Journey to the East:  
The German Military Mission in China, 1927-1938

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the experience of German military advisors in China during the interwar period. It explores the political, cultural, and social dimensions of military advising and the concept of military advisors as vehicles of transnational exchange. Between 1927 and 1938 over one hundred high-ranking German military officers traveled to China to advise Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang on military modernization and industrialization. The German advisors quickly learned that they could not impose German institutions and technology on China but rather, they needed to adapt to the foreign environment and situate their reforms within the Chinese context. The project required extensive archival research in Germany and the United States. Close readings of primary sources, including reports from the German military mission and the German Foreign Office as well as the personal papers, correspondence, and recollections of the advisors, have shed light on their experience and efforts to transform the Chinese army from a conglomeration of poorly trained and armed feudal warlord armies into a modern national military capable of defending the country against Japanese encroachment.

Many of the advisors adapted to living and working in China and reconciled their foreign service with their sense of duty to the Fatherland. In China, German officers found a place to further hone their military skills while the Treaty of Versailles prevented
them from practicing their craft in Germany. The advisors believed they were cultivating a future German ally and a bulwark against the rising tide of communism in Asia. The German military mission also promoted Sino-German trade, which took on added importance after the Nazis came to power in 1933 and launched their policy of rearmament. The increase in armaments production required greater access to raw materials. China possessed vast supplies of raw materials, which it traded with Germany in exchange for armaments. The Sino-German relationship during the interwar period pivoted around the German military mission.

Nazi foreign policy complicated the work of the German military mission in China. While official German foreign policy in East Asia remained one of neutrality from the Weimar era to the Third Reich, the Nazis began leaning noticeably closer to Japan as the 1930s progressed. The German army, however, supported a closer Sino-German relationship. The advisors recognized that a Sino-Japanese war would almost certainly bring an end to the burgeoning Sino-German relationship and thus sought to prevent war between the two Asian powers. They hoped that a strong Chinese military would deter Japanese aggression. Ironically, while the advisors worked to modernize the Chinese military in order to deter a Sino-Japanese war, the improvements made by the Chinese military under German supervision played a significant role in transforming what could have been a limited incident in 1937 into the beginning of World War II in Asia. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the origins of World War II and the
connections between the Asian and European theaters. Ultimately, Germany’s officers contributed to weakening their ally Japan in World War II through their assistance to the Chinese.
Dedication

To My Family and Friends
Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my advisors John Guilmartin and Alan Beyerchen. Casual conversations with them sparked my interest in German military advisors in China and the desire to pursue it as a dissertation project. They have provided invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout my years as a graduate student at The Ohio State University. Peter Mansoor has also pushed me to take my dissertation in new directions and I am grateful for his editorial skills and support throughout the process. I am indebted to Jürgen Förster, who was my sponsor in Germany. He helped me acclimate to life in Germany and directed me to consult archival collections, which I would not have found otherwise. Thanks are also due to Dave Frye, Mark Grimsley, Ann Higginbotham, Geoff Megargee, Geoffrey Parker, John Plating, Christopher Reed, and Jennifer Siegel for their advice, feedback, support, and encouragement.

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Many friends and colleagues have supported my work throughout the years and unfortunately, I cannot name all of them. The military history reading group and seminar classes at the Ohio State University were receptive audiences and told me when I was going in the wrong direction as well as encouraged me to pursue new ones. Ryan McMahon, Craig Nelson, Anne Sealey, Stephen Shapiro, and Matt Yates often read and critiqued dissertation chapters or offered advice and they were always available to go out for ice cream in times of need. I would also like to thank the many friends who encouraged me and lent me their couches during research trips over the years. Finally, I would like to thank my family for supporting me throughout graduate school even though they did not understand why it took so long to finish.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: History
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A Note on Abbreviations, Chinese Transliterations, and German Terms

The Pinyin transliterations for Chinese people and place names will generally be used in the text of this dissertation with the Wade-Giles transliteration in parentheses upon first use, except in the case of the more popularly known Wade-Giles transliterations as they tend to resonate with a larger audience. For example, Nanking will be used instead Nanjing and Chiang Kai-shek instead Jiang Jieshi. The authors of the contemporary primary sources used Wade-Giles and so that system will be used in the references for the sake of consistency with the archival sources. Two common abbreviations that appear throughout the dissertation are GMD for the Guomindang and CCP for the Chinese Communist Party.

The Auswärtigen Amt is referred to as the German Foreign Office or Wilhelmstrasse in the text of this dissertation. The Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts or Political Archive of the Foreign Office appears as AA in the footnotes.

The Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, the German Military Archive in Freiburg, Germany is abbreviated as BA-MA in the footnotes.

Bayerisches Staatsarchiv—Abteilung IV, Kriegsarchiv is the Bavarian State Military Archive in Munich, Germany. In the footnotes, it is referred to as the Kriegsarchiv.

The Reichswehr was the German military during the Weimar Republic. In 1935, when Hitler announced German rearmament the term Reichswehr was superseded by the term Wehrmacht. Similarly, the Reichswehrministerium (RWM), the German military ministry became known as the Kriegsministerium in 1935.

The German Army High Command was the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL) in WWI. During the Weimar era, the Reichswehrministerium acted essentially as the German Military High Command. In 1935 with the announcement of German rearmament, the Reichswehrministerium became the Kriegsministerium. Following the Blomberg-Fritsch affair in February 1938, it became the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) became the German Military High Command with authority over the high commands of the
different services: *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH), *Oberkommando der Luftwaffe* (OKL), and *Oberkommando der Marine* (OKM).

_Handelgesellschaft für industrielle Produkte_, more commonly known by the acronym HAPRO, was a private German company, which coordinated Sino-German trade with the needs of the German military and industry.

The title *Generalberater* replaced *Chefberater* in 1934 but both terms have been translated as “head advisor.”

The *Lehrbrigade* or *Lehrdivision* was a model unit. The *Lehrbrigade* was instituted by Max Bauer in 1929 and developed into a larger, more complex *Lehrdivision* around 1933. German advisors trained this model unit in the conduct of modern warfare with the intention that it would then go on to train additional units in the Chinese army.
Introduction

On 10 October 1936, spit-and-polished soldiers in clean pressed uniforms goose-stepped down the boulevard in front of cheering crowds. They were armed with Mauser pistols and rifles. Row after row of giant Krupp guns and artillery excited the assembled masses. The spectacle of the country’s newfound military might brought an outpouring of national pride. This scene, reminiscent of the Wehrmacht parades in Berlin, did not take place in Germany; rather, it took place half way around the world in Nanking, China. Chiang Kai-shek presided over the parade of his elite German-trained divisions of Chinese soldiers.

Between 1927 and 1938 over one hundred retired German army officers traveled to China to serve as military advisors to Chiang and the Chinese Nationalists, collectively forming the German military mission. Both Chiang and the German advisors believed a closer Sino-German relationship would be mutually beneficial politically, militarily, and economically. The Sino-German relationship during the interwar period pivoted around the German military mission, which sought to modernize the Chinese military and in the process, facilitated military exchange and trade while influencing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The German advisors made great strides in modernizing the Chinese army over the course of the decade, while at the same time, unknowingly
contributing to the origins of World War II in Asia by giving Chiang the army, plans, advice, and confidence he needed to wage war against Japan.

This dissertation examines the efforts of the German advisors to build a modern military for China, which was ultimately tested in World War II, and considers the factors that contributed to the successes and shortcomings of the mission’s work. The leader of the mission (Chefberater/Generalberater or head advisor) set the tone and direction of the mission’s work. Chiang appointed the various leaders of the mission. He worked through Chu Chia-hua, a Chinese engineer and President of Sun Yat-sen University who had attended university in Germany and had numerous contacts with German universities and military commanders, to identify potential advisors. The head advisor’s ability as a foreign advisor was particularly important as it dictated the effectiveness of the mission’s efforts and the work of the lower level advisors reflected the head advisor’s influence. Hence, this dissertation is structured in five largely chronological chapters, each one examining the mission under its various leaders—Colonel Max Bauer (1927-9), Lieutenant Colonel Hermann Kriebel (1929-30), General Georg Wetzell (1930-34), General Hans von Seeckt (1934-35), and General Alexander von Falkenhausen (1935-38). While all of the head advisors had proven themselves as capable soldiers in the First World War and were some of Germany’s most innovative military thinkers, they were not all suited to serve as foreign advisors. Bauer, von Seeckt, and von Falkenhausen all possessed the skills and personality to effectively direct the work of the advisors and cooperate with the Chinese officials; however, the mission’s work floundered under Kriebel and Wetzell’s leadership.
In order to be effective in their role leading the German military mission, the head advisors needed to be able to adapt to the foreign environment. Defining military development broadly and considering the interconnections between the military, industry, society, and politics made for greater success in the mission’s work. The advisors who took a broad interest in China, beyond its military affairs, were better able to situate military reform in the Chinese context than those who focused narrowly on military development at the tactical and operational levels of war, training Chinese troops to engage in combat on the battlefield and coordinate campaigns respectively. They were able to operate more smoothly at the strategic level (historically a problematic area for German officers in general), where Chiang, in consultation with high-ranking military officers, ministers, and advisors, determined China’s national objectives and the resources available to devote to achieving those aims. With their knowledge of China, the more capable advisors were able to build a modern military and anticipate the stresses of modernization as well as the benefits. The German advisors who took a broad interest in China were also able to forge close relationships with their Chinese colleagues and Chiang, whose support of the head advisor would also be a key factor in the mission’s effectiveness. Another significant factor in the mission’s success was the ability of the head advisors to navigate the dynamic political environment in both China and Germany.

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1 Joint Publication 3-0 Doctrine for Joint Operations (Revised 11 August 2011) provides the US military’s current working definitions for the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. While there are no fixed boundaries between these levels they provide useful categories for both soldiers and scholars examining military affairs. The employment of resources to achieve national aims is determined at the strategic level. The operational level links the strategic objectives with the employment of forces at the tactical level by determining the organization and employment of forces in campaigns. At the tactical level, battles are planned and executed. See chapter 1, pgs. 12-14. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf [accessed 21 September 2011].
The rise of the Nazi party in Germany complicated the task of the German military mission in China. While the advisors (and many members of the German army) continued to push for a stronger Sino-German relationship, the Nazi government began leaning noticeably closer to Japan as the 1930s progressed. The advisors recognized that a Sino-Japanese war would almost certainly bring an end to the burgeoning Sino-German relationship and thus sought to prevent war between the two Asian powers. They hoped that a strong Chinese military would deter Japanese aggression. Ironically, while the advisors worked to modernize the Chinese military in order to deter a Sino-Japanese war, the improvements made by the Chinese military under German supervision played a significant role in transforming what could have been a limited incident in 1937 into the beginning of World War II in Asia.

**Historiographical Overview:**

Despite its pivotal role in securing the Sino-German relationship during the interwar period and the development of World War II in Asia, historians have largely neglected the German military mission in China. Interestingly, East Asian historians seem to be much more aware of the presence of German advisors in China in the 1930s than German historians. Most of the historical works on Chiang and Republican China mention the German military advisors’ efforts to create a modern army, while very few works on Germany in the 1930s acknowledge the existence of the German military mission and the way it complicated Germany’s relationship with the Far East in the lead up to World War II.
There are currently three English-language monographs that focus on the Sino-German relationship during the interwar period. Hsi-huey Liang’s *The Sino-German Connection: Alexander von Falkenhausen between China and Germany, 1900-1941* utilizes primarily German documents along with some interviews conducted with Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan to examine von Falkenhausen’s Sino-German experience. Liang’s work uses von Falkenhausen’s biography as a lens through which to examine the Sino-German relationship but focuses primarily on the social and cultural aspects of the exchange rather than the German role in China’s military development. John P. Fox chronicles Germany’s East Asian policy in the interwar period in his work *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1931-1938*. He considers the role of the German military mission as it complicated the efforts of the German Foreign Office to balance German diplomacy between China and Japan but the monograph is primarily a diplomatic history. Finally, William C. Kirby’s *Germany and Republican China* provides an economic history of the Sino-German relationship and while the German military advisors play a prominent role in the book, they are not the main thrust of the work and hence, are not closely examined.

In recent years, the study of transnational history has become a popular trend in the historiography. Sebastian Conrad has been one of the leading scholars to locate the development of German identity in the international context. His work *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich* (*Globalisation and Nation in Imperial Germany*) reconciles the concept of the nation-state with the increasingly globalized world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While there has been significant growth in the study of transnational history, historians have largely neglected the role of the military. Scholars tend to focus on the military’s effort to burn rather than build bridges. Isabel
Hull’s *Absolute Destruction* and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius’s *Warland on the Eastern Front* examine the German military’s tendency to destroy rather than understand foreign cultures. While in most cases this perception of the destructive nature of the German military is accurate, military advising provides a unique example of the capacity of high-ranking officers in the German military for constructive as opposed to destructive ends as well as of their adaptability to foreign environments as demonstrated by their work in China. The attention to transnational history provides a new framework for examining the process of military advising.

Historian David Ralston, in his work on transnational technology transfers, examines the efforts of many countries, including China, to emulate European armies during the colonial and imperial eras in *Importing the European Army*. He demonstrates that many countries like China, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire came up short in their efforts to build European-style militaries as they lacked the political and social structures to support such institutions. Japan, which proved to be the most successful in Europeanizing its army after the Meiji Restoration, built the necessary supporting structures, including a centralized state government, industrial infrastructure, an educational base, and fiscal instruments among others. These developments in Japan were revolutionary; however, many other extra-European states failed to anticipate the stresses that military modernization would exert on society and many experienced social and political revolutions as a result. Ralston, among others, finds the terms “modern” and “modernization” to be problematic and instead defines the process as *Europeanization*. For the purpose of this dissertation, the terms modern and modernize are used to describe
the efforts to make the Chinese military competitive with the contemporary forces of the Great Powers, notably Japan.

This dissertation examines the continuation of the process described by Ralston, which by the interwar period had evolved from Europeanization to modernization. For Chiang and the German advisors, modern did not mean European. Similar to the Self-Strengthening Movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, Chiang sought to use European technology to create a modern military while maintaining Chinese traditions and culture within the armed forces. By the twentieth century, both the Chinese and the German advisors had learned from the pitfalls described by Ralston and recognized that they could not impose a European-style army on China. Chiang and the German advisors sought to create a Chinese army that utilized European tools to protect the country while maintaining its distinctive national character.

While this dissertation builds on the growing body of transnational historiography, it also enters into the debate on the origins of World War II and the connections between the Asian and European theaters. A. J. P. Taylor’s *The Origins of the Second World War*, first published in 1961, is still one of the standard texts on the origins of the war and represents the large body of historical works that focus on the war in Europe while neglecting the Asian theater.² Gerhard Weinberg, the German historian who has established himself as the preeminent scholar of World War II, writes primarily about the European theater with only a few chapters about Asia in *A World at Arms* and

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² Frank McDonough, another prominent scholar on the origins of the war, also focuses primarily on Europe. He examines the connections between WWI and WWII in Europe in *The Origins of the First and Second World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). McDonough is also the editor of a forthcoming volume of essays, *The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective* (New York: Continuum Books, 2011), which promises to add an international dimension to the debate but the majority of essays in the volume still deal with Europe.
Hitler’s Foreign Policy. To remedy the deficiency in the World War II historiography Akira Iriye authored *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, which examines how the Second Sino-Japanese War developed into a world war as many western powers came to China’s assistance in the late 1930s and early 1940s. This dissertation adds to Iriye’s work by examining the role of the German military advisors in shaping the Second Sino-Japanese War.

There is a large body of historical works on the Second Sino-Japanese War, notably Frank Dorn’s *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937-41* and John Boyle’s *China and Japan at War: 1937-1945: The Politics of Collaboration* to name but a few of the works. Some Chinese historians argue that World War II in Asia began in 1931 with the Mukden Incident, whereas a number of European and American historians tend to view the Sino-Japanese War between 1937-41 as distinct from or a mere prelude to World War II in the Pacific. For the purposes of this dissertation, World War II began with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937. Following the resolution of the Mukden Incident in 1932, though tensions persisted between China and Japan, there was a lull in hostilities. Following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, however, hostilities resumed at an extreme level. It is impossible to separate the Sino-Japanese War from 1937-41 from the greater war in Asia and the Pacific. The Second Sino-Japanese War was merely the first phase of World War II. While historians have paid a great deal of attention to how events in Europe affected the war in Asia, outside of the American experience, little consideration has been given to how the war in Asia affected the fighting between the European powers. This dissertation concludes with a consideration of the effects of the
Second Sino-Japanese War on the larger world war and particularly the German war effort.

**Looking Westward:**

The Sino-German relationship had a long history. Germany’s contact with China began when Prussian ships reached China in 1750 and the relationship solidified in the nineteenth century. For China, the nineteenth century was one of increasing clashes with the West, many of which resulted in defeat and concessions. By the second half of the century, China’s disastrous encounters with the West began to spur efforts at reform and self-strengthening. Yet, China’s relationship with Germany was unique. During the second half of the nineteenth century prior to Bismarck’s dismissal and Kaiser Wilhelm II’s reign, China was not threatened by Germany but rather looked to the recently united European power, which was experiencing exponential economic growth and possessed a government with the strength to stifle domestic opposition, as an inspiration and example to follow. China would continue to draw on the German example well into the twentieth century.

The first decades of the twentieth century proved to be turbulent ones for China. Qing China, which reached its height in the eighteenth century, suffered from military defeats against the west as well as internal turmoil and rebellion throughout the nineteenth century. The last Qing emperors were torn between the need for social, political, and military reform to restore order and the desire to maintain the traditional

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3 For more on nineteenth-century China, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), chapters 7-9.

power structure. The twentieth century opened with half-hearted attempts at government reform by the last of the Qing rulers, who sought to adopt Western technology and ideas while maintaining the dynasty’s power. The Manchus looked to Germany as an example of military might on which to model their military reform; yet, as Ralston writes “military reform… amounted to little more than exchanging Confucian roles for German epaulets.” These superficial attempts at reform went beyond the military and included efforts to reform the Chinese economy and society; however, they combined with social turmoil and, as so often happens when decrepit governments attempt to change, resulted in revolution in 1911 and the fall of the Qing dynasty. The revolution forced the abdication of the Qing rulers and ushered in half a century of warfare as various parties struggled for supremacy in China. The balance between central and local power had long marred China and was exacerbated by the revolution. The Republic of China, declared in 1912, by no means controlled the vast reaches of China as warlords ruled over their own autonomous regions and refused to recognize the Republic.

Various political leaders and ideologues created parties, notably the Guomindong (GMD) and Communist (CCP) parties, which transcended local boundaries and sought to

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6 Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, pg. 133. It should be noted here that some German advisors were present in China in the 1890s and worked with individual commanders. Of note is the example of Chang Chih-tung, who modeled his army’s organization on the German example and whose army had been trained and was commanded by approximately thirty-five German officers and NCOs. See Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, pg. 129; Ralph L. Powell, *The Rise of Chinese Military Power, 1895-1912* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), pg. 223; and Frederic E. Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pg. 231.
define a new China. During the early years of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen had been largely sidelined by Yuan Shi-kai and spent the second half of the 1910s formulating a more coherent ideology, which the various political parties in Republican China were lacking. By 1920, Sun and the GMD were firmly entrenched in Guangdong province and sought to expand their power and reunify China. While he preached the importance of Chinese nationalism, he was also eager to acquire assistance from the outside to expand and solidify his power. He was unsuccessful in his efforts to acquire aid from Britain, Germany, and Japan; however, he found assistance by allying with the newly formed Chinese Communist Party in 1922. Given Sun’s socialist leanings, an alliance with the Communists was not too far-fetched. Through the CCP-GMD United Front, Sun received aid from the Soviet Union. Spence writes that the Nationalist-Communist alliance was:

> born of a shared desperation and a shared hope. The desperation was over China’s fragmented state, compounded by feuding militarist regimes and foreigners’ special privileges. The hope lay in drawing on the spirit, skills, and intellectual powers of the Chinese people to create the strength necessary for lasting reunification. Despite competing long-range goals and clashing personalities, Communists and Nationalists could agree at least on the need to attempt reunification of the country through a mixture of military force and social reform.

The Chinese Communists hoped to use the superior numbers of the GMD to gain a foothold in China and spread communism. The Nationalists hoped to draw from Communist political organization as well as to reap the benefits of Soviet aid. The Soviet Union encouraged the CCP to ally with the GMD. For the Soviets, not only would an

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8 Spence, Search for Modern China, chapter 12.
9 Spence, Search for Modern China, pg. 272.
alliance strengthen the Chinese Communists and further the goal of expanding the worldwide communist revolution, but stability in China also provided security on its far eastern border. Together with Soviet aid and advisors, the GMD-CCP alliance built the National Revolutionary Army in an effort to suppress the warlords that ruled over a fragmented China.

With Sun Yat-sen’s death in 1925, Chiang took over the GMD leadership and inherited the campaign to unify and modernize the country as well as the alliance with the Communists and Soviet aid. In 1926, the United Front launched the Northern Expedition against the warlords. Despite being a precarious alliance given the stark ideological contrast between the two parties, the United Front experienced success in reuniting vast stretches of China. The ideological friction within the United Front increased after Chiang took over as leader of the GMD since he was effectively a fascist. Despite ideological differences the Northern Expedition was still a great military success with the National Revolutionary Army defeating the warlord forces and expanding the reaches of Republican China to the Yangtze River.\(^\text{10}\) Yet, the very success of the Northern Expedition planted the seeds for the unraveling of the GMD-CCP alliance. While achieving victory on the battlefield, tensions between Chiang and Mao as well as with the Russian advisory group under the leadership of Borodin were intensifying. As the Republic expanded its reaches, resource base, and power, the GMD and CCP began to heavily dispute their social aims and the direction of the new Republic. In April 1927, as a result of these rising tensions and the Northern Expedition’s success in taking Shanghai,

Chiang purged the Communists, thus cementing the supremacy of the GMD over a newly unified, albeit fragile, China.\textsuperscript{11} 

Shortly before dismissing his Soviet advisors on the verge of the GMD-CCP split, Chiang began inquiring about the interest of German military officers in coming to China to work as advisors. Historian William Kirby points out that for Chiang, the employment of German advisors was “compatible with what may be called his effort at ‘conservative modernization.’”\textsuperscript{12} Chiang was attempting to transform China through the militarization of Chinese society, which would create a new social order that would allow for a modern industrialized nation-state with a world-respected military while maintaining traditional Chinese culture and identity.\textsuperscript{13} He was likely inspired by Japan, which successfully modernized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries using much the same strategy.

Chiang was predisposed to German advisors for several reasons. He may have inherited a desire for German expertise from his predecessor Sun Yat-sen, who had sent several confidential missions to Germany in the 1920s in an effort to find technical and military advisors for the Canton government. These missions failed. The German experts that Sun wanted were either unavailable or uninterested. The German Foreign Office had not helped matters as they remained wary of Sun and were not convinced by his appeal that “to get rid of the yoke of Versailles there is no way better than the assistance of


\textsuperscript{12} Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pgs. 46-7.

\textsuperscript{13} Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pg. 47.
establishing a great, strong, modern army in China, and then let China speak for you.”

After failing to acquire German advisors, Sun turned increasingly to Soviet expertise, which Chiang was now eager to replace with Germans.

The Prussian ideal had long intrigued Chiang. From his readings and studies, Chiang knew that Germany was disciplined and orderly. Chiang hoped to emulate Bismarck’s blood and iron policy in China. According to Kirby, this desire to emulate Bismarck’s Prussia would take the form of an attempted militarization of Chinese society, “the goal of which was not preserve the status quo but to create a law abiding citizenry of a modern, industrialized nation-state.” Chiang wanted to revolutionize Chinese society and the state. He hoped to create a modern Chinese nation-state while maintaining Chinese traditions and values. He saw Germany as a recent example of a state that had quickly industrialized while having maintained its own distinct identity.

The official history of the Chinese Nationalists recorded their admiration for the German model of modernization:

In recent centuries, Germany had accomplished remarkable achievements in the field of military science. Although Germany had been defeated in World War I, she was able to recover and overtake other countries in the development of science as well as military knowledge within a few years. The spirit of the German people would be a good example for us to pattern ourselves after. Therefore, our government proposed to obtain some German military experts to help us build up our Armed Forces.

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14 Chiang quoted by Spence, The Search for Modern China, pg. 397.


16 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 47.

Chiang appears to have shared these sentiments or was perhaps one of the driving forces behind them. He was struck by Germany’s ability to rise again even after defeat. He was impressed with German militarism, the national *Geist* or spirit, and its industrial and technological capabilities. For Chiang, Germany was a model of a modern, militarized, and industrialized society, which had maintained its sense of unique culture—a *Kulturnation*.

Chiang’s efforts to build a new, modern China with the aid of German experts need to be situated in the broader international context. Not only was China in flux internally, but the international system was also rapidly changing. The First World War had destroyed not only the imperial German Reich but also the structure of imperialism in East Asia. As Iriye pointed out:

> On the one hand, Japanese expansion on the continent coupled with the temporary distress of the European powers, destroyed the balance in the Far East which, though always precarious, the imperialists had managed to maintain. On the other hand, there were new forces undermining the very foundation of the old diplomacy—the ‘new diplomacy’ of the United States and the Soviet Union, and the self-conscious assertion of nationalism in China.  

Chiang’s efforts to modernize China stemmed from his desire to carve out a new role for China in the international system and establish a new balance of power in East Asia. He wanted China to no longer be the victim of imperial aggression but to play a leading role in the balance of power in East Asia as a counterweight to Japan.

After the Great War, both Germany and China were trying to reassert themselves as Great Powers in world politics. Given the instability in the international system, the

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interwar period was the ideal time to resituate themselves and establish a new balance of power. Both had been shunned by the victors in the Great War and embraced each other. The Sino-German relationship would prove to be mutually beneficial as both sides sought national rejuvenation. As China looked westward to Germany to assist in its modernization, Germany looked eastward to find the means to secure a German resurgence.

Looking Eastward:

Germany had a long, and at times tenuous, relationship with the East. Throughout the nineteenth century, Germany’s foreign policy toward China was conducted on a generally egalitarian footing. At the turn of the century, however, Germany launched a more aggressive, imperialist policy, which met its end in the Great War. After the First World War left Germany militarily and politically impotent, the country once again intensified its eastward gaze, as it looked to the Soviet Union, Japan, and China in its efforts to revitalize itself.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Germany and China had a unique and generally positive relationship. Trade dominated much of the nineteenth-century Sino-German relationship. The Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) in 1858 and the Convention of Beijing in 1860 solidified Sino-German trade by granting Prussia and other German Zollverein states favored-nation status. By the end of the century, Germany was second only to Britain in the number of firms it had established in China and the amount of goods imported by China. Given the strength of German trade and Bismarck’s focus on domestic politics, Germany in the imperial era did not appear threatening to China, unlike
the villainous British. Sino-German relations were conducted in an egalitarian fashion until 1897 when Germany, under Kaiser Wilhelm II’s reign, launched a more aggressive imperial policy. At the turn of the century, Germany acquired concessions in China including Hankou, Tianjin, and large portions of the Shandong (Shantung) peninsula. German aggression towards China lessened after the Boxer Rebellion and Sino-German relations improved in the lead up to the Great War; however, they never reached their pre-1897 level of goodwill. Kirby highlights the contradiction of German policy between 1902 and 1914, as Germany dealt with China on a more or less equal basis while retaining its status as an imperial power.¹⁹

The Great War was a severe blow to Germany and the peace settlement stripped Germany of its political, military, and economic power. In the wake of the war, Germany experienced political revolution with the founding of the Weimar Republic and the various coups against it (in which many future advisors played a part). The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to cede its overseas colonies and concessions, including those in China. Interestingly, while Tianjin and Hankou returned to China, German concessions in Shandong, much to China’s embarrassment, were handed over to Japan.²⁰ No longer an imperialist power, Germany needed to reformulate its policy towards China. Both countries had been humiliated by the Great War peace settlement and found themselves as international pariahs conducting foreign relations on the fringes of the international

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stage. The two countries sought to revitalize their more egalitarian relationship that had dominated much of the nineteenth century and embraced one another once again.

The Versailles Treaty made Germany militarily impotent by stripping the country of its air power, much of its navy, and reducing its army to a police force of a mere 100,000 men. Throughout the 1920s, the German military attempted to covertly rearm and circumvent the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. The remnants of the German army high command and general staff began looking eastward for solutions. It was not unusual for the German army in the Weimar era to conduct its own foreign relations, separate from the German state.21 Under the direction of future advisor to Chiang, Hans von Seeckt, the German Reichswehr established a secret military relationship with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union allowed the German military to secretly use some of military bases, outside the purview of the League of Nations Investigation Commission, to experiment with new technology and tactics. In exchange, the Soviet military was allowed to observe these experiments and learn from German military expertise.22


The German army hoped to establish a similar relationship with China, especially as its relationship with the Soviet Union waned in the early 1930s. China promised space for the German military to experiment and the opportunity for German officers to continue practicing their vocation. The German advisors believed that through a Sino-German military exchange they could cultivate a future ally and establish a bulwark against the rising tide of communism in Asia. In addition to its military benefits, Germany could also benefit substantially from Sino-German trade. Germany had industrial goods, especially armaments, which China desperately needed and China had vast supplies of raw materials, which were in high demand in Germany. The German war industries had been severely damaged at the beginning of the 1920s by the Versailles Treaty restrictions on armaments production and by the Great Depression at the end of the decade. A relationship with China had the potential to remedy the woes of German industry through large trade contracts and the construction of German factories abroad.

