

## Chiang Kai-shek and His Time

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# Chiang Kai-shek and the Japanese Ichigo Offensive, 1944

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**Abstract** During the second world war, American General Joseph Stilwell severely criticized Chiang Kai-shek's lack of will to fight the Japanese invaders. However, such a view, though dominant in the field for more three decades, cannot stand up to a close examination of relevant archives and other primary source materials, which only recently have been made available. Recent scholarship focuses so much attention on the second Burma campaign that it largely overlooks the largest offensive ever launched by the Japanese army throughout its history. This paper examines a series of Japanese campaigns codenamed Ichigo, and will rely in large part on Chiang Kai-shek's diaries to examine how he dealt with them. My essay is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the offensive and Chiang's command during it, while the second describes Chiang's handling of defensive failures.

**Summary** 1 Commercialization vs Mechanization: the Henan Battles. – 2 Empiricism vs Strategic Reform: the Battles in Hunan. – 3 Defeatism vs Momentum: The Battles of Guangxi. – 4 Reform and Rectification of the Nationalist Army. – 5 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Chiang Kai-shek. Ichigo offensive. Fang Xianjue. The Bible. Military reform.

During the second world war, American General Joseph Stilwell severely criticized Chiang Kai-shek's lack of will to fight the Japanese invaders. However, as Hans Van de Ven (2003) and Chi Hsi-sheng (Qi 2011) demonstrate in their respective works, such a view, though dominant in the field for more than three decades, cannot stand up to a close examination of relevant archives and other primary source materials, which only recently have been made available. Obsessed with his defeat in Burma in 1942, Stilwell not only exaggerated the strategic importance of that campaign but also misinterpreted Chiang's wartime strategy, especially his determination to fight the Japanese invasion to the end. While remedying the previous deficiency in the field, however, recent scholarship focuses so much attention on the second Burma campaign that it largely overlooks the largest offensive ever launched by the Japanese army throughout its history. I propose to examine a series of Japanese campaigns codenamed Ichigo, and will rely in large part on Chiang Kai-shek's diaries to examine how he dealt with them. My essay will be di-

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vided into two parts. The first part deals with the offensive and Chiang's command during it, while the second describes Chiang's handling of defensive failures.

To begin, I want to point out Western observers tend to see Chiang Kai-shek as a national leader in a mature nation who faced far greater expectation than he could deliver. Such observations have merit, yet they underestimate the impact of the Japanese attacks beginning in 1937, which lasted more than four years. The Japanese occupation of the coastal provinces and rocketing military spending drove the Nationalist government to a low point, while the winter offensive of 1939 clearly showed Chiang's inability to mobilize regional and local forces as he would like. In 1940 the national currency *fabi* fell so dramatically that a stabilization fund of 5 million English pounds could not prevent its depletion within several months. In 1941, another stabilization fund supported by American and British credit failed to prevent a new wave of devaluation of the *fabi*, which forced Chiang to centralize the collection of land taxes, thereby prompting severe strains with provincial governments and encouraging centripetal tendencies. Some of his trusted generals seemed to join the ranks of residual warlords such as Long Yun of Yunnan, Pan Wenhua of Sichuan, and Yan Xishan, all of whom posed serious threats to Chiang Kai-shek's government and drastically undermined his ability to make war (Chiang, *Riji* 1942, May 31). In a time of high inflation, Chiang had no choice but to tolerate corruption such as trading with enemies and other illegal practices, which further diminished the army's will to make determined resistance.

In 1941, while seeking to stifle Nationalist outside contacts, to take advantage of the near destruction of the Nationalist air force, and bomb the Nationalist government into capitulation, the Japanese army launched military action to pacify areas of the coastal China behind their front lines, where the Communist Party had maintained a vigorous presence and built grassroots power with the support of mobilized and organized peasants. The offensive reduced Communist territory and Communist-ruled population, forcing the Communist Party centre to evacuate many higher-ranking cadres to Yan'an to enjoy a safer environment while also simultaneously undertaking rectification campaigns. The Nationalist suspense of appropriations and tightening up of economic blockade in the Yan'an area, as well as shrunken territory behind the Japanese lines, meant that the Communists also suffered a financial crisis, which resulted in what Mark Selden (1971) called the Yan'an Way. Lowering peasant's burdens, the Communists initiated a series of reforms that aimed to reduce their military and administrative expenses. In desperation, the Party even began to plant and sell opium to make ends meet during this difficult time period, yet it was also able to implement rectification and cadre screening to strengthen the unity of its rank-and-file (Chen 1995, 263-98; Xiao 2013,1, 399-457; Gao 2000).

Three years later, in 1944, the Japanese Ichigo Offensive was aimed at three provinces of National China - Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi - respectively located in North China, Central China and South China. The major commanders of these three provinces can be separated into three groups. In Henan, the major commanders came from the Whampoa Military Academy, where Chiang Kai-shek had served as its first commandant. In Hunan, the major commanders came from Guangdong within the Northern Expeditionary Army. In Guangxi, the major commanders were residual warlords incorporated into the Northern Expeditionary Army. I will first discuss how Chiang Kai-shek directed them to resist the Japanese offensive respectively in these three provinces and later examine his measures in coping with military debacles and their consequences. The subtitles serve to highlight my characterization of the three battles in the three provinces.

## 1 Commercialization vs Mechanization: the Henan Battles

While the Imperial Headquarters considered the mobilization of 400,000 to 500,000 soldiers to launch the Ichigo Offensive, the largest campaign ever undertaken by the Japanese army in its history, Chiang Kai-shek was preoccupied with the urging of both America and Britain for the participating in the Burma Campaign, not to mention the Russian bombing of the Xinjiang-Outer Mongolia borders. Actually, the Japanese attack at Imphal of India in the spring of 1944 surprised the Allied powers for its scale, and both General Stilwell and General Mountbatten urged Chiang to throw in his Yunnan forces in coordination with the attack of the Chinese army in India, but Britain's refusal to honour the commitment of a sizable naval presence in south Burma led him to refuse to send more troops to north Burma. Chiang strengthened his case by citing fears of a possible Japanese offensive in China, but his diaries suggest that he consistently underestimated Japanese intension and capability. Instead, he was so optimistic as to propose other actions to his generals in the China Theatre. Earlier, during a military conference in Hunan, Chiang considered it was time for his army to prepare for a counteroffensive, asking his field commanders to identify geographical goals and telling them what should be taken as guidance (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, February 9). In early April, he thought Japan had transferred its China Theatre troops to the India-Burma region, and that it was an opportune time for the Chinese to launch an offensive (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, April 9). Once Japan acted contrarily and began a serious offensive in the China Theatre, Chiang still thought that the Japanese were unable to amass an army larger than several infantry divisions.

The main goal that Japan's Ichigo Offensive aimed to achieve was the linkage of three railroads (Peking-Wuhan, Wuhan-Guangzhou, and Hengyang-Guilin), as well as the near destruction of American airbases nearby

that made the Japanese homeland and logistical lines vulnerable to strategic bombing. This offensive required the Japanese to mobilize troops from Manchuria and other parts of occupied China, particularly withdrawing troops fighting against the Communist guerilla forces. The concentrated Japanese force would first cross the Yellow River, which was then flowing southward to the Huai River and cut the Japanese occupied China into the northern and central parts. With the reinforcement of the attacking Japanese forces from the North China, the Middle Yangtze Japanese forces could then move to conquer and occupy Hunan province, especially its capital, as well as the valley and the railroad along the Xiang River. Finally, this Japanese army would receive support from the Japanese army in south China and northern Vietnam, and in a coordinated attack occupy Guangxi, especially areas along the railroad piercing its northern part. Guangxi was the home province of the Guangxi army, over which Chiang had only nominal control.

In early March, Chiang took notice of the Japanese attempt to repair the Yellow River Bridge near the railroad junction town Zhengzhou, but he thought the Japanese goal was to prepare a retreat route for its army in Wuhan, where Japan maintained the only offensive army corps in China. In his judgment, repairs would take several months and the best counter strategy was incessant bombing (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, March 4). Chiang thought it would take the Japanese more than two months to complete the reconstruction of the iron bridge, which meant that he had plenty of time to request aid from the American air forces in China. Even if the American air forces could not come in time, he thought his army was capable of delaying the Japanese offensive and in the meantime launching a counter offensive in the Three Gorges Area in the middle Yangtze to harass the Japanese army that might begin a retreat from Wuhan (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, March 8, March 18).

In late March, Chiang read a digest of one British newspaper, which criticized the poor command of the Chinese army, the inappropriate use of the equipment and uneconomic use of human resources, and rampant corruption under cowardly leadership. Chiang considered the critical reports a "precious materials" worth pondering by his generals and civilian leaders and in the very day he endorsed the plan to reinforce Myitkyina from western Yunnan in view of the Japanese attack at the Indian border Imphal. He seemed to have been preoccupied himself with the situation in Burma rather than inside China (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, March 31).

Some intelligence reports about Japanese redeployment of troops failed to alert him into reconsidering his military plan about Beiping-Wuhan Railroad in Henan. He did not begin to pay serious attention to the Japanese offensive until two days after the Japanese overwhelmed the heavily fortified Haiwangcheng in April 17 on the south bank of the Yellow River (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, April 19). It was a serious signal, but still he took it lightly. The

Japanese redeployment not only sent serious signals in terms of unusual railroad traffic north of the Yellow River, but by the withdrawal of mopping up forces from Communist occupied Shanxi and the transfer of units from the Yellow River Bend front eastward to the Yellow River Bridge (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987b, 206-7). It was understandable if the Communist army chose to withhold vital intelligence, but Chiang's own intelligence department also failed scandalously. Misled by successful resistance against the westward Japanese army, Chiang believed the Japanese meant to primarily attack southward along the Beijing-Wuhan railroad. Confident of Tang Enbo's Henan army, he thought he could stem the Japanese offensive, which he called a stupid move (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, April 22). He had secretly amassed a huge army west of the Beiping-Wuhan Railroad in the hilly and mountainous areas, and hoped they would win a victory in the plain west of the walled city of Xuchang, a key rail junction.

