

MAO TSE-TUNG AND OPERATIONAL ART DURING THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR

**A MONOGRAPH
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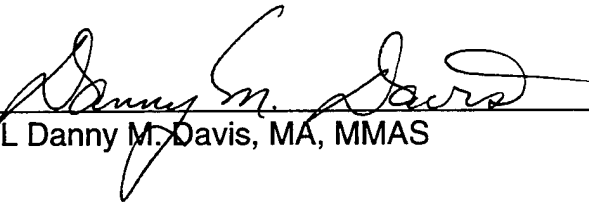
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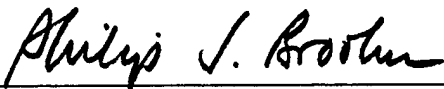
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ABSTRACT

MAO TSE-TUNG AND OPERATIONAL ART DURING THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR
by Major Thomas P. Reilly, USA, 60 pages.

This monograph examines the nature of operational art during the third and final phase of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949. During this period Mao Tse-Tung and the Red Army fought Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Army for the military and political control of China.

The initial portion of the monograph discusses the areas of military strategy and the development of operational art. This area was developed using contemporary monographs, research projects, and professional journal articles. Professional military journals such as *Parameters* and *Military Review* publish relevant articles covering these subjects on a recurring basis. The majority of the information covering Mao's thoughts and writings were drawn from *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* published in Beijing, China by the Foreign Languages Press.

The section dealing with the essence of operational art was developed primarily from James Schneider's theoretical paper; *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art*. In this paper Schneider identifies, defines, and argues that eight key attributes must exist for the fullest expression of operational art to be manifested. These eight attributes are; the distributed operation, the distributed campaign, a system of continuous logistics, instantaneous command and control, the operationally durable formation, operational vision, the distributed enemy, and distributed deployment. This monograph uses Schneider's eight key attributes of operational art as a *measure of effectiveness* for evaluating the use of operational art during the Chinese Civil War.

This monograph concludes that while Mao Tse-Tung was one-step removed from the operational level of war, the commanders of the Red Army, guided by his theory of protracted war and his controlling strategy, successfully applied operational art to decisively defeat a larger, better equipped, and trained military force in a sequential series of battles and engagements.

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SECTION I. INTRODUCTION

“Wisdom prevails over strength, knowledge over brute force; for wars are won by skillful strategy, and victory is the fruit of long planning.”

Bible: Proverbs¹

The triumphant entry of the Communists into Peking in 1949 effectively marked the end of this twenty-eight year revolutionary political and military period. Between 1921 and 1949 a titanic struggle occurred within the great land mass known as China. The results were to have immediate and long-term effects on the course of world events. This campaign for control of China occurred in three overlapping phases. The first phase; a period of predominate internal conflict, occurred between 1921 and 1936. The two primary opponents were the leaders of the Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang (KMT); and the leaders of the fledgling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The second phase; a time of uncooperative national unity, began in 1936 and lasted until 1945. The final phase, an internal civil war to determine the future of China, occurred between 1945 and 1949.

The period of internal strife between the ruling KMT and the growing CCP began in 1921. The Chinese Communist movement developed into two ideological segments. The Leninists, who favored urban revolution in keeping with conventional Marxist-Leninist theory and Mao Tse-Tung and his growing band of followers, who argued for basing the foundation of the revolution among the peasants in the countryside.²

In 1921, Mao Tse-Tung and eleven other intellectuals met in Shanghai and founded the CCP. Over the next seven years Mao began to advocate a “marriage of convenience” between the KMT and the CCP. Mao, of rich peasant background, began

to openly champion the cause of the Chinese peasants masses. The failure of the Chinese Leninists to bring about revolution and Mao's connection to the peasantry catapulted Mao into a leading position within the CCP.³ This period also marks the ascendancy of Mao's theory of revolutionary warfare. In 1927, with Chu-Teh, Chen-Yi, and Lin-Piao, Mao formed the Chinese Red Army. Mao's experiences during this period convinced him that any successful struggle against the entrenched power of the state would be protracted, victory would come only after a long, arduous political and military effort, and that the peasant masses in the countryside were the key to final victory.

Although Japan occupied areas of China since the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the fighting entered a new stage in 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.⁴ When the League of Nations failed to force the Japanese to withdraw from Manchuria, international relations between China and Japan deteriorated further. The Chinese-Japanese conflict of 1931-1932 was renewed on a much larger scale on July 7, 1937 following the Marco Polo Bridge incident in the city of Lu-kou-ch'iao, near Peking. The Marco Bridge Incident is considered the start of the Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War in Asia. Open hostilities developed out of China's nationalist desire to end the affront of foreign settlement on Chinese territory and from Japan's desire to keep Chinese armies out of Northern China.⁵

In October of 1934 the Communists abandoned their base areas and began the *Long March* seeking to secure new territory in the northwest. As the Red Army reached Northern Guizhou in January, 1935 it found time to rest and the CCP and Politburo found time to meet. The Zunyi Conference was convened to discuss the current situation and to

determine a strategy for the future. However, the conference turned into a major review of past policy and heralded a change in the leadership of the party.⁶ At the conclusion of the conference Mao was elected to the Five-Person Secretariat and the Central Military Leadership Group. At this point Mao was on the verge of assuming complete control of the CCP. As the Red Army continued the *Long March* a dispute occurred between Mao and Chang Kuo-t'ao. Chang openly challenged Mao's policies and leadership. This dispute led to the division of the Red Army into northern and southern elements. Subsequently, Mao successfully led the southern elements of the Red Army into new base areas in Northwest China.⁷ At the conclusion of the *Long March*, Mao was effectively in control of the CCP; including the Red Army.

Following the Sian Incident of 1936, a united front was formed between the KMT and the CCP.⁸ During this period, Mao tested and refined his political and military concepts for the eventual final confrontation with the controlling Nationalist government. While, Chaing Kai-shek, the leader of the KMT, built and prepared his military, with U.S. assistance, for the coming struggle with the Communists.

The period between 1945 to 1949 saw the Nationalist and Communist Chinese return to their internal fight for control of China. With the elimination of the Japanese threat in 1945, Mao prepared for the final campaign against Chaing Kai-shek's government. During the ensuing civil war, Mao put into practice everything he had learned during the past twenty-eight years of political and military conflict.⁹

The primary military and political personality in this nearly three decade long struggle was an educated Chinese middle-class peasant; Mao Tse-Tung. During this

twenty-eight year span Mao studied the orthodox Marxist-Leninist approach, and then developed his own brand of Communism based primarily on the peasants in the countryside. He would also develop, refine, test, and validate his own theory of revolutionary warfare.

The commonly held view of Mao Tse-Tung during this period is that of a communist political ideologue and guerrilla leader. Unfortunately, this remains a too narrow and short-sighted view of this remarkable man. Two commonly read and quoted works covering the life of Mao Tse-Tung during this period are; Samuel B. Griffith's *Mao Tse-Tung, On Guerrilla Warfare*, and the *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung*. The first work, written by a USMC brigadier general, provides a Western view of Mao and his theory. The second work, provides a politically corrected Chinese version of selected writings of Mao. Read superficially, these two works perpetuate the myth of Mao as the leader of a unique revolutionary guerrilla movement and tradition. However, Mao's revolutionary movement was far more than a simple theory of guerrilla warfare. His theory of revolutionary warfare ultimately led to his final victory and control over the People's Republic of China.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine and analyze Mao Tse-Tung as an operational level commander during the third phase of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949. It investigates the development and practice of Mao's theory of revolutionary war within the context of operational art. This monograph focuses on the controlling research question: *Was Mao Tse-Tung practicing operational art during the third phase of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949 ?*

To answer this question the monograph focuses on five areas. First, this paper examines the contemporary theory of operational art. This first section establishes the theoretical foundation for examining the controlling research question. This section introduces and examines the development of operational art. This includes a discussion of military strategy and the operational challenge of orchestrating the ends, ways, and means of national power into successful military operations. Finally, this section identifies and defines the principal components of operational design.

The second section presents a brief introduction to the military history of the third phase of the Chinese Civil War. Between 1945 to 1949 the Nationalist and Communist Chinese fought a large scale struggle for control of mainland China. During this period Mao was able to fully implement his theory against his Nationalist opponents. The third section analyzes this period of the Chinese Civil War in terms of operational art. It answers the supporting research question; *Was operational art used during this phase of the Chinese Civil War ?* In addition, this section examines the Communist command and control structure to determine whether or not Mao was in a position from which he could directly plan the operations of the Communist field armies.