The German military mission in China never officially represented Germany, the Foreign Office, or the Reichswehr. The mission’s unofficial status resulted in part from the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, which forbade any German soldier from serving actively or in an advisory role abroad. Hence, all German advisors retired from the Reichswehr or were discharged before they traveled to China. The advisors had private contractual agreements with Chiang and the Nanking government for their work and they were paid by the Chinese. The Reichswehr leadership on Bendlerstrasse in Berlin, though interested in the work of the German military mission, never officially sponsored the advisors. The German Foreign Office closely monitored the mission’s activities. Prior to the Nazi consolidation of power, the Foreign Office wanted to ensure that German
advisors in China would not upset international opinion of Germany or hurt its foreign relations. With German rearmament, which the Nazis announced in 1935 though it began earlier, the advisors in China became unofficial military attachés.

With the Nazi takeover of the government in Germany, the Sino-German relationship took on added importance and the Reichswehr began to strengthen its ties with the German military mission in 1933. Deteriorating German-Soviet relations brought an end to the covert military collaboration between the Reichswehr and Red Army in 1933, leaving the German army to look for a new partner. At the same time, the Nazis launched their program of expedited rearmament, which fueled the need for access to raw materials. China was able to supply vast quantities of these raw materials, which were vital for the Nazi rearmament program and a German resurgence. According to Kirby, as early as 1929, German industry acquired eighty-eight percent of its antimony and fifty-three percent of its tungsten through private trade with China. Tungsten and antimony were of particular importance for German rearmament after 1933 as they were used in armor plating, armor-piercing shells, rifle barrels, airplanes, and munitions.

With the economic importance of the Sino-German relationship for the German military, the Reichswehrministerium forged closer ties with the mission. Although Chiang continued to appoint the head advisor of the mission, beginning in 1933 the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht leaders took a more active interest in ensuring the quality of the leader as well as his willingness to work closely with Bendlerstrasse. The German military mission arranged for a liaison in Berlin to coordinate their needs in China with personnel.

recommendations from the German military as well as to ensure communications between the two institutions.

While the Third Reich’s military policy lent added urgency to the Sino-German relationship, it also complicated Germany’s Far Eastern policy. Interestingly, Hitler, for much of the 1930s, pursued a generally balanced policy in the Far East that protected Germany’s military and economic interests in China and limited its commitment to Japan. As Fox points out, Hitler and other high-ranking Nazi officials were concerned with the Far East only in as much as it was able to favorably influence Germany’s standing in European and world affairs. As the 1930s progressed, Hitler and his Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, both failing to recognize the importance of Sino-German trade for the military, became particularly interested in Japan as a result of its strategically important position in international affairs, especially given its position regarding the Soviet Union and the British Empire, both of which played pivotal roles in Hitler’s foreign policy.24 In the late 1930s, Japan threatened the far reaches of the British Empire in the Pacific. Hitler also hoped that when time came for a German-Soviet war, Japan could open a second front in the eastern Soviet Union.

The German advisors in China recognized the Nazi preference for Japan. They believed that a Sino-Japanese war would force Germany to choose sides and as long as the Nazis were in power, that would mean an end to Germany’s special relationship with China as the Nazi leadership would side with Japan to aid its future campaigns against Britain and the USSR. With its military in disarray, China was an inviting target for the more modern Japanese military. The German advisors believed a stronger Chinese army

would deter Japanese aggression or at least quickly bring Japan to the negotiating table when it realized a full-scale war would be too costly in terms of men and material and impede their quest for empire in the Pacific. Ironically, while the advisors worked to modernize the Chinese military in order to deter a Sino-Japanese war, the improvements made by the Chinese military under German supervision played a significant role in transforming a limited incident in 1937 into the beginning of World War II in Asia as the Chinese army, though perhaps not strong enough to beat Japan, was strong enough to engage in a long and costly war of attrition.

The turning point in Germany’s Far Eastern policy of balance came not with the onset of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 as Germany maintained positive relations with both sides and even sought to broker a ceasefire, but with the turn of the year in 1937/38. Fox attributes the decline of Sino-German relations and the increasing commitment to Japan to the deterioration of Anglo-German relations in 1937. In November 1937, Hitler reached the conclusion that Britain was Germany’s irreconcilable enemy. As a result of Japan’s increasing mastery of East Asia and the Pacific and its ability to threaten the British Empire, Fox eloquently writes that “Germany’s interests in China were sacrificed on the altar of National Socialist Weltanschauung… signified in the summer of 1938 by the open declaration of support for Japan made clear by the withdrawal of the German Ambassador and the German military advisers from China.”

The ideological hatred of the Soviet Union and assumption that a German-Soviet war would occur in the foreseeable future also fueled the Nazi decision to ally with Japan. The Germans considered Japan, with its mechanized units and aircraft, a mostly-

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modern force that could threaten the Soviet border in the Far East when the German army attacked in the west. However, the Chinese army, which had been trained by the German advisors, substantially weakened the Japanese forces in 1937-38. Japanese victories against German-trained Chinese troops came at a high cost in terms of losses of men and material. These losses set the Japanese up for defeat against the Soviets at Nomonhan in 1939, after which they would never again fight against the Soviets and thus could not relieve pressure on the German troops invading the Soviet Union in 1941. China continued to suck away material and manpower resources from Japan throughout the duration of the World War II.

Throughout the interwar period the German advisors, most of whom were conservative German nationalists, worked in China as a means of further serving Germany by furthering the interests of their homeland outside its borders. They adapted to living and working in China with the Chinese military and served Chiang, and by extension their Fatherland, dutifully. At the beginning of the 1930s, they believed they were aiding a covert German military resurgence but by the end of the decade, they had unknowingly contributed to weakening Germany’s ally Japan and set their country up for failure in the Soviet campaign and ultimately the war.

**Overview:**

This dissertation is divided into five chronological chapters, which are centered on the leaders of the German military mission. The head advisors set various tones and directions for the mission’s work and their influence, for better or worse, trickled down to the lower-level advisors in the mission. Each chapter examines the recommendations of
the advisors and the progress made by the Chinese army made under German supervision. There were many points of continuity between the experiences of the advisors in Germany during the Great War and their work in China. The ability of the head advisor to recognize the connections between military modernization and industrialization was of special importance. The chapters also assess the advisors’ adaptability to China and the relationships they forged with Chiang and their Chinese colleagues. The political maneuverability of the advisors in both China and Germany is also taken into account. The success or failure of the head advisor in these areas largely dictated the effectiveness of the mission.

The first chapter deals with Max Bauer and the foundation of the mission. Bauer was an expert on the military-industrial complex but more importantly, he proved capable of adapting to foreign environments. He was adept at political intrigue, which was important given the necessity of circumventing the Versailles Treaty and appeasing (or evading) the German Foreign Office and League of Nations Investigation Committee. Bauer was a charismatic character, who got along well with Chiang and cemented a strong foundation for the German military mission in China.

Chapters 2 and 3 trace the decline of the mission’s work under the leadership of Hermann Kriebel and Georg Wetzell. There were a number of continuities between these two advisors. Both of them focused heavily on military modernization at the tactical level at the expense of industrialization. They conceived of the military sphere narrowly and focused on the tactical and operational level without considering the overall strategic picture or China’s greater development. These two advisors were never able to establish a close relationship with Chiang, nor did they express a genuine interest in China. They
lacked Bauer’s ability to maneuver politically and often frustrated the German Foreign Office, the Reichswehrministerium (RWM), and the German industrialists with trade interests in China.

Hans von Seeckt, the father of the German Reichswehr, revitalized the German military mission’s work between 1934 and 1935. Chapter 4 examines his leadership of the mission. Von Seeckt was much more adept than his predecessors, Kriebel and Wetzell, at managing politics both in China and Germany, which was especially important given the Nazi consolidation of power. Chiang was enamored with the Prussian general, who had an esteemed military reputation but also devoted his energies towards developing an in-depth understanding of China and focused on industrialization and securing Sino-German trade.

While von Seeckt focused on industrial issues, his adjutant and soon to be successor, Alexander von Falkenhausen worked with the Chinese military to prepare for war with Japan, Chapter 5 examines von Falkenhausen’s leadership of the mission and his preparations for war. He had extensive experience in the Far East, was quick to adapt to life in China, and had a keen understanding of Chinese culture, society, and politics. During von Seeckt’s tenure, von Falkenhausen was primarily responsible for military training but when he assumed the leadership role of the mission, he also took on the added responsibilities of securing Sino-German trade and strategically advising Chiang.

The conclusion provides an analysis of the mission’s work by considering the Germans’ final product, the army with which China began World War II in 1937. This final chapter considers the role of the German advisors in the origins of the war as well as the performance of Chiang’s forces against Japan in the war’s first year. It also highlights
the long-term consequences for Germany in World War II as some of its best officers had trained their own ally Japan’s enemy with devastating results.
Chapter 1
Max Bauer: International Man of Mystery

Max Bauer was Chiang Kai-shek’s first German advisor. He proved to be an intriguer and technical expert with charm and charisma—the ideal combination for such work and, hence, he laid a strong foundation for the German military mission in China. Bauer understood Chiang’s desire to modernize China and build it into a world power while maintaining its distinct national character. Bauer recognized that a strong modern military was an integral component of Great Power status and that it would also require an industrial base, which China was severely lacking. Aware of the complex relationship between the military and industrialization, Bauer drew up plans for China’s simultaneous development in both spheres. Throughout its existence, the German military mission would continue to follow and build on Bauer’s plans.

Bauer’s military and industrial expertise was not the only factor that contributed to his success as an advisor. He was also able to adapt to living and working in China and took a genuine interest in learning about the foreign land and culture, which not only provided him with a framework for instituting military and industrial reform but also endeared him to his Chinese colleagues. He established a close relationship with Chiang and earned his trust, which was important for pushing through reforms. Beyond his rapport with the Chinese leadership, Bauer was also adept at political intrigue and thus well suited for circumventing the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, avoiding the
unwanted attention of the international community and the angst of the German Foreign Office, and navigating the currents of Chinese and German politics.

Bauer’s Formative Experiences:

Bauer’s experience prior to traveling to China prepared him well for the technical and political aspects of his advisory work. He had served in the German army during the First World War where he proved to be an innovative thinker both on the battlefield and in general staff positions. When the war began he worked as an artillery officer in the field and contributed to the development of innovative artillery tactics. He worked his way into Ludendorff’s inner circle and in 1916, was put in charge of the Hindenburg program to coordinate industrial production on the home front with the needs of the German military. Bauer would later draw on this experience, both the program’s successes and failures, when advising Chiang on economic and military reforms.

While managing the German military’s needs and industrial production, Bauer also gained political experience. Ludendorff inserted him into the inner circles of the German government as a sort of spy on the civilian government for the German Army High Command (Oberste Heeresleitung, OHL). In Berlin, his intriguing, much to the OHL’s pleasure, contributed to the fall of German chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. At


the war’s end, Bauer continued his foray into German politics. Like many veterans, frustrated with the severe restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and Germany’s downtrodden position and seeing the Weimar Republic as an aberration, Bauer joined a far-right wing paramilitary group. In 1920, he was actively involved in supporting the Kapp Putsch, which attempted to overthrow the Weimar government. After the Kapp Putsch, Bauer became essentially *persona non grata* in the eyes of the German government and military. His disassociation with these institutions actually allowed him greater freedom of movement in foreign political circles than an official representative of the Weimar government.

After the Kapp Putsch, Bauer spent five years in exile, traveling abroad and cultivating his foreign advisory skills. He traveled to Hungary, the Soviet Union, Spain, and Argentina where he worked to secure contracts with German industries for war material and advise on military and industrial development. Though he was by no means an official representative of the German government or military, both institutions monitored his movements to the best of their ability. His advisory activities and efforts to facilitate armaments trade were illegal under the Versailles Treaty. The Foreign Office and the Reichswehr wanted to ensure that he did not upset fragile international opinion, but perhaps more importantly they were interested in the political, military, and economic inroads into foreign lands that he was undoubtedly carving for greater German interests. Because of the shady nature of Bauer’s travels and work during the interwar period, he became highly conscious of anything that was recorded about him or his actions. He was

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28 Vogt, *Oberst Max Bauer*, chapters VII and VIII.
keenly aware of the importance of manipulating perceptions about his character and the nature of his work.

By the time he traveled to China in the fall of 1927, Bauer had gained extensive international experience working often covertly as an advisor on the fringes of the international community. Between 1927 and 1929, Chiang paid for Bauer to make two trips to China. The first, starting in December 1927 and lasting through the spring of 1928, was a fact-finding mission, in which he observed the Chinese military and its industrial base and made some cursory recommendations regarding modernization. Bauer then returned to Germany to build support among the German industrialists for trade with China, secure business contracts, and recruit retired army officers to come to China to work as advisors. In the fall 1928, Bauer returned to China to serve as a personal advisor to Chiang and brought with him a number of retired German officers who wanted to work with the Chinese army.

Throughout his travels abroad, Bauer had proven himself capable as a technical advisor, adaptable to foreign environments, and adept at navigating the political sphere. He recruited advisors with similar traits—technical experts in their field with personalities suited for work abroad. Many of the German advisors who followed in Bauer’s footsteps to China shared similar life experience. They were some of Germany’s most innovative military thinkers and leaders during the First World War. They tended to be conservative German nationalists, some of whom were driven to the far right of the political spectrum in the disastrous wake of the war. A few like Bauer were actively involved in the right-wing Kapp and Beer Hall putsches against the Weimar government or were members in the Freikorps. All were eager to see a German military and political
resurgence in the face of the Versailles Treaty restrictions, though some were more willing than others to wait patiently and maneuver covertly to achieve these ends. By working in China, they believed they were serving the interests of Germany and thus continuing their duty to the Fatherland.

Over the duration of his travels in China between 1927 and 1929, Bauer laid a strong foundation for the German military mission in China, which became one of the primary means of transnational exchange of ideas, technology, and people between Germany and China in the interwar period. Bauer recognized this exchange as one of opportunity for both sides. For Bauer and his successors, the German military mission was a means of modernizing China and cultivating a strong future ally for Germany. It would also serve as an avenue toward a revitalized German economy and military, so that the Fatherland could once again rise to respectable Great Power status.

**National Renewal:**

When Bauer arrived, China was fractured and disorganized after nearly two decades of revolution and civil war. Chiang sought to unify and modernize the country while solidifying his power. He was in the process of building a new, modern China and was eager to find German advisors, whose own country had only recently unified and quickly became a world power. He believed he could use German military and industrial expertise to transform China. Bauer saw Germany as impotent under the Weimar government and the Versailles Treaty restrictions. Both Bauer and Chiang agreed that Germany was oppressed by the victors of the Great War and suffered politically, militarily, and economically under the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. Like many
veteran officers, Bauer, though forced to be patient and wait for the international tide to turn, attempted to pave the way for a German resurgence. He believed that opening the door to China would be an important avenue leading to Germany’s revival as a Great Power by providing a trading partner, a place for covert rearmament, and a future ally. Germany and China had suffered drastic decline in the 1910s and 1920s; however, Bauer and Chiang believed a mutually beneficial Sino-German relationship would contribute to the national renewal of both countries.

Having made great strides towards reunifying China in the Northern Expedition and with his leadership of the GMD firmly established, Generalissimo Chiang began pursuing a program of what Kirby describes as “conservative modernization” in China after the GMD-CCP split. He sought to reform the state’s administrative institutions and instruments of power, remold education and society, and develop a modern industrial infrastructure all the while cultivating the nation’s sense of its traditional character and identity. Chiang began looking to other nation-states for models of modernization and was particularly struck by the German example. German militarism, the national spirit, and their industrial and technological capabilities impressed the Generalissimo. Chiang hoped to draw from the German example, for only sixty years earlier the country unified and quickly challenge continental Europe for industrial and military supremacy. In order to accomplish his lofty goals of reform and creating a modern China, Chiang sought out German advisors to assist in modernizing his military as well as the Chinese economy and industrial base.

29 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pgs. 46-7. Spence, The Search for Modern China, pgs. 273, 365-9.
China had much to gain from German military and industrial expertise. Chiang hoped his army could learn from the German military prowess that enabled it to challenge continental Europe for supremacy. The German army had been the picture of orderliness, discipline, and innovation in its use of new weapons and tactics. German military advisors could bring these traits to China’s army. Along with military modernization came industrialization. German advisors could share their knowledge of industrial production and assist in constructing China’s own industrial base. Building and industrial infrastructure would be a long process but in the meantime, German advisors could work to secure trade contracts between the two countries.

While Chiang sought to benefit from the wealth of German expertise, Bauer believed that a renewed Sino-German relationship would benefit his own Fatherland. Germany, like China, suffered through turbulent times following the Great War. Germany was militarily impotent and faced serious economic troubles. The World War I peace settlement stripped Germany of its military might and the resource rich Ruhr region. The country was forced to pay reparations and it suffered from self-inflicted hyperinflation. Hard times led to political polarization and violence as the left and right of the political spectrum literally battled it out on the streets. The infant Weimar Republic faced various threats from the extremes of the political spectrum as various groups questioned its legitimacy and its ability to govern Germany. Having accepted responsibility for the war that had wrecked so much destruction on the continent, Germany had become an international pariah on the periphery of the international community.
Bauer believed Germany could benefit economically and militarily from exchange with China. The task of modernizing China would require German trade in the form of material goods as well as intellectual exchange. He saw the German military mission as a means of reviving German industries and its military by promoting Sino-German exchange. While it would be a long process, by revitalizing the German military and industry Bauer believed he was setting Germany back on the path to reassert itself as a respected (if not feared) Great Power. Yet, Bauer’s scheme to contribute to German renewal through a Sino-German relationship was complicated by the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and the German Foreign Office, whose representatives believed that they, too, were serving the best interests of Germany by appeasing the League of Nations and international opinion. The complex, tenuous relationship between Bauer and the Foreign Office will be discussed shortly.

Bauer had a more favorable relationship with a number of German industrialists as he contributed to the opening of a new, largely untapped market. In striving to renew Germany’s industrial production (especially of armaments), Bauer worked to establish inroads and set up contracts for a number of German firms in China. These firms included Junkers, Krupp, and several firms that produced materials for railroad development and munitions manufacturing. German production of war materials and the aviation industry had been severely damaged by the World War I peace settlement. Setting up a trading relationship and building factories in China would alleviate the financial strains on these companies that were at the heart of the German war industry. Bauer’s forays into securing Sino-German trade will be discussed on a more in-depth level shortly but for now it is important to note that revitalizing these companies would
also lay a foundation for jump-starting the German war industry should the opportunity for rearmament arise.

German rearmament was undoubtedly at the forefront of Bauer’s mind when he laid the groundwork for the German military mission in China. Throughout the 1920s, the Reichswehr maintained a covert relationship with the Soviet Union. This was a mutually beneficial relationship: the Germans shared their technical and doctrinal expertise regarding new weapons systems, including tanks and aircraft, and the Soviets provided space and facilities for experimentation and training—something that could not be done in Germany due to the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. Bauer, though unassociated with the black Reichswehr activities, worked in the Soviet Union in 1923-24 to establish contracts for the German armaments industries.

Bauer hoped to establish a covert relationship between the German military and China reminiscent of its deal with the Soviet Union. The leader of a 1929 Reichswehr study commission in East Asia, Captain (Hauptmann) Hauger, reported that Bauer thought the German military could exploit the experience of organizing the Chinese military and building up a war industry for its own benefit. Not only would it provide experience and training for Reichswehr officers but more importantly, Bauer believed that China could become a testing ground, a “Versuchsfeld,” for the German military.

Much like the Soviet Union, China provided space outside the purview of the League of Nations in which the Germans could pursue military experimentation with machines and

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30 For more on the covert German-Soviet relationship see Post, The Civil-Military Fabric of Weimar Foreign Policy, pgs. 110-129; Whaley, Covert German Rearmament, chapter 1; Corum, Roots of Blitzkrieg, pgs. 170-2; on aircraft development in the USSR, see Homze, Arming the Luftwaffe, chapter 1; on tank development, see Habeck, Storm of Steel, chapter 3.

31 Hauptmann Hauger, Bericht über eine Studienreise nach Ostasien (c. 1930), BA-MA RH 2/1822, pg. 39.
tactics. Developing a new military force in China could provide practice for when it came
time to expand the Reichswehr as well as its industrial base.

China and Germany had much to gain from the mutually beneficial Sino-German
relationship. They both had witnessed serious economic decline, suffered revolution and
upheaval, and stood on the periphery of international relations eager to earn Great Power
status. Both Bauer and Chiang recognized that military and industrial might would be
significant factors in securing Great Power status for China and Germany. The two
countries could work together to achieve their goals of vibrant industrial production and
modern militaries that would rival the Great Powers and secure their positions as world
powers. A strong Sino-German relationship in these formative years would also lay the
groundwork for a future alliance. Hence, Bauer shaped his military and industrial
recommendations to Chiang for the utmost benefit of both countries.

**Bauer’s Military Recommendations:**

Bauer’s main task in China was to transform Chiang’s army into a modern
military, which in 1927 appeared to be a daunting task. He drew up a number of plans,
both short and long term, for military modernization. In advising Chiang on military
reforms, Bauer drew on the German example, utilizing the experience he gained in the
Great War. Bauer utilized the imperial German army as a model for Chinese military
organization and grafted on new technology as well as tactics and doctrine that first made
their appearance in the First World War. Yet, his plans for development were flexible
enough to account for China’s own unique situation and needs.
Chiang’s military required a fundamental restructuring in order to become an effective instrument of force. The modernization of Chiang’s army was hindered by its large size. As was customary during that period in China, warlord armies varied greatly in the quality of their training and their armaments but size tended to win the day.32 Bauer encouraged Chiang to undertake a systematic massive demobilization to be followed by a great reorganization of his armed forces after he had subdued the warlord threat, which was still present after the completion of the Northern Expedition. He highlighted how the Great War demonstrated that mass armies had outlived their usefulness in Europe. They were immobile and quickly bogged down. They were also logistical monsters, consuming massive amounts of supplies not only in terms of food and clothing but also weapons and ammunition. At the time of Bauer’s arrival in China, it lacked a strong centralized government with an administrative apparatus and bureaucracy to organize, maintain, supply, and coordinate a massive armed force. China also lacked the industrial foundation to supply and arm China’s large armed forces and Chiang would therefore need to purchase weapons from abroad for his troops.33

The demobilization of a large portion of Chiang’s forces would facilitate arming a new force with modern weapons. Bauer recommended arming the Chinese military with modern weapons such as machine guns, aircraft, poison gas, and breech-loading artillery. Utilizing his economic expertise, Bauer took into consideration the expense of purchasing


these weapons in his recommendation that Chiang demobilize much of his army. Bauer recognized that it would be impossible for China to properly arm and train a million-man army with new machines and new tactics in the 1920s. China lacked the funds, resources, and industrial infrastructure to accomplish such an expansive goal.

Chiang seemed to recognize the potential benefits of a smaller military force. Reducing the size of the army would improve the quality of the force and make it more manageable than the million-man army. It would facilitate the centralization of a military administration and limit warlords from illegally extracting revenues. Systematic demobilization would also enable Chiang to disband the warlord armies that had joined his forces but still operated semi-autonomously under their previous warlord commanders and thus would eliminate potential rivals. With a smaller force, the centralized military administration could improve the standard of living for the common soldiers. Demobilization, as Chiang understood it, would create a disciplined and trained labor force of former soldiers for national reconstruction.

Demobilization and the creation of a modern twentieth-century fighting force would be a gradual process. Bauer believed that the best way to modernize China’s military was to begin with one division. He recommended the development of a Lehrtruppe or model unit that would be trained in the use of modern weapons and the conduct of modern warfare and after reaching proficiency would disperse to train

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34 Rather than fight on the battlefield, it was customary practice for Chiang to forge precarious alliances with his enemies and incorporate their armies into the National Revolutionary Army; however, rather than distribute these forces throughout the army, they remained intact and under the command of the warlord. See Ch’i, Warlord Politics in China, chapter 9.

additional units. This Lehrtruppe was to consist of infantry trained in the use of machine guns, a field artillery regiment, a flying unit, an engineer battalion, a logistics staff, and an intelligence/communications unit (Nachrichten Trupp).\footnote{The meaning and translation of the term “Nachrichten Trupp” is vague. It is sometimes translated as reconnaissance troops but during the First World War era and into the interwar period. However, it could also be used to describe communications and signaling units or to describe military intelligence prior to the establishment of the Abwehr in 1921. The context in Bauer’s reports tends to be vague. Bauer, \textit{Die Organisation einer neuzeitigen Wehrmacht}, Potsdam April 1927, BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 81-93 and \textit{Aufbau des Heeres}, BA-MA, N 1022/41, ser. 94.} The German military mission, building on Bauer’s suggestions, went on to create a model unit. Model units were not new to the Chinese military. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of regional Chinese military commanders, including Zeng Guofang, Li Hongzhang, and Yuan Shikai, experimented with reforming their armies by introducing European organization and technology through model units.\footnote{Powell, \textit{The Rise of Chinese Military Power}, chapters 2 and 6. Ralston, \textit{Importing the European Army}, chapter 5.} Bauer and the German advisors embraced the concept of the model unit although it is unclear if they drew from the previous Chinese historical examples. The German military mission’s model unit began as a Lehrbrigade towards the end of Bauer’s time in China and lasted through Kriebel’s leadership. Under Wetzell and his successors von Seeckt and von Falkenhausen, the German military division developed the model unit into a larger, more complex Lehrdivision.

In addition to the development of this training unit, Bauer encouraged Chiang to dedicate a substantial amount of resources towards the development of railroads. Bauer saw the railroad as an integral component of modern warfare. Historian Dennis Showalter in \textit{Railroads and Rifles} demonstrated the invaluable contribution of the railroad to
German unification. The railroad was vital to Prussian success in the continental wars of the late nineteenth century and also physically tied the German states together. World War I demonstrated the German military’s institutional dependence on railroads. In his memorandum to Chiang, Bauer praised Moltke’s genius in incorporating the railroad into his strategic thinking. The railroad would facilitate troop movement across the country, enhance the Chiang’s ability to project power, and play an important role in logistics.\(^{38}\)

Bauer also saw airpower as playing an important role in the future of warfare. He encouraged Chiang to incorporate aircraft into his new military force as they had great implications for the battlefield. The airplane increased the size of the battlefield and could strike far behind enemy lines. Bauer highlighted the many uses of aircraft—transport, reconnaissance, and bombardment to name but a few. For reasons of economic efficiency, Bauer recommended that Chiang adopt two basic types of aircraft—a light, single-engine, two-seater and a heavier, multi-engine aircraft. Bauer believed that these two basic airplane models could be modified to accommodate a variety of missions such as reconnaissance, ground support, and fighter aircraft for the former and bomber and transport aircraft for the latter.\(^{39}\)

In many ways, Bauer was ahead of his time regarding theories of airpower. While many Europeans, especially Giulio Douhet, stressed the application of aircraft for strategic bombing as a war-winning weapon, Bauer was quick to point out that aircraft alone could not win wars and that ground troops were still of the utmost importance. He


highlighted the need for coordination between aircraft and ground troops. Bauer believed that future battlefield tactics would become a concert of aircraft, artillery, poison gas, and infantry attacks all coordinated to achieve the utmost effect. The difficulties of coordinating these attacks would require extensive training, especially for the officer corps.

Bauer laid plans for revamping the Chinese military education system. He based his plans on the German Kriegsakademie model. Bauer believed that all officers should receive a uniform general education. This general military academy (Allgemeine Kriegsschule) would train officers in practical and theoretical military studies. All future officers, be it army, air force, or police, would receive the same training in basic military doctrine that would provide them with a common outlook. General military education was designed to train officers to think and move in unison. The German concept of Auftragstaktik rested upon this common outlook—that officers in the field, having received the same training, could anticipate the moves of their fellow officers and make decisions accordingly even if cut off from communication. Beyond the basic level of general military education, officers would move on to more specialized military training for their individual branches and technical training. At the highest level of military education, promising officers of various specializations would be brought together to

42 Bauer, Militärschulen für das Heer, BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 64-68.
43 See Bauer’s discussion of Fachschulen and Ausbildung von technischen Offizieren in Militärschulen für das Heer, BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 73-75.
reintegrate their expertise and broaden their outlook so that they could move on to serve in various command and staff positions.\footnote{Liu, \textit{A History of Modern China}, pg. 84. Bauer, \textit{Militärschulen für das Heer}, BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 69-75.}

Much of Bauer’s military advice evolved out of his experience in the German military. In the First World War, he witnessed a cacophony of new technologies grinding down men on the battlefield as their officers attempted to develop new tactics and doctrine to accommodate the new tools of violence. There was a great deal of continuity between Bauer’s proposals and the technology, including weapons and tactics, that the German military had experimented with during the Great War and even into the interwar period. Bauer’s experience provided him with a smorgasbord of options of machines and ideas to present to Chiang, but modernizing China’s military would require a more in-depth transformation that went beyond the superficial appearance of the military and the purchase of modern arms.

