

Study on the Reasons Why Mao Tse-tung Wrote Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War

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Abstract

Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War is one of Mao Tse-tung's most representative works on military and philosophy. Regarding the reasons why Mao Tse-tung wrote Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War, Mao made different statements on different occasions. Based on an in-depth study of the history and reality, the author holds the opinion that Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War was written by Mao Tse-tung to meet the actual need of compiling textbooks for the teaching of Red Army University in which the teaching materials are extremely short of supply. And the work was written by Mao on the basis of summarizing the experience and lessons of the China's Revolutionary War, criticizing the opportunism line of the Communist Party of China, and deepening relevant meetings (such as the Zunyi Conference) etc.

Keywords

Mao Tse-tung; Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War; Reasons for Writing.

1. Introduction

Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War (hereinafter referred to as "Problems") was written by Mao Tse-tung in the fall of 1936, but was later suspended due to the occurrence of the Xi'an Incident. There are three main arguments about the reasons for the writing of the Problems. For example, on February 23, 1941, Mao Tse-tung talked in the "Author's Knowledge" written for the publication of "Problems" in Eighth Route Army's military and political magazine publication that "this short book was written in the autumn of 1936 as a teaching book for the Red Army University, with the purpose of summarizing the experience of the Civil War". [1] According to the explanatory notes to the "Problems" made by the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung Volume I which was published by the People's Publishing House in October 1951, this book was written to summarize the experience of the Second Civil Revolutionary War (1927-1937), and at that time Mao Tse-tung delivered a lecture speech at the Red Army University established in northern Shaanxi. [2] In accordance with the commentary on the "left" opportunism of 1931-34 in the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung Volume I, the Problems was written primarily to criticize the military errors of this new "left" opportunism line. [3] Why are there these different discussions? This article intends to explore this issue.

2. The Emergence Background of Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War

After the failure of the Great Revolution, the Communist Party of China drew lessons from the blood and gradually explored a new path of the Chinese revolution in which revolutionary armed forces fought against counter-revolutionary armed forces. The Communist Party of China sequentially launched the Nanchang Uprising, the Autumn Harvest Uprising and the

Guangzhou uprising, but all end with failure. Mao Tse-tung led the troops of the Autumn Harvest Uprising to Jinggangshan, and later joined forces with Zhu De's Nanchang Uprising troops to form the Fourth Army of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Revolutionary Army (later renamed the Fourth Army of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Red Army according to the instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China). Under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung's correct military line, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army has repeatedly won some battles. They won the first four victories against "encirclement and suppression", and established, consolidated and developed revolutionary base areas. However, due to the dominant position of Wang Ming's "left" opportunism line in the Party, the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army failed the fifth anti-"encirclement and suppression" campaign and was forced to withdraw from the Jiangxi Revolutionary base and move westward, later known as the "Long March". Heavy losses were suffered in the early years of the Long March.

At the critical juncture of the survival of the Chinese Workers and Peasants Red Army under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, in January 1935, the expanded meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee was held in Zunyi (historically known as the "Zunyi Conference"), which focused on discussing the military and organizational issues. At the Zunyi Conference, Bogu first made a summary report on the fifth anti-"encirclement and suppression" campaign, emphasizing that the objective reasons such as the overpowering strength of the enemy had led to successive military failures of the Red Army, and he did not reflect on the mistakes made in military command. Zhou Enlai made a deputy report on military issues, made self-criticism on the mistakes in military command, and took the initiative to take responsibility. Mao Tse-tung also made a speech at the meeting, in which he analyzed and criticized bogu and Li De's wrong purely defensive military line, held that the main reason for the failure of the fifth anti-"encirclement and suppression" campaign was not objective, explained the strategic problems of China's Revolutionary War, and pointed out the direction for the future. Mao's speech was endorsed and affirmed by the participants. At the conference, Mao Tse-tung was elected as a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau, the supreme military command of Bo Gu and Li De was cancelled, and Zhou Enlai and Zhu De were appointed to command of the military. And at the conference, Zhang Wentian was entrusted to draft the resolution of the meeting. He "drafted the Summary Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Opposing the Enemy's Five campaigns of Encirclement and Suppression on the basis of the discussions held at the conference, especially on the basis of Mao Tse-tung's opinions and in combination with his personal understanding in the process of transformation". After the conference, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau divided the work and decided that Zhang Wentian would replace Bogu in charge of the the general responsibility, and Mao Tse-tung and Zhou Enlai would be in charge of the military. Later, a three-man military command group composed of Mao Tse-tung, Zhou Enlai and Wang Jiaxiang was established. At the Zunyi Conference, the domination of Wang Ming's "Left" opportunism and adventurism on military was ended, the most pressing military and organizational issues were solved, and actually the correct line of leadership represented by Mao Tse-tung was established. It can be said that Mao Tse-tung's speech at Zunyi Conference and the resolution of Zunyi Conference drafted according to his opinions were the beginning of Mao Tse-tung's systematic summary of the experience and lessons of China's Revolutionary War.