On 23 April, Chiang asked General Claire Chennault about bombing the Yellow River Bridge, but American air bombers went into action four days later. It was only ten days after a Japanese division forced the Yellow River 25 miles east of the Iron Bridge that the American bombers finally appeared, and their strikes proved totally ineffective. Chennault's bombers returned the next day, but this time due to reasons unknown they failed to even reach the destination. Far worse was their release of the unused bombs on their way to Kunming, southwest China, resulting in numerous deaths of Chinese refugees (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, April 23, April 26, April 28). The situation continued to deteriorate when a planned third bombing mission was aborted. By this time, Chiang had suffered a serious intelligence failure that resulted in his total unawareness of the Japanese moving a whole tank division other than infantry units across the Yellow River Bridge, preparing to launch a blitzkrieg against a Chinese army that had never seen tanks in formation, let alone the possession and use of anti-tank weapons. The Japanese army now including at least four infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade, kept its intension secret as their infantry units moved southward as Chiang had expected by this time. Unfortunately for Chiang, this seemingly stupid move by the Japanese army ended up easily breaking the defences of Xuchang, where Tang Enbo had assigned a division for the task. With only about two thousand men at his disposal, the division commander, a young Whampoa officer, fought heroically and committed suicide when his undersized force collapsed on May 1. It was a hard fight lasting slightly more than 24 hours (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987b, 372-84, 389-90; Chiang, *Riji* 1944, April 30), but Chiang did not realize that a much more serious debacle lay in store.

Persistently misjudging Japanese ambition and overestimating the fighting capability of his own troops, Chiang made another strategic blunder. Originally he sought to use his Henan army to fight a decisive war near

Xuchang. In fact, Tang Enbo had responded to his opinion and asked for permission to fight, but after pondering on the fighting capability of Tang's troops Chiang ended up hesitating. Apart from a lack of confidence in Tang's army, he worried such an action might lure the Japanese forces away from their intention to link the Beijing-Wuhan railroad and attack instead at Luoyang, the ancient capital of China, which was located to the northeast of Xuchang along the Yellow River. He thus asked Tang Enbo and his army to withdraw to the nearby hilly areas, in the hope that constant menace from the west would prevent the Japanese from maintaining unimpeded railroad transportation, even though he did not doubt the Japanese capability to move southward along the railroad (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 2).

But the development of subsequent events surprised him and then caused him to panic. Just before Chiang made his strategic decision, a Japanese army of at least three infantry divisions had moved southward along the Beijing-Wuhan railroad. One Japanese infantry division suddenly made a turnabout and, spearheaded by a tank division and a cavalry brigade, launched a blitzkrieg strike along a river valley pointing towards Loyang (Nihon Boei-jo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987b, 452). According to one Japanese estimate, this tank division was half strength of a regular one, with only 20 to 30 percent firing power of a Russian tank division (Nihon Boei-jo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987b, 163). Nonetheless, having never seen such a large tank force, Tang Enbo's army immediately fell into disarray and broke into smaller units, running for safety into the mountainous areas of western Henan. In his own attempt to run for his life, Tang Enbo went further west and lost touch with his scattered troops. Chiang sought to reach these forces directly through phone calls, ordering them to stand and fight, even though the Japanese forces broke their positions. He also repeatedly ordered General Tang to return to the fronts and assume the actual responsibility of commanding troops. Despite his strict orders, the fronts did not stabilize as he had hoped. Instead, a contingent of the Japanese tank force followed the footsteps of the retreating Chinese army along a river valley, and soon reached the highland guarding the southern approach to Luoyang, while the main Japanese force continued to devote its energy to searching and destroying Tang Enbo's beaten and demoralized army (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 4).

In these desperate times, another Japanese division moved westward along the right bank of the Yellow River and the Longhai Railroad and penetrated the Chinese positions manned by Jiang Dingwen's troop of the First War Zone, thereby prompting another panicky retreat. Chiang tried to put a stop to this debacle, making numerous phone calls to the two generals, Tang Enbo and Jiang Dingwen, and, disregarding the chain of command, directly issuing orders to their subordinates. On May 4, he worked until three o'clock of the next day (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 4). With

several hours' rest, he continued to urge and exhort General Jiang, General Tang, and their subordinates to stand and fight, while also asking his air force to bomb the advancing Japanese vanguard and dropping copies of a letter he had written to encourage the front commanders both east and south of Luoyang (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 5).

When the Japanese stopped for a respite, Chiang found his army in a chaotic state he could not imagine. The Japanese pause in their attack at Luoyang did not mean the suspension of their offensive, just that they had made the destruction of General Jiang Dingwen and Tang Enbo's major troops their top priority. Unaware of the Japanese intentions, Chiang simply determined that his two generals unable to comply with his orders and maintain contacts with each other, as well as their scattered combat units. Chiang was extremely upset by General Jiang's false report of a serious Japanese breakthrough, which aerial reconnaissance proved otherwise. General Jiang also behaved despicably by moving his headquarters from Luoyang to further west without informing Chiang and his subordinate units. Chiang thought that General Jiang had hidden his whereabouts in order to prevent his underlings from looking for his guidance and instructions (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 7; Liu 1996, 656-7, 661).

Pained and grieved by the questionable performance of his generals, Chiang cursed them for their cowardly and incompetent behaviour. In his rage, he cited a long-standing public criticism that Tang Enbo had devoted too much time to smuggling with Japanese occupied areas and had failed to adequately train his troops (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 4). Though not blaming General Jiang Dingwen on the same grounds, Chiang certainly knew the latter had also amassed a fortune through commercial and smuggling activities. He instead focused his criticism on Jiang Dingwen's lack of commandership. Thanks to Jiang Dingwen's inability to command his troops in a military urgency, Chiang found he had to bypass the Ministry of Military Command chain and gave orders directly to Jiang's subordinate officers, thus acting like General Jiang Dingwen's "chief of staff", and enabling Jiang to shed his responsibility (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 6, May 31).

On May 8, an aerial reconnaissance report that 200 Japanese vehicles were approaching Luoyang from the east suggested an imminent attack at the ancient capital. This information led Chiang to consider a plan for the defence of Luoyang. Without considering the serious consequences, he rashly ordered the withdrawal of Jiang Dingwen's motley forces from the east. On that night, he prayed five times to God for the defence of Luoyang (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 8). The subsequent quietness of the fronts led him to regret yielding the area east of Luoyang without a fight, and circumstances quickly worsened following a sudden crossing of the Yellow River by the Japanese army from Shanxi, threatening to attack Luoyang with more than a division from the west (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 10, May 11). Chiang now had to worry about a siege of Luoyang from three directions:



east, south, and west. Acting on their own and eager for an even greater victory, one Japanese tank division launched an offensive at the walled ancient capital, but the higher command immediately ordered a suspension of the assault. It harboured a different plan for conquering Luoyang (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987b, 602-6).

Still trying to organize a counteroffensive, Chiang conceived of a strategic plan that would require the assembling of a large force to the southwest of Luoyang and with Luoyang as bait to lure and divert the major Japanese forces. While weakening the assaulting force by a positional war at Luoyang, he would then use his regrouped forces to strike a crushing blow on the Japanese army in a mobile war outside the walled city (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 10-16). To aid in the defence of Luoyang, Chiang urged air strikes but no airplanes were available. General Tang obeyed his orders, but in the face of Japanese tanks and other infantry units, he found it impossible to re-assemble his disintegrated force. He continued to run for safety further west. Tang failed dismally, but even if he had reassembled his army, he would only have played into Japanese hands, because the Japanese forces viewed decimating the Chinese field army far more important than capturing a well-fortified and already isolated Luoyang. Both the forces of Jiang Dingwen and Tang Enbo preferred to disappear into the mountainous regions of western Henan. Facing the same Japanese threat, General Jiang Dingwen acted differently from the obedient General Tang, making no attempt to regroup his army and running pell-mell for safety. In order to prevent Japanese discovery of his whereabouts, Jiang even cut radio contacts with the subordinate units and as a result, Chiang had no means to assess the condition of forces inside Luoyang. Chiang sought desperately to change his fortune.

By this time, the Japanese had assembled another attack force east of the Yellow River Bridge and secretly prepared to attack Luoyang, including the fortification in its northern suburbs. This Japanese attacking force, consisting of one division and two brigades, had taken advantage of the Chiang's yielding of land east of Luoyang and swiftly moved into the attacking lines while waiting for further orders to launch full-scale assaults. Once the offensive was launched, it took no more than two days to occupy the Beimang Mountains (the northern shield of Luoyang) and only another day to conquer the walled city.

Chiang chose generals Wu Tingning and Zhang Shiguang for the defence of Luoyang. Wu was a native who had made his military career in a warlord army, while Zhang was a Whampoa cadet who Chiang did not know personally. Wu led two divisions to defend the fortifications on Beimang Mountain, while had only one division which had recently been evacuated from the Taihang Mountains after serious setbacks at the hands of the Communists. Chiang could not reach them via telephone, and his attempts to assemble an attacking force did not go well either. General



Jiang Dingwen picked up his phone only reluctantly and responded using what Chiang thought as a disrespectful tone of voice. The attempt to reach General Tang failed because the Japanese hunt for his main force had driven his headquarters further west (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 11). He considered air supremacy vital for the success of strategy, but after a day's successful bombing near Luoyang the weather did not cooperate, hampering his use of air power. Unable to reach the defenders of Luoyang, Chiang asked his airplane to drop personal letters to them to strengthen their resolve (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 12).

Foiled by the Japanese crossing of the Yellow River from Shanxi, Chiang worried about a possible Japanese thrust into the neighbouring province of Shaanxi, and ordered General Hu Zongnan to prepare for the worse (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 13). Actually, by this time, the Japanese full-scale attack at Luoyang was still in the making. Luoyang was not in imminent danger. Thus, when Chiang dreamed about a bright moon and stars, he interpreted them as signs that God meant he would soon see the light despite the darkness. He also interpreted the sudden downpour of rain which had incapacitated the Japanese tanks as a religious miracle. Even more surprising was his promise to God that he would ask his eldest son to get baptized should the decisive war near Luoyang turn out to be a success (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 14). Through his diary, we can feel Chiang's anxiety in waiting for the Japanese to besiege Luoyang.

Only two days later, bad news poured in from all fronts. Both Generals Jiang Dingwen and Tang Enbo were still on the run. It was almost impossible to locate their headquarters, so Chiang had no means to reach the Luoyang defenders. Ten days later, when Chiang was in optimistic mood, the Japanese suddenly broadcast they had occupied the ancient capital, prompting both Generals Wu and Zhang to lead their survived troops in an attempt to break through the Japanese siege. The Japanese clandestinely moved a division from the east of Luoyang and focused their attack on the Beimang Mountains. Once the Beimang Mountains were taken, the ancient walled capital could hold out no longer. In reflection, Chiang thought he had no personal ties with both generals. Given that Wu was a conservative general, he should not have expected him to do more. He said nothing about his Whampoa student. In recalling the failure of the defence, he criticized himself for interfering in field manoeuvres and especially for oral instructions by telephone, admitting he had made strategic blunders (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 25).