\textbf{Industrialization and Economic Considerations:}

Largely as a result of his experience in World War I, both as an artillery officer on the field and a staff officer coordinating the Hindenburg Program, Bauer was keenly aware of the connection between modern militaries and the industrial base that supported them. When Bauer traveled to China, the country had yet to experience an industrial revolution and thus lacked a modern industrial infrastructure. During the nineteenth-century Self-Strengthening Movement, China witnessed a few efforts to create a domestic war industry, notably Li Hongzhong’s arsenals in Jiangnan and Suzhou (Soochow), but...
these arsenals were limited in scale and produced inferior armaments. These arsenals were incapable of supplying the modern army that Chiang wanted to create. Bauer advised Chiang as much, if not more, on economic and industrial matters as on military affairs because he understood the interconnected nature of industrialization and military modernization.

Bauer distinguished his role as an economic advisor to Chiang rather than a military advisor. According to historian William C. Kirby, the title of “economic adviser” was “in part for foreign and official German consumption, to avoid the notoriety (and illegality) that the post of ‘military advisor’ would bring with it.” The title of economic advisor was a means of circumventing the Versailles Treaty, which prohibited German soldiers from serving in an active or advisory capacity in foreign militaries. By using this title, as opposed to military advisor, Bauer avoided an international uproar about German mercenary forces as well as the intervention of the German Foreign Office in the German Military Mission’s activities in China. While serving as a military advisor would have been illegal, working as an economic advisor was only moderately scandalous.

Despite his efforts, in the fall of 1928, as Bauer was returning to China for a second time with a number of new German advisors for Chiang, the press began making a series of accusations about Germans serving as soldiers for hire. Bauer was quick to point out in a response to these press accusations that there were no Germans serving in the Chinese military and there were no contracts between the Chinese government and its German employees based on their military skills. Bauer maintained that he and the other

46 Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, pg. 51.
German advisors had been hired because of their technical skills to aid Chiang in his efforts to create a modern China.\textsuperscript{47} Starting with Bauer, a number of German military advisors would be hired in China as technical and economic advisors in order to circumvent the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, even though they also served in a military capacity.

While Bauer used this distinction between military and economic advisor to evade the restrictions of Versailles and public outrage both in Germany and the international arena, it is important to note that Bauer saw the two roles as inseparable. Bauer understood the economic implications of twentieth century warfare. A modern military force required an economic foundation to support it. Bauer believed the creation of a modern military force in China would drive industrialization, which would in turn drive further development in the military sphere in a feedback loop. Interestingly, at the same time the Soviets were pursuing a similar strategy of simultaneous industrialization and militarization embodied in the First Five Year Plan.\textsuperscript{48}

Bauer found it difficult, if not impossible, to separate military and economic development. He knew the ability to wage war in the twentieth century was heavily dependent on the strength of the military-industrial complex. His experience in the First World War shaped the way he understood warfare and his advice on such matters. During World War I, Bauer had worked under Ludendorff to implement the Hindenburg Program, the ultimate coordination of German industry and the military. A reporter from

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{47} Bauer, \textit{Erklärung}, 26 October 1928. Copies of this document can be found in BA-MA N 1022/45 and the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (AA) R 9208/2242.

\textsuperscript{48} For more on the First Five Year Plan and Soviet militarization and industrialization, see David R. Stone, \textit{Hammer and Rifle: The Militarization of the Soviet Union, 1926-1933} (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).
\end{footnotesize}
the *North China Daily* interviewed Bauer upon his return to China in the fall of 1928.

Bauer discussed his experience:

&Dagger; During the Great War, my task was to mobilize the economic and industrial resources of Germany in the interest of the German army. I came to know something about the management of big industrial enterprises at that time. That knowledge is now available for General Chiang and his country.\(^4^9\)

Bauer was thus not only an experienced soldier but also an industrial coordinator. He had been well trained to coordinate industrial production with military needs.

While the *North China Daily* reporter attempted to force Bauer to comment on his military activities by moving on to a discussion of the development of a General Staff for the Chinese military, Bauer maintained his focus on economic issues. Bauer pointed out to the civilian reporter and audience that “you cannot have a General Staff until you have a modern army and China has no modern army. You cannot organize and use a General Staff until you have industries to support an army.”\(^5^0\) Bauer went on to say the development of a General Staff for China would be the “crowning glory of many years of terrific work, but now is not the time.”\(^5^1\) In this interview with the press, Bauer depicted a linear process of modernization: first, develop an industrial base; next, use the industrial base to create a modern military; and finally, create a General Staff. Bauer’s discussion implied that he planned to be involved in the whole process of modernization yet emphasized that China was only on the first step and that he was there as an economic

\(^4^9\) Parts of the interview were recorded in an article titled “Colonel Bauer arrives in Shanghai,” *North China Review*, 25 November 1928. The article clipping was placed in the German Foreign Office Files, see AA R 9208/2242.

\(^5^0\) “Colonel Bauer arrives in Shanghai,” AA R 9208/2242.

\(^5^1\) “Colonel Bauer arrives in Shanghai,” AA R 9208/2242.
advisor with military ends in sight but it was the time to focus on industrial development. While Bauer stressed his role as an economic advisor in this interview because of its public nature, it still stresses the importance of industrial development to create a foundation for military modernization.

Bauer worked diligently to cultivate his public image as an economic advisor. These efforts were facilitated by the way he understood the interconnected nature of the military and economic spheres. According to Bauer’s successor, Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant) Hermann Kriebel, Bauer’s development plans for China considered all areas of life ("gesamten Lebensgebiet"), of which the military was merely one element that the Chinese government needed to consolidate its power and create stability.52

The image of Bauer as an economic advisor was not only important for the public at large but also for the German Foreign Office. His tenuous relationship with the Foreign Office will be discussed later but for now it is sufficient to focus on his success in convincing a number of German diplomats that his work in China focused on industrial development. While Bauer was in Germany in the summer of 1928, escorting the Chinese study commission and recruiting additional advisors, one German diplomat, Thiel, wrote from the consulate in Shanghai to the embassy in Beijing recommending that the German Foreign Office lend its support to the study commission and the German advisors. He justified this recommendation on the grounds that Bauer’s main tasks were the expansion of the traffic net and the development of essential industries (Schlüsselindustrie). Thiel informed the Foreign Office that he advised Bauer not to infringe on the Versailles

52 Letter from Hermann Kriebel to Foreign Office representative Herbert von Borch, Peping, 13 November 1929, BA-MA MSG 160/34.
Treaty. He urged the Foreign Office to consider the potential benefits of German participation in the reconstruction and industrialization of China, particularly for German trade interests.53

While the Foreign Office continued to question the nature of Bauer’s work despite Thiel’s recommendations, after Bauer’s death in 1929 the German Foreign Office seemed largely convinced that the main thrust of his work had been directed at addressing China’s lack of industry. The German Foreign Office even acquired some of Bauer’s plans. Another Foreign Office representative, Herbert von Borch, wrote a confidential report to Berlin providing evidence that while Bauer advised on military affairs, he also directed much of his energy and interest towards economic development. Bauer, encouraged by Chiang, worked on plans for the demobilization and reorganization of the Chinese army as well as plans for the development of a rail net, harbors, and aviation industry.54

Bauer’s image as a mere economic advisor and the way he depicted a linear process of modernization for China differed dramatically from how he actually advised Chiang. Behind closed doors, Bauer was very much an economic and military advisor. Rather than advising Chiang to undertake a step-by-step process of modernization that devoted all efforts to establishing an industrial base first, as he depicted in his press interviews and correspondence with the German Foreign Office, he recommended simultaneous development in the industrial and military spheres. Developing an industrial base to support a new military would have far-reaching effects on the state and society.

53 Thiel’s telegram from Shanghai to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peking, 15 July 1928, AA R 9208/2241.

54 Von Borch’s report to the Auswärtigen Amt (AA) in Berlin, Peping, 23 January 1930, AA R 9208/2243.
The development of a rail net, new harbors, improved streets, and an aviation industry would facilitate domestic and international transportation of people, goods, and ideas. These developments, such as railroads, highways and automobiles, and aviation would not only have an impact on society in China but also had military applications.

Chiang’s new military would require a large industrial base and Bauer understood that it would take time to build one in China. Initially, Chiang would have to import the necessary supplies and weapons from the West; however, Bauer emphasized the need for China to establish its own, self-sufficient industrial base and not to rely on imports from the European world. As long as China relied on the Western world for its war material, it would be in a subordinate role and open itself to Western exploitation and interference. China’s dependency on the West for arms and munitions would also severely hinder its control over its own military affairs. Industrial development would allow China to become independent from the West and economically self-sufficient. China’s industrial and economic independence from the West and its possession and control of its own war industry would make it significantly militarily stronger. While Bauer recognized the importance of being industrially self-sufficient, he also understood that the process of industrialization would take time and resources. Bauer recommended that in the interim, Chiang import the necessary supplies from Germany.

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55 Bauer, section on Chinas Handelvertrag in Europa in Denkschrift 4, Summer 1928, BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 130-133.
56 Bauer, Denkschrift Nr. 2, BA-MA, N 1022/41, ser. 36-7.
57 Many reports and memos, notably Militärische Betrachtungen über China and a memo written by Bauer in Nanking, 22 December 1928 are contained in BA-MA N 1022/41.
Many Westerners saw China’s lack of an industrial base as a severe handicap. As historian Michael Adas pointed out, Europeans measured non-Western peoples based on their scientific thought and technological innovation. Based on this ideological framework, China’s poor industrial infrastructure made it inferior to Europe. Bauer, unlike many of his contemporaries, saw China’s lack of industrial infrastructure as an opportunity rather than a mark of inferiority. He pointed out the advantages of China’s position in its ability to stand at a distance and observe several examples of industrialization and military modernization. As a result, China was able to pick and choose the best developments to pursue and avoid some of the failures and dead ends that had resulted in wasted time and resources in the West. China was essentially a tabula rasa, much like Germany had been in the early nineteenth century. Germany experienced a swift rise to industrial supremacy on the continent when it experienced the first and second industrial revolutions, based on steam and electricity respectively, nearly simultaneously.

Michael Adas has suggested that Germany was well suited for its leap to industrial supremacy on the European continent in large part because it was not committed to obsolete technology. Germany serves as the prime example in Gerschenkron’s model of economic development, which suggests that economic and industrial growth occur more rapidly in economically deprived countries as they leap

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61 Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Man*, pg. 142.
While this model of industrialization was articulated long after Bauer’s life, it appears that he implicitly understood it and hoped to replicate it in China.

Industrialization and military modernization were expensive processes to pursue. One of Bauer’s advantages as an advisor was that he was able to distinguish between the necessities and the luxuries—an important skill for an advisor, considering the expenses incurred during the process of simultaneously modernizing both the economy and military. In the interview with the *North China Daily*, Bauer stated:

> China has no organized industry. They have got to start right, because it is an expensive and difficult task to correct mistakes afterwards. If I can be of service in assisting them to start right, then I can do something here. There is so much to be done here in industry, that there is no use talking about organizing a national army until there is a national industry, because without a national industry no army can be any good.\(^6\)

Bauer observed the almost complete lack of modern industry in China and presented his first priority as one of developing China’s industries. The European, or more precisely German, experience provided a model of industrialization and military modernization that he drew from but recognized that it could not be superimposed on China.\(^6\) China lacked the industrial infrastructure. Bauer recommended that Chiang decide early on which weapons systems would be most valuable for the Chinese military and focus China’s energies toward developing the necessary industries to support those choices. For instance, in his discussion of aircraft, Bauer listed their many different roles: air superiority, reconnaissance, close air support, day and night bombing, and transportation.

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\(^6\) Parts of the interview were recorded in an article in the “Colonel Bauer arrives in Shanghai,” AA R 9208/2242.

These diverse missions required different types of aircraft, but as was previously mentioned, Bauer recommended that Chiang adopt just two basic models. Bauer believed choosing two aircraft made sense economically in terms of importing these machines, but more importantly it would simplify the necessary industrial foundation that needed to be developed in China. Two types of machines would be easier to produce and maintain than ten different machines and could still fulfill most of the necessary military demands.  

Economic matters and affordability influenced Bauer’s military recommendations especially in regards to naval development as well as aircraft. Navies were exorbitantly expensive to build and maintain. Bauer praised China for not being an imperialist nation and pointed out that it would not need a large naval force to maintain colonies and concessions overseas. He pointed out that China did not require the naval force that nations such as Japan, England, and the United States needed to pursue their imperialist aims. Bauer recommended that China develop a small, defensive naval force to protect itself against imperial aggression—one that could interdict naval supply lines of an attacking force (i.e. Japan) and provide coastal defense.

Bauer recognized many differences between Europe and China that would affect industrialization and military reform. He directed a good deal of energy towards developing plans for China’s industrialization. While developing these plans, Bauer always kept military development in mind. He intimately understood the industrial requirements of a modern, twentieth-century military. His advice to Chiang on military

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and economic development reflected his conceptions of modern warfare and took into consideration the cost of modernization and its effects on China’s society.

**Situating Reform in the Chinese Context:**

The extensive plans for industrialization and military modernization were a testament to Bauer’s military and technical acumen and served as a blueprint for German advisors in China for the next decade, but one of the aspects that made Bauer a unique advisor was his desire to understand China in a broader context. He recognized that although technology could be imported from Europe, it would have to be situated in Chinese society. Bauer seemed genuinely interested in learning about China—its politics, its history, its culture, and its people. His knowledge about China beyond its military affairs provided him with a framework for situating military and industrial development in the Chinese context.

Bauer devoted a significant amount of time and effort to educating himself about all facets of life in China. He observed and studied Chinese society and culture. During his first trip to China in late 1927, Bauer recorded the events of his journey as well as the interesting things and people he encountered. The details of his travel report *Reisebericht* suggest that he kept a daily journal of his travels and then went on to reflect, edit, and type up an account of his journey to China upon his return to Germany in the spring of 1928. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as advances in transportation technology made international travel more readily available, travel literature, reports, and journals began to appeal to a broader audience eager to hear about
foreign areas. In his travel report, Bauer went into great detail describing the foreign land that he had encountered. He arrived in China on 15 November 1927 and began his description with “Canton! Where should one begin when everything one sees is new and foreign. This is China!” His sentiments suggest he was initially overwhelmed yet intrigued by the foreignness he encountered. He went on to portray the city of Canton as a mix of Chinese and European elements, automobiles and rickshaws. He described a dinner party in Canton on his first evening there, and while most of Bauer’s account has a chronological order, he paused before discussing the putsch against the government in Canton the next morning in order to first discuss the architecture, geography, and people—their customs, beliefs, clothing, professions, and craftsmanship. Bauer’s writing suggests he prioritized building a cultural understanding in which to situate the military and political events.

Bauer’s interest in the environment and people seems to have stemmed from a genuine curiosity about the foreign culture and society as well as a desire to understand China on its own terms so that he could better advise its leaders on the proper course to pursue regarding modernization—both economic and military. Bauer appended a description of the character of the Chinese people (Volkscharakter) to his travel report. The study of the Chinese Volkscharakter provided a more in-depth look at the Chinese

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67 Discussion from Journeys: The Second Annual Graduate Student Conference sponsored by the German Department at the Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, March 2010.

68 “Canton! Ja, wo soll man anfangen, denn alles, was man sieht ist neu, fremdartig. Hier ist China!” Bauer, Reisebericht, BA-MA N 1022/39, pg. 14.


70 Bauer, “Der chinesische Volkscharakter,” BA-MA N 1022/39, pgs. 55-81. An additional (more legible) copy of the study can be found in BA-MA N 1022/41, ser. 1-30.
people, society, history, and economy. Bauer examined such diverse topics as religion, morality, family, marriage and sexuality. Bauer pointed out that the *Volkscharakter* stems from the various customs, business, and religious views of the Chinese people. He described a feedback loop as these attributes not only shaped the *Volkscharakter* but also were informed or re-shaped (*umbilden*) by it.\(^1\) Bauer recognized the constant feedback between the character of the people and their customs and traditions, which maintained a constant dialogue that resulted in a cyclical, albeit gradual, reshaping.

It was important for Bauer and the other advisors to consider China on its own terms. As previously discussed, Bauer did not judge China to be backward like many Europeans, who saw China as inferior because of its lack of technology and failure to industrialize. In similar fashion, Bauer pointed out that in regards to culture and religion, the Chinese should not be judged inferior, backward, or barbarous because they were not European or Christian. He highlighted the fact that the most hubristic notion was one that assumes that one’s own religion is the single, true religion and therefore superior to all others. Bauer saw this tendency of the Europeans as a false premise and a dangerous one.\(^2\) He preferred to think of China as different from Europe and was fascinated by its diversity. Bauer was likely a much more amenable colleague for the Chinese to work with than many European or American advisors (e.g. Joseph Stilwell) who had an air of western superiority.

As his extensive writings and studies of China suggest, Bauer had diverse interests and believed that a broad understanding of Chinese affairs would make him a

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more effective advisor. He advised Chiang not to focus solely on technical developments, but also on developing the political and cultural spheres.\(^7\) While technical developments were important, Bauer understood that they needed to be situated in the proper context in order to be effective. As historian David Ralston demonstrates, modernizing, or more accurately *Europeanizing*, armies in the period between 1600 and the First World War required political and socio-economic changes in order to be effective. Many non-western countries attempted to import European military structure without changing their traditional social and political frameworks. These states failed to consider the forces that creating these new European style armies would unleash. New armies demanded the development of administrative organs within the state to organize, fund, and support the army as well as the education of capable managers to support military development. These political and social developments were also often modeled on the European example. Yet, the forces unleashed by Europeanization often resulted in revolution, which China experienced throughout the nineteenth century.\(^4\) Bauer’s interest in and knowledge of Chinese culture, society, and history facilitated his efforts to assimilate Chinese traditions and character with European economic and military modernity. He understood that transforming the military and industrializing China would have profound effects outside the military sphere and on Chinese society and attempted to direct these forces for Chiang’s benefit.

In order to be effective as a military and economic advisor, Bauer needed to gain an understanding of the political situation in China. He recognized the central role of the

\(^7\) Letter from Bauer to Chiang, 24 July 1928, BA-MA N 1022/43.

\(^4\) Ralston, *Importing the European Army*, introduction and chapter 5.
military in the GMD. He saw the GMD as having lofty goals but at the time of his second visit in 1928, it was essentially a civil-military dictatorship. The GMD required military force to ensure its very survival against various factions and powerful warlords. Bauer noted that the GMD government was marred by “western corruption,” but observed that there were greater dangers like the Communists and Japan.\(^7\) Bauer would develop a keen understanding of the turbulent political situation in China over the course of his employment but he recognized the immediate problems of China’s fractured political and social environment.

China’s divisions through much of the 1920s stemmed from the struggles among the warlords. Chiang and his military need to be placed in the context of the warlord period in China. During this period, Chinese warlords developed their own personal military forces. These personal security forces of strongmen had strong local and regional ties. Their very existence and livelihood depended upon their commander, who organized, supplied, and led them on the battlefield. This was a far cry from the armed forces of the European powers, which had largely overcome local ties to forge a national identity as a cohesive fighting force that was supplied by the state and served the nation-state. The warlord era was a period of transition in China. Edward Dreyer, who has written an extensive history of the warlord era, emphasizes the divergence between the superficial appearance of the warlord armies as modern in terms of terminology, uniforms, and occasionally their weaponry, and the deeply rooted pre-modern social

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\(^7\) Report by Bauer, Nanking, 10 December 1928, BA-MA N 1022/45.

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structure of the warlords’ armed forces, which were essentially feudal in organization. In
the 1920s, Chiang became in effect the most powerful warlord. 76

Bauer was present in China during a period of transition as Chiang sought to
solidify his control of the country and create a national military as opposed to the
conglomeration of the warlord forces he then possessed. One of the avenues toward
creating a national identity in the armed forces was through military education. Bauer’s
influence on reforming the military education system in China so that it would conform
to the German example has already been discussed but it is important to consider the role
of education in developing a national army. Chiang and Bauer intended to use military
schools as vehicles of ideological indoctrination. Historian F. F. Liu, himself one of
Chiang’s generals who had worked closely with the German advisors, pointed out that
military education was a central aspect in the efforts of the Nanking government to create
a united national military. 77 As Chiang wrote, the purpose of the new military academies
was to “teach every cadet, as well as every soldier he may command after graduation, to
be loyal to his nation, his people, party principle, and the Chinese revolution.” 78 Cadets
received instruction on the goals and ideals of the GMD, including the creation of a
modern, unified China. As officers, they would go on to indoctrinate their soldiers.
Chiang recognized his role as a leader during this revolutionary period. The military
became a microcosm of the profound changes he hoped would take root in society—

76 Dreyer, China at War, pgs. 5, 56, 76-8.
77 Liu, A Military History of Modern China, pg. 82.
78 Chiang Kai-shek, speech on the 18th Anniversary of the Central Military Academy, June 16, 1942.
Translated into English and quoted by Liu in A Military History of Modern China, pg. 83.
embracing new technology and the transformation of China into a modern nation-state, all the while maintaining classical Chinese traditions and customs.

Bauer understood he was in China during a time of instability. He recognized the ever-present threats Chiang faced from the CCP, warlords, and Japan. Bauer realized that Chiang’s armed forces were a vital component in the efforts of the Generalissimo to consolidate his power and establish a centralized Chinese state as well as a tool of national security that could address both domestic and foreign threats. Bauer believed military modernization and industrialization could be used as tools for tying China together and aid Chiang in consolidating his power. One of the basic issues that Bauer and Chiang struggled with was the need to create a Chinese national identity that transcended familial and local ties. Chiang and the GMD could use technology, education, and industrialization to help create such an identity and consolidate as well as project his power.

Technology, like the railroad, had the potential to physically tie the large country of China together. Railroads facilitated German industrialization and unification in the nineteenth century and brought the divided German lands together. China lagged substantially behind the West in terms of railroad development. Bauer saw the railroad as an integral part of modern warfare but also pushed for the development of rail nets in China as a foundational element for the process of industrialization—an element that would affect not only military development but also modern civil society. The railroad would explode previous conceptions of space and time. It would allow for faster movement of people, goods, and ideas. The railroad had proved to be a vital element in troop mobilization, movement and supply in European warfare in the late nineteenth and
early twentieth century. It would also facilitate communication in the military and civil spheres and connect cities. The establishment of a rail net across China had the potential to tie the fractured country together.\(^79\)

The airplane, too, could be used to connect China’s diverse regions by allowing for a faster exchange of goods, people, and ideas. It also served as a symbol of power. Not only had it rapidly become an important instrument in warfare, but it had also quickly developed into a symbol of power and technological prowess in Europe in the twentieth century. Germany especially had rallied around flight and the aircraft as a marker of national pride. It demonstrated man’s ability to conquer the physical forces of nature.\(^80\) Bauer understood aircraft as a technological means of making China’s large land mass more manageable and connected. It would also be a visible symbol of Chiang’s power.

Chiang’s military was what kept him in power and Bauer directed much of his military reforms toward consolidating that power. F. F. Liu highlighted the similarities between the reorganization of China’s military and government administrative apparatus and the imperial German model. The imperial German system was designed to ensure that the Kaiser had absolute control over the military and made it largely free of parliamentary interference. World War I highlighted the weaknesses in the imperial

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\(^80\) See Bauer’s various reports and memos regarding aircraft and aviation in BA-MA N 1022/41. In regards to the aircraft as a symbol of power and national pride, see Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
German system; yet Chiang went on to adopt it anyway. Liu pointed out that there were various explanations for the imitation of the German administrative model. Bauer, himself, was a monarchist and advocated such a system for China but, perhaps more importantly, this system would ensure that Chiang, like the German Kaiser, would have undisputed control over the military.  

Bauer attempted to weave his recommendations into China’s social, political, and cultural fabric. He worked diligently to learn about China’s society, culture, economy, history, and politics in order to be a more effective advisor. Bauer, compared to most westerners, was especially sensitive to China’s cultural environment and refused to judge it simply as inferior to the West because it was different. Bauer’s sensitivity to Chinese affairs, his desire to understand China on its own terms, and his ability to situate his suggestions and plans for modernization in a broad context made him effective as an advisor and appealing to Chiang.

**Relations with Chiang Kai-shek:**

Bauer quickly demonstrated to Chiang that he was knowledgeable about military modernization and industrialization, but Bauer’s success as an advisor went beyond his managerial and technical acumen. A number of future German advisors and leaders of the German military mission would prove to be experts in their field; yet, Bauer stood out, in large part, because of his ability to forge a close relationship with the Generalissimo. Chiang was intrigued by Germany and its quick rise to power. Bauer was able to capitalize on Chiang’s affinity for all things German and used it as a means to

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establishing a close relationship. Their relationship stemmed from their ability to identify with one another on a number of ideological issues as well as Bauer’s interest in China and sense of duty to both his homeland and the land of his employers.

Bauer recognized Chiang’s appreciation for Germany—its military might, industrial strength, and national character—and was able to use this as a foundation to build a relationship with the Generalissimo. The two men had great respect for one another and their relationship developed into a genuine friendship. When Bauer returned to Germany in 1928 after his first visit to China, Chiang wrote to him requesting his support for the Chinese study commission that was on its way to Germany to examine political organization, military affairs, and the armaments industry. Chiang believed only Bauer’s support of the mission would foster good progress and success. He expressed great confidence in Bauer’s ability and gratitude for his services.\(^\text{82}\) Captain Hauger reported to the Reichswehr that the Chinese government had great hopes for Bauer.\(^\text{83}\) He spoke with German and Chinese nationals involved in the German Military Mission and learned of Bauer and Chiang’s close relationship. Observers noted that Bauer and Chiang had bonded during frequent walks in the hills near Sun Yat-sen’s grave to discuss all sorts of matters. Bauer developed great respect for Chiang’s integrity and soldierly virtue.\(^\text{84}\) A number of former advisors, interviewed around 1960, also commented on the close friendship between Bauer and Chiang. One German advisor said of the two men,

\(^{82}\) Letter from Chiang to Bauer (translated into German by Li Nai), 1 March 1928. BA-MA N 1022/43.
“One can speak of a real friendship.” Their relationship was not merely professional but also personal. This close relationship cemented a future for the German military mission in China. Hauger noted shortly after Bauer’s death in 1929 that Chiang continued to employ German advisors and extend them great trust and deep friendship just as he had done with Bauer.

Chiang and Bauer’s friendship benefited from many ideological beliefs that they shared. According to historian Jonathon D. Spence, Bauer was a capable advisor, who had a “wild and visionary strain which he expressed in flamboyant rhetoric that apparently appealed to Chiang Kai-shek.” Chiang was impressed by the spectacle that Bauer presented and he was able to identify with Bauer on several ideological issues. Kirby identified Bauer’s ideological beliefs as “national bolshevism”—one of the many far right wing political movements in Weimar Germany. The National Bolshevists advocated a sort of völkisch socialism or communism, much like the Volksgemeinschaft that the Nazis would institute. The National Bolshevists opposed the Treaty of Versailles and rejected Western capitalism and imperialism. As Klemens von Klemperer wrote “National Bolshevism was based on a psychology of resentment toward the West and an intense love-hate relationship toward the East.”

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85 Interviews conducted by Bernd Martin c. 1960 with former German advisors, many of who commented on the close personal relationship between Bauer and Chiang in BA-MA MSG 160/37. Unfortunately, many of the interview notes are not clearly labeled. The original German quote from the interview notes is “Mann kann von einem richtigen Freundschaftverhältnis sprechen.” Kirby also discusses the relationship in Germany and Republican China, pg. 50.

86 Hauger, Bericht über eine Studienreise nach Ostasien, BA-MA RH 2/1822, pgs. 47-8.

87 Spence, The Search for Modern China, pg. 398.

88 Kirby’s discussion of National Bolshevism and Klemperer’s description can be found in Germany and Republican China, pg. 48.
Germany and China together, Bauer and Chiang agreed, writhed under Western oppression. China had a long history of dealing with Western imperialism in East Asia. Germany, arriving late to the Western contest to carve up the world, had been forced to find its own path, a Sonderweg, to Great Power status. Both Germany and China resented the World War I peace settlement. China was embarrassed by the Shandong settlement, which gave the former German territory of Qingdao to Japan rather than China, while Germany had been rendered impotent by the Versailles Treaty. Captain Hauger even noted in his report to the Reichswehr that the Chinese saw Germany as a fellow sufferer of European hostility. 89 Bauer’s ideological rejection of the West likely appealed to Chiang and provided a common enemy for the two to ally against.

Both Bauer and Chiang were ardent nationalists, but they recognized the twentieth century as a time when the world was become increasingly connected through new transportation technology and better communication networks. Bauer stressed the importance of nationalism and maintaining national identity in an age of growing internationalism. 90 Bauer’s travels throughout the 1920s to the USSR, Spain, Argentina, and finally to China suggest that he did not oppose transnational exchange so long as a distinct national character continued to be maintained. Bauer’s beliefs on the importance of national character were compatible with Chiang’s desire to maintain Chinese culture and traditions while going about the process of modernizing the military and economy. Their shared views on the importance of the nation-state in an age of internationalism


provided a common ground for Bauer and Chiang to pursue a Sino-German transnational exchange that would benefit both countries.