The fifth section briefly examines this period of the Chinese Civil War using James Schneider's eight key attributes of operational art in an effort to solidify the answer to the supporting research question; *Was operational art used during this phase of the Chinese Civil War?* Finally, in the concluding section, this monograph uses the weight of evidence from the analysis contained in the previous sections to answer the controlling research question. The purpose is to determine whether or not Mao deserves the title of

operational artist for the design and conduct of Communist operations against the Nationalist forces of Chaing Kai-shek during the third phase of the Chinese Civil War.

SECTION II. THE THEORY OF OPERATIONAL ART

“War is a matter of vital importance to the State; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.”

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*¹⁰

To understand the theory of operational art we must first understand the general development of military strategy. This section discusses the nature and purpose of strategy and the changes that brought about the development of contemporary military strategy. Finally, this section traces the development of the theory of operational art. The intent is to answer two supporting research questions. First, *What is operational art* ? Second, *What purpose does operational art serve* ?

Nineteenth century thinking divided war into two distinct levels; strategic and tactical. Strategy was normally concerned with generally deciding the war with one decisive battle during a single campaign season. The idea of the decisive battle meant that the campaign and the war were decided with a single clash of armies. Tactics described how these battles were fought and won at the micro-level in the realm of “combat and with the weapons , methods, and maneuvers on the battlefield.”¹¹

Napoleon defined strategy as the “art of making use of time and space”¹² for controlling the movements or flow of the campaign from its beginning to its end. Napoleon’s definition of strategy therefore included his vision of how the individual battles composing the campaign were tied to his strategic plan. Modern military theorists

such as Carl von Clausewitz and Baron Henri Jomini also drew clear distinctions between strategy and tactics. Clausewitz defined strategy as “governing the why, when, and where battles and engagements are fought.”¹³ Jomini defined strategy as the “the art of bringing the greatest part of the forces of an army upon the important point of the theater of war or zone of operations.”¹⁴ Both of these strategists viewed strategy as the controlling aspect of all battles and engagements.

The tactical level of war governed how battles and engagements are fought and won. Clausewitz defined tactics as “the use of the armed forces in the engagement.”¹⁵ Jomini viewed tactics as “the use of these masses at the points to which they shall have been conducted by well-arranged marches; that is to say, the art of making them act at the decisive moment and at the decisive point of the field of battle.”¹⁶ Both of these strategists viewed tactics, the battle or engagement, as the final episode of the campaign. These final acts of the strategic play were set up by the strategy controlling the entire campaign.

Napoleon formulated four strategic principles of campaigning. First, “every campaign should have on clearly defined objective.” Second, that “the main enemy force should be that objective.” Third, “the army must maneuver in such a way as to place itself on the flank and rear of the enemy army,” and fourth, “to strike at the lines of communications of the enemy army, while protecting your own.”¹⁷

These four strategic principles of campaigning meant that Napoleonic strategy was limited to the scope of the campaign. The campaign being conducted in a single season and decided by one decisive battle resulting in the defeat of the opposing army

and the successful conclusion of the war. During the 19th Century “the acme of strategic skill was the ability to deliver a strategic decision through a single decisive battle.”¹⁸

This view of strategic thinking began to lose its relevance due to changes in the very nature of warfare by the middle of the eighteenth century. By the late nineteenth century the ability to deliver a strategic decision through a single decisive battle began to rapidly decline for three primary reasons. The first was demographic, the second geopolitical, and the third technological.

During the nineteenth century there was a dramatic rise in population throughout much of the world. This population explosion enabled nations to employ multiple armies. Each of these armies was capable of conducting its own military campaign. Therefore, a single nation was now capable of conducting two or more simultaneous military campaigns.¹⁹ It also meant that individual nations were now physically capable of absorbing large numbers of casualties and still continue the war.

During this same period the effects of this population increase were compounded by the development of a system of national alliances. This emerging trend meant that a group of nations could deploy several armies capable of conducting operations on multiple fronts. Theoretically, and in actuality, the theater of war now spanned an entire continent.²⁰

Advances in military technology also increased the rate of change in the strategic environment. Early examples of technology changing the nature of warfare include the railroad and the telegraph. The “high capacity and rapid pace of railways conferred a new strategic mobility on armies.”²¹ Railroads enabled commanders to move large numbers

of troops over great distances in shorter periods of time. The result was an exponential increase in the size of the theater due to the increased capability of strategic movement.

The telegraph also brought about fundamental change to strategic thinking. "One of the principal uses to which electric telegraphs were put to use was to help manage the railways."²² The telegraph increased the ability of commanders to effectively command their armies over greater distances. This meant that geographically separated armies could now operate as a unified force under a common aim. These advances in technology began to push on the foundations of nineteenth century military thinking.

The expansion of the strategic battlefield led to the realization that armies could no longer be concentrated on small limited battlefields within sight and direct control of the commander. A commander was now required to command, control, and supply armies he could no longer physically see. The development of the railroad and the telegraph provided immediate command and control solutions to this new capability of warfare.²³

The general increase in population, the development of a sophisticated system of national alliances, and advances in military technology together led directly to the realization that a connection existed between the two classical levels of war. This realization led to the development of the operational level of war and the concept of operational art.

Soviet military theorists were among the first to recognize the changes in nineteenth century strategic thought and the implications of the concept of operational art. In a series of lectures at the Frunze Military Academy between 1923 and 1924 A.A.

Svechin delivered the first views on the concept of operational art. He described operational art “as the bridge between tactics and strategy” that is “the means by which the senior commander transformed a series of tactical successes into operational bounds linked together by the commander’s intent and plan and contributing to strategic success in a given theater of military operations.”²⁴ Svechin based the development of his theory of operational art on an examination of past battles and wars. Svechin correctly recognized the conceptual link between strategy and tactics when he wrote:

*Then, battle is the means of the operation. Tactics are the material of operational art. The operation is the means of strategy, and operational art is the material of strategy. This is the essence of the three part formula given above.*²⁵

V.K. Triandafillov was a student of Svechin’s. In *The Nature of the Operations of Modern Armies*, he began to expand the Soviet understanding of the concept of operational art by applying the concept to future battles in future wars. Triandafillov’s main thesis concerning operational art is:

*... that in a major war among large states no single operation could be decisive, and that final victory would go to the force which could conduct a series of successive and coherent operations*²⁶

Operational art, then, is the conceptual and physical link between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. The current U.S. Army definition of operational art is:

*the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals through the design, organization, integration execution of battles and engagements into campaigns and major operations. In war, operational art determines when, where, and for what purpose major forces will fight over time.*²⁷

Contemporary military thinking has evolved to a division of war into three distinct, yet, interrelated levels; strategic, operational, and tactical. These three levels of

war define the entire range of military operations. The operational level is the link between tactical actions and strategic objectives. The strategic level of war encompasses national, alliance, or coalition objectives. The operational level of war provides the vital link between strategic objectives and tactical employment of forces. At the operational level, military forces attain strategic objectives through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations. The tactical level of war is concerned with the execution of battles and engagements to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units.²⁸

The operational challenge of linking ends, ways, and means remains the cornerstone of operational art. Strategic guidance is the link between the strategic level of war and the operational commander. This guidance must contain a balance of the ends (objectives), the ways, (concepts) and the means (resources).²⁹ Henry Kissinger points out that "in the past the major problem of strategists was to assemble superior strength; in the contemporary period, the problem more frequently is how to discipline the available power into some relationship to the objectives likely to be in dispute."³⁰

The key to understanding this relationship is the concept of balance. The harmonization of these three factors; ends, ways, and means, is the enabling action that allows a successful operational outcome. Clausewitz's injunction that no nation should undertake war "without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it"³¹ continues to haunt contemporary military commanders and planners at the operational level of war.

While the challenge of balancing the ends, ways, and means of national power is central to understanding the contemporary nature of operational art, the military planner requires a set of tools for applying these components of national power. The four central concepts of operational design are useful tools for studying and understanding the concept of operational art. These four central concepts are; center of gravity, decisive points, lines of operation, and the culminating point.

The first of the operational concepts is the idea of the center of gravity. Clausewitz defines center of gravity as; “the hub of all power and movement, on which everything else depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed.”³² A contemporary refinement of Clausewitz’s definition is found in Joint Doctrine; “a center of gravity is that characteristic, capability, or location from which alliances, nations, and military forces derive their will to fight, their physical strength, or freedom of action.”³³

The identification of the center of gravity is essential to operational design. It is from the center of gravity that decisive points, objectives, lines of operation, and concepts of culmination flow. Decisive points are the second of the four basic operational concepts. Baron Henri Jomini used this term to define his “fundamental principle of war.” In his *Summary of the Art of War*, Jomini provides four maxims which provides the essence of the concept of the decisive point.