After the Long March of the Red Army reached northern Shaanxi in October 1935, the crisis of the Chinese nation was unprecedentedly serious and the national contradictions between China and Japan gradually replaced the domestic contradictions and rose to become the main contradictions in China. There is an urgent need to sum up the experience and lessons of the political and military lines of the Communist Party of China. On December 27, 1935, Mao Tse-

tung made a report on the Strategies Against Japanese Imperialism at the activists meeting of the Wayaobao Party in northern Shaanxi, and systematically discussed the possibility and importance of establishing the anti-japanese national united front, which solved the problem of the party's political line and made a political ideological preparation for the upcoming war of resistance against Japan.

On March 25, 1936, on the agenda of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee to discussing the issue of the strategic policy, Mao Tse-tung made a report and put forward the policy of "development for consolidation". Mao Tse-tung's report was discussed at the meeting on March 26 and was unanimously approved by the participants. The meeting decided that the strategic guidelines would be drafted by Mao. This decision prompted him to further study strategic issues.

With the development of the revolutionary situation, there is an urgent need to strengthen our own strength and change the situation of the enemy and ourselves. The most effective way is to train a large number of competent military cadres for future use. Under such circumstances, it is particularly important to run the Red Army University well. On May 8, 1936, Mao Tse-tung put forward the idea of establishing the Red Army University in his report. Under the call of Mao Tse-tung, the CPC Central Committee decided to establish a new Anti-Japanese Red Army University on the basis of the existing Red Army University, and selected many outstanding cadres with combat experience for training. In the early days of establishing the Red Army University, the conditions were very difficult and both teachers and teaching materials are short of supply. Therefore, Mao Tse-tung personally gave lectures and reports to students, and tried his best to find ways to buy the teaching materials from the white areas, borrow from other places, or compile teaching materials by himself. As "the Red Army University asked me to give a lecture on revolutionary strategy", [4] Mao Tse-tung began to collect and read a large number of military books, especially those on strategy, in preparation for going to the Red Army University to give a lecture on revolutionary strategy. In September 1936, Mao Tse-tung made two calls to urge Liu Ding in Xi'an to buy some military books, not ordinary books on tactics but only the strategy books and battle books on large corps, as well as some ancient Chinese art of war books such as "Sun Tzu". And Mao said to Liu Ding, Liu can borrow some books from Zhang Xueliang if Zhang had such kind of books. On October 22, 1936, Mao Tse-tung sent a letter to Ye Jianying and Liu Ding, again asking them to buy Sun Tzu's Art of War and military books on campaign command and strategy. Mao Tse-tung read eight books such as the Sun Tzu's Art of War, Clausewitz's book, Military Codes written by Japanese, and the books on discussing strategy and the cooperation of several types of arms written by Soviets. [5] He also read Comrade Liu Bocheng's translation of Combined Arms, the 'Rules of Battle' and some bourgeois books. [6] On the basis of reading ancient and modern military works at home and abroad, Mao Tse-tung began to study and summarize the experience and lessons of China's Revolutionary War, and started to compile military textbooks about the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Red Army- Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War.