During the Japanese attack at Luoyang, Chiang realized his plan to urge generals Jiang Dingwen and Tang Enbo to regroup their army was a mission impossible. Instead, he ordered Hu Zongnan to send reinforcements from Xian. The fall of Luoyang made that effort meaningless. As the Japanese pursuit seemed to have reached an end, Chiang gave no more heed to his instructions to Hu. In fact Hu Zongnan's troop had made no headway

in throwing back the Japanese army (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 23, May 31, June 3). Realizing that Hu was unable to handle any tank-led offensive, Chiang then asked Hu to withdraw his forces back to Lingbao, the gate to Xian, and left the surviving troops of the First War Zone to put up further resistance (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 6-10).

By this time, the Japanese army had already started their offensive in the Central Yangtze for several days, but to Chiang's surprise, the Japanese army also launched an attack at Lingbao. The Japanese headquarters considered this campaign an appended job, allowing the Japanese army which had crossed the Yellow River to join the attack in Henan to satisfy their eagerness for the sweetness of victory. Seriously constrained by both logistics considerations and military man power, the campaign was from its beginning considered a limited one, which would not last more than several days, but the sudden attacks from the flanks with the tank support still caught Chiang by surprise and put Hu Zongnan's army in panicky retreat. The offensive raised the possibility for the Japanese army to enter Shaanxi through narrow paths along a major tributary of the Yellow River. Chiang expected Hu's troops to make a determined and successful stand. Instead, faced by Japanese air bombings and tank assaults, Hu Zongnan's army held only three days and pulled back despite Chiang Kai-shek's orders to the contrary.

Chiang could not accept such a performance from troops which Hu Zongnan had spent five years training for fierce counterattacks against his enemies. Public opinion, both domestic and international, had considered Hu Zongnan's troops to be China's cream of the crop, which Chiang had wasted in watching the Communists in northern Shaanxi. It possessed the best-equipped units in the entire Chinese army, and those that retreated were the best of the best. Their defeatist attitude and lack of military discipline shocked Chiang, and embarrassed him to the extent that he felt unable to face his fellow countrymen.

To add to the humiliation, a small Japanese contingent suddenly appeared from mountains in the south of Lingbao, when Chiang congratulated for the success of air bombing in forcing a Japanese withdrawal. Misled by his field commanders, Hu Zongnan not only failed to make an attack as ordered by Chiang but also gave up the Lingbao county seat without even a gesture of resistance. The Japanese army abruptly halted its advance and began to withdraw as planned. Hu Zongnan claimed he had repelled enemy attacks and boasted the recovery of the county site. Not knowing that the Japanese had called off the fighting as part of their initial plan, however, Chiang accepted Hu's false reporting of victory. At any rate, the Japanese army withdrew as planned and the situation soon stabilized. Chiang deplored that he lost a chance to lure the Japanese army into an attack at the gates of Xian. Having second thoughts, however, he remarked that even if he had had the chance, he would not expect Hu Zongnan to be a triumphant general since Hu was both "immature and weak". Afterwards, he proceeded to shake

up Hu's army with court martial. Three division level officers, all Whampoa graduates, were accused of retreating without permission and secretly executed by firing squads. In fact, Chiang should have congratulated the Japanese army for not being bold enough to conceive an offensive on Xian. When the air force told him about the Japanese withdrawal, he gave thanks to God for protecting China (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 10, June 12, June 13).

Two days later, he pondered the implications of a Japanese conquest of Xian: it would be an end of his rule. He summarized the Lingbao campaign in the following words:

In fact it was the last decisive key moment for the anti-Japanese resistance. If Xian or its gate Tongguan were attacked or occupied, it would doom our cause. The reason was not simply the geographical importance of Xian. It was because Hu Zongnan had devoted himself single-mindedly to training a force of ten army corps more than five years. If these two places were lost, the Nationalist government would be unable to hold the people's support. That is why the fate of Tongguan was far more important than even a warzone. For half a month, I could not have meals with a peaceful mind nor sleep well. Thanks be to God, who turned danger into safety. No human being could engineer such an achievement. (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 15)

In fact he should have thanked the Japanese army high command for its failure to push for further victory in the Lingbao campaign. If the Japanese generals had had more imagination and acted more boldly, they might have inflicted a deadly blow on his government, though they might have sacrificed the second stage of the Ichigo Offensive. For Chiang Kai-shek, the Henan battle was a disaster. Tang Enbo's troops fleeing towards western Henan, like earlier warlord armies, were often attacked by the Henan peasants and disarmed. Stories like this further intensified both international and domestic criticism of Chiang's military leadership. He removed both Jiang<sup>1</sup> and Tang, but spared Hu because he could think of no another trustworthy alternative. He knew the deficiencies of Tang Enbo, but was unwilling to push for further punishment, which means he should bear some responsibility for Tang's failure in strategic designing. He underestimated Japanese ambition and determination and never correctly foresaw the Japanese blitzkrieg. Tang Enbo proved loyal and obedient despite all charges of corruption, incompetence, and smuggling with Japanese occupied areas.

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1 Chiang Kai-shek picked Jiang Dingwen's former subordinate at Whampoa Military Academy, General Chen Cheng to be his replacement. On departure, Jiang Dingwen asked his junior successor to turn a blind to ledgers of his commercial activities and to turn deaf ears to any reports of his wrongdoings, regardless of their source (Chen, *Riji* 1944, July 9, July 10; July 17, July 30).

## 2 Empiricism vs Strategic Reform: the Battles in Hunan

Soon after the Battle of Luoyang, the Japanese began to move their troops in Central China. In addition to auxiliary forces of two divisions and three brigades, they mobilized troops from the homeland, Manchuria and other parts of north China to strengthen the only strategically offensive army corps in the China Theatre, which had consisted of eight divisions and one brigade, into a force of eleven divisions and five brigades. The actual attacking forces included ten divisions, supported by an air division and a tank regiment. Including the forces used in the subsequent Guangxi battles, the Japanese army mobilized 326,000 men, 1,282 artillery pieces, 103 tanks, and 9,450 vehicles and 67,000 horses (Nihon Boei-jo boeikenshusho senshishitsu 1987c, 72-3, 117-8). Chiang's intelligence was not solid enough for designing a counter strategy. First, he thought the Japanese imperial headquarters had mobilized nine divisions to occupy the Wuhan-Guangzhou railroad, but soon his military intelligence experts changed the estimate of the Japanese attacking forces to only five divisions, perhaps excluding the second line divisions that the Japanese later also used for the offensive. These attacking forces led him to believe the Japanese aimed at only the provincial capital Changsha and its surrounding counties, rather than linking the Hunan-Guangdong railroad and destroying the airfields nearby. He further inferred from the level of the mobilization that it was not difficult for the Japanese army to occupy Changsha, despite the fact that they had tried three times without success, but if it could maximize advantages in topography and transportation, the Chinese army could still win a victory as they had done earlier. The Japanese would have to trudge with their artillery pieces and other heavy equipment through numerous rivers and rice paddies. With air supremacy that General Stilwell had promised, Chiang had reasons for being optimistic (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 28, June 3).

During the earlier Henan battle, Chiang understood very well how vital air support was to the defence of his ground troops. He worked very hard to seek the cooperation of General Stilwell, but the American general was much more interested in wresting the command of several divisions and later the whole Chinese army from Chiang's authority through the leverage of controlling Lend Lease materials, on which an adequate operation of his air and ground forces would depend. While the Henan battles were raging, Chiang twice sent telegrams to Stilwell, only to fall on deaf ears. The American general wanted Chiang to commit more troops to North Burma, while Chiang saw no military sense for so doing unless Britain and the United States honoured their earlier commitment for more ground troop and navy support. Chiang swallowed his personal dignity and anger, doubling his efforts to enlist the cooperation of General Stilwell, particularly for the supply of airplane fuel (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 31, June 1).

Chiang also urged the commanders of other War Zones, especially the Sixth and Ninth, to launch diversionary attacks, but these later proved highly ineffective.

Preoccupied with the military situation in Shaanxi until mid-June, Chiang entrusted the defence of Changsha to the commander of the Ninth War Zone, General Xue Yue, a hero who had made fame for his three successful defences of the provincial capital. Xue Yue delegated the job to the recently promoted commander of the Fourth Army, Zang Deneng. In light of his earlier successful experiences, Chiang offered General Xue two bits of advice which Xue might have adopted anyway: first, fight an attrition war and delay Japanese movements; second, avoid the main Japanese army and focus the attack on smaller units. However, all this advice turned out to be obsolete because the Japanese had devised a strategy that remedied their mistakes in the three earlier attempts to occupy the provincial capital. The Japanese generals also threw much larger forces into this attempt, and launched the attack on Changsha twenty days earlier than expected, on May 27, before the Chinese forces could prepare an adequate defence (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 17).

The Japanese assembled their attacking force and divided them into three columns moving southward, placing their priorities on the eastern flank. The best divisions were put on the mountains that served as the sources of the waterways flowing westward to the Xiang River, with the column west of the Xiang River assigned to prevent reinforcements arriving from the Sixth War Zone. Only the central column followed the older route east of the Xiang, which pointed directly to Changsha (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujō senshishitsu 1987c, 206-7). The powerful left flank attack freed the central column from falling into what General Xue called the “heavenly furnace” by depriving the defenders of the advantage for falling back to the hilly and mountainous areas. The central column then moved slowly but steadily with its heavier artillery and equipment through the rivers, swamps and rice paddies.

Overconfident in his previous strategy, General Xue Yue made a further blunder by situating himself far away from the combat zone, leaving Zhang Deneng, the commander of the Fourth Army, to handle the defence of Changsha. That force had won the name of Iron Army for its heroic fighting during the Northern Expedition, and the commander had obtained his promotion without the benefit of any ties to the Whampoa Military Academy. The defence of Changsha constituted of two tasks. The walled area was located east of the Xiang River and the Yuelu mountains across the river, where Chiang had constructed a supposedly impregnable artillery base overlooking the city. Two and half weeks after the beginning of the Japanese offensive, on June 15, General Zhang suddenly found two Japanese divisions approaching both south and west of the capital, a challenge he could not have imagined based on his previous experiences.