**German Political Entanglements:**

While Bauer believed he was furthering German interests in an age of growing internationalism by cementing a Sino-German relationship, not all factions in Germany supported him. In addition to situating his work in the Chinese context, Bauer also had to navigate the German political sphere. The German Foreign Office was hesitant to support, if not outright opposed to Bauer’s efforts to build a Sino-German relationship and establish a German military mission. The Foreign Office expressed numerous concerns about the effect of German advisors serving in China on Germany’s international relations and trade.

Even before Bauer’s arrival in China, the prospect of German officers working in China troubled the Foreign Office, especially when their work could be connected to the Chinese army. In the summer of 1927, a flurry of telegrams between the German Embassy in Beijing (Peking) and Wilhelmstrasse expressed concern over Chiang’s efforts to acquire German military instructors for the Whampoa Military Academy, China’s premier officer training center, as well as advisors for the army. Adolf Boye, a German diplomat who was stationed at the embassy in Beijing, expressed a vehement dislike for the Chinese and was strongly opposed to German nationals taking up employment in China. Boye advised the Foreign Office in Berlin to issue a strict disclaimer regarding the employment of Germans as military instructors. He believed that Germany had nothing to gain from the endeavor. He pointed out that the Chinese offered employment merely
because they thought they were doing a favor for Germany and hence would be ungrateful for the services of the German instructors. Boye’s strong opposition to German involvement in Chinese military and economic affairs stemmed in part from his extreme dislike of the Chinese people. He described the population of twentieth-century China as “half Chinese” (“halb-chinesische”), not to be confused with their diligent, hard-working, intellectual, and honest ancestors.91 Boye perceived the contemporary Chinese people, particularly the leadership, to be lazy and thoughtless, corrupt and looking only to climb the power hierarchy while the country was on the verge of anarchy.92

While Boye failed to recognize the value of any sort of Sino-German relationship, he proved to be the exception as the Foreign Office in general was generally not opposed to such a relationship but was more concerned about the negative effects of the German military mission on Germany’s foreign relations. Wilhelmstrasse had legitimate concerns about the presence of German advisors in China, which was a flagrant violation of the Versailles Treaty.93 Boye’s dislike for the Chinese was extreme, but he highlighted some important international relations issues that concerned the more moderate German diplomats as well. Another German diplomat, Thiel, who was generally supportive of the GMD’s efforts to modernize China, also expressed unease about the activities of German military advisors.94 Both Boye and Thiel were concerned over the potential violation of

91 Telegram from Adolf Boye in Peking to the AA in Berlin, 9 August 1927, AA 9208/2241.
92 Telegram from Boye in Peking to the AA in Berlin, 9 August 1927, AA 9208/2241.
93 Fox, Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, 15.
94 Thiel suggested the German Foreign Office lend support to a Chinese political and military study commission in 1928. See Thiel’s telegram from Shanghai to the AA in Berlin, 3 January 1928, AA R 9208/2241.
the Treaty of Versailles, particularly Article 179, which forbade Germans from serving in foreign militaries. The German Foreign Office had legitimate concerns about flagrant violations of the Versailles Treaty and the potential international repercussions. While the German military saw covert rearmament as the path to Germany’s reassertion of power, the Foreign Office tended to favor a policy of playing by the rules and gaining the trust of the international community. This strategy would continue to be a point of contention between the German officers who served in China and sought to circumvent the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, and the Foreign Office personnel who sought to operate within the legal framework laid out by the treaty.

Boye strongly advised Berlin against official support of the Germans seeking employment in China. He pointed out the political and financial instability of the advisory positions and the potential for the questionable political activities of advisors to provoke international concern, hostility, and distrust of Germany. On 5 August 1927, Boye recommended that German citizens looking to serve as instructors and advisors be made aware that they would receive no official support or backing from the Foreign Office. He reiterated his point a few days later in another telegram, in which he stated that Germany should not allow itself to be seduced by the “China-clique” and Germans seeking adventure and employment in China do so at their own risk. Boye was concerned about the possibility that Germany would have to spend a good deal of

95 Telegram from Boye in Peking to the AA in Berlin, 9 August 1927, AA R 9208/2241. Telegram from Thiel in Shanghai to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peking, 15 January 1928, AA R 9208/2241.
96 Telegram from Boye in Peking to the AA in Berlin, 5 August 1927, AA 9208/2241.
97 Telegrams from Boye in Peking to the AA in Berlin, 5 August 1927 and 9 August 1927, AA 9208/2241.
capital—both financial and political—to rescue its citizens should the situation in China deteriorate.

While the presence of German military advisors in general was problematic for the Foreign Office, Bauer, in particular, given his history did little to assuage their concerns. Bauer was a particularly inflammatory figure. Even the Reichswehr, which was more than willing to conduct its own foreign policy when displeased with Wilhelmstrasse, found Bauer’s presence in China alarming. The Reichswehr was not opposed to arranging a covert military exchange program similar to the one it had with the Soviets but even in that case, according to Kirby “the Reichswehr made it clear to the Soviets that they would have nothing to do with [Bauer].” 98 The Reichswehr, much like the German government, wanted nothing to do with Bauer officially in the Soviet Union and China; however, both the Reichswehr and the German Foreign Office were keenly interested in monitoring Bauer’s activities in China. Although interested in establishing its own relations with China and monitoring Bauer’s activities, the Reichswehr chose not to work through the disgraced colonel. Bauer’s presence in China and the opposition of the Foreign Office briefly tempered the Reichswehr’s efforts to secure a relationship with China. 99

The German Foreign Office kept close tabs on press reports regarding German officers in China, especially those concerning Bauer. The English-language North China Daily printed several articles of concern to the Foreign Office surrounding Bauer’s second journey to China in the fall of 1928. The newspaper’s description of Bauer and his

98 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 48.
99 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 55.
fellow German advisors as anti-democratic monarchists concerned the German embassy staff in China. Oskar Trautmann, who worked for the Foreign Office in Berlin at the time, sent a telegram to the German embassy in Beijing, suggesting that in light of the English press campaign against Bauer, it would be best if the Chinese would renounce him and not allow his return. Trautmann went so far as to recommend that the matter should be discussed with Chiang directly. He highlighted the fact that the English press would always see Bauer as a military advisor—not an economic advisor—because of his history and militaristic character. Trautmann was referring to Britain’s concern not only about Bauer’s military service in the First World War but also his involvement in the Kapp Putsch, which demonstrated his desire to put military power above all else.

To alleviate international apprehension over the advisors’ work and to ease the concerns of the Foreign Office, Bauer attempted to keep his activities veiled in secrecy while molding the public perception of his work as an economic advisor in China. He offered a response to the “catty and tendentious distorted reports…[of the] leftist democratic” press in 1928. Bauer stated that he was not actually in the service of the Chinese government or military and that there was no contractual relationship. To be fair, Bauer technically was not contractually employed by the Chinese government or military; rather, he had a personal contract with Chiang to build up his own military

100 Telegram from Thiel in Shanghai to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peking, 25 October 1928, AA 9208/2242.
101 Telegram from Trautmann in Berlin to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peking, 26-7 October 1928, AA 9208/2242.
102 Bauer, Erklärung, Potsdam 26 October 1928, BA-MA N 1022/45. A copy can also be found in AA R 9208/2242.
103 Bauer, Erklärung, Potsdam 26 October 1928, BA-MA N 1022/45 and AA R 9208/2242.
force, which in the warlord context would not seem unusual.\textsuperscript{104} Bauer also noted that no Germans had contracts for their military skills.\textsuperscript{105} One of Bauer’s favorite techniques for circumventing the Versailles Treaty and potential international concern was blurring the line between military and economic development, as previously discussed. Bauer designed his statement to the press to appease international concerns, notably the British given its English translation, as well as those of the German Foreign Office.

Bauer was not the only German officer in China concerned with the press and the meddling of the German Foreign Office. The \textit{North China Daily} quoted another anonymous retired German army officer in China who stated:

\begin{quote}
We Germans are trying to discourage our reputation for military skill. The German Republic is sick of war, and of military affairs in general. We do not want a strong military power in our own country, and we do not want to help any other country to build up a strong military organization. But our government cannot prevent individual Germans from making contracts with individual warlords in China. Individual Britons and Japanese have acted in the same manner in the past, without the support of their governments. It can be safely stated that the present contracts have been made entirely without encouragement from the German government.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

It seems that this German officer was attempting to paint a (laughable) picture of a new age of German pacifism for international consumption. He attempted to appeal to the international community by highlighting the similarities between the German advisors and their British and Japanese counterparts, while drawing any blame or fallout away from the Foreign Office or German government.

\textsuperscript{104} For a more in-depth discussion the continuities between Chiang’s military force and struggle for power and Chinese warlordism, see Dreyer, \textit{China at War}, especially chapters 3 and 4.

\textsuperscript{105} Bauer, \textit{Erklärung}, Potsdam 26 October 1928, BA-MA N 1022/45 and AA R 9208/2242.

These press reports did little to appease the Foreign Office’s worries. The German Foreign Office had good reason to divorce itself from the activities of the German military advisors and discourage their presence in China from an international relations standpoint. The Foreign Office not only had reason to be concerned about the League of Nations perception of the military advisors, but also their effect on Germany’s great Far Eastern policy. Wilhelmstrasse was particularly worried that the presence of the military advisors in China would damage German relations with Japan. Throughout the interwar period, Germany officially maintained a policy of neutrality in East Asia. German military advisors in China had the potential to mislead the Japanese to conclude that Germany was favoring China. The Foreign Office’s conclusion at the turn of the decade was that ultimately, more harm than good would come out of the presence of German advisors in China.\textsuperscript{107}

Wilhelmstrasse was concerned not only about the damage that the military advisors would have on Germany’s international reputation, but also about their effect on Sino-German trade. German diplomats, notably the German Chargé d’affaires in Beijing Otto von Erdermannsdorff, feared that trading and sending arms exclusively to Chiang would hurt German trade with other parts of China. In the late 1920s, while Chiang had made strides in unifying the country, the Nanking government was not recognized as the sole government in China, nor was its stability assured. Chiang still faced threats from various warlords, many of whom continued to benefit from trade with and arms shipments from Germany. Von Erdermannsdorff was concerned that the activities of the German advisors would prejudice German trade toward Nanking during a time of

\textsuperscript{107} Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, pgs. 14-16.
instability when it seemed just as likely that another regime could emerge as the leading power in China. Germany traded with other Chinese regimes, notably the Canton government as well as various warlords. Von Erdmannsdorff feared they might see Germany as favoring the Nanking government. The German Foreign Office did not want to provoke anti-German sentiments or the refusal of those regimes to continue their trade with Germany. Von Erdmannsdorff described the volatile domestic situation and the precarious position of Chiang’s leadership in China in a confidential memo to the Foreign Office in Berlin in early 1929. He was especially worried that Bauer’s activities in China would strengthen the attacks of Chiang’s enemies, who claimed his government was rife with Western corruption. He feared that Bauer and the other German advisors would provoke a reaction that would turn Chiang’s opponents into outright enemies.108 Interestingly enough, only four months after Erdmannsdorff’s memo, Bauer died of smallpox. Many suspected that Chiang’s enemies had deliberately infected him, as he was the sole person in his entourage to contract the disease, which is highly contagious.109

With few exceptions, the Foreign Office, the Reichswehr, and the German advisors who followed Bauer to China recognized that Germany had much to gain from a relationship with China, though they often differed in the way they defined their aims for a Sino-German relationship. Though tragic, Bauer’s death in May 1929 initially appeared as though it would benefit the Foreign Office and the Reichswehr, both of which were

108 Memo from von Erdmannsdorff to the AA in Berlin, 4 January 1929, AA R 9208/2242. Also see Fox, Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, pgs. 14-16 for a more in-depth discussion on Germany’s trade with the various warlords in China and the potential effects of the presence of German advisors to the Nanking government.

109 See the numerous reports on and newspaper clippings from May 1929 about Bauer’s death in the Foreign Office files, AA R 9208/2242. Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 61.
eager to conduct relations with China without associating themselves with rogue retired colonel. Yet, those institutions failed to recognize Bauer’s effectiveness until his successors took over. While Bauer’s history and reputation had been problematic, he had learned to maintain a low profile, manage public perception, and work in secret. Many German diplomats and industrialists would look back fondly on Bauer’s work in China. His successors Kriebel and Wetzell were less concerned with public perception. They focused heavily on military affairs and failed to continue the mission’s façade as an economic advisory group, which would be much more problematic for the Foreign Office. At the same time, Kriebel and Wetzell also failed to work closely with the Reichswehrministerium. That relationship would not be fully restored until Hans von Seeckt traveled to China in 1934.

**Conclusion:**

While Bauer was a problematic figure for many officials in Germany, he proved to be the ideal person to lay the foundation for the German military mission in China. The intriguing nature of Bauer’s work during the First World War and throughout the 1920s made him keenly aware of the importance of public perception. He brilliantly molded the façade of the German military mission as one of an economic advisory group for official German and foreign consumption. In doing so, he laid a strong foundation for the German military mission. Chiang wanted not just a modern military, but also a modern nation-state with an industrial base. Bauer’s simultaneous efforts to build a modern military and industrialize China impressed Chiang, as did his broad interest in China. The theory that there was a conspiracy surrounding Bauer’s death by small pox after being
deliberately infected by Chiang’s enemies, though it may never be resolved, has merit.

The fact that Chiang’s enemies would kill off the Generalissimo’s closest advisors serves as a testament to Bauer’s effectiveness. The assassins, likely warlords, achieved their goal of weakening Chiang’s position and German support by eliminating Bauer. When Bauer died, hostilities in the Chinese civil war among the warlords resumed and the German military mission slid into disarray under the poor leadership of Bauer’s successors.

Bauer was knowledgeable about military and industrial affairs, but more importantly, he had extensive international experience and the ability to adapt to a foreign environment and forge strong personal relationships with the Chinese. Together, China and Germany could assist each other in the long process of revitalization and the quest to achieve Great Power status. Bauer set a high standard for his successors to follow.

Bauer’s successors, Kriebel and Wetzell, much to Chiang’s chagrin, fell short as they failed to consider China’s development outside the military sphere and severely underestimated the value of their personal relationships with Chinese officials.
With Bauer’s suspicious death in May 1929, the German military mission was left in a precarious position without a leader. Bauer had proven himself to be adept at navigating the rocky waters of diplomacy and public opinion. He also demonstrated his astute ability as a military advisor, balancing the immediate needs of security in China with the long-term goal of in-depth modernization across the country. His ability as an advisor, his ideological leanings, and his interpersonal skills had all facilitated his ability to endear himself to Chiang Kai-shek. Bauer had set a high standard for all German advisors in China to meet, especially his successors.

A number of Bauer’s successors failed to live up to the high standards he had set. Immediately following Bauer’s death, Chiang appointed Hermann Kriebel, who was en route to China to serve as Bauer’s second in command, as leader of the mission. Kriebel had been a general staff officer in the Bavarian army and retired as a lieutenant colonel. He lasted for barely a year as head of the mission before Chiang sought out a replacement. Kriebel took over the mission amid an increasingly unstable political environment as hostilities in China’s civil war resumed after their brief lull during Bauer’s tenure. The civil war complicated the task of modernizing the Chinese army, but

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110 While the Bavarian army fought alongside the German army in World War I, they only merged in 1919.
Kriebel’s personality and narrow focus on military affairs were more significant factors in his failure as a leader and the decline of the mission’s work.

While Kriebel may have been a capable soldier, he proved to be a poor manager of the mission. He was never able to gain the respect of or authority over the advisors that Bauer had. Kriebel lacked Bauer’s cultural sensitivity, forethought, interpersonal skills, and finesse. He focused too heavily on military affairs—conceiving of military advising in a narrow sense, setting his focus primarily on tactical training and operational plans rather than considering the broader context of military and national development. He failed to develop an understanding of Chinese politics and society. He also neglected the closely intertwined relationship between military modernization and industrialization. As a result of his narrow conception of military modernization, Kriebel alienated his fellow advisors, the German Foreign Office, and the Chinese leadership. The mission’s work quickly declined as a result of Kriebel’s poor leadership. His experience in China demonstrates the need for advisors to be more than military tacticians.

**Instability Reigns:**

Upon taking over command of the mission in the summer of 1929, Kriebel faced an uphill battle. The German military mission was lacking the resources it would need to effectively implement Bauer’s plans for the modernization of the Chinese military and industry. The mission’s work was also hindered by the rapid deterioration of political stability in China. The fragile coalition of warlords in the GMD began to unravel as Chiang faced a continuation of the civil war, which made the work of the mission much more difficult.
For much of Bauer’s tenure as advisor to Chiang, the political situation had been relatively stable with the completion of the Northern Expedition against the warlords in April 1928. According to historian Edward Dreyer, “while warlordism remained a major force, Chiang Kai-shek was in a stronger hegemonial position, and the GMD government in 1928 had more widespread political legitimacy, than any Chinese government since 1912.” Yet this relative stability rested on a fragile foundation. The Northern Expedition’s original objective was the destruction of the northern warlords. At the end of the campaign, the three major warlords, Zhang Xueliang (Chang Tso-liang, son of Zhang Zuolin, who was assassinated by the Japanese in 1928), Feng Yuxiang (Feng Yü-hsiang), and Yen Xishang (Yen Hsi-shan) had not been destroyed but rather formed a tenuous military coalition with Chiang. Around the time of Bauer’s death, this alliance began to unravel, thus leaving many Westerners with the impression that China’s brief stability was a fleeting phenomenon and that the country was once again on the verge of a resumption of hostilities.

The 1929 Reichswehr study commission in East Asia led by Captain Hauger was traveling in China when Kriebel took command of the mission. Hauger recorded some of the complications faced by the German military advisors as hostilities in China’s civil war resumed. He noted that after Bauer’s death the German advisors lacked the necessary support and resources in material and men to carry out their task of re-making the Chinese military and industrial base along modern lines. Hauger saw the task at hand as too large and too diverse for the small circle of German advisors. He also highlighted the

111 Dreyer, China at War, pg. 151.
112 Dreyer, China at War, pgs. 151-2.
fact that the confused domestic political situation and political intrigue in China were not conducive to military reform and the activities of the German advisors. Hauger’s travels in China are indicative of the Reichswehr’s continued interest in the area for the purposes of covert German rearmament, training soldiers, and experimenting with new weapons systems and tactics similar to the covert relationship with the Soviet Union. While Hauger saw the potential benefits of a relationship between the Reichswehr and China via the German military mission, he believed that 1929 was not the proper time to pursue such a relationship given the increasing instability.

Kriebel took over the leadership of the mission during this unstable time. Warlord tensions and fighting persisted throughout his tenure as leader of the mission from May 1929 to May 1930. Kriebel expressed concern over both domestic and foreign policy shortly after taking over command of the mission. In September 1929, Kriebel explained the fragile situation in China in a letter to the German-American journalist Karl Wiegand. During the First and Second World Wars, Wiegand served as a war correspondent for Hearst newspapers. He interviewed a number of high-profile German politicians and military commanders and continued his correspondence with many of German military officers throughout the interwar period. In his correspondence with Wiegand, Kriebel expressed his frustrations with the fact that Chiang had not fully resolved the warlord issue during the Northern Expedition in 1926. Zhang Xueliang, Feng Yuxiang, and Yen Xishan still ruled in Mukden, Shanxi and Henan (Honan), and Shaanxi respectively. Kriebel knew that these three warlords were indeed capable of opposing Chiang and threatened the stability of the Nanking government. The warlord threat was complicated

by the intertwining of domestic and foreign political strife as a result of the Communists, who were receiving support from Soviet Russia. Kriebel was frustrated by these domestic struggles as they hindered his work with the Chinese army.\textsuperscript{114}

Many of the German advisors hoped that Chiang would disarm a large portion of his military, especially the warlord forces that his army subsumed, but the continual threats from the warlords as well as the communists, both Chinese and Russian, made disarmament a difficult proposition to pursue. The German advisors, starting with Bauer, encouraged Chiang to disarm a significant portion of his poorly trained and equipped mass army in order to create a smaller, yet more effective military force. This disarmament process called for the demobilization of the various warlord armies in order to create a unified national force as well as eliminate Chiang’s rivals’ instruments of force. Kriebel witnessed the beginnings of this process of disarmament but pointed out that it needed to be halted in the north because of the threat of a Russian-Bolshevik incursion through Mongolia and Turkestan. The forces in the north that Kriebel referred to were those of the three major warlords: Zhang, Feng, and Yen. While the disarmament of the warlord armies was imperative, Chiang could not undertake it because of the threat from the Soviet Union. Kriebel feared the potential of these troops being utilized against the Nanking government by their warlord leaders.\textsuperscript{115}

Chiang and Kriebel had to delicately balance the threats faced by Nanking from the warlord armies in the north as well as communist agitation from both domestic and

\textsuperscript{114} Letter from Kriebel to Karl von Wiegand, 9 September 1929. Hoover Institution. Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H. Kriebel was surprisingly candid in this letter although he requested that his name not be associated with the information that he provided to Wiegand.

\textsuperscript{115} Letter from Kriebel to Wiegand. 9 September 1929. Hoover Institution. Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H.
foreign sources. This proved to be a daunting task. Domestic turmoil and the Russian threat prevented the disarmament of Chiang’s forces and they hindered the work of the German military mission, as it would be difficult, if not impossible, to completely reform Chiang’s military while it was still fighting.

**Kriebel and the Chinese Military:**

Kriebel wanted to mold the Chinese army in the form of the once great imperial German army. He took with him to China much of what he had learned about modern warfare from the Great War. Steeped in German tradition, Kriebel thought primarily in tactical and operational military terms. Like many German officers before him, he proved to be a capable tactician but quite inept at the strategic level. Unlike Bauer, he took little interest in acquiring a broad understanding of China, which hindered his understanding of Chiang’s strategy and his ability to serve effectively as an advisor during the civil war.

At the tactical level, Kriebel proved to be fairly innovative when it came to bringing German methods to China. He believed that the Chinese were indeed capable of becoming adequate (“vollwertig”) soldiers, who possessed the ability to act independently and make good judgments as required by modern warfare.\(^\text{116}\) Kriebel set out to train the Chinese military in new tactics for modern warfare, many of which the Germans had developed in the Great War. One German advisor, Erich Stoelzner, described Kriebel’s efforts to bring new German tactics to China. Given the context of

\(^{116}\) Kriebel wrote of the Chinese soldiers, “Ich glaube dass man aus chinesischen Truppen vollwertige Soldaten machen kann, die auch im modernen Krieg mit seinen grossen Anforderungen an Selbstaendigkeit und Urteilskraft jeder anderen Armee gleichwertig werden koennen.” Letter from Kriebel to Wiegand. 9 September 1929. Hoover Institution. Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H.
civil war and the impenetrability of city walls in China, Kriebel recommended that Chiang create special assault units (Sturm Battalion), modeled on the German storm troops of the Great War, to use in combination with artillery to break through city fortifications. Modern artillery was a rare luxury for Chiang’s army. It was expensive, required training, and difficult to move. Chiang’s few artillery pieces were often outdated and had proven to be largely ineffective against these walls because of the earthworks behind them. The only way through these walls was by the gates that controlled the flow of people into and out of the city. In order to combat these walled cities, Kriebel recommended that the storm battalions, equipped with bamboo ladders and under the protection of machine gun fire, climb the walls. Meanwhile, artillery, though limited, should focus on the gates to open a way for other units to storm into the city.¹¹⁷

Kriebel’s proposed storm battalion, as depicted by Stoelzner, was a blend of German and Chinese warfare with its combination of bamboo ladders and machine guns. The Chinese assault units closely resembled in form and purpose the German storm battalions of the Great War with some units launching a frontal assault while others penetrated the lines.¹¹⁸

In training the Chinese troops to conduct storm troop tactics, Kriebel demonstrated his faith in their ability to become a modern armed force, capable of twentieth-century warfare. Storm troop tactics had been developed by the Germans in an attempt to overcome the stalemate of trench warfare in World War I.¹¹⁹ These tactics

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¹¹⁹ Lupfer, Dynamics of Doctrine and Gudmundson, Stormtroop Tactics.
required advanced training to coordinate simultaneous troop movements and firepower. In order to be successful and prevent friendly-fire tragedies, the attack had to be precisely timed. While Kriebel would not see Chinese troops use this tactic in battle, according to Stoelzner, it did prove to be successful in a field exercise under Chiang’s supervision, conducted shortly after the first storm battalion was trained.\textsuperscript{120}

While Kriebel was a capable advisor at the tactical level, his shortcomings, like many German officers, became apparent at the strategic level. He failed to grasp a full understanding of the complexities of Chinese politics and warfare. He offered military solutions when political ones were much more appropriate. During this phase of the civil war, Chiang often preferred to remain on the defensive, if he fought at all, which frustrated Kriebel and other German advisors to no end. The inability of Kriebel to understand the political dimensions of Chinese civil warfare trickled down to the lower levels of the German military mission. One disgruntled German major quoted in a newspaper article said: “I built a powerful system of fortifications south of Tsinanfu. It would have taken a twelve to one force, perhaps more, to take those lines, especially in view of the artillery carried by the south. But what’s the use of a defence system if they won’t defend it?”\textsuperscript{121} The article went on to point out that the German advisors were unaccustomed to the political maneuvering that contributed to military victories in China. Kriebel and his advisors failed to understand that when Chiang was not fighting on the battlefield, he was maneuvering politically to negotiate warlord coalitions and aimed to achieve victory while avoiding the devastating effects of battle.

\textsuperscript{120} Erich Stoelzner’s Personal Recollections, Hoover Institution, The Stoelzner Papers, pg. 24.

\textsuperscript{121} The major was quoted in a newspaper clipping in the German Foreign Office files. See “German Advisers,” \textit{The North China Standard}, Peiping, 30 October 1929, AA R 9208/2238.
Nanking’s approach towards its various opponents, which often appeared to be submissive or inactive, frustrated and confused Kriebel. In 1929, Chiang faced a number of diverse threats to the fragile stability he had created in China. He needed to balance the threats from warlords, the constant threat of communist uprisings from both internal sources as well as the threat of a Soviet Russian invasion, and the ever-lingering threat of Japanese encroachment. In a letter to Wiegand in September 1929, Kriebel expressed his concern about Chiang’s passive, patient approach to the problems. While the Russians and the warlords in the north were growing stronger and the threat of war remained ever-present, Chiang remained on the defensive. Kriebel saw this as problematic not only because it gave Chiang’s enemies time to enhance their military might but also because it was dangerous to the morale of Chiang’s own army.122

Kriebel’s frustration with Chiang reflects his failure to understand the political context of warfare in China as well as his upbringing in the German military. While Chiang would often take to the defensive or attempt to avoid battle in order to gain time to regroup his own forces, Kriebel pushed continually for offensive action. He, like many German officers in the early twentieth century, underestimated the value of a strong defense and looked for offensive solutions. Perhaps they should have read Clausewitz, who emphasized defense as the stronger form of war, more closely.123 Kriebel came of age as an officer in the era of the “cult of the offensive,” when grand ideas of fast moving

122 Letter from Kriebel to Wiegand. 9 September 1929, Hoover Institution. Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H.

encircling operations prevailed among the officer corps. While this early twentieth-century
cult of the offensive pervaded European military institutions, it had especially
deep roots in the German military and was not merely a product of advances in
transportation technology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As historian Robert
Citino points out, the German way of war stressed rapid offensive operations.\textsuperscript{124} The
concept of “\textit{kurz und vivus}” (short and lively) wars had long been a foundational element
of the German military’s institutional culture, since at least the days of Frederick the
Great.\textsuperscript{125}

China, however, was different. Wars were often long and involved massive, slow
moving armies. Chiang’s army could not replicate the rapid encirclement campaigns that
the German army had utilized on the eastern front in the Great War. In China, there were
long stretches of what on the surface appeared to be inaction on the battlefield but in
reality involved behind-the-scenes negotiations. Kriebel, as well as many German
advisors under him, failed to understand the political maneuvering that was intrinsic in
Chinese warfare.

When Chiang’s forces did take action, it was often defensive in nature. Chiang’s
unwillingness to take offensive action repeatedly frustrated Kriebel. In Kriebel’s mind,
rapid offensive operations were the best way to combat Chiang’s enemies, not secret
negotiations. Kriebel’s failure to understand Chiang’s strategy contributed to the
breakdown in their relationship as it often led to disputes over the proper course of action.

At the time of Kriebel’s resignation, rumors circulated that it was a result of Chiang’s

\textsuperscript{124} Robert Citino, \textit{The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years War to the Third Reich} (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), pgs. 193-208.

\textsuperscript{125} Citino, \textit{The German Way of War}.
disregard for German advice. Despite Kriebel’s advice, Chiang remained on the
defensive at Xuzhou (also transcribed as Hsuchow or Suchow) and Bengbu (Pengpu) in
1930. One Chinese newspaper article pointed out that the German advice was militarily
sound; however, the German advisors did not necessarily understand Chiang’s delicate
position and his need to balance domestic political issues within his own party.\footnote{126} For
Kriebel and many of the advisors under him, victory was to be achieved on the
battlefield, not via quiet political negotiations behind closed doors.