1. *To throw by strategic movements the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without comprising one’s own.*
2. *To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one’s forces.*

3. *On the battlefield, to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which it is of the first importance to overthrow.*

4. *To so arrange that these masses shall not only be thrown upon the decisive point, but that they shall engage at the proper times and with ample energy.*³⁴

A contemporary refinement of Jomini's concept is found in current U.S. Army doctrine; a decisive point is; "a point, usually geographical in nature, that, when retained, provides a commander with a marked tactical advantage over his opponent."³⁵ Decisive points could also include other physical elements such as enemy formations, command posts and communication nodes.³⁶ The identification of decisive point(s) is critical in operational design. It is the identification and elimination of decisive points that weaken an enemy center of gravity and make it vulnerable to attack. Conversely, identifying friendly decisive points leads to the protection of friendly centers of gravity. Additionally, decisive points assist the operational level planner in defining friendly and enemy lines of operations and culmination.

Lines of operation is the third concept of operational design. Lines of operation define the directional orientation of friendly and enemy forces. In his *Summary of the Art of War*, Jomini described lines of operation in terms of interior, exterior, concentric, and divergent.

Interior lines of operation allows the general to concentrate the masses and maneuver with his whole force in a shorter time than the enemy would require to oppose them a greater force.

Exterior lines of operation are formed by an army which operates at the same time on both flanks of the enemy.

Concentric lines of operation depart from widely separated points and meet at the same point, either in advance of or behind the base.

*Divergent lines of operation are those by which an army would leave a given point to move upon several distinct points.*³⁷

Joint Publication 3-0 refines Jomini's concept of lines of operation as: "the directional orientation of the force in time and space in relation to the enemy. They connect the force with its base of operations and objectives."³⁸ From these definitions we can see that the base of operations, decisive points, and objectives are essential to defining lines of operation. The identification of lines of operation is critical in operational design because it enables the operational level planner to understand the inherent strengths and weaknesses associated with operating on the various types of lines of operation. Additionally, it will assist him in determining methods for attacking an enemy force based on his lines of operation. "If the art of war consists of bringing into action upon the decisive point of the theater of operations the greatest possible force, the choice of the line of operations, as the primary means of attaining this end, may be regarded as fundamental in devising a good plan for a campaign."³⁹

The culminating point is the fourth concept of operational design. Culmination affects both offensive and defensive operations. Clausewitz, in *On War*, describes culmination as:

*As a war unfolds, armies are constantly faced with some factors that increase their strength and with others that reduce it. The question therefore is one of superiority. Every reduction in strength on one side can be considered as an increase on the other. It follows that this two-way process is to be found in attack as well as defense.*⁴⁰

. . . the natural goal of all campaign plans, therefore, is the turning point at which attack becomes defense. If one were to go beyond that point, it would not merely be a useless effort which could not add to success. It would in fact be a damaging one, which would lead to a reaction; and experience goes to show that such reactions usually have disproportionate effects."⁴¹

Joint Publication 3-0 also address the concept of culmination:

From both an offensive and defensive application. In the offense, the culminating point is the point in time and space at which the attacker's combat power no longer exceeds that of the defender. Here the attacker greatly risks counterattack and defeat and continues the attack only at great peril. Success in the attack at all levels is to secure the objective before reaching culmination. A defender reaches culmination when the defending force no longer has the capability to go on the counteroffensive or defend successfully. Success in the defense is to draw the attacker to culmination, then strike when the attacker has exhausted available resources and is ill-disposed to defend successfully.⁴²

From these definitions we can see that culmination is a function of the relative power of the force over space and time. The concept of culmination is best understood by identifying those factors which could cause the opposing forces to fail to achieve their respective objectives. Operational planning seeks to bring your opponent to culmination while avoiding your own.

The application of operational art requires vision, anticipation, and an understanding of the relationship between the desired end state and the application of available means. The operational planning imperatives guide the application of operational art. These are:

1. Develop a clear understanding of the *strategic aim*.
2. Determine the *end state* required to achieve the strategic aim.
3. Identify friendly and enemy centers of gravity.
4. Identify the *operational objectives* that will produce the end state.
5. Determine the *sequence of actions* most likely to achieve the operational objectives.
6. Organize and *apply the resources* to accomplish the sequence of actions.⁴³

With the six imperatives as a guide, we can now briefly consider the three central elements of operational design: objectives, sequencing of operations, and application of resources. "No one starts a war - or rather, no one in his right mind ought to do so - without first being clear in his mind what he intended to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it."⁴⁴ Therefore, a clear understanding of the strategic and operational objectives is essential to the operational planner. Operational objectives focus the actions of a joint or combined force. As the operational planner identifies the enemy center of gravity and there corresponding decisive point(s) he is identifying potential operational objectives.

*Determining the operational end state and ensuring that it accomplishes the national objectives is the first step in the operational planning process. Failure to make this determination wastes scarce resources and puts the entire effort at risk.*⁴⁵

At the operational level of war rarely does a single operation achieve the strategic objectives. Operational planners plan for the attainment of intermediate objectives by sequencing operations over time and space. This sequencing of operations is known as operational phasing. The operational phases of a campaign may be sequential, simultaneous, or overlapping and it is usually difficult to determine when the one phase begins and another phase ends. Joint Publication 3-0 describes operational phasing as:

*... the best arrangement of major operations. This arrangement will often be a combination of simultaneous and sequential operations to achieve the desired end-state conditions quickly and at the least cost in personnel and other resources. Commanders consider a variety of factors when determining this arrangement, including geography of the operational area, available strategic lift, changes in command structure, logistics buildup and consumption rates, enemy reinforcement capabilities, and public opinion. Thinking about the best arrangement helps determine tempo of activities in time and space.*⁴⁶

Application of resources refers to the process of applying appropriate joint force supporting capabilities to the operational and tactical level objectives of the joint force. The correct application of resources assists in the concentration of decisive force to ensure the rapid defeat of opposing enemy forces. Proper application of resources requires a knowledge of the type of forces required to achieve operational and strategic objectives by phase and the organizations or structures best suited to carrying out those missions.

The initial part of this section dealt with the theoretical concepts concerning military strategy and tactics. Next, it outlined the changes in warfare that led to the development of the theory of operational art. This initial discussion included a presentation of the theoretical pieces that comprise the essence of operational art. The final part deals with a set of attributes that potentially serve as a *measure of effectiveness* when evaluating a military campaign in terms of operational art.

In his School of Advanced Military Studies Theoretical Paper; *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Emergence of Operational Art*, James Schneider identifies eight key attributes that he argues must exist for the fullest expression of operational art to be manifested. These eight attributes are:

1. *The Distributed Operation*
2. *The Distributed Campaign*
3. *A System of Continuous Logistics*
4. *Instantaneous Command and Control*
5. *The Operationally Durable Formation*

6. *Operational Vision*
7. *The Distributed Enemy*
8. *Distributed Deployment*⁴⁷

The distributed operation is the first of these eight key attributes. The distributed operation is “an ensemble of deep maneuvers and distributed battles extended in time and space but unified by a common aim.”⁴⁸ The common aim is the retention of freedom of action for the friendly force and denial of freedom of action for the enemy force. The distributed operation is the basic building block of all operational planning and execution.⁴⁹

The second of these eight attributes is the distributed campaign. The distributed campaign is the final structure the operational artist creates. It is characterized by “the integration of several simultaneous and successive distributed operations in a campaign.”⁵⁰ A distributed campaign primarily focuses on terrain and geography and not the enemy and because of this it changes the classical paradigm of the battle of annihilation to a battle of exhaustion.