Chiang construed the Yuelu mountain artillery base as the guardian of Changsha, helping the defenders of the walled city to repel the Japanese invaders. Aware of the Japanese attempt to envelop Changsha, he urged General Xue Yue to keep open the road traffic to the west and prepare for a possible flanking attack from Hengyang in the south. In mid-June, Chiang was preoccupied primarily with the fall-out of the Henan battle and its impact on domestic and international opinion, particularly the sharp criticism within his party and government. Seeking comfort from what Hu Zongnan claimed to be a major victory at Lingbao, he paid no attention to the actual defence of Changsha (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 15, June 17). But to his dismay, two days after a morning radio contact, he was unable to reach General Zhang no matter how hard he had tried. The silence was then followed by a Japanese radio broadcast that claimed air bombing had effectively neutralized the Yuelu mountain artillery base and that the provincial capital was doomed. Chiang could not understand the radio silence. If the Japanese army still used the propaganda leaflets to urge the defenders to surrender, he reasoned, it should mean there was still some resistance from the Chinese defenders. Why could he hear nothing from General Zhang Deneng's headquarters (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 18, June 19)? Puzzled by the lack of radio communication, Chiang wondered whether the Japanese air force had used poisonous gas to knock out all of his soldiers, but he quickly realized that no gas attack was so effective as to silence a whole army. He then pondered how much truth the enemy broadcasting had revealed (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 17, June 18, June 19; Nihon Boei-jo boeikenshu-jo senshishitsu 1987c, 267).<sup>2</sup>

To prepare for the Japanese attack, Chiang Kai-shek had strengthened the Yuelu Mountains base with the installation of the most advanced heavy artillery, as well as the storage of 50,000 artillery shells. General Zhang Deneng's 4th Army consisted of three divisions. Despite the opposition of Xue Yue's chief of staff, he insisted on putting two of his three divisions in the city and assigned an under-sized division, only about 3,000 combat soldiers, to defend the Yuelu base. The decision played into Japanese strategy which emphasized the attack at periphery rather than the core of Changsha, and focused on the occupation of the Yuelu base rather than a frontal assault on the walled city. The Japanese army started their attack at the Yuelu base complex on June 16; it took them only two days to achieve the victory. Once occupying the base, they immediately used the captured artillery and shells to blast Changsha. Exposed to the artillery attacks from the rear, General Zhang's army immediately fell into panic

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2 Japanese compiled military history pays no attention at all to the attack of Changsha. It only mentioned 15 or 16 June as the D day, but never specified the real time for the assault. No details are provided about the process of offensive. This can be seen as the evidence that the Japanese saw it without any importance.



and he ordered a breakout. The defence of the walled city of Changsha did not last more than one day (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 20).

Chiang was so exasperated by the quick fall of Changsha that he ordered a court martial for the responsible officers, while blaming himself for not managing to know his officers and troops better. For political reasons he had to leave General Xue Yue aside, so he ordered the arrest of General Zhang Deneng. Later his chief military judge, someone who had made a name for winning over residual warlords rather than for the strict implementation of military law, recommended life imprisonment after protracted interrogation and investigation. Evidence suggested that General Zhang brushed aside the advice of Xue Yue's chief of staff that successful defence of Changsha should hinge on the defence of the artillery base and refused to adjust the deployment accordingly, thus depriving the artillery base of necessary infantry protection. Determined to make a show of his anger, Chiang overruled the verdict and ordered the execution of General Zhang during the subsequent battle in Hengyang (He 1986, 455-6, 464).

It has been rumoured that Chiang used the military defeat to purge officers who did not belong to his "faction". Such a malicious reading is not warranted, but it did occur to Chiang that he could not count on foreign or co-opt native troops for urgent and important missions. If he had a dependable, trained army, together with an air force at his disposal, he believed he could still have saved Changsha. Chiang emphasized loyalty and dependability far more than other qualities of his commanding generals (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 21). He did not know General Zhang had graduated from a military academy in Yunnan and attributed his military incompetence to climbing upward through the rank and file (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 26). Perhaps for this reason, he chose his Whampoa student General Fang Xianjue and his 10th Army for the defence of Hengyang, an important transportation centre south of Changsha. His dealings with Xue Yue reveal the importance of political considerations for military matter. As a hero of the resistance campaign, Xue Yue could not be held responsible for military defeat. Such a selective application of military law, however, encouraged wild speculation about Chiang's motivations and further harmed his prestige and authority.

The Hunan battle then moved southward to Hengyang, a key site that could be reached in several hours either by train or waterway from Changsha. The city faced the joining of two rivers along its southeast and lay against the Hengshan Mountains. After the loss of Changsha, Chiang faced an internal debate as to whether his forces should defend Hengyang at all costs. His deputy chief of staff, the Guangxi General Bai Chongxi, was so obsessed with the defense of his home province that he urged Chiang to abandon Hengyang and move all the available forces to the Hunan border with Guangxi. His deputy chief of staff, General Liu Fei, whom military observers would consider as a close follower of General Bai, saw things

quite differently. A native of Hunan, he argued from his position as chief advisor that aroused public opinion could no longer tolerate the loss of any more Chinese land; the army had to show determination to fight to the last. Chiang concurred, but asked his staff officers to make a contingent plan for the loss of Hengyang. When he was still hurrying supply officers to send provisions and ammunition, the Japanese began an attack at the airfield outside Hengyang on June 25. The next day when the Japanese army attacked Hengyang, Chiang still worked very hard to expedite the logistic and air support.

General Fang Xianjue's 10th Army was understaffed and ill-equipped. With about 17,000 soldiers, he was now facing two Japanese divisions, about 30,000 strong. General Fang was fortunate enough since the Japanese seriously underestimated the toughness and resilience of his soldiers, who effectively combined grenade attacks with excellent fortifications for resistance. The attacking army was initially beaten back after suffering heavy casualties, including the wounding of a division commander. When the news reached Guilin, General Bai Chongxi allowed the provincial newspapers to issue a special issue, which was then followed with celebratory fireworks the whole day. One higher ranking officer asked Chiang to do the same in Chongqing. Chiang refused because he did not consider it a conclusive victory. Several days later, the Japanese army attacked again with bombing and shelling far fiercer than the first round (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987c, 347, 373-4; Xu, *Riji* 1944, July 5; Ge 2005, 141-5).

The Japanese failure in their initial attack at Hengyang, however, gave Chiang some cause for optimism. Given the Japanese performance in Hunan, he saw feasibility for a successful defense of Hengyang. After the Japanese movement of their troops from Guangdong, he even planned to make a decisive war south of Hengyang, where General Fang weakened the Japanese force from the north and lured another Japanese force from the south. Instead of rushing the Canton reinforcements, he asked the commander of the 62nd Army, the only army with full strength nearby, to slow down in his attempt to reach Hengyang (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 1, July 5). Chiang did not know the Japanese thought similarly. They prepared to use a second attack wave to lure more Chinese reinforcements into Japanese traps. Aware of the Japanese moves outside Hengyang, he chose to interpret them as attempts to divert Chinese reinforcements in order to enable the attacking divisions to withdraw from Hengyang. Actually, by then the Japanese were able to use three divisions to cope with the Chinese reinforcements, while ordering the two divisions to make fresh attacks at Hengyang after supplying them with more provisions and ammunition.

During respites between the two waves of attacks, Chiang did not have the luxury of relaxation. Domestic and international public opinion continually questioned his ability to lead the nation, or at least to command his

army. Various rumors about Chiang and his family had been circulating in Chongqing since the spring, but then an anonymous letter in British English reached Madame Chiang, listing the extra-marital affairs and other heinous deeds of Chiang and his two sons, particularly his eldest son's bastard twins. As his wife was preparing for a long absence for medical treatment in Brazil, Chiang found it necessary for the couple to swear their moral integrity in front of very high ranking officials, foreign missionaries and dignitaries. At the very same time, the clash between Chiang and his American chief-of-staff General Stilwell also reached a climax. Urged by General Stilwell, President Roosevelt sent a telegram to Chiang and used the poor performance of his Chinese troops in the middle Yangtze to justify his urging him to entrust the whole Chinese army to General Stilwell. The fact that this telegram reaching his hand on the seventh anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the beginning of the War of Resistance, pained Chiang to the extreme (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 3-8; Chen 2012, 2, 850).

Strengthened with raining artillery shells and supported by domination of the skies, the Japanese army launched a second attack. Again the Japanese underestimated General Fang's tenacity and resilience. Five days after the attack, Chiang finally realized that the Japanese had no intention of abandoning their ambition to conquer Hengyang and dispatched about 30,000 fresh soldiers to the front (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 15). The Japanese army used the attack at the 10th Army as an opportunity to lure the Chinese reinforcements for annihilation. The 62nd Army of Canton hurried to Hengyang, but only reached the outskirts, where the Japanese dug in and, despite heavy casualties, refused to yield the road. In spite of Chiang's personal letter of encouragement, Fang's army was indeed exhausted; it could not even find a battalion of soldiers to bear arms and go outside the walls to welcome the reinforcements. After repeated orders, General Fang finally put up a ragtag battalion to do the job, but they were ambushed and annihilated no sooner than they had stepped outside the city walls (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 15-19, July 20). Chiang blamed the commander of 62nd army for timidity and cowardice, but the real reason was Japanese adjustment of their strategy. They decided to leave Fang's army aside while focusing on the assault and destruction of the reinforcements.

As the reinforcements failed to reach Hengyang near the end of July, Chiang's desperateness grew and it can be seen in his prayers. The very day after General Fang's failure to link with the 62nd Army on July 20, Chiang prayed to God, saying that he felt "entrapped in a well, facing only pitch dark walls and with wounds all over his body. If not extended a helping hand, he feared he would be condemned to eternal shame, unable to fulfil his endowed mission" (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 21). Five days later when he realized the futility of sending reinforcements, he even promised God to construct a huge iron cross on the top of the nearby Hengshan Mountain on his 60th birthday if granted victory, and a mass conversion of

the whole 10th Army to Christianity was promised. As nothing came from the prayers, he examined himself, stating that, "I could face heaven and earth, as well as ghosts and gods, with clear conscience. If God wants to fulfil his will through me as his tool, what enemy forces can beat me?". But realizing the Japanese determination to occupy Hengyang as well as the Wuhan-Guangdong Railroad, he admitted his inability to prevent it from becoming a reality, unless God intervened on China's behalf. Gradually he resigned himself to the inevitable, but, quoting from *The Streams in the Desert*, he considered all sufferings the badge of being one of the elect (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 25-26, July 31).

Beyond Chiang's expectations, Fang was able to hold out due to the fact that the Japanese army gave higher priority to the interception of Chinese forces in flanks, particularly the reinforcements outside Hengyang. During the respite between attacks, Chiang allowed himself the comfort of imagination. He imagined the Japanese attacking force as an arrow now approaching the end of its flight (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 1, August 3). Actually, the superior Japanese army that spread outside Hengyang easily beat away the 79th Army which came from north-western Hunan to lift the siege of Hengyang. However, the 62nd Army, which received some air support, was able to inflict high casualties on the invaders. After eight days' fighting, a large Japanese regiment had to use non-combat soldiers to stop a breakthrough of their positions (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo sen-shishitsu 1987c, 488-91). Meanwhile, four days after Chiang made the first observation that the Japanese force acted as an arrow of spent force which he could be brought to an end by his reinforcements, the Japanese strengthened its Hengyang army with two additional divisions, preparing to strike a crushing blow on Fang's decimated forces. After powerful artillery shelling, as well as air bombing and strafing, the attacking army quickly broke the backbone of the resistance force. General Fang sent in almost simultaneously three consecutive radio messages: First requesting reinforcements, then reporting urgency, and finally confessing "we are finished". Fifteen minutes later Chiang found a wave of Chinese air bombing put a stop to the Japanese offensive. He misread the temporary suspension of the offensive as proof that his prayer fifteen minutes ago elicited God's response (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 4).