In order to combat the warlord uprising of 1929-30, Chiang utilized as much, if
not more, political maneuvering as military campaigning. Dreyer said of Chiang “despite
his later ineptitude as a commander-in-chief in the more narrowly military sense, Chiang
Kai-shek in these years demonstrated a subtle mastery of the realities of Chinese politics
in the unacknowledged or ‘residual’ warlord period that followed the Northern
Expedition.”\footnote{127} Secret political negotiations secured the defections of key warlord
commanders, notably Zhang Xueliang’s defection in 1930, to Chiang and the Nanking
government and were a vital factor in Chiang’s success. These defections tipped the
scales of the warlord alliances in Chiang’s favor.\footnote{128} Chiang’s political maneuvering was a
means of breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting—a teaching of Sun Tzu that
the German advisors often failed to consider.\footnote{129} Kriebel and the German advisors under
him failed to grasp the strategic concepts expounded by Sun Tzu, who recognized the

\footnote{126} The newspaper clipping titled “Military Advisors,” \textit{The Central China West}, 9 July 1930, was placed in the
Foreign Office Files, AA R 9208/2238
\footnote{127} Dreyer, \textit{China at War}, pg. 117.
\footnote{128} Dreyer, \textit{China at War}, pgs. 152-5.
\footnote{129} Sun Tzu (Giles translation), \textit{The Art of War}, III.2.
costly, destructive nature of war. The German advisors seemed not have considered Sun Tzu’s teaching in *The Art of War* that “in the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy’s country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it.” For Kriebel along with many German officers, military excellence meant the destruction of the enemy on the battlefield.

While Kriebel brought innovative German tactics to the Chinese army, he failed to comprehend the political dimension of warfare. Chiang’s tendency towards mere military posturing or inactivity on the battlefield frustrated Kriebel, who never gleaned an intimate understanding of Chinese strategy. The way the Germans and Chinese defined victory presented a cultural gap that would plague not only Kriebel but also many future advisors. This gap in military culture led to friction between Chiang and Kriebel and was one of the significant factors in the rapid decline of their relationship.

**Kriebel’s Neglect of Industrial Development:**

Strategic ineptitude and his failure to grasp the political context of warfare in China were not Kriebel’s only shortcomings as leader of the German military mission. He also failed to appreciate the connection between military and industrial development. He severely neglected China’s industrial development, preferring to focus on military reform within the army. Much to the dismay of Chiang, Kriebel disregarded most industrial matters, delegating them to the German civilian advisors. However, he also saw their

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130 Sun Tzu (Giles translation), *The Art of War*, III.1.
work as less important than advising the Chinese army and so they too were often neglected, which led to friction within the mission.

China’s lack of industry was problematic for military modernization and though Kriebel recognized it, he failed to address the issue. In a letter to Wiegand, Kriebel wrote that most of China’s weapon factories were not viable. The majority of weapons and munitions were imported from foreign countries but as Kriebel explained to Wiegand, many of their imports were worthy of being placed in a museum because they were old and out-dated. China’s few good weapons were limited by the high cost of maintenance and munitions. Overall, Kriebel seemed quite pessimistic about China’s armaments industry and imported weapons. Kriebel’s comments to Wiegand indicate that he was aware of the serious problems related to China’s industries and trade; yet, seeing the problem as insurmountable, he ignored the issue rather than attempting to provide a solution. His failure to address China’s industrial shortcomings is a matter of speculation. Perhaps he was overwhelmed by the deficiency of Chinese arms or believed military reform was a more pressing issue. Perhaps as a general staff officer, he believed he was not qualified to comment on industrial matters or maybe he thought that his expertise could be better utilized in the military sphere and thus left industrial matters to be dealt with by the civilian advisors. In any case, Kriebel lacked Bauer’s experience with war industry and it showed much to the detriment of the German military mission and China’s military and industrial development.

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131 Letter from Kriebel to Karl von Wiegand. 9 September 1929. Hoover Institution. Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H.
Kriebel’s neglect of trade and China’s industrial development as well as his shortcomings as a leader proved to be serious problems for the mission. In November 1929 von Borch, one of the German diplomats in China, identified increasing discord among the advisory staff as a result of Kriebel’s poor leadership and inattention to civil affairs. According to von Borch, Kriebel did not possess Bauer’s leadership qualities. He lacked personal authority and never developed Bauer’s sense of duty to Chiang and China. His poor leadership was apparent to the civilian advisors. During Kriebel’s tenure, the civilian advisors had little influence and were quite dissatisfied with their subordination to him; as a result they were reluctant to accept his leadership.132

A significant portion of the mission was composed of civilian advisors. According to a roster of the mission from January 1930 in the Foreign Office files, approximately one-third of the forty odd advisors were civilians.133 The presence of these civilian advisors was the result of Bauer’s plans and recruitment. In 1928 Bauer had recruited a number of civilian technical advisors to come to China. They advised the Chinese in fields such as engineering, chemistry, transportation, aviation, municipal affairs and government. In Bauer’s plans, these civilian advisors had a vital role as they helped the Chinese to establish factories and develop a modern infrastructure that included highways, railways, and communication lines. The activities of the civilian advisors were designed to provide a strong industrial foundation on which the military advisors could build an effective modern military. Kriebel failed to appreciate the relationship between industrial and military development. He focused on training the Chinese troops to use

modern weapons and newly developed tactics (such as the German storm troop tactics), without considering where these weapons would come from or how the Chinese would move or supply their troops.

While Bauer had a holistic view of the task of Chinese military modernization and recognized the fundamentally intertwined relationship between military, political, socio-economic, and industrial development, Kriebel had a very compartmentalized view of the world and the mission in China. In line with his worldview, Kriebel divided the mission. A number of telegrams and reports in the German diplomatic community document this division in January and February 1930. Under Kriebel’s direction in February 1930, the mission was divided into three departments: the military department under Kriebel’s leadership; a department for civil matters led by Dr. Schubart; and a section dedicated to military education under the leadership of General Fritz Lindemann.134

This divorce between military and civilian advisors proved to be detrimental to the mission. Stoelzner, who had joined the mission while Bauer was in charge, pointed out that because Kriebel was “a trained staff officer only[,] all the other advisers and their work with different civilian organizations became neglected and as a result many of those advisers did not get an extension of their contracts and left for home.”135 Their departure was detrimental not only to China’s state and industrial development, but also to Sino-German trade. Many of these advisors had been central in negotiating contracts between the Chinese government and various German firms in the steel, railroad, and aircraft


135 General Stoelzner’s Personal Recollections, Hoover Institution, Stoelzner Papers, pg. 22.
industries, among others. The Foreign Office was concerned that the dismissal of the civilian advisors would have a negative effect on the Sino-German relationship. It was also concerned that their dismissal was indicative of the shifting focus of the German advisors away from industrialization and towards military affairs, which had the potential to provoke international outrage at Germany’s flagrant violation of the Versailles Treaty.\(^{136}\) Kriebel was chiseling away at the economic façade of the mission that Bauer had fashioned. For the Foreign Office, Bauer’s work, in retrospect, became far less problematic given the actions of his successor. Kriebel made few friends among the German diplomatic corps.

Kriebel also alienated many of the advisors and industrialists, not only with his neglect of matters outside the military sphere, but also with his personality. Captain Krummacher, who served as the main liaison between training the Chinese troops in the field and the headquarters of the German military mission, had many negative things to say about Kriebel. He believed that Kriebel’s name would forever be associated with the fiasco of the mission.\(^{137}\) He, like Stoelzner, was also concerned about the neglect of the civilian advisors, particularly the effect it would have on supplying the Chinese military. Krummacher wrote that Bauer had worked diligently to establish ties with Skoda and Krupp and fostered a successful international weapons trade. The Dutchman *Oberst de*

\(^{136}\) These concerns of the Foreign Office are expressed in a number of reports and correspondence. See especially, the report from the Deutsches Generalkonsulat in Shanghai to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peping, 28 April 1930. A report from von Borch to the AA in Berlin on 21 May 1930 mentions the divided nature of the mission upon Wetzell’s arrival in China. Another telegram to the Deutsches Generalkonsulat in Shanghai on 9 May 1930, discusses friction within the mission. These files can be found in AA R 9208/2244.

\(^{137}\) Krummacher wrote in a letter to one of his former commanding officers in Germany “Ein etwaiges Fiasko der Mission wird mit dem Namen Kriebel unauslöschlich verbunden sein und bleiben.” Letter dated 20 April 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1, ser. 157.
Fremery was a crafty character much like Bauer and capable of maintaining an international weapons trading business while circumventing the League of Nations. De Fremery’s weapons trade was one of the lifelines of the German advisors and the Chinese army. With great disdain, Krummacher pointed out that Kriebel was stupid enough to make an enemy of de Fremery. Kriebel further damaged the Sino-German trade relationship by alienating General Chen Yi and the Chinese *Handelsabteilung* (trade delegation) in Berlin.

Krummacher’s issues with Kriebel’s leadership of the mission did not stop with his concerns over the Sino-German trading relationship. He also believed Kriebel was a poor administrator. In April 1930, approximately ten months after Kriebel had taken over command of the mission, Krummacher pointed out that he had met only once with the advisors. He also thought that Kriebel had made a poor choice in dividing the mission. He pointed out that Kriebel’s command staff busied itself with useless paperwork rather than spending time in the field training Chinese soldiers. Krummacher was also disappointed with Kriebel’s inability to provide direction for the mission’s tasks or to address important problems.

Kriebel’s poor leadership skills and his narrow conception of the military sphere severely hindered the work of the mission. His focus on tactical and operational military affairs and neglect of Chinese industrial development resulted in friction among the German advisors and hindered his ability to please Chiang, who had been so impressed

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138 Krummacher wrote “Kriebel hat die ungeheuer Dummheit gemacht, sich mit diesem Mann zu verfeinden und ihn herauszudraengen versucht,” in a letter to his former commanding officer (unnamed) dated 20 April 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1, ser. 151.

139 Krummacher’s letter to his former commanding officer, 20 April 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1, ser. 149-167.
Bauer’s balance of political, military, and economic development. While Kriebel and the military advisors could train Chinese troops to be effective in the short term, he lacked the foresight and long-term planning ability that would allow the China to break free of its reliance on Western arms and supplies and enable it to support its own military endeavors.

The German Foreign Office:

Kriebel’s focus on military affairs rather than industrial development in China and his failure to understand the political context of warfare in China was problematic not only for the Chinese leadership and German advisors but also for the German Foreign Office. As head of the German military mission, Kriebel complicated the task of the Foreign Office to maintain a positive international perception of Germany. Though Bauer had been a problematic character throughout the 1920s for the Foreign Office, the diplomatic community began to look back fondly on the Bauer years in China as compared to Kriebel’s. While Bauer attempted to work covertly in China and avoid press about the mission’s military activities, Kriebel’s focus on military matters at the expense of industrial development shattered any illusion about the real purpose of the mission. The involvement of the German advisors in the Chinese civil war, made public in numerous press reports, was also problematic. Finally, Kriebel’s ideological leanings and membership in the Nazi party were also unsettling for many members of the German diplomatic community.

Upon taking over as leader of the mission, Kriebel attempted to forge closer relations with the German Foreign Office. In the fall 1929, he wrote to von Borch
claiming that he worked in the same spirit as Bauer. Bauer’s plans had encompassed all areas of life in China, from industrialization to the development of administrative state apparatus. Kriebel highlighted the fact that the military was merely one part of Bauer’s plans. While Kriebel spoke of continuity between himself and Bauer and his desire for the mission to concern itself with China’s broad development, his interest proved to be only in military affairs.

Kriebel’s preaching about the mission’s work to develop China militarily as well as industrially and politically and his promises to follow in Bauer’s footsteps did not fool von Borch. The German diplomat recognized that there would be great discontinuity between Bauer and Kriebel’s leadership. Shortly after receiving Kriebel’s letter, von Borch wrote to the German Foreign Office in Berlin:

Oberst Bauer had for his lifetime tried to describe military advisors as a necessary evil that must be accepted, however, the focus of his commission’s activities lay in the sphere of economic building. Now the opposite is the case. The civil element of the advisors is a façade as military advising and practical troop training stand in the foreground.

To von Borch, it was quite clear that Kriebel saw his task as the modernization of the Chinese military. Von Borch may have been overly sympathetic to Bauer, but at least Bauer’s efforts to portray his work as economic in nature made it much easier for the German Foreign Office to plausibly deny the presence of German military advisors or

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mercenaries (as described by some press reports) in China. Kriebel’s intense focus on military affairs would make the Foreign Office’s work much more difficult.

Von Borch also noted that Bauer had wanted to improve relations between China and various German industries. The German diplomat appreciated Bauer’s efforts to promote Sino-German trade, thus serving the interests of both countries. While not stated explicitly, von Borch’s praise of Bauer’s efforts to secure Sino-German trade implied that Kriebel failed to promote trade.  

The Junkers aircraft-producing firm kept close tabs on Bauer in China, with their reports on his activities and even a brief correspondence between him and Professor Hugo Junkers. The Junkers firm worked closely with one of Bauer’s civilian aviation advisors, Ottfried Fuchs, who provided the company with reports on the Far East, promoted the purchase of Junkers aircraft in China, and worked to facilitate contracts. Interestingly, after Bauer’s death there is relatively little documentary proof of contact with Kriebel. While reports in Junker’s files continued to mention Bauer’s work in China long after his death, relatively few reports even mention Kriebel’s name. This absence of evidence speaks to Kriebel’s disinterest in facilitating the expansion of Sino-German trade.

The failure of Kriebel to maintain the appearance of the German mission in China as an organization that promoted Sino-German trade and economic in nature was only exacerbated by the Chinese civil war. The German Foreign Office was very concerned with the publicity surrounding the involvement of German advisors in the fighting in

143 See the Firmenarchiv Junkers (FA JU) in the Deutsches Museum Library and Archive. Files FA JU 0702/T.3-T.7 contain numerous reports on Bauer yet scarcely mention Kriebel. After Bauer’s death, Junkers seems to have worked mostly through Ottfried Fuchs.
China. Given European sensitivity about Germany and any military-related activity in the 1920s and 1930s, the German Foreign Office feared that even a few press reports about German mercenaries fighting in China would stir up an international outcry. The Foreign Office kept close tabs on the press reports in China. Their files contain a number of newspaper clippings about German advisors fighting in the Chinese civil war. Some articles refer to the Germans as “soldiers of fortune.” Another article on the German advisors pointed out that “Ostensibly their duties are to help raise the level of training in the Chinese army and more particularly to educate officers in key positions. But it is now alleged that at least some of these men are with forces at the battle front.” Especially inflammatory were the reports about the connection between the German advisors and the use of poison gas in the Chinese civil war. These press reports reminded readers that poison gas was a German invention and they had been the first to employ the awful weapon during the Great War. The articles expressed concerned that the Germans were now bringing the horrible weapon to China. The press alleged that the German advisors in China were assisting Chiang in the development of factories to manufacture poison gas as well as being deployed with his troops to direct the usage of chemical weapons on the battlefield.


146 The foreign office reports contain a number of articles translated into German regarding the use of poison gas and its connections to the German advisors. See article translation from *Tai wu shih pao* from 22 March 1930 (translation dated 24 March 1930); Memorandum from von Borch to the Generalkonsulate in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, and Canton, 3 March 1930; report dated 8 April 1930 with German translations of an article from *Kiangnan wan pao* on poison gas. All reports and correspondence can be found in AA R 9208/2238.
Many of the press allegations were deliberately inflammatory. Chiang’s opponents likely fed these reports to the press to play on western fears of German militarism in the hopes that they would result in the withdrawal of the advisors. In a memo to the German consulates in China, von Borch highlighted the fact that Chinese press reports sought to discredit Chiang and also attacked Germany in the process.\(^\text{147}\) Von Borch expressed his concern several times to Kriebel about the impact of the presence of the German advisors on German foreign relations.\(^\text{148}\) The German diplomatic community feared an international backlash in response to the presence of retired German officers on the battlefields in China. They also wanted to insure that favorable relations between Germany and China continued but were concerned that the presence of the German advisors would disrupt relations, especially if Chiang did not emerge victorious from the civil war. Kriebel’s letters to von Borch denying the presence of the advisors on the battlefield did little to reassure the diplomat.

Kriebel’s own ideological views also bred distrust among the German diplomats. Many of the German advisors in China were on the right of the political spectrum, oftentimes as conservative German nationalists; however, some swung ideologically to the far right. As previously mentioned, Bauer had been involved in far right wing paramilitary activities in Germany in the years immediately following World War I. While Bauer had not been involved with the Nationalist Socialists, it seems likely that had he lived longer, he would have joined their ranks. Kriebel, however, was a Nazi party

\(^{147}\) Memorandum from von Borch to the Generalkonsulate in Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, and Canton, 3 March 1930, AA R 9208/2238.

\(^{148}\) Letters from von Borch to Kriebel, 4 December 1929, 22 April 1930, and 9 May 1930, AA R 9208/2238.
member from the beginning. In 1923, he marched alongside Hitler in the Beerhall Putsch, after which he was sentenced to prison alongside his fellow putschists. Their ideological affinity likely contributed to Bauer inviting Kriebel to China in 1929.

According to Kriebel’s son, his father had been concerned about Germany’s military capability after the Great War peace settlement and so “he took part in the Hitler Putsch on the side of Ludendorff.” The deliberate attempt to distance his father from Hitler in his recollections was clear and fashionable at the time Kriebel’s son recounted the story of his father’s life in 1976 as a means of justifying membership in the Nazi party while separating him from the crimes of the Nazi party. The son’s comments need to be taken with a grain of salt. Like many German officers, Kriebel may well have been concerned about national security after the Versailles Treaty left Germany virtually defenseless, but ironically one of his last acts as an active duty officer had been to serve on the German armistice commission. Kriebel’s son went on to highlight his father’s assistance to a number of German-Jewish emigrants in China while serving as the Generalkonsul in the 1930s. Yet, Kriebel, as one of the early members of the Nazi Party, seems to have bought whole-heartedly into Nazi ideology. The original members

150 “Rede zum 100. Geburtstag von Oberst a. D. und Botschafter Hermann Kriebel, geb am 20.1.1876 in Germersheim, gest. am 16. 2. 1941 in München” presented by Kriebel’s son in January 1976. The transcript can be found in Kriegsarchiv, HS 3355, pg. 4.
151 “Rede zum 100. Geburtstag von Oberst a. D. und Botschafter Hermann Kriebel,” Kriegsarchiv, HS 3355, pg. 4. See also Kriebel’s large personal collection of documents and publications pertaining to the Waffenstandstillekommission (WaKo) Kriegsarchiv, HS 3348-3352.
of the Putsch, who were put on trial in 1924, formed a close-knit circle and the racist overtones of the party were already evident by that time.

Hitler and Kriebel had indeed been quite close in the 1920s, although they may well have drifted apart later in the 1930s. Hitler’s appointment of Kriebel as Generalkonsul in 1934 was due in part for Kriebel’s longtime and loyal membership in the Nazi party. In 1941, after Kriebel’s death from illness, photographs and an article about his funeral made the front page of the Nazi newspaper Völkischer Beobachter. By all appearances from the photographs in the newspaper and accompanying articles, Kriebel was given quite the grand Nazi funeral. One picture even captures Hitler saluting the swastika-flag draped coffin. One of the central articles, titled “Hermann Kriebel’s Death: The Party Lowers the Flag on the Bier of its Oldest and Most Faithful Comrade,” speaks to Kriebel’s loyal party membership.¹⁵³

Kriebel’s membership in the Nazi party did not help his standing with the German Foreign Office during his tenure as head of the German military mission in China. As early as 1929, reports from the German Foreign Office expressed concern about the rising tide of fascism among German nationals in China. As a National Socialist, Kriebel drew the attention of a number of people in the German Foreign Office. Shortly after his arrival in China, a Foreign Office report in June 1929 took note that the man succeeding Bauer had been involved in the Hitler Putsch in 1923.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ See the folder on Kriebel’s funeral, “Nachrufe zum Tode von Oberst Hermann Kriebel, gest. am 16. 2. 41 zu München,” in Kriegsarchiv, OP 26207. It contains several newspaper clippings from Völkischer Beobachter from 18-21 February 1941. See especially, “Hermann Kriebel gestorben: Die Partei senkt die Fahnen an der Bahre eines ihrer ältesten und treuesten Mitkämpfer” from 18 February 1941.

Another German Foreign Office report by Trautmann, who was always wary of the Party, also expressed concern and paranoia about the growing number of applications from National Socialists to work in China. Trautmann was well aware of Kriebel’s ideological views and that a number of people within the National Socialist circle sympathized with him. He was especially concerned by the growth of the Nazi party within the German community in China. Trautmann wrote in his report “Of special note is the effort of a prominent National Socialist, who through the local Chinese consulate asked Kriebel to build a political-military organization in China, which could later be transplanted in Germany.”

Apparently, as early as 1929, the German Foreign Office was concerned about the rise of the Nazi Party. The diplomatic community was paranoid that the Nationalist Socialists, after their setbacks in the early 1920s, would regroup outside German borders only to transplant a stronger movement back in Germany. They were concerned about the discord sewn by Nazi party members not only for diplomatic relations but also the stability of the German government. Trautmann’s ravings about the Nazis in China in 1929 may have resulted from what at the time could have been considered an irrational fear of the far right and have been largely disregarded. In retrospect it seems that he had every reason to be concerned about the rise of the Nazis, even though his concerns about transplanting a Nazi organization from China to Germany were unwarranted. However, in only a few short years, Trautmann would find himself navigating German foreign

155 “Besonders bemerkenswert ist, dass ein prominenter Nationalsozialist den Versuch gemacht hat, durch Vermittlung der hiesigen Chinesischen Gesandtschaft Oberstleutnant Kriebel zum Aufbau einer politisch-militärischen Organisation in China aufzufordern, die später nach Deutschland verpflanzt werden soll.” Quoted from Trautmann’s report to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peking, 23 September 1929, AA R 9208/2238, pg. 1.

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relations in the Far East, which were increasingly complicated by the Nazi ascension to power in Germany. The reports of the Foreign Office in 1929-30 display their concern about a movement that would have been largely on the fringes of mainstream politics. Their angst over the far right party fed the diplomatic community’s distrust of Kriebel. Their fear of the Nazi Party circa 1930 is ironic given their future complicity with the Nazis not only in terms of foreign policy but also the Holocaust.156

Kriebel’s Relations with the Chinese

Kriebel managed to alienate not only the German advisors in the mission and the German Foreign Office but also his Chinese employers. Kriebel lacked Bauer’s curiosity about and understanding of Chinese culture and society. He also failed to display Bauer’s modesty and was unable to forge a close relationship with the Generalissimo. The head advisor was the key node of contact between Chiang and the German military mission. Much of the mission’s work depended on Chiang’s support. Kriebel failed to recognize the importance of his role essentially as a diplomat on the mission’s behalf to Chiang.

Upon first taking over the leadership of the mission, Kriebel seems to have recognized the importance of Chiang and his leadership in the creation of a modern China. Kriebel wrote to Wiegand, “One cannot picture China today without Chiang Kai-shek, if one has gained insight into the affairs. I strongly believe that the credibility of the

156 The new work by Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, and Mosche Zimmermann, Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010) details the German diplomatic community’s role in the Holocaust.
Nanking government would be lost if this man were out of action."  Kriebel acknowledged China’s precarious position and believed, rightfully so, that Chiang’s leadership was the only thing holding the country together. While Kriebel was aware of Chiang’s pivotal role, he failed to consider how his relationship with Chiang would affect his own work and that of the mission’s. He never endeared himself to Chiang and failed to become part of the Generalissimo’s inner circle as Bauer had done.

Initially, out of respect for the recently deceased Bauer, Chiang was willing to give Kriebel the benefit of the doubt. Kriebel was, after all, a capable and knowledgeable soldier, although he may have been fighting an uphill battle to win the respect of the Chinese. As only a lieutenant colonel, Kriebel was the lowest ranking of the leaders of the mission. Kriebel’s apologetic son pointed out that the Chinese thought hierarchically, especially in terms of military rank and so his father’s rank proved to be a great handicap in his efforts to reform the Chinese army. While Kriebel’s son attributes his difficulties in China to his rank, Kriebel’s personality, cultural insensitivity, and intense focus on military modernization, narrowly conceived, were more significant factors hindering his ability to forge close relationships with his Chinese colleagues and Chiang.

157 “Man kann sich China heute nicht ohne Tschang Kai Scheck vorstellen, wenn man einigen Einblick in die Verhältnisse gewonnen hat. Ich bin fest davon überzeugt, dass der Kredit der Nankingregierung verloren ginge, wenn dieser Mann ausgeschaltet wuerde.” Letter from Kriebel to Wiegand. 9 September 1929, Hoover Institution, Karl H. von Wiegand Papers, Box 16: Correspondence: Kriebel, H.

158 Hauger makes reference to Chiang extending friendship and trust to the German advisors after Bauer’s death. Kriebel would have been one of these advisors. See Bericht über eine Studienreise nach Ostasien, BA-MA RH 2/1822, pg. 47.

Chiang quickly grew to dislike Kriebel. The Generalissimo thought broadly about China’s development, not merely its military modernization but also about industrialization and the cultivation of a new sense of Chinese identity among China’s diverse people. Bauer had impressed Chiang with his all-encompassing plans for China’s development. Chiang came to expect that all of his German advisors would think about the various facets of development, but Kriebel focused primarily on military affairs and conceived of them narrowly. Kriebel lacked Bauer’s interest in China as well as his interpersonal skills. According to von Borch in a secret report to the Foreign Office in Berlin in February 1930, Kriebel’s failure to establish his authority over the advisors and to cultivate a close relationship with Chiang like Bauer had resulted in part from his personality, but also because of his exclusive focus on military affairs.\footnote{Report from von Borch to the AA in Berlin, 24 February 1930, AA R 9208/2238.}

Kriebel and Chiang’s relationship quickly declined. Stoelzner, who witnessed the rapid deterioration of the relationship, was unsure of the precise reason why Kriebel and Chiang had a falling out but he believed their inability to get along personally and professionally may have stemmed from Kriebel boasting to several well-connected Chinese people that he had saved Chiang during the fighting along the Lunghai railway in the war against the warlord leader Feng Yuxiang.\footnote{Erich Stoelzner’s Personal Recollections, Hoover Institution, The Stoelzner Papers, pg. 22.} This episode highlighted Kriebel’s cultural insensitivity and his lack of tact. His boasting about saving Chiang was disrespectful and had the potential to harm Chiang’s reputation and credibility on a national, if not international, level. Bauer had made a point to instruct his team of advisors to build and maintain close and cordial relations with their Chinese commanding
officers, interpreters, and other co-workers and never to “show off.” Kriebel failed to recognize that these directions were a key part in forging effective working relationships with their Chinese employers and unfortunately, he failed at the highest level.

Kriebel’s personality proved to be an obstacle for the mission. Stoelzner pointed out that Kriebel did not get along well with most of his Chinese colleagues because he spoke the truth bluntly and insisted that his recommendations be carried out. Kriebel’s brashness was insulting and his stubbornness was unacceptable to his Chinese employers. Stoelzner went so far as to compare Kriebel to the American General Stilwell, both of whom ran into difficulties with Chiang and their Chinese colleagues because they were more soldiers than diplomats.

Chiang’s displeasure with Kriebel was probably not only the result of personality differences and Kriebel’s insensitivity to the Chinese environment but also a result of the mission’s work. As was previously discussed, the mission began to fracture under Kriebel’s leadership. The internal divisions within the German military mission affected their work. In January 1930, Chiang gave a speech to his German advisors in which he expressed his concern over their performance. Following a Chinese setback with Russia, Chiang told them:

Among the advisors some of them have even failed to give one bit of advice to China throughout the whole year. It has been even worse that they have made no answer to questions laid down by China. In view of such circumstances we feel very disappointed.

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163 Erich Stoelzner’s Personal Recollections, Hoover Institution, The Stoelzner Papers, pg. 22.
164 Erich Stoelzner’s Personal Recollections, Hoover Institution, The Stoelzner Papers, pg. 22.
165 Quoted from a US military intelligence report written by John Magruder, MID report 2657-I-357 19, dated 22 January 1930, National Archives and Records Administration II (NARA II) RG 165 Entry No. 65 [microfilm M-1444, roll 13]. For more on the failures of the Chinese military in the Sino-Soviet conflict of
Chiang’s language was strong and his message was clear. The German advisors were not fulfilling their duty. This cessation of advisory work occurred during Kriebel’s tenure as leader. Given that the Chefberater was the main point (often the only point) of contact between Chiang and the German advisors, the Generalissimo’s disappointment was probably heavily directed at Kriebel, the main representative of the mission. Chiang may also have recognized the shortcomings of the advisors’ work as the result of poor leadership. It was Kriebel after all, who set the tone and direction of the mission’s work.