For the campaign to be successful, the operational planner must develop a physical structure capable of sustaining the military forces throughout the conduct of the campaign; a *system of continuous logistics*. The concept of continuous logistics is central to the idea of operational art. Without the physical means capable of supporting successive movement, battle, and regeneration of its military forces, the operational planner can not realistically be expected to plan and execute a coherent campaign plan.⁵¹

The fourth attribute is *instantaneous command and control*. Modern technology has made the theory of instantaneous command and control a reality. The invention of the telegraph, railroad, and internal combustion engine heralded the arrival of this capability. Without the capability to communicate, pass, and receive information from dispersed operational formations, the commander is incapable of waging modern warfare. This key attribute enables the operational commander to adjust his distributed forces to achieve his operational goals strategic aims.⁵²

The *operationally durable formation* is the fifth attribute of operational art. An operationally durable formation is capable of conducting a succession of distributed operations. This succession of distributed operations includes, simultaneous, sequential, and successive operations conducted in time and space throughout the depth of the enemy's positions. "It is the primary engine of operational design: it is the hammer that drives the operational chisel."⁵³

The concept of *operational vision* is an unquantifiable quality that the operational commander must possess. Operational vision requires the operational commander to develop and disseminate a unified and holistic approach in the design, execution, and sustainment of his campaign(s).⁵⁴ Operational vision and instantaneous command and control have an interdependent relationship.

For operational art to exist, the operational commander must also face a *distributed enemy*. The concept of the distributed enemy is critical to our understanding of operational art. A distributed enemy is generally organized, trained, and fights in a comparable fashion to its opponent. A distributed enemy is vulnerable to the operational

art attributes of; a distributed campaign consisting of a single or series of distributed operations by operationally durable formations. However, neither the quantity nor the quality of the enemy force is the issue. Without a distributed enemy the operational commander faces a new set of operational challenges.⁵⁵

The final attribute of operational art is the idea of *distributed deployment*. With the rise of modern industrial warfare, military deployment patterns changed dramatically. Distributed deployment refers to the ability of a nation involved in a war to seize and / or defend resource and production bases. This attribute tends to create a close relationship between force deployment, campaign design, and geography.⁵⁶

Operational art is the creative use of *distributed operations* for the purposes of achieving the strategic aim. Distributed operations are given form and purpose through the design and execution of *distributed campaigns* using *operationally durable formations*. The starting point for the design of the distributed campaign is the *operational vision* of the commander. The operational commander controls the conduct of the campaign through means of *instantaneous command and control*. *Continuous logistics* and *distributed deployment* are critical factors that enable the operational commander to achieve the strategic aim.

For the purpose of this monograph, we will accept James Schneider's argument that these eight key attributes must exist for operational art to occur. Therefore, these eight attributes will form one element for analyzing and answering the controlling research question.

In an effort to summarize this section, we will return to the two supporting research questions posed at the beginning. First, *What is operational art?* For the purpose of this monograph operational art is:

the application of military forces to achieve a strategic aim through the design, organization, integration, and execution of battles and engagements into a sequence of actions designed to achieve the established strategic aim.

Operational art is not the “panacea” of operational planning. It is the conceptual link between the contemporary view of the three levels of war. While operational art remains a means to an end, it is not an end in itself. The translation of strategic objectives into a campaign with its tactical objectives is the essence of operational art.

Second, *What is the purpose of operational art?* The purpose of operational art is to assist the planner with the task of taking strategic aims and translating them into a military campaign. The campaign is a series of linked battles and engagements designed to meet the desired end state. Operational art is more than the “simply applying tactical principles in a bigger way or strategic principles in a smaller way.” “Operational art is more than being bigger or smaller, it is different.”⁵⁷ Although the results of operations, like strategy, can be interpreted in the classic terms of principles of war, the process of gaining those results consists of different, broader, more numerous, and more complex actions that are not only different in type, but are greatly expanded in time and space.⁵⁸

By installing the operational level of war between strategy and tactics, the Army acknowledged that the planning and conduct of campaigns and the connecting of political goals to military means constitutes an activity different enough from tactics to merit separate study.”⁵⁹

The purpose of this section was to briefly trace the historical development of operational art and to establish a theoretical foundation for its understanding. The

concept of operational art remains the cornerstone of operational planning. The concepts and elements of operational design do not in and of themselves provide an easy answer to the problem of what is operational art. However, they do provide a solid theoretical and practical foundation useful for understanding the concept and practice of operational art. This study will use the basic concepts of operational art and the eight attributes of the structure of operational art proposed by Schneider to answer the controlling research question in the fourth and fifth sections.

SECTION III. THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR, 1945-1949

“Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy.”

“The supreme excellence in war is to attack the enemy’s plans.”

“Next best is to disrupt his alliances.”

“The next best is to attack his army.”

The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative.”

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁶⁰

This section provides a brief synopsis of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949. The section begins with a review of the major events leading up to the final phase of hostilities between the Communists and Nationalists. Next, this section provides an overview of the three distinct periods within this phase of the conflict and outlines the strategy of the combatants. This includes an analysis of the corresponding results of the war. The purpose is to set the foundation for the operational analysis of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949.

Throughout the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945, the Nationalists and Communists maintained a fragile agreement to cooperate against the invading Imperial Japanese forces. The intent of this agreement was for both sides to coordinate military operations

to defeat the invaders. While the Nationalists and Communists tacitly cooperated, their leaders knew that the Japanese invasion was simply another event in the ongoing civil war.

The overarching strategy of both the KMT and CCP forces was to avoid decisive battles with Imperial Japanese forces. While the Red Army successfully fought Japanese forces in several early battles, they soon began to suffer significant defeats. Therefore, they reverted to a strategy of force preservation. The Communists focused their efforts on establishing their base areas in Northern China, increasing the areas under their influence and control, and protecting their army for the continuation of the struggle with the Nationalists.⁶¹

The fundamental Nationalist strategy was also to avoid decisive battles with Imperial Japanese forces. After several early defeats, including their disastrous defeat in Shanghai in 1939, the Nationalist armies understood they were militarily inferior to the Japanese Army in large-scale, pitched battles. While they conducted several successful small scale operations during the conflict, the primary objective of the Nationalists was one of controlling the spread of Communist influence across the countryside and to preserve the Nationalist Army for the coming struggle with the Communists.⁶²

The *Anhui Incident* is typical of the “level of cooperation” between the Nationalists and Communists during this period. In December 1940, Chiang ordered the New Fourth Army to cross the Yangtze River and to conduct operations against the Japanese forces to the north. The commander of the New Fourth Army, General Yeh-T’ing initially refused to obey the order. He argued that when he crossed the Yangtze

River, he would expose his flank to a Japanese counterattack. However, his reluctance to cross was based on the mission of spreading communism south of the river ordered by Mao. In an effort to motivate Yeh-T'ing to obey the order, Chaing moved Nationalist troops in the vicinity of the New Fourth Army. After exchanging several messages with Chaing, Yeh-T'ing began to slowly cross. By January 1941, with a majority of the New Fourth Army across Yangtze River, the nearby Nationalist troops attacked the remaining elements of the New Fourth Army south of the river and inflicted severe casualties. This included the capture of General Yeh-T'ing.⁶³

As U.S. forces under General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz closed in on Japan the KMT and CCP began to position their military forces in an effort to gain a positional advantage from which they could negotiate, or if necessary to fight.⁶⁴ Although the Red Army was inferior to the Nationalist Army in terms of manpower, equipment, and transport, they were concentrated in the strategically important areas of East and North China. This geographic advantage was to become a decisive element in the coming struggle. While the Nationalist Army possessed superiority in terms of numbers of soldiers, equipment, transport, and the Americans as allies, their forces were primarily concentrated in Central and South China. This inferior geographic position was to become a central element in their eventual defeat.

With the surrender of Japan in August of 1945 the Communists were maintaining large base areas in Northwest China and communist guerrillas operated across large areas of Eastern China. More than 100,000,000 people lived in the Communist controlled areas and there were more than 1,000,000 soldiers under the banners of the Red Army.

While the Communist soldier was poorly trained and equipped in comparison to his KMT counterpart, he was a politically motivated soldier who was fighting for a cause.⁶⁵

In August 1945 the Nationalists were in control of a majority of western, central, and southwestern China. The population of these areas was about 300,000,000 and there were approximately 2,800,000 soldiers in the Nationalist Army. The quality of the Nationalist force varied widely. The core of this army remained the five American trained and equipped divisions that had fought in Burma. However, the bulk of the Nationalist army remained the ragged, unreliable, and poorly equipped troops raised from the provinces.⁶⁶

In broad terms, the Communists adopted a horizontal strategy of conquest during the this phase of the war. The precedent for this Communist strategy is found in ancient Chinese history. The ancient kingdoms based in what is now the Shensi Province in Western China have historically adopted a horizontal strategy of conquest. They sought to link Shensi to the sea through the Yellow River plain.⁶⁷ This concept provided the Communists with the opportunity to consolidate many of their base areas and isolate Manchuria from the Nationalist Army. If the Red Army allowed Nationalist forces unhindered movement through North China into Manchuria, the Communists could have been contained in Western China and would therefore be vulnerable to encirclement and piecemeal destruction.