Again, Chiang promised Fang that he would send a tank regiment from Guangxi to relieve the siege. He could not sleep that night, and after a prayer he began to rework the directive he had sent to the tank commander three days before, reminding him that they should reach Hengyang the same day and rush to the front with a company of infantry troops (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 5). The promised tank regiment never materialized. It actually made little advance due to topographical problems and Japanese mopping up campaigns along their planned route (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 12). Two days after the urgent notes mentioned above, Fang found he

had less than 2,000 men still capable of bearing arms, and most of them had no combat experience. Realizing his end was approaching, Fang and his division commanders sent Chiang a farewell telegram, pledging to fight to death (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 6-8). Fang then committed suicide, but failed because of the timely intervention of his subordinates. Unable to die and unable to fight, Fang eventually chose to negotiate for something like an honourable surrender. He promised to lay down weapons in exchange for medical treatment for all the wounded soldiers. The Japanese army accepted the conditions but later honoured only part of the agreement. General Fang was incarcerated in a Catholic church on a nearby mountain, albeit without strict surveillance.

Having received the farewell telegram, Chiang still harboured hopes. He interpreted an aerial intelligence report as suggesting that the situation could be improved if reinforcements were encouraged to move fast. On the very night of the farewell telegram, he got up three times to say prayers. Pondering heavenly principles, human affairs and his devotion to God, he thought he deserved a miracle bestowed from above, but further aerial reconnaissance soon revealed without a doubt that there was no longer any sign of Chinese resistance. Gripped by shame, grief and deep sorrow, Chiang tried to seek comfort from his wife, but she was thousands of miles away. Unable to reveal his emotion to his sons, he chose to recite Mencius: "vast-flowing passion-nature (*haoran zhiqi*) is exceedingly great, and exceedingly strong. Being nourished by rectitude, and sustaining no injury, it fills up all between heaven and earth. It is the mate and assistant of righteousness and reason. Without it, man is in a state of starvation" (Legge 1895, 190). Someone translates "vast-flowing passion-nature" as noble spirit. Only by identifying with Mencius' noble spirit or vast, flowing passion nature, he was able to live through the long ordeal of military debacles (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 7-9).

Unable to see General Fang as a traitor, Chiang simply dismissed the Japanese broadcasts that claimed Fang had raised white flags, begging surrender like the British general in Singapore. Before the broadcasts, Chiang had edited a short biography of General Fang, hoping to use his heroic exploits to encourage the rank and file. His order to distribute the biography met opposition from his staff, who were concerned about a possible sharp turn of events. Now Chiang had even more to worry about. Some people cited Japanese broadcasting to question General Fang's patriotism and cursed him as a traitor. American officers buttressed such accusations with a photograph at the scene of the negotiations, which only showed Fang's back without any clear signs of begging for peace. Despite all this contrary and embarrassing evidence, Chiang insisted on trusting Fang's patriotism and spent several more days finishing the latter's biography together with a telegram about the enormous sacrifices the 10th Army had made at Hengyang. Later Japanese changes of their story about

General Fang gave him some relief and comfort, with subsequent broadcasts claiming that negotiations had started after finding General Fang in a dugout rather than waving a white flag (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 9-12). These events continued to haunt China, however, especially after General Fang escaped from Japanese hands several months afterward. Despite favouring a reinstatement of Fang, however, Chiang had to confront loud public opinion that sang for high-pitch patriotism and demanded complete sacrifices for the resistance cause.

What General Stillwell's staff officer predicted as a defence unlikely to last more than 7 days turned out to be actually a defence lasting 47 days under overwhelming Japanese shelling and bombing. Despite his failure to honour his promise of suicide, Fang had accomplished what no other Chinese officers could do - write one of the best chapters of the resistance war. Two days after the ravaged city of Hengyang fell, Chiang made the following reflection on the 47 days' battle:

My failure to grasp opportunities in guiding the war explains the fall of Hengyang. False intelligence accounts for the mistakes I have made. First I thought the Japanese army would withdraw out of their own accord. Next I underestimated the Japanese strength, refusing to hurry reinforcements. I frequently missed opportunities. Finally, the troops from Guangdong and Guangxi lost the will to fight and break the siege. I gave the tank formations three more days to prepare, but when I ordered immediate reinforcement they excused themselves, citing problems with rivers and topography. My agony and anger rose to extremes. The officers' intellect and the troops' command over techniques are so low. How our army can be called an army? How can we be spared insults from foreigners? The state of our army seemed to force me to hand training and command of the entire force to Stilwell. (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 10)

Chiang admitted that he had made many mistakes in directing the Hengyang campaign, but he placed more blame on failures of military intelligence and the training of his troops. Actually he had already by this time begun to ponder a military reform that aimed at improving the fighting capabilities of his army, although no concrete methods were adopted about improvements in military intelligence. Before the reform could have any effect, Chiang still had to use those resources at his disposal to continue the resistance. Meanwhile, as a national leader, he had to face serious challenges to his leadership. Internationally, the Americans criticized his poor leadership and pressured him to give command of his troops to General Stilwell. Domestically, the Chinese Communists began to win increasing sympathy and support from public opinion, and pressured him for a political reform. Chiang considered suicide, but a sense of historical



mission encouraged him to stand fast. He told himself, "as long as I lived, the country would have a future. Neither the Communist bandits nor the Japanese invaders would succeed if I were around. If I kill myself due to discouragement and pessimism, my country and people would then perish together" (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 11). Besides the trust of the soldiers and people, he emphasized that control over military and financial power would guarantee his ultimate success in dealing with both domestic and international enemies (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 11). In other words, he had no intention to relinquish his powers, let alone to a foreigner or a foreign country.

Now let me turn our attention to the third stage of the Japanese offensive, which aimed at Guangxi, where Generals Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi had retained much control and where the political dissenters of the Nationalist government congregated.

### **3 Defeatism vs Momentum: The Battles of Guangxi**

The defense of Hengyang delayed the Japanese invasion of Guangxi by at least one month, but subsequent mopping-up actions in the area west of Hengyang secured railroad transportation from Hunan to Guangxi and set the stage for Japanese incursions into Guangxi. Initially, Chiang Kai-shek hoped his army in Hunan could discourage the Japanese from crossing the provincial borders, and for this purpose he sent the American-equipped 93rd Army from Chongqing to the front. Commanded by Chen Munong, a Hunanese general with credentials from the Whampoa Military Academy, the army was nicknamed as Chiang's "Praetorian Guard" in Chongqing, and most of its officers had graduated from the same Whampoa Academy. Despite being equipped with American weapons, and including both a tank battalion and an anti-tank artillery battalion, Chen and his army did not have time to reach southern Hunan for action, and stayed in Guangxi (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujō senshishitsu 1987a, 385; Zhang 2008, 363).

Chiang's initial plan was to make a determined resistance in Quaxian and Guilin, while withdrawing his forces from Hunan along the Hunan-Guangxi Railroad. Quaxian, the gate to Guangxi, had been fortified several years earlier, when the Japanese made attacks from south China. After General Chen gave his vow to defend the strategically important county for at least three months, Chiang hurried his quartermasters to transport all provisions and ammunition needed for promised resistance. About ten days later, the commander of Fourth War Zone, Zhang Fakui, came to inspect the military positions and concluded that these so-called fortifications were not up to the standard. Without walls, in his judgment, Chen Munong could not hold the county for more than three days. Zhang

Fakui thus asked Chiang to rescind the earlier order, but to defend for two weeks in order to evacuate the stored ten thousand bombshells, one million rounds of bullets, sixteen thousand grenades and sixteen thousand sacks of rice (Zhang 2008, 364-6).

General Bai Chongxi accepted Chiang Kai-shek's initial plan, but when Zhang proposed the evacuation he responded favourably, eager to strengthen the defence of Guilin. Bai told Chiang he would hold Guilin for four to five months with the help of Karst caves and rock formations in its surroundings. Despite his chief-of-staff's opposition, Chiang finally agreed with the change of the plan. Two days later, General Bai suddenly joined hands with Zhang Fakui and urged Chiang to airlift all available troops from Sichuan and Guizhou to Guilin. Astonished by the request, Chiang refused flatly. It is unclear why General Bai made the sudden request; we only know that, on the same day, the Japanese crossed the border without knowing the terrain in the area. Perhaps Bai realized that the enemy had mobilized far more troops than he could imagine for the offensive against Guangxi. While six Japanese army divisions had expanded their control over south-western Hunan bordering Guangxi, four additional divisions were sent from the southeast (Guangdong and North Vietnam) and headed towards Liuzhou, which lies at south of Guilin. Chiang, still conceived of the Japanese army as an arrow of spent force, viewed the Guangxi army and militia as sufficient for defensive purposes, particularly after he had agreed with the evacuation of Chen Munong's 93rd Army. What he could not tell General Bai was his great concern for the security of Sichuan, where the residual warlords and the provincial elite had become restive because of his huge requisitions of human and grain resources (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, September 11).

To Chiang's surprise, Chen Munong made no resistance at all when the Japanese army launched a formal attack two days later, and his army began evacuation immediately. Chen's army even burned all the provisions and ammunition Chiang had prepared for them. Informed of the occurrence, Chiang was furious and ordered the commander of the Fourth War Zone to execute Chen Munong, who by this time had reached Guilin for safety. If he had known that Chen Munong's soldiers were staring at the Japanese crossing the river shielding Quianxian, he would have had more reason to shoot Chen, and had he read a Japanese colonel's assessment of the fortifications of Quianxian, he would have been absolutely furious. After inspecting the fortifications, the enemy officer came up with a conclusion completely different from Zhang Fakui. These fortifications were designed by the Central Government, consisting of concrete structures and moats five kilometres deep. The pillboxes were well-designed and placed. This Japanese colonel wondered why the Nationalist army gave up Quianxian without firing a shot (Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujo senshishitsu 1987c, 608, 738, 748-9, 752). General Stilwell was very upset about the yielding of Quianxian, and soon began to destroy the airfield of Guilin and evacuate its personnel and airplanes.