Kriebel failed to recognize that the German advisors could only be as effective as his relationship with Chiang would permit. As his relationship with Chiang deteriorated, so did the mission’s work. Kriebel lacked the ability to maneuver diplomatically among the highest levels of the Chinese leadership and within the mission itself. By early 1930, Chiang was already seeking a new German advisor to head the mission and advise him personally. After the “police-action” against Feng in northern China concluded, Chiang contacted Chu Chia-hua in Germany to find a replacement. The German Foreign Office in Berlin sent a notice to the embassy in Beijing (Peiping) in February 1930 that the Chinese government had been in contact with Ludendorff about the possibility of his former colleague, Georg Wetzell, taking over the leadership of the mission in China. Kriebel seems to have been unaware that Chiang was looking for his replacement until Wetzell arrived in China in May 1930.

1929, see Bruce A. Elleman, Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989 (New York: Routledge, 2001), chapter 11.

166 Telegram from Schubert in Berlin to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peping, 25/6 February 1930, AA R 9208/2238.
Conclusion:

While Bauer had a holistic view of modernization in China, Kriebel had a compartmentalized one. He failed to consider the various facets of modernization and that military reform required industrialization, both of which would have an impact on society and the state. Kriebel’s personal papers display little evidence that he took an interest in China outside of its army. Unlike many of the leaders of the mission, his papers contain no travel logs or journals about his experiences in the foreign land. He never developed an understanding for the broader context within which he worked. He attempted to pursue military modernization in a vacuum. Under Kriebel, the mission’s work seriously deteriorated. While Kriebel was a capable soldier, he failed as an administrator of the mission and in the diplomatic aspects of his work with the Chinese. He alienated his fellow German advisors, the German Foreign Office, and the Chinese leadership.

Upon Wetzell’s arrival in China in May 1930, Kriebel submitted his resignation as head of the mission. He continued to work in China with the mission and as an advisor was free to focus solely on military reform in the Chinese army. Kriebel may have been a capable military advisor at a lower level but he was not an effective leader of the mission. Though he found it difficult to work under Wetzell’s leadership, Kriebel remained in China as an advisor until 1933, when he returned to Germany as the Nazis came to power. However, Kriebel would not remain in Germany for long. Interestingly, though Kriebel largely failed at the diplomatic aspects of his work as head of the German military mission, he was appointed Generalkonsul in Shanghai by Hitler and so returned
to China in 1934. His post was largely ceremonial, as he does not appear to have been seriously involved in the formulation of German policy towards China.
Chapter 3

*Sturm und Drang: Georg Wetzell*

In May 1930, Georg Wetzell replaced Kriebel as the head advisor of the German military mission. Over the previous year, under Kriebel’s leadership, the mission’s work had declined as had its standing in the eyes of Chiang Kai-shek. The Germans and Chinese alike had high hopes for Kriebel’s replacement. Wetzell had earned his reputation as a capable general staff officer in the First World War and like Bauer, he had worked under Ludendorff. Initially, the German advisors and GMD leadership were enthusiastic about Kriebel’s replacement. They were soon disappointed.

Turbulent times rocked both China and Germany between 1930 and 1934, when Wetzell was in charge of the mission. Chiang was consolidating his power in China and still fought in skirmishes with the northern warlords but more importantly, he launched an aggressive military campaign against the Communists. Aside from its internal turmoil, China also faced ever-increasing aggression from Japan. The political scene in Germany was also becoming increasingly violent and in 1933 the Nazis took control of the government, which would have great impact on German Far Eastern policy as well as military affairs.

Wetzell had to navigate the rocky political waters of Germany, China, and international relations while directing the work of the German military mission and advising Chiang; however, like his immediate predecessor Wetzell proved to be more of
a soldier than a diplomat or politician. There were a number of unfortunate lines of continuity between Kriebel and Wetzell, even though the two of them never got along well. Wetzell was a capable military commander and he defined the mission of the advisors in a narrow military sense, much like his Bavarian predecessor. Wetzell, true to Prussian form, focused on military training and planning at the tactical and operational levels to the neglect of strategy and planning for China’s industrial development. He also saw China’s industrialization as a secondary matter and a mere side effect of military modernization. He showed little interest in broader Chinese affairs and failed to develop an in-depth understanding of the foreign context in which he was working. His lack of understanding of the broader political and social currents in China as well as global politics resulted in his ineptitude at strategic planning. He often attempted to impose German ideas and plans without adapting them to suit China’s needs and its military’s ability. Wetzell proved to be quite stubborn and was often frustrated by the failure of the Chinese leadership to conform to the German military model. Chiang quickly tired of Wetzell’s abrasive personality, his stubbornness, and his failure to think broadly about China’s development and modernization. Wetzell would hold his position for four years but his shortcomings as the leader of the mission were a recipe for disaster and nearly resulted in the cancellation of the mission.

Completing the Transition:

Unbeknownst to his German advisors, Chiang in early 1930, given his dissatisfaction with Kriebel, began seeking out a new head advisor for the mission. Through Dr. Chu Chia-hua, who facilitated contacts between the Nanking government
and German officers such as Erich Ludendorff, they found General der Infanterie Georg Wetzell, who had recently retired from the Reichswehr. The Chinese had offered Wetzell employment several times throughout the 1920s but he only accepted the offer in 1930.\footnote{Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pgs. 35, 40.} Wetzell, like Bauer, had been a part of Ludendorff’s inner circle during the Great War. He was a general staff officer and served as Ludendorff’s chief of OHL operations, where he had proved himself to be a capable soldier and military planner.\footnote{Lupfer, \textit{Dynamics of Doctrine}, pg. 10.} In May 1930, much to the surprise of the German advisors including Kriebel, Wetzell arrived in China to serve as the new head advisor.\footnote{Erich Stoelzner describes the surprise of the German advisors, who had been unaware the Chiang sought out a replacement for Kriebel. See his \textit{Personal Recollections}, Hoover Institution, The Stoelzner Papers, pgs. 22-4.} Given Kriebel’s interpersonal and leadership skills (or lack thereof), Wetzell’s arrival was met with great relief and enthusiasm.

Upon his arrival in China in May 1930, Wetzell issued a statement to all of the advisors, informing them that with Chiang’s support, he was taking over as the head of the mission. Wetzell’s statement was a simple one-page address that on the surface seemed to ensure continuity, yet more importantly sought to address the problems that had arisen in the mission under Kriebel. Wetzell wrote to the advisors, “In a most heartfelt greeting, Gentlemen, I ask you to continue to work with me, in a trusting manner and spirit of camaraderie, in the great task for the good of China and its national government.”\footnote{“Indem ich alle Herren herzlichst begruesse, bitte ich sie in vertrauensvoller Weise und in kameradschaftlichen Geiste mit mir an der uns gestellten grossen Aufgabe zum Wohl Chinas und seiner Nationalregierung weiterzuarbeiten.” Wetzell’s letter to the advisors, 24 May 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1, ser. 135.} The tone of the letter suggests that Wetzell wanted to foster a sense of cohesion among the advisors and the head of the mission. He saw their task as aiding
China’s development; however, it would later become apparent that Wetzell understood military means as the primary avenue toward successful national development to the neglect of other areas.

In his address to the advisors, Wetzell spoke of continuity in the mission’s work and leadership during the transition from Kriebel to himself. He reassured the advisors that their work was important. In an effort to be diplomatic and to ease the transition between Kriebel and himself, he told his advisors that Chiang was especially appreciative of Kriebel’s work and therefore, Kriebel would serve as Wetzell’s official representative on special occasions when Wetzell was unable to attend. Wetzell also probably recognized the close association between the work of the advisors and that of the head advisor and did not want the advisors to feel that their work had been a waste under Kriebel’s failed leadership. Wetzell thus reassured the advisors that their activities and work would not change and they would remain in their “trusted posts.”

While superficially suggesting continuity between himself and Kriebel, Wetzell recognized the problematic divisions within the mission as a whole that came as a result of his predecessor’s compartmentalization. Wetzell wanted to create a greater sense of cohesion within the mission. He took over as leader during a difficult time, when Chiang was once again fighting an uprising of the northern warlords. Wetzell promised the advisors that after the cessation of the current hostilities in China, he would work to improve the cohesion and collaboration of the advisors and also to directly manage them. Wetzell seems to have recognized the concerns of Krummacher, who remained

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172 Wetzell’s letter to the advisors, 24 May 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1, ser. 135.
as adjutant to the head advisor after Kriebel’s departure, about the fractures in the mission and the lack of contact between the head advisor and the lower-level advisors. He promised to make himself more accessible to the advisors, unlike Kriebel, who had managed the mission from afar. For the most part, Kriebel had cloistered himself away at the mission’s headquarters in Nanking while many of the military advisors worked out in the field or at the military academies at Whampoa and Luta. Wetzell also seems to have recognized Krummacher’s concerns about the hindrance of paperwork and the divided nature of the mission. He sought to address these issues. He planned to streamline and improve the work of the advisors by reducing the burdensome paperwork to allow the advisors to focus on the primary task of training the Chinese armed forces.

Krummacher played an important role in the transition from Kriebel to Wetzell. While the head advisor was the main (if not the only) point of contact between Chiang and the German military mission, Krummacher served as the point of contact between the leader of the mission and the German advisors, who were working in the field training Chinese units and teaching in the military academies. Krummacher kept the head advisor, who was usually in Nanking or traveling on campaign with Chiang, informed about the progress of training the model division (Lehrdivision), its supplies, and its performance. Krummacher provided a figure of continuity throughout the decade of the mission’s existence, having served first under Kriebel and then as the adjutant for Wetzell, von Seeckt, and von Falkenhausen. He was accessible to the leader as well as to the advisors and bridged the hierarchic levels within the mission.

173 See Krummacher’s correspondence with Wetzell about the Lehrdivision in BA-MA MSG 160/1.
Krummacher probably informed Wetzell about his predecessor’s shortcomings and the problems in the mission upon his arrival in China. While Wetzell made veiled references to fixing these problems during his initial address to the advisors, he actually ended up creating new problems. Rather than reducing Kriebel’s compartmentalization of the mission, he merely focused on the military aspects to the neglect of other areas in China’s development. Under his leadership the mission’s effectiveness declined as he lost Chiang’s trust throughout the various military campaigns.

**Wetzell and the Chinese Civil War, 1930:**

When Wetzell took over Kriebel’s position, Chiang was still dealing with the threat from the northern warlords. Wetzell’s arrival in China coincided with perhaps the most desperate of the internal struggles within the GMD between the Nanking government and the northern warlord alliance of Feng Yuxiang and Yen Xishan. This struggle, the Central Plains War, which erupted in May 1930 and lasted until November, provided Wetzell with his introduction to China’s military and internal political problems. Ultimately, Chiang defeated his opponents and took a large step in the consolidation of his power over a centralized China; however, the fighting demonstrated the unpreparedness of Chiang’s German-trained *Lehrdivision* as well as the differing notions of victory between the German advisors, specifically Wetzell, and the Chinese leadership.

The intervention of Zhang Xueliang and his army on Chiang’s side proved to be the decisive factor in the fighting—not the German-trained forces. According to reports from the German Foreign Office, early in the fighting during the Central Plains War,
Chiang’s prized German-trained *Lehrdivision* was badly defeated in battle near Langfang against warlord forces of superior numbers. The nearly annihilated German-trained division limped back behind the lines and had little effect on the rest of the struggle.¹⁷⁴ Many factors contributed to the failure of the *Lehrdivision*. The German-trained units lacked air support and artillery during the battle and they faced numerically superior forces. The German advisors and the units they trained had suffered under Kriebel’s leadership. They had been burdened with paperwork as opposed to actual training and lacked direction and cohesion. The German mission and the units it trained did not have enough time in the wake of Kriebel’s departure to prepare for battle.

Wetzel inherited this broken force and system that Kriebel had created but perhaps more importantly, he also inherited Chiang’s disappointment and waning faith in his German advisors. As the Chinese Nationalist soldier turned historian H. H. Liu pointed out:

> Wetzel advised Chiang on the strategy of the campaign against Feng Yü-hsiang and Yen Hsi-shan, but his advice was not always followed. At this stage the pronouncements of the German advisers were not carrying the weight that they later were to be given, for Chiang believed foreigners to be incapable of taking into account the habits and customs of the people and the psychology of the Chinese soldier.¹⁷⁵

Liu’s account of Chiang’s skepticism of foreigners probably resulted from his recent disappointments with the German advisors under Kriebel’s leadership. Wetzel probably did little to ease Chiang’s concerns over the cultural gap between the Chinese and his


¹⁷⁵ F.F. Liu served as an officer in the Chinese nationalist forces and his military history combines sources in Chinese and German (as well as many other languages) with his personal insight into the GMD’s military and leading personalities, which he had experienced first-hand. See Liu, *A Military History of Modern China*, pg. 76.
foreign advisors. Wetzell was stubborn and blunt. He believed that his advice to Chiang should be followed unquestioningly. Wetzell was often quite frustrated by Chiang, who did not always follow or even consider his plans. Liu ultimately compared Wetzell’s personality to that of “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell.\textsuperscript{176}

While Chiang’s forces prevailed, the ending of the Central Plains War provides an instructive example of the military cultural gap between China and Germany and the understanding of victory. Like Kriebel, Wetzell arrived in China without understanding the conduct and strategy of Chinese warfare. Towards the end of the war in 1930, a German instructor at one of Chiang’s military academies, who worked closely with Wetzell, reported to the German diplomat von Borch that with Zhang Xueliang’s entrance, the military decision was not far off. The informant reported, however, that he was unsure if the opportunity for Chiang to achieve a decisive (endgültig) battlefield victory over his opponents would present itself. The military academy instructor pointed out that the lack of a final victory was not necessarily a bad thing and in fact, the desire for such a total victory was perhaps only held by those who saw the situation in purely military terms. The instructor noted that from a political viewpoint the fighting had died down in late 1930, which was consistent with the character of the belligerents. The belligerents, in opposition to the desire of the German advisors’ for a decisive battlefield victory, avoided the complete annihilation of the enemy. Rather, their aim was to weaken the enemy substantially so that he voluntarily left the field of battle. The German military

\textsuperscript{176} Liu, \textit{A Military History of Modern China}, pg. 76. On Wetzell’s abrasive personality, also see, Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pgs. 109-111.
instructor went on to suggest that perhaps 4,000-year-old China was wiser than “young Europe.”

This episode illustrates the divorce between the Chinese conception of victory and the German one. For Chiang, forcing his enemy off the field of battle was victory enough. He needed a time of peace to consolidate his political power as well as to train and reorganize his military forces. For the German advisors, particularly Wetzell, victory meant the complete annihilation of the opponent. Wetzell could not understand Chiang’s willingness to be complacent with a “victory” that did not include the complete destruction of the opposing forces on the battlefield. Wetzell believed that letting the opponent walk away from the battlefield meant that the threat was not eliminated and could rise again in the future. The German military had long associated victory with the annihilation of the opponent. This recalcitrant German desire for total victory contributed to the horrific stalemate in the trenches in WWI. The German military instructor reporting to von Borch recognized the close association between the German understanding of victory and the tragedy of the WWI and hence suggested that perhaps China, with all of its 4000 years of experience in warfare, had learned to avoid devastating long-term wars of attrition that resulted from the unending pursuit of annihilating the enemy.

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178 For more on the German conception of victory and the annihilation of the enemy and the influence of Count Albrecht von Schlieffen on these notions, see Jeduha Wallach, *The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and Their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), chapter 2, 3, and 13.
The Central Plains War provided a sub-optimal start to Wetzell’s leadership of the mission. According to Kirby, Wetzell had a reputation as a superb soldier and leader, but he was unprepared for China’s military backwardness.\footnote{Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 109.} The Central Plains War highlighted this backwardness—the lack of modern equipment, little to no reconnaissance or accurate maps, and poor logistical support, to name a few deficiencies. Wetzell’s tenure as head advisor began with the defeat of the German-trained units. His relationship with Chiang also got off to a rocky start, in part due to Kriebel’s legacy but also because of Wetzell’s own personality and the cultural gap between him Chiang. While the Central Plains War came to a close in the fall of 1930, China would not experience peace for some time. China would again face Japanese aggression beginning in 1931 with the Mukden Incident and Chiang continued his quest to unify China and consolidate his power by waging war against the Communists. Many of the problems that Wetzell faced in the Central Plains War, including poor logistical support and his struggles with Chiang, would continue to plague the mission’s work during the military campaigns between 1931 and 1934.

**Obstacles in Training the Chinese Military:**

The main task of the German military advisors in China was to train the Chinese military but they faced a number of obstacles in their efforts. Firstly, the Germans were training the Chinese military so that it could compete with Japan, yet they had to overcome the Japanese influence on the army, particularly within the officer corps. Secondly, the Germans had to deal with individual Chinese officers with few centralized
command structures in place. Individual officers could choose to disregard German advice or to act independently of the central leadership and command. These difficulties were exacerbated by the fact that many officers had questionable loyalty to the Nanking government. Finally, the Germans also had to deal with the issue of supplying the Chinese military.

The Japanese military had exerted great influence on China’s military and Chiang in particular. Since the late Qing era, the Chinese had looked to Japan and the Meiji restoration as a model of military modernization and industrialization that involved the incorporation of western technology while maintaining their distinct culture. The Chinese had great respect for the Japanese military. Chiang himself had attended military school in Japan, as had a number of high-ranking officers in the Chinese military. The Japanese military influence could still be felt in China in the 1930s. This influence became increasingly problematic during Wetzell’s time in China in part due to Japanese aggression.

Wetzell recognized the Japanese influence on the Chinese military as well as the threat it presented. While working to build China’s military into a modern force, Wetzell had to navigate international politics. Official German foreign policy in East Asia was one of neutrality. In line with this policy, Wetzell pointed out to Chiang in a memorandum in 1931 that the German advisors were not in China to stifle the Japanese influence and replace it with a German mode of thought and behavior. He pointed out that in a short time the Japanese had accomplished much in terms of their own military development. Ever the German nationalist, Wetzell was quick to point out that the Japanese were advised by a Prussian general staff officer, General Meckel, who helped to
shape the Japanese military to imitate the Prussian military.\textsuperscript{180} Wetzell highlighted the similarities between the German and Japanese military style and influence in order to assure Chiang that there would be a great deal of fluidity between the two.

In his memorandum to Chiang, Wetzell tried to convince him that the German advisors would do a better job than the Japanese in assisting the Chinese military to become a capable fighting force. Wetzell was appalled at the work of the Japanese advisors in China. He described his amazement to Chiang with the fact that in “more than 30 years of activity from more than 100 Japanese advisors and more than 1000 Chinese officers as students in Japan, the condition of the Chinese army compared to the Japanese is exceptionally backward.”\textsuperscript{181} Wetzell attributed the failure of the Japanese advisors to their emphasis on theoretical knowledge. The German advisors, on the other hand, were equipped to impart a theoretical and practical knowledge of the military art and modern warfare to the Chinese army.\textsuperscript{182} German military training emphasized a theoretical knowledge base with practical experience. The Germans sought to reenact the experience of warfare with live-fire training exercises as well as staff rides.

This mix of theoretical and practical knowledge was especially important in the more technical fields, such as artillery, on which the Germans focused heavily. Artillery,


\textsuperscript{182} Wetzell, Denkschrift über Ausbildung bei der Artillerie, December 1931, BA-MA MSG 160/3, pg. 2-3.
especially the ability to coordinate fire with infantry movements, quickly became one of the key measures of modernity of fighting forces in the first half of the twentieth century. The Germans had been at the center of the artillery revolution during the First World War.\(^{183}\) Fighting against the warlords illustrated the serious deficiency of Chiang’s artillery. Luckily for Chiang in the civil wars against the warlords, his opponents were also lacking artillery but Japan was a different case entirely and the German advisors knew as much. The advisors recognized that effective artillery would not only give Chiang a substantial advantage in fighting to establish his supremacy in China but it would be a necessity in a war against Japan.\(^{184}\) Japan had learned the value of artillery during the Russo-Japanese War as well as the stark industrial realities of supporting such warfare. Though facing industrial limitations, the Japanese spent the decade between 1927 and 1937 modernizing their artillery.\(^{185}\) Liu highlighted that the Chinese deficiency in artillery resulted from China’s weakness in heavy industry. That weakness persisted through the 1930s although the Chinese, at German advice, took steps to remedy their lack of artillery. Liu noted that between 1932 and 1937 heavy weapons worth over 610

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\(^{183}\) Showalter emphasizes German success in technological innovation and the growth of the German military-industrial complex as it relates to artillery in the nineteenth-century in *Railroads and Rifles*, part III. Zabecki provides probably the most in-depth examination of the artillery revolution in the German army in the First World War in his book *Steel Wind*.

\(^{184}\) In making an argument in support of the establishment of an artillery school, Wetzell cited the lack of artillery on the Honan battlefield in the fighting against the warlords and also the advancements of the Japanese in this area. See Wetzell, *Denkschrift über Ausbildung bei der Artillerie*, December 1931, BAMA MSG 160/3, pgs. 13-18.

\(^{185}\) While the Japanese were ahead of the Chinese in artillery and mechanization in the 1920s and 1930s, Drea notes that these branches suffered from industrial and manufacturing backwardness. Edward J. Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), pgs. 132-133 and 187-188.
million marks were export from Germany to China. He suspects that that number is actually much higher as many of the arms were secretly exported.\textsuperscript{186}

The German advisors sought to assist the Chinese in remedying their artillery deficiency (among others) and replace the influence of Japanese advisors. They recognized Japan’s ulterior motives in “aiding” the Chinese military. Wetzell expressed his belief to Chiang in December 1931, in between the Mukden Incident and the Battle of Shanghai, that “Japan had no interest in a unified China, and even less in a modern military on land, in the water, or in the air.”\textsuperscript{187} A backward Chinese military posed little threat to the Japanese military machine and its expansionist aims in Asia. By training a number of Chinese officers, the Japanese were also, in many ways, laying the foundation for future collaboration.

Chiang’s willingness to employ and cooperate with his enemies, including former warlord leaders as well as Japanese-friendly officers, frustrated Wetzell and his advisory team. The German advisors found the artillery school to be especially problematic.

Things were not always troublesome at the school. In the early summer 1933, General Shao Pai-chang took over as the head instructor (\textit{Unterrichtsleiter}) in the artillery school. The German advisors worked well with General Shao and thought he was qualified for the position. Shao believed in the German system of training. He had spent two years in Berlin and spoke German. He also had practical experience with several German firms

\textsuperscript{186} Liu, \textit{A Military History of Modern China}, pgs. 154-155.
including Siemens, Rheinmetall and Mauser.\footnote{188} While the Germans were initially pleased with this appointment, Shao would not last long in his position. While Shao was away from the school, developing a new lesson plan that embraced German methods, Chu Bin took over his position in the school. By the end of the summer of 1933, Chu Bin had officially taken over as head instructor largely as a result of internal scheming and conniving. The Germans saw Chu Bin as Japanese friendly and expressed great concern over leaving the school essentially in the hands of the Japanese.\footnote{189} The German advisors, especially Captain (\textit{Hauptmann}) Gilbert, a highly skilled artillery and ballistics specialist, recommended to Chiang that he find a new head instructor who was less susceptible to Japanese influence, but he ignored their advice. Krummacher was especially annoyed by the situation. He saw the affair as a victory for Japan. He believed it was dangerous to put such a man, who was amenable to Japanese influence and had even led a mutiny against Chiang, in charge of young, impressionable Chinese officers.\footnote{190}

Ridding the Chinese military of Japanese influence was a daunting task, even as Japanese aggression towards China rose. The Germans sought to overcome or circumvent some of the roadblocks they faced as a result of China’s internal political situation or Chiang’s obstinacy by arranging an educational exchange for Chinese officers to travel to Germany to attend military schools and specialized training.\footnote{191} This educational

\footnote{188} Letter from Krummacher to Wetzell, Nanking, 18. July 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3. Also see Colonel William Whitson’s interview with General Shao, Taipei, Taiwan 12 August 1965, United States Military Academy (USMA) Library.

\footnote{189} See the letters from Krummacher to Wetzell, 1 and 31 August 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3.

\footnote{190} Letter from Krummacher to Wetzell, 31 August 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3.

\footnote{191} See correspondence between Wetzell and Brinckmann in 1933. See especially the letter from Wetzell to Brinkmann, dated Nanking, 16 February 1933 and the attached Bestimmung für die Abkommendierung der chinesischen Offiziere zur Führergehilfenausbildung in die deutsche Armee; the letter from Wetzell to
exchange served several purposes. First, training Chinese officers in Germany would reduce, if not cut off completely, the Japanese influence on the Chinese military. Next, these German-trained Chinese officers would bring their knowledge of the most advanced war-fighting methods and technology back to China. They would be uniquely suited to adapting European methods of warfare to the particular needs of China. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the German advisors, German education and training would create a core group of Chinese officers who would support the efforts of the German advisors and who would be more likely to follow German advice.

General Shao stood as the prime example of a German-trained Chinese officer who worked well with the German advisors and understood their long-term plans. Like the Germans, Shao believed in the importance of creating a plan for the artillery school and not wavering from it, even though results might come slowly. General Shao’s replacement, Chu bin, was problematic from the German perspective, not only because of his pro-Japanese tendencies but also because he disregarded German advice and acted independently. The German advisors arranged a lecture series on modern warfare for officer cadets in the military schools. The intent was to train young officers in modern warfare. The Germans understood modernization in the Chinese military to be a process over the course of a generation that started with the young officers, who would over time replace the older generation. Chu bin ignored the Germans’ long-term plan for officer education and began a lecture series for frontline artillery officers without German

Brinkmann, dated Peping, 10 April 1933 and the attached letter from General Li Nai to Wetzell, dated 4 April 1933; and the German translation of a letter from Tschang Tse-Tung to Wetzell, 20 April 1933. This correspondence can be found in BA-MA MSG 160/4.
approval or input. The problem with Chu bin’s expansion of the lecture series was a lack of resources. There were not enough capable lecturers to properly convey information about artillery in modern warfare. Krummacher informed Wetzell that as a result of the lack of capable personal to teach these classes, the frontline artillery officers “learned mere half-measures and crap.”\textsuperscript{192} The German officers, both in Germany and China, emphasized the importance of quality over quantity. This issue of quality over quantity would be a recurring problem in the relations between the German advisors and the Chinese. Chu bin’s actions demonstrated his disregard for the quality of artillery officer training as well as the work of the German advisors.

German advisors had problems working with a number of other Chinese officers for various reasons. Upon assuming command of the German military mission, Wetzell recognized the necessity of overcoming the local identity associated with warlord troops and their commanders in order to create a national military. In summer 1930 Chiang had placed the \textit{Lehrdivision}, which was being trained by the Germans, under the command of General Fong. The Germans believed that they were training the core of the future Chinese military. The \textit{Lehrdivision} would later go on to train additional Chinese divisions in the art and practice of modern warfare. It was a cadre-system like the German Reichswehr. While the Germans believed they were training the heart of the Chinese national army, General Fong believed that the \textit{Lehrdivision} was essentially his own personal force, much like the warlord armies. He saw it as a reward for his loyalty to

\textsuperscript{192} Krummacher wrote, “Das ist weiter verfluchte Massnahme, da es bestimmt an geeignetem Lehrgang fehlen wird und infogedessen die Maenner bloss Halbheiten und Mist lernen.” in his letter to Wetzell, Nanking, 1 August 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3, pg. 3.
Chiang. Naturally, Fong’s perception of the Lehrdivision as his personal force led to friction with his German advisors.

The Germans understood the difficulties involved in overcoming local identity in the context of creating a national military. Germany had recently experienced this process (albeit without the existence of warlord armies). During the wars of national unification between 1864 and 1871, the Prussian army became a national institution. The Prussian military code was expanded to the whole of the German Reich, regional armed forces were integrated into the national military, and the military became an instrument of spreading nationalism. Yet, this process was not easy. It was not until after World War I that the Bavarian army was fully integrated into the German military. Germany was a microcosm for the process of nationalization that was going on in China, which was much larger, more diverse, and had already experienced two decades of internecine warfare among the various warlords. General Fong was a product of this milieu. He allied himself with Chiang and believed his command of the Lehrdivision was essentially a reward or token of favor from the highest warlord—a sort of medieval feudal system.

Wetzell’s problems with Chinese officers in charge of German-trained units did not end with General Fong. According to one advisor, Konstantin Meyer, Wetzell never got along well with the Chinese because he was “too exact and demanding.” He experienced problems with General Li Nai, who commanded the German-trained 88th...

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193 Letter from Wetzell to Krummacher, 1 August 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1.


