor of poor peasants for them to be of service in gaining uncoerced compliance from the rest of the population. When the KMT was able to contest areas under the CCP’s control, the CCP’s institutions, elaborate as they were, collapsed.

The only prominent work in the field of comparative revolution to directly address the experience of the CSR is Skocpol’s (1979) *States and Social Revolutions*. She is largely in agreement that the forces of counterrevolution were simply too great for the CCP to overcome. Chiang Kai-shek,

with the willing acquiescence of local and provincial authorities anxious about the Communists’ social-revolutionary policies, directed his well-equipped armies against the Kiangsi Soviet. At first guerilla tactics succeeded in holding the Nationalists at bay. But by 1935, Chiang’s fifth ‘Encirclement and Annihilation’ Campaign, designed by German military strategists, succeeded in forcing the communists to abandon [the base area].⁸⁹

Though this telling may appear uncontroversial, the clear implication is that strategy and the raw force of arms is sufficient to defeat a revolutionary

movement. This is not Skocpol's argument, however, and it is unlikely that she would actually want to argue that the massive application of armed force is sufficient to stop a social revolution.

Skocpol's argument is that successful social revolution is a function of (1) international pressure on agrarian bureaucracies and (2) conditions for peasant revolt. The first of these conditions is fulfilled when international pressure brings about reforms that challenge the interests of regime elites. Where these elites have autonomous control over local resources they will oppose reforms and hobble the regime. Conditions for peasant revolt are in place where agrarian sociopolitical structures provide peasant communities with some degree of solidarity and enjoy some significant level of autonomy from landlords.⁹⁰ These conditions jointly form the sufficient conditions for social revolution. While this theory may explain the *final* success of the CCP in 1949, it does not explain why the CCP collapsed in 1934 because the nature of the KMT regime did not significantly vary between 1934 and 1949 (the details of the latter period will be discussed in the case study on the Chinese Civil War). As discussed above, the KMT's counterinsurgency campaign represented little more than a sustained attempt to restore the preconflict status quo wherein local elites dominated the countryside.

The KMT's success against the CCP in southern China presents a challenge to more contemporary state-centric approaches to revolutions as well (Wickham-Crowley 1992; Goodwin 2001). Broadly speaking, this literature contends that violent, exclusionary regimes produce revolutionary movements that ultimately topple them. The KMT regime was violent and exclusionary before and after 1934 and was violent and exclusionary at the time of its collapse in 1949. This body of work cannot offer an explanation for why the CCP failed in 1934 and not in 1949.

Yet another possible hypothesis comes from the practitioners of counterinsurgency warfare who espouse winning over the hearts and minds of civilians. The Nationalist Military History Bureau's (1967) *History of Military Actions Against the Communist Rebellion During 1930-1945* holds that the collapse of the CSR came from the KMT's employment of the "Three/Seven" strategy, its supposedly comprehensive military, political, economic, social, and logistic strategy.⁹¹ However, for all of the talk about its new strategy, in the latter part of 1934 as the campaign against the Communists was coming to an end Chiang Kai-shek lamented, "We have for some time now talked about using a 'three parts military, seven parts political' strategy, but that is only an ideal. In reality, at this point we have 'three parts political' and 'seven parts military!' At best we have five parts

of each!”⁹² The CCP reported often and in detail on the “White Terror” (*baise kongbu*) unleashed by KMT forces as they advanced into the CSR.⁹³ Forces led by local elites reclaimed their property, and killed those who had taken part in the CCP’s redistribution drives.⁹⁴ More generally, the KMT was fighting to restore a fundamentally unjust rural political economy. A battle for hearts and minds of the people this was not.

Literature on the Chinese revolution has also failed to advance a systematic account of why the CSR collapsed. Tsao Po-i’s (1967) *The Rise and Fall of the Jiangxi Soviet* remains the most comprehensive study of the history of the CSR. Tsao’s discussion of the political failures of the CSR centers on the “indifference” (*lengmo*) and “disdain” (*biqu*) of civilians toward the CCP.⁹⁵ The CCP’s calls to “protect the Soviet Union” in the wake of Japanese encroachments in northern China, its transplanting of the alien-sounding “soviet” (*Suweiai*) onto Chinese soil, the Party’s contempt for what he calls Chinese “traditions,” the levies it placed on the peasantry, and intense class struggle in the CSR are the reasons Tsao cites for the CSR population’s reluctance to take part in CCP organizations or campaigns and the population’s tendency to flee the CSR for KMT-controlled areas.⁹⁶ He concludes 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.⁹⁷ There is much to recommend this interpretation, but Tsao’s history of the conflict gives little indication as to the processes that led to the collapse, a deficiency that this book rectifies.

The collapse of the CSR was the cause of much soul-searching within the CCP. While on the Long March, the CCP stopped at Zunyi in Guizhou Province to ponder the lessons of the defeat. A purely military explanation of the conflict, that is, that the objective balance of forces was such that the CCP could not have succeeded against the Fifth Encirclement and Annihilation Campaign, was argued by Wang Ming in Moscow in November 1934 as the CSR was collapsing and later by Bo Gu at the Zunyi Conference in January 1935.⁹⁸

The official verdict that is still Party orthodoxy today was laid out in the CCP’s 1945 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Chinese Communist Party” which states that this strategy of “engaging the enemy outside of the gates” (*yudi yu guomen zhiwai*) and conceding no ground to the enemy in defense of the CSR in a “contest of attrition” (*pin xiaobao*) was the primary reason for the collapse of the CSR. The result, according to the Resolution, was that the Party had no choice but to abandon the CSR.⁹⁹ The sole mention of the

political aspect of CSR policy is found in the 1935 “Summary Resolution on the Counter-Offensive Against the Enemy’s Fifth ‘Encirclement and Suppression Campaign’” promulgated after the Zunyi Conference. Specifically, it stated that

The deepening of class struggle within the Soviet Areas along with economic construction and the thorough improvement of the relationship between the government and the masses served to encourage the broad masses’ zeal and enthusiasm for participating in the revolutionary war. The conditions were thus in place for [the Party] to completely smash the Fifth ‘Encirclement and Annihilation’ Campaign.¹⁰⁰

Hartford’s summary of the analysis of the collapse of the CSR remains accurate thirty-five years after she wrote it:

The basic debate seems to have been between those who read in the soviet period a fundamental failure of the Party to attract overwhelming peasant support, therefore fundamentally failing; and those who think the Party did attract a huge amount of peasant support but nevertheless failed because of external factors which no amount of peasant support could have withstood.¹⁰¹

The theoretical framework I advance in this book and the case study above squares this circle by contextualizing the roles of military and political factors in an insurgency and providing an account of the causal processes by which each influence the outcome of irregular conflicts. In so doing, it provides the most comprehensive explanation of the collapse of the CSR yet advanced and permits a comparison with other periods of the CCP’s insurgency. The next chapter will do just that and analyze the CCP’s Three-Year Guerrilla War against the KMT in southern China.