Chaing Kai-shek also used ancient Chinese history in his search for a strategy. The Nationalist Army also adopted a historical vertical strategy for isolating and destroying the Communists. Historically, the states of Southern China relied on a

strategy designed to establish north-south control and thereby contain the enemy in the west. With the enemy isolated from the coast and in the interior of China, they became vulnerable to encirclement and destruction. This strategic concept provided the Nationalists with the possibility of isolating the Communist base areas from the bulk of the Red Army and preventing the loss of Manchuria.⁶⁸

Beginning in March 1945, the Red Army began a series of limited offensives to establish a Communist border area around Northern China and Manchuria. They established three primary objectives for these offensives. First, to gain control of the lines of communication in Northern China. Second, to increase the size of the Communist border areas, and finally, to establish a Communist presence in Manchuria itself. In North China, four separate armies advanced to secure the main railways leading into Manchuria. This advance effectively cut the lines of communication leading into Manchuria. The Communists succeeded in achieving all three of their objectives.⁶⁹

The Nationalists also began to position troops in anticipation of the end of the war. However, the end of the war “caught Chaing and almost all of his forces in southwestern China, 600 to 1,500 miles away from the key territory in the north and northeast.”⁷⁰ Chaing Kai-shek quickly realized that he was in an inferior strategic position and with the help of American air transport, the KMT began to reposition forces into North China and Manchuria.

The cease fire between Japan and the Allies ending the Second World War went into effect on August 15, 1945. This event signaled a new phase of the struggle between the KMT and CCP for control of China. Both Chaing Kai-shek and Mao Tse-Tung

realized that the capitulation of Japan was another of the long string of events that would have a significant impact on the civil war that began its armed conflict stage in 1927.⁷¹

The Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949, occurred in three consecutive phases. The first phase; the defensive stage of the People's War of Liberation, occurred between July 1946 and June 1947. The second phase; the consolidation stage, began in the summer of 1947 and continued into the fall of 1948. The third and final phase; the strategic offensive phase, commenced on September 24, 1948 and ended with the fall of the Szechwan Province on December 27, 1949.⁷² This was two months after the official founding of the People's Republic of China on October 11, 1949 in Peking.

The defensive stage of The People's War of Liberation began in July 1946 and continued until June 1947. During this period the Communist strategy was one of strategic withdrawal and mobile warfare. The Red Army avoided defending fixed positions, systematically abandoned cities, and concentrated on the destruction of enemy forces rather than the occupation of geographic objectives.⁷³ The Nationalist strategy was one of strategic offensive aimed at rapidly gaining territory to prevent the spread of Communism by isolating the Communist base areas and the Red Army. Nationalist forces focused on clearing lines of communication in North China and capturing the major cities in Manchuria. Among these initial successes was the capture of the Communist capital of Yenan.⁷⁴

Paradoxically for the KMT, who appeared to be successful, the results of this initial stage were to prove decisive for the CCP. The Communists were able to keep the Red Army intact and to strengthen the relative power of their guerrilla units operating

behind Nationalist lines. Mao believed that the results achieved during the first year of the People's War of Liberation had "left the Communists with the initiative and laid the foundation for the complete annihilation of the enemy and for final victory."⁷⁵ The primary objective of the Nationalist forces; occupy geographic objectives, resulted in the Nationalist Army becoming dangerously over-extended. By focusing on the occupation of important geographic objectives, the Nationalist Army over-extended its lines of communication and greatly reduced its ability to maintain and generate combat power.

An unintended result of these initial Nationalist offensives directly benefited the Communists. As Nationalist military forces "liberated" areas previously under Communist or Japanese control, they quickly began to act as conquerors rather than liberators. The people inside the liberated areas quickly developed "a feeling of hatred and distrust because the officers and enlisted men of the Nationalist Army were arrogant and rude."⁷⁶ The Nationalist forces "stole and looted freely"⁷⁷ The unintended result was the swinging of the "moral pendulum" towards the Communists. During this phase losses on both sides were high. The Communists had "given up large tracts of land and suffered more than 300,000 casualties."⁷⁸ Nationalist losses were estimated by Mao to be "1,120,000 total men; including 780,000 regular troops and 340,000 puppet troops and Peace Conservation Corps volunteers."⁷⁹

The second phase began during the summer of 1947 and continued until the fall of 1948. The Communist strategy during this phase was a textbook example of Mao's theory of protracted war. During this time the Red Army undertook a series of limited objective offensives against the Nationalist Army lines of communication. These

operations were conducted primarily in the central Chinese provinces of Hupeh, Honan, and Anhui. The objective was to disrupt the Nationalist Army lines of communication by cutting the major north-south railways throughout Northern China. The Nationalists continued their strategy of occupying strategically important cities and critical points along their lines of communication throughout Northern and Central China. The Nationalist Army began a campaign to consolidate and fortify its positions in Northern China and to rebuild its strength.⁸⁰

By the end of 1947 the Red Army had successfully cut Nationalist Army lines of communication throughout Northern China. These successes included; joining two communist base areas in Hopei across the Peking-Hankow railway and permanently cutting the lines of communication north and south of the Manchurian city of Shenyang.⁸¹ While the Nationalist Army retained possession of the strategically important cities and positions along their lines of communication, their relative power was dwindling. Even though they were unable to sustain their lines of communication they continued to follow a strategy of occupying cities and fortified positions. This gave the Communists virtual control of the countryside throughout North China and Manchuria. By the end of this phase of the war, Communist power was on the rise and the Red Army held the initiative. The Nationalists had surrendered the initiative and began to see their relative power declining.

Realizing they were clearly in the dominant strategic position the Red Army entered the third phase of Mao's theory of protracted war; the strategic offensive. This third and final phase began on September 24, 1948 when the Red Army captured the city

of Chinan in Shantung. The capture of this city was quickly followed by the capture of the Nationalist supply base in Chinchow. These two defeats led to the collapse of Nationalist opposition in the Northeast. The loss of Manchuria all but sealed the Communist victory. The cities of Tientsin and Peking fell during the middle of January 1949. This included the loss of more than 300,000 Nationalist troops and the capture of large stocks of arms and supplies. Concurrently, the area south to the Yangtze River was cleared of Nationalist forces during the Huai-Hai campaign. This campaign resulted in the destruction and capture of more than 600,000 Nationalist troops and enabled the Communists to gain control of Central and Eastern China.⁸² “The events of the last year, and more specifically those of the last four and one-half months, have resulted in such overwhelming losses to the Nationalist government that, acting alone its military position has declined beyond possible recoupment.”⁸³ The KMT’s political and military cohesion was shattered and would not recover until its successful retreat to Taiwan.

Following the KMT’s crushing defeats in the January of 1949, active campaigning ceased for a period of peace negotiations. This effort at ending the conflict was short lived. On April 20, 1949 when the Nationalists rejected the CCP’s ultimatum demanding the abolition of the Nanking government and the surrender of all its troops. This rejection of CCP demands was quickly followed by the continuation of Communist offensives. The Yangtze River valley was quickly overwhelmed by the Second and Third Field Armies. The First Field Army easily took Lanchow, the capital of the Kansu province. This resulted in the rapid capitulation of the remainder of Northwest China. August 1949 saw the resumption of offensive action in the south, resulting in the capture

of the entire Chinese seaboard. By the end of 1949 the remaining western provinces were also under Communist control. The “liberation” of the Chinese mainland was completed by the end of the year.⁸⁴

SECTION IV. OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR

“If a general who heeds my strategy is employed, he is certain to win. Retain him !
When one who refuses to listen to my strategy is employed, he is certain to be defeated.
Dismiss him !”

Sun Tzu, The Art of War⁸⁵

This section presents an operational analysis of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949. The foundation for this analysis was established in Section II. This analysis occurs in two parts. Part one, is an examination of the Chinese Civil War in terms of the operational challenge facing Mao and the Red Army and includes a brief examination of the Communist command and control structure. Part two, is an analysis of the Communist campaign plan for each phase of the war using the three elements and four concepts of operational design discussed in section two. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether or not the Red Army was practicing operational art during this period of China’s long civil war.