195 Combined Service Detailed Interrogation Center (CSDIC) report on the interrogation of Konstantin Meyer, December 1944, NARA II RG 165, Entry Number 179, Box 667, Folder 1, pg. 3.
Division. Wetzell saw Li Nai as an obstacle to the work of the German advisors. Rather than supporting and facilitating the work of the German advisors, he hindered it. Wetzell made his displeasure about having to work with Li Nai clear to the German advisors as well as to Chiang. Wetzell pointed out to Krummacher that the Americans working in China had it much easier than the Germans. The Americans worked directly with the Finance Minister T. V. Soong, whose sister May-ling had married Chiang, and not with a “Hanswurst” like General Li Nai.\footnote{Wetzell expressed his displeasure with Li Nai in several letters to Krummacher. See his letters from 18 and 30 August 1932 in BA-MA MSG 160/3.} Wetzell got along well with T. V. Soong so much so that their relationship was a detriment to his relationship with Chiang Kai-shek.\footnote{Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pgs. 110-111.} 

In addition to the personality clashes between Wetzell and the Chinese, the German advisors had to deal with the more tangible problem of securing armaments for the Chinese military, which was in a sorry state in regards to its supplies and industrial base. Chinese soldiers were equipped with a mix of arms and uniforms from various countries that were cobbled together. China’s military lacked a central supply system. Often, individual commanders would purchase their own supplies through the Shanghai import-export warehouses.\footnote{Kirby, \textit{Germany and Republican China}, pg. 109.} The German advisors found the lack of standardization, uniformity, and absence of a central supply system to be problematic.\footnote{One of the German advisors, Meyer, reported the lack of uniformity of Chinese arms. See CDSIC report on the interrogation of Meyer, NARA II RG 165 Entry #E-179, Box 667, Folder 1. Krummacher also attests to the lack of standardization in the artillery in a letter to Wetzell, 1 August 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3. A German report on the military supply situation in China also reports on the problematic private weapons trade, which prevented national uniformity across the military. See Anlage zum Schreiben W/Y 2. 8 October 1930, BA-MA MSG 160/1.} Without a centralized procurement and supply office, the responsibility to arm military forces fell to
individual commanders, thus reinforcing the warlord mentality and regional rifts in the army and hindering the creation of a national army. The lack of standardization and uniformity in arms also made it difficult to resupply parts and munitions.

When Wetzell first arrived in China, the Great Depression was making a severe worldwide economic impact. Given the state of Germany’s economy, German trade interests in China were becoming especially important and the German military mission provided a means for securing the interests of German businesses in a growing yet largely untapped market. Wetzell would ironically become one of the problematic elements in this attempt to establish a close Sino-German trade network. He focused too closely on purely military affairs and not enough on the broader industrial and economic development of China.

After Chiang’s victory in the civil war against the northern warlords was virtually assured, the German Foreign Office offered an assessment of the German military advisors and their potential benefit in fostering Sino-German trade. The German Foreign Office recognized the great influence that the advisors had on the Nanking government and Chiang Kai-shek and their potential to push for German trade interests. Von Borch pointed out that much of the ability of the German military mission to foster a favorable Sino-German trade relationship depended on the personality of its leader. Von Borch highlighted Bauer’s great influence on the Chinese government and Chiang; however, he expressed concern over Wetzell’s ability to play a political role as a sort of industrial diplomat. Von Borch described Wetzell as one of the “old-school officers,” who were too focused on purely military matters. The diplomat went on to say that Wetzell’s focus on
military matters would mean that trade interests were secondary and only inasmuch as they related to military affairs—for army supplies and the like.200

The Foreign Office’s concerns over Wetzell were justified. He preferred to focus purely on military development at the expense of industrial development. At one point Krummacher, who was concerned about the artillery school’s supplies, urged Wetzell to use his relationship with Chiang to encourage him to purchase several German field guns.201 Wetzell, however, lacked the close relationship with Chiang that more successful head advisors, like Bauer, had had. Wetzell preferred to work directly with Chiang’s brother-in-law T. V. Soong. Chiang and Wetzell’s relationship had declined so quickly that by March 1932, Chiang began to seek out a new German officer to head the military mission. He wanted someone who would coordinate military and economic development.202

Wetzell focused primarily on military matters, especially training and education, not on China’s broader industrial development. He failed to be an industrial diplomat for Germany. Wetzell saw industrial development as a secondary matter, a sort of side effect from military development. Unlike Bauer, Wetzell failed to recognize the closely intertwined relationship between military and industrial development. He continued, like Kriebel, to maintain the separation in the mission of the military and civilian advisors. He focused on military education and operational planning at the expense of trade and

201 Letter from Krummacher to Wetzell, 18 July 1933. BA-MA MSG 160/3.
202 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 111. Kirby cites a letter from Trautmann in Peking to the AA on 17 April 1932.
logistics. His focus on operational military affairs and his inability to integrate plans for simultaneous industrial and military development would be a significant factor in his downfall. It would not be until von Seeckt’s replacement of Wetzell that Sino-German trade and Chiang’s relationship with the head advisor would be restored.

The Battle of Shanghai, 1932:

While Wetzell had encountered many obstacles in training the Chinese military, he proved to be a capable tactical and operational military advisor. The Chinese army made significant advances while Wetzell was in charge of the German military mission. The advisors and the German-trained divisions would be tested against superior Japanese forces in the Battle of Shanghai in 1932. Although the Chinese forces lost the battle, their performance demonstrated a marked improvement from the battles against the warlords in 1929-30 and their rapid progress under the German advisors, which has yet to be closely examined by historians.

Following the Mukden Incident in 1931, in which the Japanese gained control of Manchuria and would soon go on to establish the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932, the Japanese sought to continue their expansion into China. In January 1932, they brought the war to Shanghai. Historians often give this battle little attention, as it was overshadowed by the Japanese action in Manchuria in 1931 and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937; however, it marks an important moment in China’s military development. While the Chinese forces ultimately had to withdraw, the battle of Shanghai still stands as a testament to the progress of Chiang’s army under the oversight of its German advisors and marked an important moment in China’s development as a
modern nation-state. While the German-trained units performed well in the battle, Chiang’s actions displeased Wetzell and their relationship suffered from an ever-widening personal and cultural gap.

The Japanese military used anti-Japanese attacks on civilians (which they may have provoked) as a pretext for attacking the Shanghai. The fighting began on the evening of 28/29 January 1932. As is often the case, there is no consensus on which side fired the first shots but it is clear that the Japanese were the aggressors. In the morning, Japanese aircraft began aerial bombardment of the city. Chiang’s biographer Jonathon Fenby notes that this incident was the first major air raid on an unprotected civilian target of city size, and thus set the precedent for Guernica and the aerial bombardments of World War II.203 While there had been numerous cases of aerial bombardment in the First World War, the Japanese attack on Shanghai was much larger in scale. Over the course of the next week, the Japanese landed marines and continued the aerial and artillery bombardments on Chapie, the Chinese settlement in Shanghai.204

The 19th Route Army opposed the Japanese attack on the city. This force from Canton was strongly anti-Japanese, but it was not pro-Chiang Kai-shek by any means. In late 1931, inter-party strife between Chiang’s Nanking circle and the Canton circle in the GMD came to a head. The hawk-like Canton circle was vehemently anti-Japanese and strongly supported the use of force to oppose the foreign aggressor; Chiang, however, preferred to focus on internal affairs, such as his campaign against the Communists and

204 For the best account of the Battle of Shanghai see, Donald A. Jordan, China’s Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001). For Chiang’s role and decision-making in the battle see, Fenby, Generalissimo, pgs. 208-215.
the consolidation of his power. He attempted to avoid war with Japan for as long as possible. Chiang wanted to strengthen China internally before taking on the Japanese foe in an outright war. The growing tensions between the Canton hawks and the Nanking circle in the wake of the Mukden Incident resulted in Chiang resigning from his posts on 15 December 1931.\textsuperscript{205}

In January 1932, with the Japanese crisis threatening Shanghai, the most cosmopolitan city in China, Chiang resumed his leadership position in the military; however, fissures within the GMD remained and continued to be an obstacle for China’s development. Chiang’s opponents, both within the GMD and the CCP, would later attribute resistance to the Japanese solely to the 19\textsuperscript{th} Route Army—not to Chiang and his military forces. Officers in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Route Army even claimed falsely that they received no assistance from the central government.\textsuperscript{206} A number of Chinese historians have fallen into the trap of believing the 19\textsuperscript{th} Route Army and its supporters’ propaganda; however, some scholars, primarily Immanuel C. Y. Hsu and Donald Jordan, have drawn attention to the important role of Chiang’s 5\textsuperscript{th} Army and the 87\textsuperscript{th} and 88\textsuperscript{th} Divisions in the defense of the city.\textsuperscript{207} These were the divisions that had been trained by German advisors.

\textsuperscript{205} Chiang’s resignation was a political tactic that he used multiple times to restore his position of authority amidst the internal governmental struggles. On the Chiang, his resignation, inter-party strife, and the Mukden Incident see, Jordan, \textit{China’s Trial by Fire}, pgs. 4-5; Fenby, \textit{Generalissimo}, pgs. 203-207; and Taylor, \textit{The Generalissimo}, pgs. 92-98.


\textsuperscript{207} Jordan in addition to highlighting the importance of Chiang’s 5\textsuperscript{th} Army provides a historiographical overview of scholarship on the Battle of Shanghai in \textit{China’s Trial by Fire}, preface and introduction. Also see Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, \textit{Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1937} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pgs. 39-49.
Chiang’s biographer, Jonathon Fenby, believes Chiang made a deliberate decision to minimize the public perception of the role of his 5th Army in the battle. Chiang had hoped to avoid a full-scale war with Japan in order to focus on China’s domestic problems, especially the campaign against the Communists, and sought to limit the fighting in Shanghai. In mid-February, when Chiang finally decided to send his elite troops into the battle, he put them under the command of the 19th Route Army. Fenby pointed out that by placing his forces under the command of the 19th Route Army, Chiang gave recognition to the Cantonese efforts and sacrifice in the first three weeks of fighting but more importantly:

The Cantonese were not part of Nanking’s core forces, so the fight between them and the Japanese could be put outside the category of a war between two nations. Had more been made of the presence of Chiang’s Fifth Army, China might have been dragged into full-scale conflict. So the minimization of his role was, in part, the product of his own desire to avoid an all-out confrontation with Japan until he had beaten the Communists.208

Fenby’s assessment highlights Chiang’s priorities to bring internal peace to China so that he could transform the country into a modern Great Power capable of militarily and politically defeating Japan. At the time of the Battle of Shanghai, Chiang was in the midst of his encirclement campaigns against the Communists. He wanted to keep the fighting with Japan limited so that he could focus on internal reform. He hoped by strengthening China internally and improving its economy, industrial capability, and military that he could achieve military victory over Japan in the longer run. Had the Nanking government fully committed its forces, the Sino-Japanese War may have begun in 1932 as opposed to 1937.

208 Fenby, Generalissimo, pg. 212.
While minimizing the role of his own forces may have been part of Chiang’s plan, Wetzell and the German advisors were concerned about the loyalty of 19th Route Army. Wetzell saw the Cantonese force as essentially a warlord army, which led to concerns over its loyalty to China and Chiang. In the first week of the battle, Wetzell expressed his concerns to the minister of war Ho Yin-chin over the Cantonese troops’ loyalty to greater China. He believed that the Cantonese sought the division of China. Wetzell had assumed leadership of the mission while Chiang was fighting the northern warlords and had a difficult time understanding Chiang’s willingness to ally with his opponents. Like his predecessor, Wetzell failed to understand the backroom political negotiations among Chinese warlords that resulted in temporary truces and fluid coalitions, which were a central feature of Chinese warfare.

Although Wetzell and the German advisors were confused about Chiang’s shaky alliance with the regional force from Canton, they did their best to help the Chinese forces prepare for battle. Using plans developed by the German advisors for defense against bombardment and hindering the enemy’s advance, including trenches and barbed wire, the 19th Route Army, for the first time, stood up well to the Japanese. The Chinese defensive system resembled the German trench networks reminiscent of the Great War in Europe. These defenses included well-prepared positions with trenches, protected posts for machine guns, and barbed wire entanglements.

Jordan writes the Chinese defensive tactics were “flexible and resilient, the Chinese seemed to follow the tao of falling back when necessary to survive, then

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209 Krummacher’s report on the Battle of Shanghai, 1932, BA-MA MSG 160/2, pg. 7.  
returning to fight again.”211 While Jordan attributes the effectiveness of the Chinese defense to its flexibility, it may also be attributed to the German influence and Great War tactics, which Timothy Lupfer describes as “elastic defense-in-depth.”212 Lupfer discusses the catastrophic casualties that the Germans absorbed during the first years of the war, while stubbornly trying to hold on to the front line of defense. The German doctrinal manual *The Principles of Command in the Defensive Battle in Position Warfare (Grundsätze für die Abwehrschlacht im Stellungskrieg)*, written in early 1917, allowed for withdrawal as long as the initiative was not surrendered to the attacker. The Germans began placing defensive positions in depth to avoid enemy artillery barrages and disrupt attacking formations. The idea was to force the attacking enemy to expend his resources and energy while the defender preserved his strength for the counterattack.213

Elastic defense-in-depth proved to be relatively effective against the Japanese attackers in Shanghai, much to the Japanese forces’ surprise. An Italian observer of the battle reported that “As a rule the Chinese defense was static, but on the whole it proved more tenacious than the Japanese and foreigners had expected.”214 By “static” the Italian was referring to the trenches, but he failed to appreciate the elasticity of the defense, which contributed to its tenacity. The Japanese had not anticipated experiencing such a fight. In terms of training and material, the Japanese were far superior to the Chinese

211 Jordan, *China’s Trial by Fire*, pg. 115
forces and they also believed that they were racially superior.\textsuperscript{215} The Chinese did not fold in a matter of days but held on for over a month. Throughout the month of February, the Japanese continually had to bring in reinforcements. Throughout his report on the battle, the Italian observer reiterated the fact that time and again the Japanese were surprised by the ability of the Chinese divisions—a markedly inferior military in terms of training and armament, yet still able to give a good account of themselves. The Italian quoted from the war records of the Japanese 9\textsuperscript{th} Division:

> So far as we knew before the beginning of the action, Kiangwan was garrisoned by the Chinese with just one company, but the attack revealed the presence of a defense system prepared with great care. This shows how the enemy had, with considerable foresight, foreseen the future action.\textsuperscript{216}

These defensive preparations were the result of the advice and supervision of Chiang’s German advisors. The defensive network allowed the Chinese forces to hold their ground for more than a month against Japanese attacks from land, sea, and air.

The German-trained 88\textsuperscript{th} Division met the Japanese offensive at Chiangwan from 20-25 February with fierce resistance. Time and again the Japanese force fell short of breaking through the Chinese lines. The elastic defense-in-depth proved effective during the first day of the Japanese offensive, which had lost momentum by the end of the day’s fighting. The 88\textsuperscript{th} Division was even able to counterattack and surround part of the enemy’s forces. On 22 February, the Japanese units were forced to retreat. In order to

\textsuperscript{215} On the strength of the Japanese forces as well as their underestimation of the enemy see Drea, Japan’s Imperial Army, pgs. 171-174. On Japanese racism and ideology, see John W. Dower, War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

save face, the Japanese press described the action as “pulling back to shorten the front” as they could not fathom such an inferior force and race of people as being so capable.217

In addition to preparing the defenses, the German-trained 87th and 88th Divisions gave a good account of themselves in the battle—a significant turnaround from their poor showing in the campaigns against the northern warlords in 1930. The Italian observer, while generally critical of the Chinese army’s actions in the battle, credits the 87th and 88th Divisions with being effective at holding their positions. The Italian observer also pointed out that while the 19th Army avoided offensive action and hand-to-hand combat, the 88th Division defending Miaochang launched a number of attacks against the Japanese that were successful in pushing the enemy back. Because the 88th Division repeatedly attacked the Japanese forces, it incurred high losses and hence, needed to be reinforced by the 87th Division. The 87th Division effectively defended Liuho for much of the battle, which prevented the Japanese forces from outflanking the Chinese defensive network. Only when the 87th withdrew to reinforce the bloodied 88th Division were the Japanese able to breakthrough at Liuho.218

While the Chinese were ultimately forced to withdraw from the battlefield at the beginning of March, their resistance became a mark of pride. Donald Jordan describes a surge of Chinese patriotism during and after the battle. He writes, “for many Chinese, to merely survive in positional warfare such pounding from Japanese naval and army tanks

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217 For an overview of the fighting at Miaochang and Chiangwan from 20-25 February see Jordan, China’s Trial by Fire, chapter 9. The quote from the Japanese press release is taken from pg. 145. Drea also documents the Japanese efforts to distract public attention from the botched campaign by focusing on stories of sensational heroism in Japan’s Imperial Army, pgs. 172-3.

and cannon and bombing for over a month seemed to be China’s first modern victory.”

For the Chinese it was a moral victory. While it may not have been a military victory, the battle proved that the Chinese forces were indeed capable of fighting in modern warfare. Their resistance drew the attention of many westerners, who began to see China as a deterrent against Japanese expansion.

The German advisors hold a significant amount of responsibility for this Chinese success. They played a major role in planning the city’s defenses and had trained the best divisions, the 87th and 88th. At the end of the military action, a US Army observer of the action reported:

much credit has been given the Nineteenth R.A. which it is felt belongs to Chiang Kai-shek’s Guard Divisions. These divisions are responsible for the determined stand at Chiangwan. Much credit also belongs to the German training which it is learned was based, in the preparation of defense positions, on the supposition that Chinese, poorly equipped, must prepare to hold lines against an enemy greatly superior in mechanical [arms].

While the German advisors under Wetzell had prepared Chiang’s military units well, the head advisor proved to be less adept at understanding the political contours of the Battle of Shanghai. Chiang had to balance his desires to minimize the fighting and keep it at the local level with not wanting China to be embarrassed by Japan during the fighting and subsequent peace negotiations. In January, with Sino-Japanese tensions gearing up in Shanghai, Chiang said in a widely published speech that the Chinese government should

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219 Jordan, China’s Trial by Fire, pgs. 235-6.
220 Jordan, China’s Trial by Fire, pgs. 235-6.
221 Captain Mayer’s report of 2 March 1932 MID report 2657-I-276 can be found at NARA II. Here it is quoted in Jordan, China’s Trial by Fire, pg. 155.
“never surrender and never sign unequal treaties with Japan.”222 This speech needs to be placed in the context of Chiang’s resignation of power largely as a result of pressure from the strongly anti-Japanese elements within the GMD. Chiang needed to prove to these elements his willingness to fight Japan.

Wetzell failed to understand this situation and gave little credence to Chinese national pride. He sought out a quick end to the fighting so that Chiang could focus on the further modernization of the army. While Chiang wanted to avoid fighting the Japanese forces as much as possible, he was in a precarious political position and did not want to embarrass China by surrendering without a fight to the Japanese. Wetzell did not appreciate Chiang’s political situation. In a discussion with German diplomats on 8 February, away from Chinese ears, Wetzell demonstrated his disdain for the Chinese and his impatience with their culture and sensibilities. He described Chinese thought as “primitive,” even among its diplomats, who were presumably well educated. Chiang and Wetzell, much like in the campaign against the northern warlords in late 1930 and early 1931, had significantly differing viewpoints on victory. While Chiang was determined to fight the Japanese in Shanghai, Wetzell believed the Chinese should have negotiated a ceasefire early in the fighting. He believed in the interest of a quick peace, Chinese negotiators should have realized that China ends at the Great Wall. Wetzell recognized a quick peace was unlikely. He pointed out that the Chinese mentality led to slowness in thought and action, but perhaps more importantly, the Chinese thought they could become a Great Power.223 Giving in to Japanese demands would have been a step

223 Krummacher’s report on the Battle of Shanghai, 1932, BA-MA MSG 160/2, pg. 12.
backward for the Chinese in their quest for international respect. The comments in this conversation demonstrate Wetzell’s lack of cultural understanding, his insensitivity towards Chinese national pride, and his failure to understand Chiang’s goals of building a modern Chinese state. Wetzell did not recognize that Chiang fought not because he thought he could win but rather because he did not want to see his country subject to international humiliation at the hands of foreign imperialists—both Japan and the Western powers. Wetzell, with his frequent meetings with the German diplomats in China, was likely more influenced by the desire to maintain stability in East Asia to foster good trading relations at the expense of Chinese pride.

Shanghai was the most cosmopolitan city in China, with a number of foreigners, including Japanese, British, French, and Americans, living and conducting business there. The Japanese attack on the city was of great international concern because it was an international business hub. The Americans, British, and French repeatedly sought to arrange ceasefires between the Japanese and the Chinese. The German diplomats were also concerned about the disruptive fighting. They expressed concerns to Wetzell that the fighting in Shanghai was hurting China’s economy. They were probably more concerned about German trading interests than about China’s industrial development or destruction in this case. The rising tide of Japanese aggression concerned the German Foreign Office as well as the Great Powers, who had economic interests in China. The German diplomats expressed concern to Wetzell that the battle of Shanghai would lead to the collapse of the GMD and the establishment of a “pax Japanica.”

224 Krummacher’s report on the Battle of Shanghai, 1932, BA-MA MSG 160/2, pg. 12.
diplomats, who were concerned about China’s political stability as it was the only potential counter-weight to Japanese expansion in Asia, shared these sentiments.

While Germany and the other Great Powers were concerned about Japanese aggression, they refused to intervene militarily. The League of Nations and the international representatives brokered several temporary ceasefires and while they were concerned about China, they refused to assist Chiang with troops. Wetzell was frustrated by the international community’s refusal to intervene on the side of China. This frustration with international politics became a common theme throughout his tenure as leader of the mission. During a later skirmish between China and Japan in May 1933, Wetzell remarked with disgust that “It is grotesque that the British are more interested in the Jewish movement in Germany than the thousands upon thousands of Chinese men, women, and children that are killed by Japanese artillery, bombs, and similar fire.”

Wetzell could not understand that while the Western powers were interested in China, especially its markets and resources, the country was not yet worth a war with Japan. The Western powers were extremely hesitant to resort to military action after the catastrophe of the Great War. For many of them, the Asian continent was of secondary (if not tertiary) concern. Perhaps what Wetzell failed to recognize was that the German military mission was a means of covert Western assistance to China. While secrecy surrounded the activities of the German advisors, the international community knew that

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225 Wetzell repeatedly expressed his hopes for international intervention and disappointment when that intervention fails to materialize. See Krummacher’s report on the Battle of Shanghai, 1932, BA-MA MSG 160/2.

226 “Es ist grotesk, wenn sich die Englaender fuer die Judenbewegung in Deutschland mehr interessieren als fuer die Tausende und Abertausende von chinesischen Maennern, Frauen, und Kindern, die hier durch japanische Artillerie, Bomben, und sonstiges Feuer getoetet werden.”Letter from Wetzell to Brinkmann, dated Peping 5 May 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/4.
they were working in China; yet, the Great Powers did not demand the mission’s withdrawal. As Barton Whaley pointed out in his work on covert German rearmament, the Great Powers were more than willing to look the other way regarding German rearmament and military activities during the Weimar era, especially when they recognized the benefits. In Europe, for instance, a strong Germany provided a buffer against the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. It is possible that the British perceived the work of German military mission in China as a means to building a buffer against Japanese expansion and hence did not protest too strongly about the mission’s work.

The Battle of Shanghai was an important test for the German-trained divisions and perhaps a harbinger of things to come. The battle proved the mettle of the German-trained 87th and 88th Divisions. In 1930, they had been bloodied by a mere warlord army. A little over a year later, they proved capable of holding their own against the Japanese military machine. The battle, filling headlines in the international press and drawing the attention of western observers and the League of Nations, demonstrated the West’s interest in China but also its unwillingness to intercede on behalf of China as well as the impotence of the League of Nations in the face of Japanese aggression. That the battle did not develop into a full scale war between China and Japan was probably the result of Chiang’s desire to focus on China’s internal affairs so that he could battle Japan in the future on more favorable terms. Given the fierce Chinese resistance in 1932, it is surprising that the Japanese did not anticipate Chinese unwillingness to surrender and sign peace terms when hostilities resumed in 1937.

227 Whaley, Germany’s Covert Rearmament, pgs. 2-4, 36, 52.
The Encirclement Campaigns:

While Wetzell was in charge of the German military mission between 1930 and 1934, in addition to fighting the Japanese as well as warlord uprisings, Chiang Kai-shek was also dealing with the Communist insurgency, particularly in Jiangxi (Kiangsi) region in southern China. During the course of this struggle, Chiang launched five major offensives, more commonly known as the encirclement or extermination campaigns, into the region. The first four failed. However, the fifth campaign was successful and forced the Communists to retreat to northern China in the famous Long March. Wetzell advised Chiang on the first three campaigns and was most closely involved in the strategic planning of the third but the German weakness in counter-insurgency warfare became quickly apparent as Wetzell looked to conventional solutions to fight an unconventional enemy. Throughout the campaigns, Wetzell’s relationship with Chiang continued to decline. Wetzell often found himself frustrated by the slow moving Chinese military. His advice often went unheeded and led to frustration on both sides. Though the GMD continued to consolidate its power throughout the fighting, the encirclement campaigns were undoubtedly a distraction that hindered military modernization; however, the campaigns contributed to the build-up of some industrial infrastructure in China out of military necessity.

In a report on the first campaign against the Communists, Wetzell highlighted the difficulties of fighting against the energetic Communist insurgency in the mountains. He pushed Chiang to embrace airpower to support the fighting in difficult mountainous terrain and encouraged the Chinese to build much-needed airstrips. He expressed his frustration that in the three months of the previous campaign, the Chinese had failed to
construct the airstrips that he had recommended. Wetzell was also frustrated by the poor quality of the Chinese maps, which were often incorrect. This hindered the work of the Operations Section (Operationsabteilung). Showing his faith in all things Western, Wetzell, rather than looking to Chinese maps and military intelligence on the area of operations, instead turned to a book by Professor Wegener, a westerner, who had traveled extensively through Jiangxi.\textsuperscript{228}

Wetzell pushed for the Chinese to embrace fast-moving operations in the campaign against the Communists, but the Chinese leadership repeatedly rebuffed his plans. The encirclement campaigns pitted the highly mobile Communist forces against the large sluggish Nationalist forces. In order to be successful against the Communist forces, Wetzell believed Chiang’s army would have to embrace mobile warfare. Wetzell was frustrated that the Nationalist forces continually halted offensives to dig in.\textsuperscript{229} It should be noted here that Wetzell’s experience in the Great War probably greatly influenced his advice. He had played a significant role in the German military’s efforts to develop new doctrine to overcome the stalemate of trench warfare.\textsuperscript{230} His proposed plans to encircle and destroy the enemy closely resembled imperial German war plans, like the failed Schlieffen Plan as well as the more successful German battles of encirclement against the Russians on the Eastern Front in World War I.

While Wetzell pushed Chiang to employ rapidly moving divisions that would encircle the Communist forces from all sides, he was disappointed as the troop

\textsuperscript{228} Feldzug gegen die Kommunistischen (1931) dictated by Wetzell, 24 June 1931, BA-MA MSG 160/2, pgs. 1-4.

\textsuperscript{229} Wetzell, Feldzug gegen die Kommunistischen, BA-MA MSG 160/2.

\textsuperscript{230} Lupfer, Dynamics of Doctrine, chapter 2.
movements quickly bogged down. Wetzell blamed the failure of the campaign on the poor Chinese military leadership and the failure to establish a traffic net to facilitate troop movement and supply. Wetzell was disappointed that the Chinese leadership failed to follow his advice advocating a campaign of rapid movement. He believed the Nationalist troops had allowed the Communists to slip through their fingers.\textsuperscript{231}

The Germans’ major contribution to the encirclement campaign was the building of a road network in Jiangxi. Wetzell continually pushed for the construction of roads and airstrips in the Communist insurgents’ zone of operations to facilitate fast moving operations. In contrast to Bauer who advocated rail development, Wetzell pushed the Chinese leadership to allocate funds for road construction and improvement.\textsuperscript{232} Bauer thought broadly about national development and rail bridged China’s vast distances. Wetzell, however, was dealing with an immediate threat that was limited to one region. An extensive road network was more suitable for gaining in-depth access across the region while allowing Chiang’s forces to engage locally with the population rather than riding past it on a train.

While Wetzell often failed to consider China’s industrial development, this was one of the rare cases where he considered China’s development beyond its army. This construction work was an opportunity to mobilize the nation in the war effort by providing jobs in road construction to civilians. In his attempts to persuade the Chinese leadership of the benefits of war work, he often referenced the mobilization of the

\textsuperscript{231} Wetzell expresses his disappointment in \textit{Feldzug gegen die Kommunistischen}, BA-MA MSG 160/2 as well as in a letter to a friend, Herr von Haeften, dated 29 June 1931, BA-MA N 629/11.

\textsuperscript{232} Report on the campaign against the Communists dictated by Wetzell, 24 June 1931. BA-MA MSG 160/2.
civilian population in Germany and Austria during the Great War to support the military. This reference made quite an impression upon his Chinese hosts, who sought to create a unified nation.\(^{233}\) The construction of a road network had the potential to engage the civilian population in the war effort, thus making it a national endeavor. It would facilitate the movement of people and both military and civilian goods during the campaign and after the conclusion of hostilities.\(^{234}\) The road network also had the potential to tie China together in a physical sense. While perhaps not up to Wetzell’s standards, historian William Wei demonstrated that there was indeed a marked increase in road construction in Jiangxi during the encirclement campaigns. By March 1934, nearly 1,500 miles of road had been laid in Jiangxi. These roads and the blockhouses built along them facilitated troop movements and aided the Nationalist troops in isolating the Communists and cutting off their supply lines.\(^{235}\)

Other than their role in the development of the road network, the Germans had little effect on the encirclement campaigns. After the failure of third encirclement campaign, Wetzell was no longer involved in the strategic planning of the campaigns against the Communists. The records of the German military mission contain no reports on the fourth and fifth encirclement campaigns. The fifth encirclement campaign was the only one to be successful and that came as the result of a change in strategy. During the fifth campaign, the Nationalists embraced the blockade-blockhouse strategy to encircle

\(^{233}\) Wetzell, *Feldzug gegen die Kommunistischen*, BA-MA MSG 160/2.