General Bai planned to defend Guilin with three of his top divisions under Wei Yunsong. On September 14, Generals Stilwell and Zhang Fakui came to Guilin to inspect the topography and preparations, and concluded it would be nearly impossible to defend Guilin for half a year as General Bai had claimed. Zhang, however, understood the political considerations requiring the Guangxi army to defend the provincial capital for at least several weeks, or better yet several months. He asked General Bai to allot three more Guangxi divisions for the defence of Guilin and the vicinity. General Bai concurred with Zhang's assessment. Contrary to what Chiang Kai-shek thought, the Japanese actually mobilized a force much larger than the Chinese generals had thought and the attack along the Hunan-Guangxi Railroad was coordinated with simultaneous offensives from Guangdong and North Vietnam at Liuzhou, the south gate of Guilin.

To orchestrate their campaigns, the Japanese army gave Guilin a respite of one and half months. During the period, Chiang Kai-shek was beset by domestic criticism of his leadership, and challenges to his legitimacy following the debacles in Henan and Hunan. The Communist Party also took advantage of the occasion to launch a skillful propaganda offensive against the Nationalist government, urging the end of Chiang's alleged dictatorship. But the greatest challenge came from his main war partner, the United States. President Roosevelt decided to throw his support for General Stilwell's grabbing the commandship over all troops within the China Theater, including the autonomous Communist forces. Viewing the proposal a great insult to both Chinese integrity and personal dignity, Chiang chose to risk an irreparable rupture of the Sino-American relationship and asked for General Stilwell's recall in late September. He eventually won the confrontation, but would pay a high price. Be that as it may, for one and a half months, Chiang was so preoccupied with the problem of General Stilwell that he made no interference in General Bai's actual command of the defense of Guilin.

As the Japanese army met little resistance along the Pearl River, Guilin was now exposed to a much stronger attacking force reinforced from Hunan. The Japanese offensive punched open the gate to Guilin, a train station, around 28 October, which worried Chiang enormously (Xu, *Riji* 1944, October 30; Chiang, *Riji* 1944, October 28, weekly reflection). Two days later, General Bai flew back to Chongqing and he sought to enlist aid for his position on the Guangxi Battle. The next day, he hurried to see Chiang's chief-of-staff and told him that it was meaningless to defend Guilin unless he could defend Liuzhou, because the fall of Liuzhou would expose Guilin to Japanese attack from both south and northeast. For this reason, Bai moved the three top divisions to defend the airfield of Liuzhou and in its lieu sent some inferior units for the defence of Guilin. He then attended a meeting of the Department of Military Command and severely criticized the neighbouring Combat Zones for their failure to launch diversionary

attacks, highlighting the futility of the defence of Guilin. Deputy Chief-of-Staff Liu Fei challenged this position, declaring that China no longer had space to exchange for time. Unless determined resistance was offered, the Nationalist government would be soon doomed. In Liu's view, only sacrifice could buy time for the Nationalist government. He criticized General Bai's transfer of three divisions of troops away from Guilin to Liuzhou (Xu, *Riji* 1944, October 31).

It was strange for Chiang to miss the important meeting. On that day, he opened the Bible after morning prayers and found the paragraphs 26 and 27 from chapter 39 of Ezekiel. He deciphered as a prophesy for recovering lost land and a blessing for the nation (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, October 31). However, when General Bai came to see him at lunch time the next day, instead of bringing good news, he again pleaded for reinforcements. Chiang told him it was too late to send more troops to Guilin, and that the request contradicted the original plan. General Bai would have no choice but to make do with troops available in Guangxi. Chiang also told him Bai that the situation in Liuzhou was hopeless, so Bai should concentrate on the defense of Guilin. In a passionate plea, Bai raised his voice, reddening his face and showing defiance, but nothing could swing Chiang. The conversation lasted two and half hours. Chiang confessed the "prating" stretched his patience to the limits, but congratulated himself for tolerance, magnanimity, and reasoning powers. He believed he had finally persuaded General Bai (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 1, November 4).

The next day, Chiang's minister of military command Xu Yongchang received a report from the general he had sent to the Guangxi front. This general found the topography advantageous and the fortifications excellent, but military morale was extremely low. The major reason was General Bai's redeployment of troops without the authorization of the higher command. Two of the three divisions Bai redeployed to Liuzhou were commanded by the nephews of Guangxi military leaders, and all the redeployed divisions were crack Guangxi troops. The remaining ones had been recently put together, were under-trained and under equipped, and commanded by inexperienced young generals. The report did not mention how much ammunition, provisions, and medical supplies were transported and stored in Guilin, but the quantities were deemed only enough for one to two months' determined resistance. The general concluded that it would be lucky for the Guangxi army to hold Guilin for two months (Xu, *Riji* 1944, November 2; Zhang 2008, 367).

It is unclear whether Chiang was informed of this report, but on 17 October, the Japanese started to attack Guilin after clearing out the Chinese defences nearby. Wei Yunsong held Guilin for only two days. Before Zhang Fakui conveyed his request for permission to make a breakthrough, he had already given his own orders for such a manoeuvre. Despite some heroic

resistance, Guilin fell after a battle lasting all of two days, instead of the expected two months.

The Japanese actually used three divisions to attack the larger Guilin area, but only used slightly more than one division for the attack on Guilin itself. The defence of Guilin's periphery lasted about two weeks. Yet the city defences held for only 48 hours. The same day Guilin fell, the victorious Japanese army moved swiftly southward to occupy the almost abandoned Liuzhou and the nearby airfield. Guilin fell before Liuzhou instead of the other way around as General Bai had forewarned. Despite high praise for their fighting capabilities and supporting militia system, General Bai's Guangxi army had performed disappointingly. Chiang could not believe that, with such large stores of ammunition, the Guangxi army could not resist less than one Japanese division for more than several hours, or only about 200 hours including the peripheral areas. He might be wrong on the exact time the defenses lasted, but he was certainly right in the easiness with which the Japanese army conquered Guilin. The military debacle greatly depressed Chiang (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 11-12).

To prepare the defence of Guilin, Bai began the evacuation of the civilian and dispensable government employees in June. The fall of Quianxian also sparked a wave of evacuations. The Japanese victory set more than 100,000 refugees to the roads or trails. A few lucky ones could board trains or climb on the roofs, but the majority had to trudge under constant Japanese bombing. Exhaustion, cold, starvation, and sickness beset them, and no help was in sight on the part of either the provincial army or government. Chiang had to order the authorities to offer charitable relief (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 4).

The fall of the provincial capital opened the door for the Japanese army to penetrate further into another province, Guizhou. Moreover, for Nationalist government, the defeat led to Sichuan students' protests, behind which, Chiang believed, were the manipulating hands of underground Communists. The residual warlords such as Long Yun and Pan Wenhua began to assert their autonomy again (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 9). Not only did the residual warlords from the Northwest begin to rethink their support of Nationalist rule, but also the war zone commander Xue Yue began to take "free actions", sending his brother's troops to occupy an airfield in the hope of gaining direct military aid from America (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 6-7). To make the matter worse, the US President used the corruption and poor performance of the Chinese army as justification for urging Chiang to compromise with the Communist Party. Ambassador Hurley even flew to Yan'an and, without prior consultations with Chiang, accepted all the conditions the Communists hoped but never expected to be agreed upon (essentially they asked for sharing military and political power with the Nationalist Party) (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 19, November 21, November 23). Chiang considered Hurley's concessions

to the Communists as detrimental as the fall of Guilin (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 11). And, as if these misfortunes were not enough, Stalin began to take revenge for Chiang's reassertion of the Chinese rule in Xinjiang by inciting a separatist movement there.

Chiang Kai-shek asked Commander Zhang Fakui to order Guilin commander Wei Yunsong to shoot Chen Munong immediately, but now Wei Yunsong disobeyed his orders of determined resistance and fled almost as fast as Chen Munong. Wei was a close follower of the Guangxi clique, and helped General Bai arrange his nephew's avoidance of being ensnared in the hopeless cause of defending Guilin. General Bai thus joined hands with another leader of the Guangxi clique and the commander of the Fifth War Zone, Li Zongren, to come to Chongqing to help save Wei Yunsong's life (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 17). An open court martial for Wei Yunsong was thus out of the question. Therefore, Chiang contradicted himself and, during a public occasion, pretended to have issued an oral permission for Wei Yunsong's breakout. Solidifying his cooperation with the Guangxi clique, however, Chiang still had to face the two Japanese divisions that followed the railroad westward.

The collapse of the Chinese troops after the fall of Guilin and Liuzhou encouraged the Japanese pursue the collapsed Chinese army, including the Guangxi army, to the end of the Guangxi-Guizhou railroad (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 25). In desperation, Chiang turned General He Yingqin and General Tang Enbo, and asked them to take over the defence of Guizhou. A native of Guizhou, General He was the chief of the Military Affairs Department and had formed a powerful military faction under Chiang with his Whampoa students. General Tang was also loyal, so Chiang asked him to lead his reorganized troops from Henan, mostly by walking for weeks through mountainous areas.

By this time another Whampoa general, Chen Sunong, and his reinforced 97th Army had reached the area. The 97th Army was considered another Praetorian Guard, which had spent one month forced-marching in straw sandals to Guangxi earlier after the loss of Quaxian. On 25 November, Chiang specifically ordered Chen Sunong to make a stand near the end of the Guangxi-Hunan railroad. Through General Tang Enbo, he asked Chen Sunong to fight to the last man. He also specifically instructed them that they should not open fire in darkness unless seeing the approaching enemy, and that they should quickly launch a counteroffensive from the flanks if the Japanese broke through their positions (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 25-26). But General Chen disappointed and disgraced him. After less than two days' engagement, he was found alone in a nearby military camp that served as Zhang Fakui's headquarters, where the previous day the American air forces mistook it for a Japanese concentration of forces and bombed to death more than one thousand soldiers, including one lieutenant general and two major generals, as well as uncounted number



of civilians (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 28, December, 2; Zhang 2008, 361, 363-6, 376, 378).<sup>3</sup> Scrambling for safety, General Chen made no effort to bring his radio equipment and accompanying code book (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 28-29).

Not knowing what happened to General Chen's defence, Chiang began to blame his military difficulties on the mass media. He attributed these disappointments to the Western press which, in his view, exaggerated the shortcomings of his army, painting a picture of starvation and sickness among the ranks and files and even striving to speculate on Chinese military moves. Chiang accused western reporters of revealing military secrets and encouraging the Japanese to undertake bolder pursuits (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 27-28). However, such imputations could not reverse the course of the war, and no evidence shows the Japanese were helped and encouraged by the Western press. The hard reality was that the Japanese army pursued relentlessly, and General Chen Sunong's army failed to stop the Japanese drive.