Mao faced a difficult operational challenge in terms of balancing the strategic ends, ways, and means to achieve a final victory over the Nationalists. In a broad sense, his challenge was to balance the desired end; Communist rule in China, with the controlling way; his theory of protracted war, and with the means available; the Red Army, communist guerrillas, and the mass of Chinese peasantry, to provide the Communists with a victory. Mao’s end state; Communist control over China, was well

developed and had been widely disseminated. He began the development of his end state with a comprehensive analysis of the situation. In his work, *What are the Characteristics of China's Revolutionary War*, published in Yanan in 1936, Mao conducted an astute analysis of the strategic situation facing the Communists. This analysis became the foundation he used to build the strategic concepts that were to guide the Communists to victory during this final phase of the Chinese Civil War.

During May and June of 1938, Mao delivered a series of speeches at the Yanan Association for the Study of Resistance Against the Japanese. During the course of these speeches Mao laid out his plan for the War of Resistance Against Japan. This plan also became the fundamental strategy used to defeat the Nationalists. Since China's Revolutionary War is a protracted one and final victory will belong to China, it can reasonably be assumed that this protracted war will pass through three stages."⁸⁶ The first stage is the enemy's strategic offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage will be the period of the enemy's strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter-offensive. The third stage will be the period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy's strategic retreat.⁸⁷ While Mao realized it was difficult; if not impossible, to accurately predict the course of the war, he fully realized that it was necessary to develop a strategic direction in order to enable planning to occur. "Although our sketch may not be in full accord with the subsequent facts and will be amended by them, it is still necessary to make it in order to give firm and purposeful strategic direction to the protracted war."⁸⁸

Mao realized that changes would occur in the relative strengths of both the Japanese and Chinese. He was also able to “quantify” the results of each of the three stages and arguably these “calculations” assisted him in determining when it was feasible to move from one stage to the next. During the first stage; the enemy’s strategic offensive and our strategic defensive, “the enemy is superior and we are inferior.”⁸⁹ During the second stage the enemy’s strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter-offensive, “Japan will continue on the downgrade and China on the upgrade.”⁹⁰ Mao realized that due to the “unevenness in China’s political and economic development”⁹¹ the changes in the strategic picture during stage three would “not present a uniform and even picture throughout the country, but would be regional in character, rising here and subsiding there.”⁹² However, generally the strategic balance would continue to favor China as she advanced and Japan retreated along the continuum of relative strategic strength.

*China moving from inferiority to parity and then to superiority, Japan moving from superiority to parity and then to inferiority; China moving from the defensive to stalemate and then to the counter-offensive, Japan moving from the offensive to the safeguarding of her gains and then to retreat - such will be the course of the Sino-Japanese war and its inevitable trend.*⁹³

While Mao developed this basic strategic analysis during the Sino-Japanese War, 1936-1945, he also realized its underlying principles would apply to the final stage of the Chinese Civil War. The three primary means available to the Communists were; the Communist guerrillas, the Red Army, and the peasants. The guerrilla bands operating in the rear of the Nationalist Army served three primary functions. First, they continued to spread the “good news” of Communism throughout China. These guerrilla units actively

recruited new members and worked to expand the areas under Communist control. Second, they were responsible for degrading the relative power of the Nationalist Army. They accomplished this by disrupting lines of communication which drew combat power away from the Nationalist Army as it chased and hunted the elusive guerrillas. Third, the guerrilla bands provided the Red Army with a pool of trained recruits for eventual integration into regular army formations. The Red Army was the second “means” available. It was simply the physical instrument that was required to bring about the Communists victory over the Nationalist government. Time was the third “means” used by Mao to defeat the Nationalists. The Kuomintang was a corrupt government held together by a system of expedients. Chaing and Mao realized that a protracted struggle worked against the likelihood of a Nationalist victory.

Mao developed and disseminated eight operational principles that were to dominate the planning, preparation, and execution of the Chinese Civil War:

1. *Attack dispersed, isolated enemy forces first, attack concentrated, strong enemy forces later.*
2. *Take medium and small cities and extensive rural areas first; take big cities later.*
3. *Make wiping out the enemy's effective strength our main objective; do not make holding or seizing a place our main objective.*
4. *In every battle concentrate an absolutely superior force, encircle the enemy forces completely, do not let any escape from the net.*
5. *Fight no battle unprepared, fight no battle you are not sure of winning.*
6. *Strive to draw the enemy into mobile warfare.*
7. *Resolutely attack and seize all fortified points and cities which are weakly defended. Attack and seize at opportune moments all fortified points and*

cities defended with moderate strength. For the time being, leave alone all fortified points and cities which are strongly defended.

8. *Replenish our strength with all the arms and most of the soldiers captured from the enemy.*⁹⁴

While Mao developed this theory of protracted war during the first year of the Sino-Japanese War, he was not able to really implement his theory until the 1945-1949 Chinese Civil War. Each of the three phases of the Chinese Civil War corresponds to Mao's three stages of protracted war. Mao's overall strategic concept of "employing our main forces to operate over an extended and fluid front through the use of large-scale mobile warfare, and not positional warfare"⁹⁵ is a clear example of Mao's understanding of the nature of the Chinese Civil War.

The national level command and control structure used by the Communists during the Chinese Civil War was functional and highly efficient. Mao sat at the head of the Military Affairs Committee. This committee was responsible for developing the strategic plan for the conduct of the campaign and balancing the strategic ends, ways, and means to achieve the desired end state.⁹⁶ This guidance was disseminated to the field army commanders through the General Chu Teh. Chu Teh headed the Revolutionary Military Council and served as the Commander-in-Chief of the General Headquarters of the Red Army. In these positions he was responsible for translating the strategic guidance into a military campaign plan. Chu Teh's primary responsibility was to "coordinate the activities" of the Communist field armies to achieve the goals of his campaign plan.⁹⁷ These campaign plans were then disseminated to his subordinates, the commanders of the Red Army Field Army's. "Over Mao's name, Chu Teh issued broad directives to field

commanders; “thereafter, they enjoyed a free hand to carry out operations as the developing situation dictated.”⁹⁸

Mao’s objectives for the first phase of the war were to avoid set piece battles with the numerically stronger and better equipped Nationalist forces, to allow them to over-extend their lines of communication, and begin the process of degrading their combat power through increased guerrilla activity in the ever expanding Nationalist rear areas. Mao understood that control of the cities would not result in victory. The decisive element was control of the countryside. Control of the countryside enabled the army to maneuver and guerrillas to operate freely. Therefore, the operational design for this first phase of the war was to conduct a strategic withdrawal into the interior of the Chinese countryside. Simultaneously, the Red Army conducted a series of independent tactical level mobile actions against the Nationalist lines of communication. Mao’s strategy also enabled the Communists to make an excellent application of their available resources. Red Army units attacked weakly defended locations along the Nationalist lines of communication, while the guerrilla units harassed supply columns and interdicted Nationalist lines of communication between their fortified positions.

Mao’s strategy of strategic withdrawal protected his center of gravity, the Red Army, from destruction by avoiding pitched battles with Nationalist forces. Mao also correctly identified the Nationalist center of gravity as their fielded military forces. This use of the strategic withdrawal is an example of the use of the indirect approach. By withdrawing the Red Army into the Chinese countryside, Mao was simultaneously

protecting his center of gravity and commencing the process of weakening the enemy center of gravity.

Mao correctly identified the two decisive points that were to affect both the KMT and CCP; the countryside and lines of operation. The compounding effect of the Communist strategy of strategic withdrawal and the Nationalist strategy of occupying cities effectively left the Red Army in control of the countryside. Communist control of this first decisive point enabled it to survive during the first phase of the conflict. It would also become critical to the success of the Communists during phases two and three. The ability of the Red Army to operate on interior lines is directly responsible for its survival during phase one of the war. The successful use of interior lines protected the Red Army from reaching its strategic or operational culminating point. The Nationalist strategy forced her fielded forces to operate on longer and more vulnerable external lines of operation and began the process that lead to strategic and operational culmination.

The use of the indirect approach weakened the relative power of the Nationalist forces by greatly extending their external lines of communication. This degradation of combat power was exacerbated by the Nationalist strategy of garrisoning cities and fortified positions along their lines of communication. Extended external lines of communication and dispersed combat power is the classic failure that leads to strategic and operational culmination.

Evaluating the Communist use of lines of operation is slightly confusing. The Red Army continued to operate on interior lines, even though they lost control of some of their base areas as they conducted the strategic withdrawal. The guerrilla units operating

behind the Nationalist lines operated on external lines of communication; strategically and operationally, while continuously operating on interior lines of operation tactically.