On October 27, 1936, on the basis of completing the partial content of "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War" (at least the first chapter), Mao Tse-tung began to give lessons about 'Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War' for the First Division of the Red Army University (the upper corps), which lasted until the occurrence of Xi'an Incident". [7] On the eve of the Xi'an Incident, Mao Tse-tung had at least completed the first five chapters of his lecture on "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War", but he had no time to continue writing this book because of the occurrence of Xi'an incident. Mao Tse-tung said many times in this regard, "I have only finished five chapters, and there are still many other issues to be finished, such as the strategic attack, the strategic shift, political work, and so on. I have no time to write any more." [8] "Once the main part was written, I won't talk about it. There are books, just read them." [9]

3. The Reasons for Writing Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War

Through combing the historical background, it can be found that profound realistic and historical factors can explain the reason why Mao Tse-tung wrote the Problems.

3.1. To Provide Teaching Materials for the Training of Military Cadres of the Chinese Communist Party

We will run Red Army universities well and train a group of military talents who will save the great Chinese nation from extinction. the early days of launching the Red Army University, both teachers and teaching materials were short of supply. Faced with such realistic needs and practical difficulties, the University invited Mao Tse-tung to give a lecture on the problems of revolutionary strategy, which prompted Mao to begin to study the problems of revolutionary strategy so as to prepare for his lessons in the Red Army University. Mao Tse-tung himself had talked why he wrote "Problems" many times. For example, on February 23, 1941, Mao Tse-tung talked in the "Author's Knowledge" written for the publication of "Problems" in Eighth Route Army's military and political magazine publication that "this short book was written in the autumn of 1936 as a teaching book for the Red Army University." [10] On June 24, 1964, Mao Tse-tung once recalled, "In 1936, the Red Army University asked me to give a lecture on the problems of revolutionary strategy. Well, I read the reference books, think about how to summarize the experience in the Revolutionary Civil War, and I wrote some handouts which were entitled "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War". Besides, the comrades at the Red Army University helped me a lot. If they didn't ask me to give a lesson, I wouldn't write this book." [11] The Problems written by Mao Tse-tung solved the practical difficulties of the Red Army University, provided the Party with a clear understanding of the strategic problems in the China's Revolutionary War during the period of transformation from domestic contradictions to national contradictions, and made a preparation on military cadres and military strategies for the coming War of Resistance Against Japan.

3.2. To Summarize the Experience and Lessons of the Chinese Revolutionary War

The direct reason Mao Tse-tung wrote the Problems was that it can serve as a textbook for the Red Army University, but the purpose was to summarize the experience and lessons of the Chinese Revolutionary War. Without paying attention to the experience and lessons of China's Revolutionary War, and without understanding and proceeding from China's special national conditions, China's Revolutionary War cannot be victorious. One of the important tasks of Mao Tse-tung's lecture on the "Problems" to the Red Army University students was to guide the students to study the revolutionary war in China's Revolutionary War and to understand and summarize the experience and lessons of the ten years of Civil War so as to apply them to the China's Revolutionary War in the future. On January 30, 1962, Mao Tse-tung once said, "On the eve of and during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, I wrote a number of papers, such as 'Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War' and 'On Protracted War'...All of them are a summary of revolutionary experience". [12] These in-depth and comprehensive summaries of experience are a good guidance for the students from Red Army University.

Therefore, In the Problems, Mao Tse-tung summarized many experiences and lessons of China's Revolutionary War, especially those of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army during its first to fifth counter-campaigns against "encirclement and suppression". Mao Tse-tung first emphasized the importance of summarizing and understanding the experience and lessons of the China's Revolutionary War and the Chinese workers' and peasants' Red Army's own combat operations. Mao said "these bloody lessons left to us from the past wars should be studied with

great emphasis.” [13] Without summarizing what is useful in China’s Revolutionary War and the experience and lessons of the Chinese Workers’ and peasants’ Red Army’s own combat operations, “we cannot direct a war”. [14] In the article, Mao Tse-tung further emphasized that if we copied military books published by China or the Soviet Union, we would be cutting our feet to suit shoes and losing the battle.