While constantly deriving courage from reading the Bible and *Streams in the Desert*, the distraught Chiang found additional ways to find comfort in his Christian faith. For no clear reason at all, he claimed God had promised him that the Japanese army would not enter Guizhou and because of His grace, so he could feel relaxed (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 29). Another night he dreamed about cleansing fecal pollution, which he persistently interpreted as a sign for turning danger into safety. He also opened the Bible after prayers to find signs. For example, he found in the 26 chapter of Samuel one account that King David got rid of Saul, and interpreted it as a portent for his army's ability to get rid of the pursuing Japanese army. Similarly, after saying a prayer and asking God to reveal his will on the Communist problem, he found the third chapter of Joshua, and deciphered it as the heavenly father's protection of him to endure through adversity so that his nation would revive (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 22). Regardless of what Chiang considered as good signs, the military reality remained bleak. When his American chief of staff, General Albert Wedemeyer, criticized the disheartening performance of his troops, dilatory working style of their supporting institutions, and General He Yingqin's failure to hurry home to assume commandship, Chiang listened silently with shame and resolved secretly to make commensurate reforms (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 30).

3 Zhang never mentioned his ever ordering Cheng Sunong to withdraw, but he sought to clear himself from the execution of General Chen Munong because he was considered the culprit for the death. He wanted to revenge the execution of Zhang Deneng. In order to clear himself, he even emphasized his urging Chiang to allow Chen Munong to evacuate before the Japanese offensive at the county.

The hot pursuit by two Japanese divisions did not allow Chiang the luxury of relaxation. Regardless of God's "promise", they still entered Guizhou and reached the end of the Guangxi-Guizhou railroad, while General He remained in Chongqing. General Wedemeyer promised to airlift two divisions from Burma, but the British blocked the decision. Unable to send timely reinforcements from Sichuan and elsewhere, Chiang was so shaken by this chain of events that he decided to abandon the provincial capital of Guizhou if the Japanese chose to pursue further. General Wedemeyer saw the possibility of the Japanese entering Sichuan, proposing to consider moving the war capital from Chongqing to Kunming. Chiang understood what the abandonment of Chongqing meant for his government, and flatly rejected this proposal. His heart was warmed by General Wedemeyer's pledge to stay with him if worst came to worst, but he still lamented the same general's failure to understand his readiness to die for righteousness (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 30, December 1-4, December 10). Logistical considerations led the Japanese vanguards to stop pursuits, despite their having decimated many Nationalist units. Chiang soon came to his senses. Commenting that "God delivered his promise to protect China", he persuaded the American embassy in Chongqing to stop evacuating the Americans, a move widely interpreted by the local people as a sign of the imminent entry of Japanese soldiers and the collapse of the Chongqing government (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 5). Despite the improving situation, the British embassy intended to evacuate its citizens, and that night Chiang again dreamed of cleansing faecal pollution and even *heard* some strange sounds of "leaving credentials (*liu guoshu*)", which he again interpreted as a good sign for turning defeat into victory (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 7). When he heard of the recovery of the last terminal on the railroad line, he thanked God for realizing his promise (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 8). Despite the stabilization of the military situation, the damage of the authority of the government was done. Like the strongmen in Henan, local "warlords" and secret society leaders of Guizhou used the slogan of protecting one's home to disarm some of the disintegrated army (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 12).<sup>4</sup> Increasingly more intellectuals tilted to the Communist side and the warlord generals Long Yun and Pan Wenhua began to ponder bolder challenges to Chiang's authority. Even within the Nationalist Party, Chiang now faced more serious challenges than Sun Yatsen's son Sun Fo's criticism. Fortunately, he had the cooperation with

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4 Chiang never mentions Tang Enbo's disarming of General Chen Munong's retreating army around this time. The army that was most officered by his Huangpu students played no role in the defence of Guilin. It soon fell into disarray, extorting and plundering local administration and people. Their misdeeds eventually forced Chiang Kai-shek to send in Tang Enbo's army to disarm them. See Zhang 1992, 34-8; Shi 1986, 188-200. General Shi Jue who was entrusted with the job mistook the 93rd army as Gan Lichu's 6th army.

the United States, which had sent Wedemeyer to serve him as his chief of staff; together they began to reorganize the badly mauled Nationalist army with American training and ammunition.

Chiang ordered a court martial for General Chen Sunong, who had fled the battle without permission from his commanding officer. He pleaded that his unit had been undermanned, and that despite this constraint he had fought the Japanese for seven days and seven nights. He also pointed out that Chiang's order reached him only after the decimation of his unit, and that it was the commander of the Fourth War Zone who urged him to leave the battlefield. Japanese accounts hinted at the unexpectedly strong resistance of his army, but do not show that such resistance actually constituted an obstacle to Japanese progress, with hard fighting lasting only for one day. Chen Sunong's claim about an order from the Fourth War Zone is doubtful. Without radio equipment, how could he receive any orders from Zhang Fakui? He should have seen the commander himself in order to get authorization for his departure from the battlefield. At any rate, his Whampoa instructor, Minister of Military Affairs He Yingqin (nicknamed Grandma for his protection and indulging of his Whampoa Military Academy students) vouched for Chen's good conduct and worked with the chief military judge who had a reputation for socializing to seek his release. He was imprisoned only because of Chiang's adamant insistence. In the end, General Chen Sunong had to wait for three more years to secure a complete acquittal and reinstatement of military position due to the intervention of another Whampoa instructor, Gu Zhutong, who now served as the chief of staff of acting President Li Zongren, the Guangxi militarist who had forced Chiang Kai-shek to resign from the Nationalist government (He 1986, 560, 576, 679; Chen 1974, 65-80; Zhang 2008, 376-7; Nihon Boeijo boeikenshujō senshishitsu 1987a, 761).

#### 4 Reform and Rectification of the Nationalist Army

No serious attempt at military reform could be detected in the military conference called in the Hengyang, Hunan, after the Lunar New Year of February 1944 (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, February 19). During the defence of Changsha, Chiang Kai-shek had ordered this conference to be reconvened in order to reform and rectify the army. This decision certainly had something to do with Roosevelt's support for Stilwell about the Chinese military command. Chiang found the military performance in Henan was so embarrassing that he had to do something to remedy the situation. The agenda Chiang had in mind included the following priorities: a system for military conscription, grain taxation from the rural sector, the elimination of unaccounted military units, the training and treatment of new recruits, reducing the size of the army by disbanding superfluous units, raising

wages for soldiers and officers, eliminating army's smuggling activities, minimizing and controlling army's commercial adventures, and last, getting rid of the army's habit of "eating the ghost soldiers", by which officers claimed a payment unwarranted by actual number of soldiers (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 8; agenda for this week). If this list can serve as an indicator of Chiang's sense of urgency, we see that he was concerned first and foremost with the extraction of resources from society, second the performance of his troops, and third breaches of military discipline by engaging in smuggling and commercial activities.

What he saw and heard about the military conscription gave him deep grief and pain. During the fighting of Lingbao, he witnessed a group of peasant recruits roped and herded like animals by county militiamen. He was so angry that he lost his temper and stopped his limousine, stepping down and beating two officers with a cane. He thought "If such an illegal matter can be seen here, we should have no difficulty in imagining what actually happens outside the capital" (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, June 7).<sup>5</sup> During the interlude between the Henyang and Guilin battles, one of his sons informed him about abuses against recruits by transport team. The angry father asked the responsible ministers and concerned officials to come to the scene to see the maltreatment with their own eyes. Having witnessing the sick, starving, and beaten recruits, he suddenly lost his temper and used his stick to hit the responsible platoon leader and even the lieutenant general in charge of the Bureau of Military Recruitment, who had reached the house late because the previous night his underlings gave him a farewell banquet, in which Beijing opera was staged followed by a game of mah-jong to celebrate his promotion (Shen, Lan 2003; Cheng 2012a, 2012b, 2012b).<sup>6</sup> Chiang did not know the cause of his being unable to appear on time at the scene, but, simply unable to bear such miserable sights and needing to vent his anger, he beat the two until they bled. Chiang instructed other higher ranking officers who were present to stay in the room and engage in self-reflection (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 30).

Unfortunately, Chiang's anger and punishment did not end these abuses, specifically the maltreating, scolding, beating, starving, and even killing of recruits, not to mention the inadequacy of clothing and medical treatment, all problems that continued to haunt the Nationalist army. Chiang sought to improve the system by issuing detailed instructions about the transport of recruits from their home to the front or by ordering the gendarmes to immediately report all the abuses and their perpetrators, while

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5 Chiang asked for investigation into abuses of recruits in a county of the Fifth War Zone. The county was alleged to give recruits only a meal a day (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, January 24).

6 It is difficult to check the accuracy of the digital materials. According to these materials, Cheng was a local militarist with ties to the provincial networks of elder brother society.

specifying minimum provisions for recruits such as bed, quilt, and clothing (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, September 1). However, a list of factors such as budget constraints, institutional backlogs, the low standards of recruits, and the intervention of local elites all prevented Chiang him from putting an end to the reoccurring sights of roped recruits, despite the upgrading of the Bureau of Military Recruitment to a ministry, which was asked to double its efforts to send recruits after the loss of the human resources from the three provinces of Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi (Lu et al. 2011).

Chiang also knew that the loss of Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi meant the doubling or tripling of the grain burden for the peasants in the unoccupied areas, particularly Sichuan. During the Japanese offensive, he had also noticed the increasing impact of grain requisitions. He never mentioned Tang Enbo's alienating peasants by the army's direct and relentless grain acquisitions from the rural areas, but he certainly noticed heavy taxation had already led to local uprisings in Guizhou and that the abuses of military men had led to a large-scale rebellion of peasants in northern Hubei in early November 1944, which ended in the killing of 20,000-300,000 people (similar riots occurred in Sichuan) (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, November 4). Chiang asked landlords and rice merchants to shoulder larger burden by purchasing national bonds (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, September 2, September 10, September 12), but unlike his Communist foes, he never exploited the class antagonism and the redistributive mechanisms behind such policies as reasonable burden (actual tax burden redistribution) and rent and interest reduction to mobilize peasants into pressuring the wealthy (landlords, rich peasants and other rural elite) to shoulder larger financial burden. Later, nobody could miss the alienating effects Chiang's extractive policies engendered, actually prompting many Sichuan local elites and strongmen to turn a blind eye to and to even support the Communist conquest in 1949. To increase peasant incomes, the Communist Party encouraged cooperative movements, but even though Chiang meant to duplicate these experiences, he could not make progress due to the failure of his grass-roots officials to mobilize and organize peasants.