By the summer 1947, Mao realized that victory for the Communists was at hand. His strategy had successfully brought the Red Army through the first year of the war intact and holding the initiative. Mao had successfully balanced the strategic ends, ways, and means available, in the proper proportions, to set the conditions for future successes.

By the summer of 1947, the Nationalist forces had "seized" the majority of their geographic objectives and had "fortified" their long lines of communication. Mao discerned that the Nationalist forces were not seeking to engage and thereby destroy the Red Army in pitched battles. They appeared to be sitting in their fortified cities and positions waiting for the Communist counter-attacks. Mao also understood that the Red Army was prepared to enter a new phase of operations against the Nationalist forces. The Communists turned to preparation for the counter-offensive. The primary Communist objective was to isolate the Nationalist Army strongholds and disrupt their lines of communication. To accomplish this objective, the Red Army undertook a series of limited objective offensives designed to isolate the strongholds and disrupt and eventually sever the Nationalist lines of communication supporting the strongholds. The result would be a systematic weakening of the individual strongholds making them vulnerable to follow on attacks. These limited objective offensives also enabled the Red Army to preserve its overall strength and consolidate its strategic position.

By the beginning of the second phase the Nationalist strategy of dispersing their fielded forces into isolated cities and fortified positions and their extended external lines

of communication had left their center of gravity vulnerable. The Communists remained in control of the countryside, the first decisive point, and were able to interdict the second decisive point, the Nationalist lines of communication. The Red Army continued to enjoy the advantage of operating on interior lines of operation. They used this advantage to further weaken and begin the process of isolating Nationalist strongholds throughout East and North China. The fielded forces of the Nationalist were approaching strategic and operational culmination, while the Red Army continued to grow stronger and successfully shield its center of gravity from attack.

The capture of the Nationalist stronghold in the city Chinan in Shantung marked the beginning of the third and final phase of the war. The Communists turned to the strategic offensive and forced the Nationalists into a strategic retreat that resulted in the piecemeal defeat of the Nationalist Army. The Red Army remained in control of the countryside and successfully cut the Nationalist lines of communication to their strongholds. This resulted in the virtual isolation of the Nationalist strongholds throughout East and North China. With the Nationalist Army isolated in their urban strongholds, the Communist center of gravity was effectively protected. The Red Army continued to operate on interior lines of communication and thereby prevent avoid the crisis of culmination.

The Nationalist forces who had operated on extended, external lines of operation during phases one and two now operated on no discernible line of operation. They had lost control of the two decisive points in the theater, mostly through inaction and faulty strategy. Their center of gravity was now dispersed, isolated, and vulnerable to

destruction in detail. They were facing the crisis of culmination and were unable to restore their strategic and operational equilibrium.

In summary, Mao developed a strategic plan that provided the Communists with an appropriate balance of the ends, ways, and means available. The Red Army was able to translate Mao's strategic guidance into an overarching operational plan. The Red Army successfully balanced and applied the three central elements of operational design and the four central concepts of operational design into a series of consecutive campaign plans. Three conclusions seem obvious. First, Mao's ability to establish the "cornerstone of operational art" enabled the Red Army to practice operational art. Second, ability of the Red Army to practice a qualitatively superior form of operational art was a significant contributing factor in the Communist victory. Third, the inability of Chiang and the Nationalist Army to practice a coherent pattern of operational art all combined to ensure the final Communist victory.

The theoretical reasons for the CCP victory are found in Section II. Mao and the Red Army successfully conducted a series of simultaneous and sequential operations designed to over-extend and thereby bring about the defeat of their numerically stronger opponent. Mao established a set of military objectives clearly attainable by the Red Army and he successfully applied the available resources to the war. The Red Army effectively protected its center of gravity while gradually weakening the KMT center of gravity through a series of operations conducted against its decisive points. The CCP conducted operations on interior, concentric, and divergent lines of operation. Mao and

the Red Army avoided strategic and operational culmination while simultaneously bringing the KMT to culmination.

SECTION V. THE EXPRESSION OF OPERATIONAL ART

“There are only five primary colors, however, their combinations are limitless”
Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁹⁹

Operational art is the creative use of *distributed operations* for the purposes of achieving the strategic aim. Distributed operations are given form and purpose through the design and execution of *distributed campaigns* using *operationally durable formations*. The starting point for the design of the distributed camping is the *operational vision* of the commander. The operational commander controls the conduct of the campaign through means of *instantaneous command and control*. *Continuous logistics* and *distributed deployment* are critical factors that enable the operational commander to achieve the strategic aim. This section presents a brief analysis of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1949, using the eight attributes of operational art proposed by James Schneider and outlined in section two. This section argues that Mao and the Red Army successfully applied or met all eight of Schneider’s eight attributes of operational art.

Throughout the Chinese Civil War, the Red Army successfully conducted what Schneider describes as “an ensemble of deep maneuvers and distributed battles extended in time and space, yet unified by a common aim.”¹⁰⁰ These “ensembles of deep maneuvers and distributed battles” were undertaken by both conventional and unconventional CCP forces. The conventional operations were conducted by the Red

Army, while the unconventional operations were primarily performed by Communist guerrilla bands. The Red Army conducted operations against the Nationalist Army in the field and against their fortified cities and positions. The guerrilla bands operated primarily in the Nationalist rear areas and along the vulnerable KMT lines of communication. These operations were planned, prepared, and executed in both time and space. This combination of conventional and unconventional forces conducting operations in time and space presented the Nationalists with an operational problem they were ultimately unable to solve. The Communist combination or “ensemble” of symmetrical and asymmetrical operations enabled the Communists to retain their freedom of action while simultaneously denying freedom of action to the Nationalists. While the Communist use of the *distributed operation* was different than the western view provided by Schneider, the Red Army successfully conducted operations that met the two components of his definition.

The controlling nature of the Communist strategy enabled them to achieve “the integration of several simultaneous and successive distributed operations in a campaign.”¹⁰¹ Red Army operations during all three phases of the war demonstrate Mao’s understanding of this attribute. Mao’s early identification of the decisive nature of the countryside is an expression of his understanding that the Chinese Civil War was a battle of exhaustion. The first phase of protracted war was designed to bring the enemy to the point of operational culmination. The second and third phases were designed to cause the defeat and eventual destruction of the enemy force through a graduated shift in operational tempo and strategy. Once the Nationalist Army was exhausted and facing

operational culmination, the Red Army began to shift its operational strategy and began the process of destruction. Mao's strategic design and the Red Army's operational plan brought the Nationalist Army to the brink of culmination before beginning the process of physical destruction. The Communists successfully designed and executed a *distributed campaign*.

The third attribute of operational art the Communists were able to achieve is the idea of the *operationally durable formations*. Due to the organization of the Communist field armies and the controlling strategic plan, the Red Army proved capable of conducting successive and sequential distributed operations. They derived this capability primarily from the peasants in the countryside and the Communist base areas. The entire Communist command and control structure shared a common view of the desired end state of the civil war. Mao successfully "developed and disseminated a unified and holistic approach in the design, execution, and sustainment"¹⁰² of the Chinese Civil War. The CCP combination of a shared *operational vision* and their ability to overcome their deficiencies in command and control enabled the Communists to exploit the interdependent relationship of *operational vision* and *instantaneous command and control*.

Importantly, during the Chinese Civil War the Red Army faced a *distributed enemy*. The Nationalist Army was organized, trained, and fought in a similar manner at the conventional level. Therefore, the Nationalists were "vulnerable to the operational art attributes of; a *distributed campaign* consisting of a single or series of *distributed operations* by *operationally durable formations*."¹⁰³ Compounding the vulnerability of

the Nationalist forces were the guerrilla bands operating throughout the Nationalist rear areas. The KMT failed to develop an effective counter to the CCP guerrillas, nor did they develop and employ their own unconventional forces. The fact that the Communists faced an opponent who was quantitatively superior, yet failed to practice operational art is not the issue.

The final attribute of operational art the Communists fully achieved is the idea of *distributed deployment*. The Communists successfully defended their resource base, the Communist base areas. They achieved this attribute through a two-pronged strategy. First, their base areas were not all fixed and therefore vulnerable locations. Base areas included regions under communist control from which the Red Army was able to draw supplies and recruits. Second, when fixed base areas, such as the area around Yenan, were threatened, they simply abandoned the fixed position and withdrew, with their supplies, into the vast Chinese countryside. The Communists also continually increased their resource and production base by seizing Nationalist assets and organizing new base areas as the Red Army advanced. Mao and the Communists were able to maximize the benefits of creating the “close relationship between force deployment, campaign design, and geography”¹⁰⁴ through the application of the idea of distributed deployment.