When summarizing the experience and lessons of the Agrarian Revolutionary War, Mao Tse-tung made a basic summary of the red Army’s military strategy and tactics, holding that the guerrilla warfare strategy and tactics of the “sixteen-character formula” which brought victory was the correct experience, while the “normal principle” of the anti-guerrilla doctrine, which has cost a lot, was a wrong lesson of failure. Therefore, Mao Tse-tung summarized the experience and lessons of many specific strategies and tactics by analyzing a series of cases. For example, he pointed out that the behavior such as contempting for the enemy or being intimidated by the enemy all led to the defeat of the Red Army. He advocated “keeping the enemy out of the door when fighting”, “not destorying altars and pots”, and “not losing an inch of land”, and he opposed the passive defense such as luring the enemy into further advance and adopting strategic retreat. He thought all of them led to the defeat of the Red Army. As for the fifth counter-campaign against “encirclement and suppression”, Mao Tse-tung pointed out, “Our army did not retreat at all, because we did not pay attention to both the local situation and the whole situation, which was indeed a reckless and rash action. We did not want to lose any part of our land, but eventually we lost all the land.” [15]

When it comes to the experience and lessons on concentration of troops, Mao Tse-tung listed some examples in the five anti-“encirclement and suppression” campaigns, such as the Battle of Tan Daoyuan launched at Tungshao in Ningtu county in January 1931, and the Battle of the 19th Route Army launched at the Gao xingwei area in Xingguo county in August 1931, the Battle of Chenjitang lachened at Shuikouwei in Nanxiong city in July 1932 and the Battle of Chencheng launched at Tuan village in Lichuan county in March 1934 and so on. In his opinion, these campaigns suffered from the lack of concentration of troops, and although they were won, they failed in a sense. He pointed out “Our strategy is ‘one as ten’ and our tactics is ‘ten as one’, which is one of the fundamental laws for us to defeat the enemy.” [16]

When it comes to the experience and lessons of the war of annihilation, Mao Tse-tung pointed out: “It’s better to cut off one finger than to hurt ten; and it’s better to destroy one of the enemy’s divisions than to destroy ten of them”. [17] “Our policy for the first, second, third and fourth campaigns of ‘encirclement and suppression’ was annihilation...In our fifth anti-encirclement and suppression campaign, we adopted the opposite policy, which in fact helped the enemy achieve their goals.” [18] In addition to the above experience and lessons, Mao Tse-tung summarized a lot of experience and lessons in Problems in China’s Revolutionary War.

These vivid and bloody experience and lessons were slowly summarized by Mao Tse-tung after his in-depth study of the history of China’s Revolutionary War. As Mao Tse-tung said on March 23, 1961, “Without those victories and defeats, without the defeat of the fifth anti-‘encirclement and suppression’ campaign and without experiencing the long March, my pamphlet ‘Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War’ could not have been written.” [19] To sum up the experience and lessons of China’s Revolutionary War, Mao Tse-tung spent a lot of effort. In October 1951, when the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung Volume I was published, according to the People’s Publishing House, the Problems “was written to summarize the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War, and at that time Mao made a speech at the Red Army University established in northern Shaanxi”. [20] When the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung was published in 1951, the contents of the articles had been revised, added with explanatory notes and approved by Mao himself, and the explanatory notes to the Problems were probably added by Mao himself.