Like their Communist counterparts, the Nationalists suffered from inflation fed by rapidly growing war expenses. However, the difference of scale was enormous because the Nationalist government had to finance a much larger army and bureaucracy, the latter of which had grown by leaps and bounds because of the urgency to control and mobilize national resources. Unable to cover these expenditures with tax incomes, whether in currency or grain, the state sought stringent methods to control the price of commodities, but this often prompted hoarding and therefore drove the inflation rate even higher. These experiences led to much more detrimental effects in the Nationalist than in the Communist areas. Other than alienating the business sector, Chiang could only seek means to lower the financial spending of his government, but, unlike the Communists,

he could not adopt a similar policy of mobilizing soldiers to engage in production. Needless to say, any effort to cut down the size of the bureaucracy also failed. Instead, Chiang began to overlook military involvement in smuggling and commercial activities, because he knew very well that the army suffered from insufficient military budgets. While such profits could relieve the commanding officers of their financial anxiety, venturing into the spheres of smuggling and commercial activities gave rise to rampant corruption. Some of the commanding officers even allowed their dependents to step into the forbidden fields of fortune-gathering. During the Henan debacle, Chiang noted that General Tang Enbo's doing business with the Japanese occupied areas had handicapped efforts to train his army (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, May 4), and later he also considered smuggling and commercial activities a key cause of his military defeat, second only to the appearance of many Chinese traitors. The commanding officers' involvement in smuggling and commerce in the name of the insufficient provisions not only alienated the people but also eroded military morale (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, July 24). However, being unable to eliminate such practices, Chiang later only specifically forbade military dependents' engaging in smuggling and commercial activities (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, October 31).

Due to public accusations that he had amassed a private fortune, General Tang Enbo handed Chiang all of his ledgers for judicial investigation, and simultaneously promised to hand over all of his earnings. However, he seemed to be alone in so doing. To put things in a comparative perspective, the Chinese Communists in at least the Yan'an areas in 1943 also encouraged their military units, as well as the branches of their regime, to find other means of raising funds and actually acquiesced in their commercial activities. The difference was that the Communist authority could later terminate these widespread practices and urge all the military units to turn over their hidden "treasures". In contrast, Chiang could not find ways of curbing ranking officers' undertaking of the smuggling and commercial activities, particularly among the top brass.

While encouraging the self-reliance of military units, the Communists also resorted to the planting and trading of opium to tide over their financial difficulties (Chen 1995; Xiao 2013, 399, 457). Chiang Kai-shek could not imitate similar policies, even though his anti-opium policy failed to eliminate the opium sale and addiction in the area under his control. For him, Western credits and loans became the only way out, but neither the United States nor the British were willing to provide the needed sums, and both powers used corruption to justify their asking for stringent supervision of these funds' use, even though they had agreed to extend a helping hand.

As a military man, Chiang placed top priority in training and equipping his army with weapons and expertise provided by the United States, a task now possible after General Wedemeyer had replaced General Stilwell



as his chief of staff. Other than mobilizing students to form a new army, Chiang sought to reform his army into one blessed with adequate pay, equipment, and training. Minimizing starvation and sickness, as well as guaranteeing minimum provisions to soldiers and adequate payment to his officers, became his top concerns, and he severely scolded his chief quartermaster for not paying soldiers on time and even dismissed him from the job temporarily in a fit of rage (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, September 6, September 12-13; Xu, *Riji* 1944, September 9).<sup>7</sup> He also blamed Minister of Military Affairs He Yingqin for only knowing the need to save money without any sympathy for soldiers' starvation (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, August 18).

Be that as it may, Chiang first had to reduce the discrepancy between authorized strength and actual strength, and standardize all the Nationalist military units. Resistance from commanding officers seemed overwhelming, for they inherited a military culture that saw their forces as private property. While facing strong resistance to his determination to reduce the size of the Nationalist army, Chiang still had to do something about the starving, sickness, and malnutrition of his forces. He did try to increase payments for the officers and soldiers, but his reforms could simply not stand up to the eroding power of the inflation; financial constraints set severe limits on what he could achieve.

Once the military crisis the Japanese offensive had engendered was over and US-China relations had improved, Chiang found more time to ponder military reforms and the concrete measures needed for implementing them. His top priority was to take advantage of American expertise and equipment to create a completely new army, including the mobilization of junior and senior high school students to join a new youth expeditionary army, a move he had already started. A more important task was to have 50 army divisions equipped with American weapons and trained by American advisors. At the same time, Chiang sought to reorganize the forces already under his control, and sought to eliminate rampant factionalism and cronyism, both of which he had inherited from the warlord period and compounded by his mishandling of the problem of military personnel, a job handicapped by his seemingly favorable treatment of former Whampoa instructors and graduates, who usually had no training commensurate with their assignment.

The Communists had initiated similar reforms by introducing a hierarchical system of compensation, albeit starting from a very low point in a seemingly egalitarian world. Chiang's bureaucracy and army had suffered tremendously from the war induced inflation. The purchasing power of their payments only amounted to 20% in 1940 and 10% in 1944. He faced

7 Thanks to the pleading of General Feng Yuxiang, the chief quartermaster retained his job on probation.

far more difficulties in improving their material lives. The Communists faced criticism from intellectuals who craved an egalitarian social order, but Chiang faced different challenge, namely finding resources to pay the rapidly growing military budget. Now with the help of General Wedemeyer, he set one US dollar a month as the goal for improving his soldiers' treatment. Furthermore, he began to see the urgency in reorganizing his central and regional military headquarters, strengthening the troops directly under central control (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 10). It was difficult to find generals up to the challenges, but he finally prevailed upon General Chen Cheng to take over the difficult task of reforming the Ministry of Military Affairs (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 14).<sup>8</sup> On the basis of his recommendations, Chiang began to reshuffle major military personnel and allocate them with American weapons (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 10, December 13, December 15, December 16, December 20, December 23, December 2). With American help, he also sought to establish personnel and logistic systems (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 19), but despite his numerous moral exhortations and official injunctions, these reforms were slow to make an impact. The way of reform and rectification was long and protracted, and abuses within the military forces plus their negative repercussions on society continued to haunt him. Late in 1944, he continued to face difficulties in dealing with the factionalism rampant in the military forces, as his officers continued to act with personal interests and sentiments as topmost concerns (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 27). He also still saw his soldiers clothed like beggars (Chiang, *Riji* 1944, December 28). After one year, he did equip about 50 divisions with American training and equipment, but once the civil war broke out the military expenses again rocketed and without a sound financial base and American's consistent and sympathetic help, Chiang had to cope with the inevitable super inflation, which seriously eroded military morale and fighting capabilities. In contrast, the Communists armies had built themselves a solid supporting structure in the countryside, and the peasants readily responded to the Communist calls for supplying soldiers and logistical support. In time, these factors contributed to the defeat of Chiang's army.

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<sup>8</sup> Chiang gave a list of people whom he planned to use, but it is unclear what he would do with the list. The list includes Whampoa generals Liu Zhi, Wang Maogong, Song Xilian, Du Yuming, Kang Ze, Liu Kan, non-Whampoa generals Xu Yongchang, He Guoguang, He Yaozu, Wang Zuanxu and the professionals of the political science group Wu Dingchang, Zhang Gongquan, Chen Yi, Xiong Shihui, and a CC clique related technocrat Zhen Yangfu.

## 5 Conclusions

Based on the data presented above, I would like to offer some concluding observations about the Ichigo Offensive. Despite his determination to fight the invaders to death, whether for nationalist dignity, personal ambition or both, Chiang persistently underestimated the Japanese ability to launch attacks on a scale larger than the 1941 campaigns against either Changsha or Changde, which his armies had resisted until the Japanese were forced to withdraw. While Chiang's intelligence people are hardly free from blame, his temperament and misjudgements also played a role in undermining Nationalist military campaigns. Once the Japanese launched their unprecedented scale of attacks, Chiang had no strategic alternative other than holding a city, weakening the attacking forces, and mobilizing a much larger force to hopefully inflict a crushing blow on the Japanese forces. Unfortunately, this strategy backfired on three accounts. First, the Japanese army often placed higher priority on the attacking peripheral forces in order to isolate the chosen city. Second, the Japanese placed higher priority to the interception and annihilation of the Chinese reinforcements than the occupation of important cities. Third, the Chinese defenders with the exception of the Fang Xianjue's 10th Army barely lived up to Chiang Kai-shek's expectations. Zhang Deneng's 4th Army, Chen Munnong's 97th Army, Chen Sunong's 93rd Army and Wei Yunsong's Guangxi Army all failed to deliver on their promised performances. The Luoyang defenders were essentially satisfactory, but Chiang was simply unable to amass enough troops to take advantage of their defense. At the same time, Chiang was lucky merely because the Japanese army allowed serious logical constraints to dictate their strategy. Moreover, enemy forces were unable to think boldly in their penetration into China's hinterlands.

In contrast, the Chinese Communists fully understood their weaknesses in the face of the Japanese pacification army, and chose not to meet enemy attacks headlong while also trying to avoid enemy attention. As a result of the so-called One hundred regiment offensive in 1940, the Japanese army wreaked large-scale retaliation against the base areas behind the Japanese fronts. By all accounts, Communist base areas shrank enormously, and the population declined almost by one half. The Communist party state barely survived, but still managed to consolidate rural support. No public opinion compared them to the Nationalist armies and blamed them for their failure to hold Chinese land. Eager for victory, the Japanese army instead dealt deadly blows on the Nationalist regular armies, which actually coexisted with the Communist guerrillas in the same north China areas, particularly the Nationalist armies in southern and eastern Shanxi. The Nationalist regular army was also forced to evacuate from Shandong and Chiangsu. The shrinkage of the Communist territory resulted in the transfer of cadres *en mass* and financial burdens to the Yan'an area. Similar effects occurred

in Chongqing after the loss of Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi, with the Communist army taking advantage of the chaos for territorial expansion. The Communist base areas behind the Japanese front also expanded because the Japanese army had to shift its garrison forces to fight the Nationalists. In short, the Communists actually experienced a revival during and after the Ichigo Offensive. As a result, when the civil war finally broke out, the Communist base areas behind the Japanese front could delay and dilute Chiang Kai-shek's offensive, thereby enabling the Communist army to compete for the control of Manchuria. The Communist forces also reversed their military fortunes after Chiang's forces overextended their logical lines and brought about a period of unprecedented inflation.

Chiang Kai-shek's military reforms assumed whole-hearted support of the United States, and the Nationalist army he reorganized with American help initially performed well once the civil war broke out. However, once the United States withdrew its military and economic support, his army immediately faced insurmountable difficulties. Chiang could neither build solid grass-roots support nor recapture the acquiescence of the upper strata of the society, such the intellectuals, the landlord-gentry and the commercial interests. These cascading series of military debacles ended up sealing Chiang Kai-shek's destiny.

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