Schneider argues that for any military campaign to be successful, the operational planner must develop a *system of continuous logistics*. This is the first of Schneider’s attributes the Communists achieved in an unconventional manner. Throughout the Chinese Civil War the primary means of logistical support to the Red Army were the

Chinese peasants and the CCP base areas. Secondary means included either “living off the land” or capturing Nationalist Army supplies and equipment.

“We captured Panlong in the evening of May 4 after two days’ fighting. About 6,000 enemy troops of the 167th Brigade were put out of action, and its commander Li Kungang was taken prisoner. We captured 40,000 suits of summer uniforms, over 10,000 bags of flour, more than a million rounds of ammunition and large quantities of medical supplies. This put an end to our serious shortage of grain, clothing, and medicine”¹⁰⁵

The CCP successfully developed and sustained a system designed to provide the Red Army with the “physical means capable of supporting successive movement, battle, and regeneration of its military forces.”¹⁰⁶ The Communists were able to sustain the Red Army through all three phases of the civil war and succeeded in planning and executing a coherent campaign plan that led to the defeat of the Nationalists.

The second attribute the Communists achieve in an unconventional manner is the idea of *instantaneous command and control*. Simply stated, the Communists lacked access to the technology that makes the theory of *instantaneous command and control* a reality.

“Lack of modern communication devices, like wireless radio sets, continually undermined attempts at coordination. Since communications among Red Army units depended upon foot messengers, messages were conveyed slowly and ineffectually.”¹⁰⁷

However, to offset this operational shortcoming, the CCP developed and used a distributed command and control system. As discussed in Section IV, the broad strategic plan was developed and disseminated to the commander of the Red Army. Chu Teh then developed a military campaign plan and coordinated the activities of the various field armies to achieve the campaign plan. The commanders of the field armies were

responsible for achieving their assigned objectives. The Communist command and control structure is an excellent example of the theory of “centralized planning and decentralized execution.” Even without full benefit of this key attribute, the CCP and the Red Army were able to communicate and pass and receive information from operationally dispersed formations. Chu Teh was able “to adjust his distributed forces to achieve his operational goals strategic aims”¹⁰⁸ and therefore wage modern warfare.

In summary, this section has shown that the Communists successfully achieved six of Schneider’s eight attributes of operational art. They were able to conduct *a distributed campaign* consisting of a series of *distributed operations* against a *distributed enemy* using *operationally durable formations*. The key members of the Communist command and control structure exhibited the attribute of *operational vision* throughout the civil war. Finally, the Communists understood the critical importance of protecting and expanding their base areas; the attribute of *distributed deployment*. This section has also demonstrated that the Communists successfully developed unconventional solutions in achieving two of Schneider’s attributes; *continuous logistics* and *instantaneous command and control*. The key to understanding the successful employment of operational art by the Communists is not to count the number of attributes they successfully employed. Rather, it is the understanding that they discovered or created alternatives to the attributes they could not fully employ. This operational flexibility enabled the Communists to practice a qualitatively superior form of operational art when compared to the Nationalists. This qualitative difference is one of the keys to understanding the Communist success.

Section VI. Conclusions

The laws of war are a problem which anyone directing a war must study and solve
The laws of revolutionary war are a problem which anyone directing a revolutionary war
must study and solve

The laws of China's revolutionary war are a problem which anyone directing China's
revolutionary war must study and solve

Selected Works¹⁰⁹

The Chinese Civil War "ended in the conquest of a country the size of continent
by an army of peasants and intellectuals, and at a pace that dumbfounded military experts.
Less than a year passed between the capture of Mukden on October 30, 1948 and the
capture of Canton on October 15, 1949 - from the frozen plains of Manchuria to the
tropical lands of Kwangtung in eleven and a half months!"¹¹⁰

The Communist victory is an excellent example of a three phased campaign plan
firmly rooted in theoretical and historical military constructs. The theoretical constructs
were drawn from Mao's study of Chinese history and culture. Mao's unique
understanding of the nature of the Chinese people and the nature of the civil war were key
elements in his strategy. He clearly understood that the true strength of the nation was
found in the countryside and in the peasants. This understanding was central to the
Communist victory. This understanding was also manifested in Mao's theory of
protracted war. The historical constructs were also drawn from the history of the China's
imperial dynasties. Mao correctly identified the historical positions the Communists and
Nationalists were facing. This understanding of the overarching strategies available to
the belligerents enabled Mao to balance the strategic strengths and weaknesses of the
opposing strategies.

The operational analysis of the final phase of the Chinese Civil War clearly demonstrates that operational art was practiced by the Red Army. The commanders of the Communist field armies successfully applied the four central concepts and three central elements of operational design throughout the war. In addition, the examination of the conflict using James Schneider's eight attributes of operational art demonstrates that the Red Army successfully applied all eight the identified attributes. The real strength of the CCP use of these attributes was their ability to combine them with their history, culture, and the military situation they were facing. The CCP and the Red Army continually developed and implemented alternatives that contributed directly to their final victory.

In terms of operational art, Mao's theory of revolutionary war is a recognition of the link between strategy and tactics. His argument for the establishment of a coherent strategic pattern of operation is an example of his understanding of contemporary military theory and strategy. His three forms of warfare are a description of the tactics required to accomplish the goals of each stage. Mao's theory of protracted war is a clear expression of strategic guidance . He is arguing for the linking and balancing of the ends, ways, and means necessary to first defeat the Imperial Japanese Army and then Chaing Kai-shek's Nationalist Army. Mao's *A Jig-Saw Pattern of War* is an expression of a contemporary military strategy and an acknowledgment of the operational level of war and the essence of operational art. This description also contains the four central elements of operational design discussed in section two. Mao's theory of protracted war is firmly grounded in

contemporary military strategy and contains many of the elements of contemporary operational art.

As the head of the Military Affairs Committee of the CCP, Mao was able to develop a coherent strategic plan for the final phases of the Chinese Civil War. His plan successfully balanced the strategic ends, ways, and means available to achieve his desired end state. While this balancing of the ends, ways, and means is the “cornerstone of operational art,” it is not in and of itself operational art, it is strategy. Mao Tse-Tung was a military and political theorist and a military strategist. While he personally was one-step removed from the operational level of war, his generals, guided by his theory and his strategy, used operational art to defeat a larger, better equipped, and trained military in a sequential series of battles and engagements.

China



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Province-Level Names

| Conventional | Characters | Pinyin | Pronunciation | Conventional | Characters | Pinyin | Pronunciation |
|----------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------|----------|----------------|
| Anhui | 安徽 | Anhui | ahn - way | Kweichow | 贵州 | Guizhou | g_way - joe |
| Chekiang | 浙江 | Zhejiang | juh - jee_ong | Liaoning | 辽宁 | Liaoning | lee_ow - ning |
| Fukien | 福建 | Fujian | foo - jee_en | Ningsia | 宁夏 | Ningxia | ning - she_ah |
| Heilongkiang | 黑龙江 | Heilongjiang | hay - loong - jee_ong | Peking | 北京 | Beijing | bay - jing |
| Honan | 河南 | Henan | huh - non | Shanghai | 上海 | Shanghai | shong - hi |
| Hopeh | 河北 | Hebei | huh - bay | Shansi | 山西 | Shansi | shahn - she |
| Hunan | 湖南 | Hunan | hoo - nan | Shantung | 山东 | Shandong | shahn - doong |
| Hupei | 湖北 | Hubei | hoo - bay | Shensi | 陕西 | Shaanxi | shun - she |
| Inner Mongolia | 内蒙古 | Nei Mongol | nay - mung - goo | Sinkiang | 新疆 | Xinjiang | shin - jee_ong |
| Kansu | 甘肃 | Gansu | gahn - soo | Szechwan | 四川 | Sichuan | ssu - ch_wan |
| Kiangsi | 江西 | Jiangxi | jee_ong - she | Tibet | 西藏 | Xizang | she - dzong |
| Kiangsu | 江苏 | Jiangsu | jee_ong - su | Tientsin | 天津 | Tianjin | te_en - jin |
| Kirin | 吉林 | Jilin | jee - lynn | Tsinghai | 青海 | Qinghai | ching - hi |
| Kwangsi | 广西 | Guangxi | g_wong - she | Yunnan | 云南 | Yunnan | yu_on - nan |
| Kwangtung | 广东 | Guangdong | g_wong - doong | | | | |

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