Why is the explanatory notes of the Problems in selected Works of Mao Tse-tung published in 1951 inconsistent with that in "Author's Knowledge" written by Mao in 1941? Was the Problems written for the Red Army University at that time or for summarizing the experience of the second Revolutionary Civil War? The author believes that the "Problems" was originally written for the Red Army University as a teaching book, but after Mao Tse-tung wrote it, the actual role and influence of the "Problems" has exceeded the role and influence as a teaching book. In 1941, during the period of total Resistance against Japanese Aggression, in the "author's Knowledge" written by Mao Tse-tung for the publication of "Problems" in Eighth Route Army's military and political magazine publication, he believed that the Problems was "still useful for the current anti-Japanese War". [21] Since then, many leading cadres, experts and scholars have specially studied the Problems. Even the Kuomintang secretly reprinted it to study the the principles of the People's Liberation Army's strategy and tactics. For this reason, Chiang Kai-shek even issued a research warrant specially. [22] Although the Problems is mainly a summary of the experience of ten years of civil war, its thoughts and methods had transcended time and space, and played a huge guiding role in the victory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation. And the Problems has become a classic work. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, when the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung was published in 1951, if the Problems was advocated as the textbooks of red Army Universities, it would not be able to reflect the due role and value of it. Therefore, Mao revised that the questions was written for summarizing experience in the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung.

3.3. To Criticize the Opportunism Line of the Communist Party of China

In the course of writing the textbook for the Red Army University, Mao Tse-tung expounded that the strategy of China's Revolutionary War is to distinguish the correct military line and correct strategy and the wrong military line and wrong strategy on the basis of summarizing the experience and lessons of China's Revolutionary War. The wrong military line and strategy should be criticized and their influence should be eliminated, otherwise the correct military line and strategy cannot be truly recognized, implemented and carried out. The Communist Party of China had made many opportunistic mistakes during the revolution and war at that time, so that Mao Tse-tung's correct military line was stigmatized as "narrow empirical theory" by "left" opportunism line theorists such as Wang Ming. On the basis of summarizing the experience and lessons, Mao Tse-tung learned from Lu Xun to conduct a 'retaliation' by criticizing those people who denounced 'narrow empiricism' was wrong in the book named 'Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War'. [23] In the Problems, Mao Tse-tung successively criticized li Lisan's "left" opportunism, Wang Ming's "left" opportunism and Zhang Guotao's right opportunism. Mao Tse-tung hoped that the Party and the Red Army would have a clear understanding of these opportunistic mistakes, fight against them and eliminate them and their influence. Mao said "if we didn't fight against these harmful tendencies which endangered the revolution and the revolutionary war and overcome them thoroughly, it will be impossible to construct a correct line and win the revolutionary war". [24] We should develop and support correct political and military lines in the struggle against "left" and right opportunism, and we must support and uphold the correct political and military line.

Mao Tse-tung later delieved many speeches, holding the view that the Problems criticized the party's opportunism line. In 1951, according to the explanatory notes in the Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung Volume I, the Problems was "the result of a major controversy on military issues within the party during the Second Revolutionary Civil War, and an expression of one line against another". [25] On June 21, 1958, at an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission, Mao Tse-tung said that the "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War was written to reply to the military dogmatism of the Central Soviet Area." [26] Therefore, it is

easy to understand that the Problems was written to criticize “the mistakes made by the ‘left’ opportunism line in military affairs” from 1931 to 1934.

Certainly, there is no contradiction between summarizing the experience and lessons of China’s Revolutionary War and criticizing the party’s opportunism line. They are two perspectives and two aspects of the one thing. It is not profound enough to summarize the experience and lessons of China’s Revolutionary war without criticizing the party’s opportunistism line. And it is not thorough to criticize the party’s opportunism line without drawing lessons from China’s Revolutionary war.

4. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Problems was written by Mao Tse-tung to meet the actual need of compiling textbooks for the teaching of Red Army University in which the teaching materials are extremely short of supply. And the work was written on the basis of summarizing the experience and lessons of the China’s Revolutionary War, criticizing the opportunism line of the Communist Party of China, and deepening relevant meetings (such as the Zunyi Conference) etc. Its content is a summary of the experience of the ten years of Civil War. which made military cadres and military strategic preparations for the upcoming War of Resistance against Japan.

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