\(^{234}\) Wetzell, *Feldzug gegen die Kommunistischen*, BA-MA MSG 160/2.

and destroy the Communists forces.\textsuperscript{236} Initially, historians attributed the development of blockade-blockhouse strategy to the German military advisors; however, this was in large part due to their primary sources of information, which came from the Communist leaders. The Communist leaders believed that the GMD leadership was incapable of developing a plan that could successfully defeat the Communist insurgency on their own and hence, attributed it to the Germans.\textsuperscript{237} Later historical accounts, including the Nationalists’ own histories demonstrated that, indeed, the Germans had nothing to do with the development and implementation of the blockade-blockhouse strategy.\textsuperscript{238}

U.S. Army Colonel William Whitson interviewed a number of Nationalist officers who had been involved in the campaigns. A common theme throughout the interviews is that the German advisors had instructed at the military academies and were involved in training, especially the 87\textsuperscript{th} and 88\textsuperscript{th} Divisions; however, the German advisors were not involved in the formulation of the blockhouse strategy employed in the successful fifth encirclement campaign. General Shao said, “The block house policy derived entirely from Chinese Military thought; it had no connection with German Advisors; besides they were inexperienced in this kind of warfare.”\textsuperscript{239} According to William Wei, Chiang was steeped in Chinese military tradition and probably drew on the experiences of Zeng Guofan, who defeated the Nian rebels in the mid-nineteenth century by containing and

\textsuperscript{236} Wei, \textit{Counterrevolution in China}, pgs. 1-5.
\textsuperscript{237} Wei, \textit{Counterrevolution in China}, pg. 107.
\textsuperscript{238} A number of high-ranking Nationalist army officers stated in interviews with U.S. Army Colonel William Whitson in the 1960s that the Germans had no influence on the blockade-blockhouse strategy. The records of Whitson’s interviews are held at the library and archive of the United State Military Academy, West Point, NY. See also Whitson, \textit{The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71} (New York: Praeger, 1973) and Wei, \textit{Counterrevolution in China}, pgs. 107-110.
\textsuperscript{239} Whitson interview with General Shao Pai-Chang, 12 August 1965, Taipei, Taiwan, USMA.
blockading rather than pursuing a highly mobile enemy. Several generals were involved in the development of the blockhouse strategy including Zhao Guantau, who suggested building a road system into Communist-controlled territory, and Qiu Gingchuan and Liu Chi-min who suggested building blockhouses to control the territory.²⁴⁰

By the time of the fourth and fifth campaigns Wetzell had largely fallen out of favor with Chiang, but perhaps more important the lack of German experience with counterinsurgency prompted the Chinese to develop their own strategy. One Chinese officer said of the German advisors and Jiangxi that “that kind of warfare was entirely new to them; they asked many simple questions. So I joked that they should hire me as their advisor.”²⁴¹ He echoed General Shao’s point about German inexperience with counterinsurgency. General Shao concluded that during the encirclement campaigns there was “1. Little German influence on strategic thought. 2. Great German influence on tactical thought.”²⁴² As in continental Europe, the Germans in China proved to excel on the tactical level, yet remain utterly incompetent when it came to strategic thought and planning.

While the fifth encirclement campaign was successful, Chiang did not achieve a total victory over the enemy, which for the Germans would have meant the complete annihilation of the opposing forces. As was already discussed, many Chinese officers considered an enemy’s withdrawal from the field as a victory and the Communists had retreated to slowly reconsolidate and rebuild their forces and influence. The Communists

²⁴⁰ Wei, Counterrevolution in China, pgs. 108-9.
²⁴¹ Whitson interview with Ho Kuo-kuang, 3 September 1965, Taipei, Taiwan, USMA.
²⁴² Whitson interview with General Shao Pai-Chang, 9 September 1965, Taipei, Taiwan, USMA.
would continue to plague Chiang’s efforts to consolidate power and Wetzell’s successors would also complain about the failure to achieve a decisive victory. Yet, the successful fifth encirclement campaign resulted in a period of relative internal peace in China. Chiang and his German advisors needed a time of peace if they were to devote all their efforts into the creation of a modern military force. For Wetzell, the encirclement campaigns had been a distraction from the main task of modernizing the Chinese military. By the end of the fifth campaign, when Chiang could devote his time and energy to military modernization, a new leader had taken over the leadership role of the German military mission.

The Rise of Nazism:

Wetzell was in charge of the mission during tumultuous times—both in China and in Germany. Not only did he have to manage Chiang’s precarious political and military situation, balancing internal turmoil from the Communists and within the GMD as well as the ever-looming Japanese threat, but he also had to deal with the changing face of German politics as the Nazi party gained control and consolidated their power in 1933. The Third Reich would have an enormous impact on German foreign policy in the Far East, and by extension, the German military mission in China. The mission would feel the impact of the Nazis more in the von Seeckt and von Falkenhausen years, but the seeds of the party’s increasing influence were planted during Wetzell’s tenure.

Nazism initially had a polarizing effect on the advisors in China. One advisor, Buli, expressed his discomfort with Nazism to Krummacher. He reported that Leichman, an advisor recently assigned to the front lines, was an ardent Nazi. He preached the tenets
of Nazism to the German advisors and bragged of the good life he was living as a result of the Nazis. Buli recommended that everything related to the Nazi Party should be banned in the mission, as it only sewed discord and division. Buli wrote to Krummacher that “We are here in China and should only be German.”

He believed the advisors should only represent German interests, not those of the Nazis. His logic should be placed in the context of Weimar civil-military relations, in which most German officers understood their duty was to the German nation-state, not necessarily the Weimar government; hence, there was a divorce between country and government in the view of many Reichswehr officers.

Nazism, while causing divisions among low-level advisors, also had an impact on the higher levels of the German military mission and on Sino-German relations. Wetzell, who in 1933 was attempting to negotiate a military exchange program for Chinese officers to study in Germany, had to deal with the Reichswehrministerium as well as the Aussenministerium, both of which were quickly falling under Nazi control. Though Wetzell had been close to Ludendorff, he was not a Nazi party member. He worked closely with Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant) Rolf Brinckmann, who was essentially a liaison between the German military mission in China and the German government, Foreign Office, and Reichswehrministerium in Berlin, to ensure the German military mission remained in a positive light from the Nazi’s perspective. The exchange program for Chinese officers faced difficulties as the Foreign Ministry (Aussenministerium) instituted strict limitations on the number of Chinese officers who would be allowed to

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243 “Wir sind hier in China und sollen nur Deutsch sein.” Letter from Buli to Dicker (Krummacher), 19 April 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3.
train in Germany. Wetzell recognized that Brinckmann would have to be an ambassador of sorts to the Nazis. While trying to arrange a visit for the Chinese finance minister T. V. Soong to Germany in April 1933, Wetzell wrote to Brinckmann “I hope that you do not get on the bad side of the Nazis.” The leader of the mission recognized the increasing power of the Nazis and the need to be able to work amicably with them to further the interests of the German military mission in China.

Beyond the necessity of a working relationship with the Nazis to facilitate Sino-German exchange, the German military mission also had to deal with the changing face of the German Foreign Office. Hermann Kriebel, former head of the German military mission, was a loyal Nazi, who had marched alongside Hitler and Ludendorff during the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923. In 1933, Hitler decided to send Kriebel back to China to serve as consul general (Generalkonsul) in Shanghai. One of the German advisors, Major Schaumburg, who was visiting Germany in the summer of 1933, saw Kriebel shortly after he learned he would be returning to China. Schaumburg reported to Krummacher that Kriebel claimed he could now seek revenge on Wetzell. Kriebel was bitter about being replaced by Wetzell in China and also believed the Prussian Wetzell had often looked down upon him for his Bavarian roots. As long as Wetzell was in charge of the mission, Kriebel would hinder its work. Given his Nazi ideology, he also

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244 “Ich hoffe, dass Sie sich nicht damit bei den Nazis unbeliebt machen.” Letter from Wetzell to Brinckmann, 24 April 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/4.

245 Letter from Krummacher to Wetzell, Nanking, 31 August 1933, BA-MA MSG 160/3, pg. 5.

tended to take a pro-Japanese stance regarding German foreign relations in the Far East.\footnote{247 Astrid Freyeisen, \textit{Shanghai und die Politik des dritten Reiches} (Würzburg: Königshauen & Neumann, 2000), pg. 206.}

Hitler taking power in Germany only added to the rising tide working against Wetzell. Wetzell proved to be poor at managing the German advisors and the divisions among the staff were furthered by spreading Nazism. Kriebel’s assignment would create additional obstacles for Wetzell, who needed to work with the German Foreign Office. Most importantly of all, however, was Hitler’s decision in 1933 to begin German rearmament. Rearmament required vast amounts of raw materials, many of which China possessed, including antimony, tungsten, and various other metals. The Nazis, interested in German rearmament and needing access to raw materials, wanted to put someone who was more skilled in industrial diplomacy and establishing trade relations than Wetzell in charge of the military mission. That person came in the form of Hans von Seeckt.\footnote{248 Kirby provides an in-depth discussion of the raw materials needed for rearmament and the role of the German military mission, especially von Seeckt, in securing trade between Germany and China. See \textit{Germany and Republican China}, chapter 5.}

**Conclusion:**

Wetzell was a capable soldier; however, he was less adept in the diplomatic aspects of his position. The German-trained divisions improved in terms of military effectiveness during Wetzell’s time as head advisor as demonstrated by their fighting against the Japanese in 1932. Initially, Wetzell worked closely with Chiang and the upper level military leadership; however, after the third encirclement campaign and the Battle of Shanghai he would no longer play a role in strategic planning. In typical German
fashion, Wetzell and the German advisors under him were highly skilled at tactics and operations, yet utterly incompetent at strategy and the Chinese leaders recognized this shortcoming. Without understanding the complex nature of Chinese politics regarding the warlords and Communists as well as Chiang’s broader goals for national development, Wetzell could not effectively advise Chiang strategically as demonstrated in the Battle of Shanghai and the encirclement campaigns.

Wetzell focused too narrowly on military matters and failed to develop an in-depth understanding of China as well as its position in international affairs. Wetzell’s obstinacy and attempts to impose German plans with only a superficial consideration of Chinese affairs inhibited his ability to get along well with his Chinese hosts and employers, especially Chiang Kai-shek. Around 1933, Chiang began to seek out a new leader for the German military mission. Wetzell, in an effort to improve his relationship with Chiang, unknowingly invited his own successor to China. In 1933, Hans von Seeckt, at Wetzell’s invitation, traveled to China to observe and assess the Chinese military. In a letter to von Seeckt after his return to Germany, Chiang nicely summed up Wetzell’s shortcomings as an advisor:

> On the basis of my trust in you, I will share my opinion about General Wetzell. He is a good friend and very good in military operations. But he is not a good organizer and had many differences of opinion with Chinese officers as well as German advisors. He also had no interest for Chinese politics and international relations.\textsuperscript{249}

By the end of Wetzell’s tenure, the German military mission in China was in need of a leader who could develop a close relationship with Chiang, who understood international politics as well as domestic Chinese and German political currents, and who could look beyond operational military affairs and consider China’s industrial development. This person came in the form of Hans von Seeckt.
Chapter 4
A Pivotal Moment: Von Seeckt’s Time in China

Hans von Seeckt was left to pick up the pieces of the German military mission in China after the Wetzell years and rebuild the trusted connection between Chiang and his German advisors, which had flourished under Max Bauer and declined over the next four years. Wetzell, sensing Chiang’s displeasure with mission, invited von Seeckt to visit China in 1932 to restore the Generalissimo’s faith in his German advisors. Von Seeckt made the journey to the Far East in the spring of 1933 and stayed in China for approximately two months. During this time von Seeckt recognized a number of problems with the mission and made some cursory suggestions on fixing them. He then returned to China a year later to replace Wetzell as the head advisor in order to save the mission from disbandment. His presence in China came at a pivotal time as the Nazis consolidated their power in Germany and China experienced a brief period of relative stability, which was ideal for reorganizing Chiang’s army. Von Seeckt successfully navigated the political currents to place the German military mission back on solid footing.

During his first trip to China, von Seeckt gleaned an understanding of China, its military, history, and society as well as the work of the German military mission. After taking over as head advisor he was able to use this knowledge to address a number of problems that had arisen during the Wetzell years. Von Seeckt proved to be everything
that Wetzell was not. His military advice was limited. Though he largely followed in Wetzell’s footsteps regarding the training of the Chinese forces, he took a far greater interest in China’s industrialization, which he saw as a vital component of China’s military modernization and the cornerstone of a lasting Sino-German relationship. He contextualized his service in China as part of his duty to his own fatherland. He understood the importance of foreign policy considerations and the need to maintain close connections to Germany. He took a broad interest in China—its people, geography, and history—not just its army. His intellectual interests and personality allowed him to forge a close relationship with Chiang and the upper echelons of the Chinese leadership. During his time as head advisor, von Seeckt restored the Sino-German connection and laid the foundation for the continued presence of the German advisors in China’s development.

**Von Seeckt’s Military Advice:**

Chiang Kai-shek was excited about the prospect of renowned German general Hans von Seeckt’s visit to China in 1933. The father of the German Reichswehr came to China with military expertise as well as Prussian prestige. The Chinese leadership was eager to hear von Seeckt’s advice on creating a modern fighting force. Von Seeckt initially proved to be quite hesitant to provide the Chinese with military advice, as he was well aware of the importance of local knowledge and his own shortcomings in this area. Eventually he relented and produced a report in June 1933 for Chiang on military modernization that laid out the principles on which the Chinese military should be built.
Von Seeckt had earned a superb reputation building the German Reichswehr after the defeat of the Great War. The Chinese seemed impressed by his ability to create a military institution with limited resources and within the framework of the severe Versailles Treaty restrictions. Von Seeckt was an innovative military thinker. He was willing to experiment with new tactics and saw technology as a means of supplementing limited manpower as well as expanding the parameters of the battlefield. He recognized that Germany’s downtrodden position after the Great War was temporary and built the Reichswehr as a foundation on which a future German military resurgence could be built. He proved to be an exceptional military leader and organizer. During his time in China, his creation, the Reichswehr, was being transformed into the Wehrmacht.\textsuperscript{250} For the Chinese leadership, von Seeckt’s Reichswehr was a sign of hope that they too could achieve military greatness in a short time and with limited resources. The Chinese leadership believed that von Seeckt could build their military in the form of the Reichswehr and eagerly sought out advice from the experienced general.

When von Seeckt first arrived in China in May 1933, Chiang wanted to meet with him to hear what the German general had to say about China’s military. Von Seeckt was initially quite hesitant to advise Chiang. He first met with Chiang before he had the opportunity to meet with Wetzell and hear his assessment of China’s situation and the work of the German military mission. Chiang bombarded von Seeckt with questions during their first meeting. Von Seeckt later admitted to the German advisors that he felt

\textsuperscript{250} For more on von Seeckt’s creation of the Reichswehr, see Corum, \textit{Roots of Blitzkrieg}. For more on von Seeckt’s military thinking see his works from the interwar period, \textit{Gedanken eines Soldaten} (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1929), and \textit{Die Reichswehr Die Zukunft des Reiches: Urteile und Forderungen} (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1929), and \textit{Die Reichswehr} (Leipzig: R. Kittler, 1933).
quite uncomfortable answering these questions because he had little preparation and was unfamiliar with the conditions in China. Von Seeckt said of Chiang’s questioning:

I wanted to give him advice on how the Chinese army could be built [like the Reichswehr]. I responded to him, that here the conditions were different than those in Germany and an imitation would not be possible but I was willing to give a response to specific questions. 251

The German general was very much aware that the model of the German Reichswehr could not be imposed on the Chinese military. He realized the Reichswehr illustrated some of the fundamental principles upon which modern armies should be built but that the Chinese military could not directly replicate it.

Towards the end of von Seeckt’s visit to China, Chiang requested that he write a report on how to build the Chinese military. Hesitating, von Seeckt told Chiang that General Wetzell, who had been in China for three years and was more familiar with the local conditions and the current Chinese military, was better equipped to write such a report that would identify the short-comings of the current force and lay out the fundamental principles for creating a new and improved Chinese military. Von Seeckt explicitly told Chiang that he was not familiar with the land and unaware of the local conditions. Colonel (Oberst) Heins, von Seeckt’s traveling companion, confirmed for von Seeckt’s biographer Friedrich von Rabenau years later that von Seeckt had seen very little of the Chinese army during his visit to China. However, Chiang insisted that

251 “Ich moechte ihm einen Rat geben, wie die Chin. Armee entsprechend aufgebaut werden koenne. Ich antwortete ihm, dass hier andere Verhaeltnisse wie in Deutschland herrschten und eine Nachahmung unmoglich sei, dass ich aber bereit sei, ihm auf bestimmte Fragen eine Antwort zu geben.” General von Seeckt’s speech to the advisors assembled in the Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA N 247/133, pg. 3.
Wetzell not write the report. The Generalissimo wanted the report from the well-renowned military genius von Seeckt.252

At the end of June 1933, von Seeckt sat down with a typist and dictated his recommendations. Given that he was well of aware of his own lack of knowledge about China and the extremely limited amount of time that he spent with the Chinese military, von Seeckt drew on his conversations and correspondence with Wetzell and the other German advisors as well as his beliefs on the principles of modern warfare to write the memorandum for Chiang. He had developed his conception of modern warfare during the First World War and throughout the process of building the Reichswehr.

One of the basic issues that von Seeckt tackled was the question of army size. Long before traveling to China, von Seeckt had to deal with the issue of army size in Germany. During the First World War, he witnessed large armies quickly becoming immobile. He believed the future of warfare lay with small, elite, fast-moving armies.253

According to historian James Corum, in February 1919, even before the Versailles Treaty forcibly imposed the 100,000 man army restriction on Germany, von Seeckt broke with German military tradition and proposed the formation of a small elite fighting force made up of volunteers rather than conscripts. His experience during the First World War, particularly on the Eastern Front where the German army, which tended to be better trained, led, and equipped consistently defeated larger enemy armies, influenced his

252 General von Seeckt noted “ich keine Kenntnis des Landes habe und die Verhältnisse nicht übersehen könne” in his speech to the advisors assembled in the Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA N 247/133, pg.4. See also Colonel Heins’s letter to von Rabenau that is attached to the Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang, BA-MA N 62/9.

thinking.\textsuperscript{254} To be fair, a 100,000-man army as dictated by the Versailles Treaty may have been smaller than von Seeckt envisioned but he used it as an opportunity to build an elite military in Germany. He set up the Reichswehr as a cadre-system that could quickly expand when Germany would finally be able to rearm. The Chinese had great respect for von Seeckt because of his work building the German Reichswehr in the 1920s. They hoped that he could do the same for them by building a strong core that could be expanded.

Von Seeckt advocated massive demobilization of the Chinese military. Germany’s army after the Great War had been forcibly demobilized and von Seeckt had used that as opportunity to weed out poorly performing soldiers and officers and thus retained only the best. One of von Seeckt’s first observations of Chiang’s army was that it suffered not from \textit{too few} troops but rather from having too many. While China had a large number of troops, most were poorly trained and equipped with obsolete or malfunctioning weapons. At the time of von Seeckt’s observations of the Nationalist forces, this large mass of ill trained and equipped troops plagued Chinese military effectiveness. Von Seeckt proposed to Chiang that a small, well-armed, and highly trained army would be much more valuable than a large army that was poorly trained and armed. In his memorandum to the Chinese leader, he proposed the idea that ten good divisions were more valuable than twenty mediocre, if not deficient, divisions.\textsuperscript{255}

Wetzell had also advocated demobilizing much of the Chinese military but that would have been nearly impossible while Chiang was actively fighting campaigns against

\textsuperscript{254} Corum, \textit{The Roots of Blitzkrieg}, pgs. 29-30.

the warlords, Communists, and Japanese. Von Seeckt was quick to point out on the first page of his report to Chiang that reforming the Chinese military would shake the institution to its core and would require a time of peace. Reducing the size of the military, reorganizing it, reequipping and retraining the soldiers would be nearly impossible during a time of war. Unfortunately, a time of peace and relative stability was a luxury Chiang was seldom granted.

Reducing the size of Chiang’s armed forces never came to fruition during the tenure of the German advisors; however, they did train smaller, elite forces within the Chinese military in the form of the model unit. The Lehrbrigade, first proposed by Bauer, came to fruition during the Kriebel-Wetzell years and further developed and expanded under von Seeckt and von Falkenhausen’s direction. Von Seeckt, continuing in Wetzell’s footsteps, envisioned the Lehrbrigade as a modern military force that would be trained by the German advisors in modern warfare and then go on to train future units in the Chinese military. The officers for China’s new and modern divisions were trained in the model unit. Von Seeckt noted in his memorandum that the best and most promising officers should be assigned to the Lehrbrigade in order to learn how to lead in modern warfare. While relatively small compared to the whole of the Chinese military, the model unit’s creation was meant for the benefit of the entire institution. It was to serve as an example for the rest of the Chinese military to follow. It would set the standards to which all other divisions would strive to reach in the future.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Von Seeckt, Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9 pg. 1.
²⁵⁷ Von Seeckt, Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pg. 7.
Unlike Wetzell, who was often occupied by providing operational advice to Chiang, von Seeckt took a special interest in the Lehrbrigade as he saw it as the key to the Chinese military’s future development. It would utilize military theory and doctrine developed in Germany. The force, under the supervision of German advisors, would train in the use of modern weaponry as well as the execution of combined arms operations. As a brief aside, when von Seeckt took over the leadership role of the mission, he devoted little direct attention to China’s military development but he maintained a strong interest in the Lehrbrigade as evidenced by Krummacher’s thorough reports on its training. Von Seeckt even encouraged Chiang to confer a special emblem to be worn on the uniforms of those who served in the Lehrbrigade as a sign of their elite status.

While von Seeckt believed that the future of warfare lay in the hands of small, elite forces like the Lehrbrigade, he also realized that fighting men were not enough. New technology and science were to play a significant role in the future of modern armies. Von Seeckt’s conception of the future of fighting forces included small mobile armies, equipped and aided by the latest technology. The use of aircraft would “render [these small mobile armies] distinctly more effective.” Von Seeckt, unlike many air power theorists at the time, realized that aircraft would not render ground forces obsolete.

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258 Von Seeckt, Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pgs. 4-5, 7-8, and 16. For more on von Seeckt’s notions of warfare, especially regarding combined arms and modern technology see, Corum, Roots of Blitzkrieg, passim.

259 See Letter from Ingwen Liang to the agents of CKS and von Seeckt, Kuling 16 September 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/5 about conferring a special emblem for the troops of the Lehrbrigade. Letters from Krummacher to von Seeckt in the summer and fall of 1934 in BA-MA MSG 160/6 record the progress of the Lehrbrigade. See also Zu Besprechen mit General Oberst v. Seeckt (Krummacher’s notes c. fall 1934) in BA-MA MSG 160/5 and the folder with papers and reports regarding the progress of the Lehrbrigade in 1934-5, BA-MS MSG 160/5.

260 Von Seeckt, Thoughts of a Soldier, pg. 62 or for the original German see, Gedanken eines Soldaten, pg. 95.
but rather would expand the battlefield.\textsuperscript{261} In his report, von Seeckt encouraged Chiang to adopt the latest technology in terms of tanks, automobiles, and aircraft into his program of military modernization. Von Seeckt, while encouraging Chiang to demobilize the bulk of his forces, proposed that a small, well-armed, and highly trained army, especially one whose fighting effectiveness could be increased exponentially by embracing the latest technology and weaponry, would be a greater asset in fighting modern wars and would be more cost efficient for the state.\textsuperscript{262}

The 1933 report for Chiang was in many ways the culmination of von Seeckt’s military advice to Chiang. According historian H. H. Liu, one of Chiang’s generals, von Seeckt’s memorandum essentially became a blue print for China’s military development and organization.\textsuperscript{263} When von Seeckt returned to China in 1934, he admitted to the German advisors that his military advice to Chiang during the previous year was by no means innovative, rather most of the suggestions that he offered regarding demobilization, the training of officers, the establishment of a \textit{Lehrbrigade}, and standardization of weapons had already been begun by General Wetzell.\textsuperscript{264} During von Seeckt’s tenure as head of the German military mission, much of the direct military advice and training would continue as it had under Wetzell. Von Seeckt largely withdrew himself from military affairs, delegating that responsibility to his chief of staff General

\textsuperscript{261} Von Seeckt, \textit{Thoughts of a Soldier}, pg. 60 or \textit{Gedanken eines Soldaten}, pg. 92.
\textsuperscript{262} Von Seeckt, \textit{Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek}, BA-MA N 62/9 pgs. 4-5 and Von Seeckt, \textit{Thoughts of a Soldier}, 63-5 or \textit{Gedanken eines Soldaten}, pgs. 95-99.
\textsuperscript{263} Liu, \textit{A Military History of Modern China}. pg. 93.
\textsuperscript{264} Von Seeckt’s address to the assembled German advisors at Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA N 247/133 pg. 3-4.
Alexander von Falkenhausen, while devoting his own attention to economic and industrial matters.

**Replacing Wetzell:**

The original intention behind von Seeckt’s first visit to China in 1933 had been to bring prestige to the Sino-German relationship through the German military mission and to restore the status of the mission, which had declined while Kriebel and Wetzell had been in charge. Wetzell recognized that his relationship with Chiang was waning quickly and hence invited von Seeckt to China in 1932 as a means of impressing the Generalissimo. Von Seeckt’s 1933 visit was met with excitement both on the part of the Chinese and the German advisors. Krummacher spoke of the jubilation and festivities of the German advisors surrounding von Seeckt’s visit; however, almost immediately rumors started to circulate among the advisors that von Seeckt was in China to replace Wetzell as the head advisor.²⁶⁵

Von Seeckt’s 1933 visit had briefly rejuvenated the German military mission in China, but after his departure, it continued on its course of decline. Immediately following von Seeckt’s departure from China, the German Foreign Office, which maintained close tabs on the activities of the German advisors, noted the deterioration of the German military mission’s work. Wetzell’s relationship with Chiang continued to be problematic as were his relationships with many high-ranking Chinese officers, including Li Nai. Lower level advisors faced considerable difficulties in training the *Lehrbrigade* that resulted from the political struggles and unclear command chain. The German

Foreign Office noted a general feeling of resignation among the advisors in its reports on the mission. Their leader was failing them and their work showed little results. The advisors, many of whom were ardent German nationalists and reconciled their foreign service as serving the Fatherland, were disappointed that they were no longer paving inroads for German business.  

Von Seeckt was also well aware of the decline of the mission. Throughout the late summer and fall 1933, Chu Chia-hua had sent a number of letters to von Seeckt requesting his return to China. In September, Chu wrote desperately to von Seeckt reporting that the relationship between Chiang and Wetzell had completely fallen apart and there was no longer any trust to be had between the two. Chu relayed Chiang’s continued trust in von Seeckt and the Generalissimo’s desire that he replace Wetzell.

Initially, von Seeckt did not want to return to China because of his age (sixty-seven years old) and health, which was made worse by China’s climate. He recognized China’s precarious internal and external political situation and the difficulties Chiang would face in unifying such a diverse land marred by so many threats, but he seemed excited by the challenges of modernizing China’s army. On his journey back to Germany, von Seeckt recorded in his diary, “If I were 20 years younger, I would happily work with him [Chiang] and it would go well.” Von Seeckt recognized his military and political knowledge would make him a valuable asset to Chiang, but he was hesitant to

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266 A number of reports in the German Foreign Office files detail the decline of the mission. See especially reports dated 31 July 1933 (ser 171-3), 23 September 1933 (ser 154), 26 September 1933 (ser 153), and 5 October 1933 (ser 151) in AA R 9208/2239.

267 See letters and telegrams from Chu to von Seeckt in the fall 1933, especially 29 September, 30 September, 28 October, 2 November in BA-MA N 247/133.

return to China because of his declining health. Von Seeckt hoped to be able to help Chiang identify another qualified German officer to replace Wetzell, but Chiang wanted von Seeckt to come directly. Interestingly, Chiang so desperately wanted von Seeckt to take over the mission that he even offered to pay him double Wetzell’s salary.269 Ultimately, von Seeckt reluctantly agreed to return to China. He had tried to hold off Chiang’s advances but relented after Chiang had threatened to completely cancel the German military mission in China and replace it with a French advisory group. The Reichswehrministerium, including Walther von Reichenau and Minister of War Werner von Blomberg, also pressured von Seeckt, as they recognized the importance of the Sino-German relationship for the German military.271 On 15 November 1933 Chu telegraphed desperately to the Chinese legation in Berlin that Wetzell must return to Germany as the relationship between him and Chiang was completely severed; however, the return of von Seeckt to China would restore the relationship between Chiang and the German military.

269 See telegrams from Chu Chia-hua to von Seeckt on 28 October and 2 November 1933, in which he relays Chiang’s desire that von Seeckt come personally to China. This correspondence is in BA-MA N 247/133.

270 Letter from von Seeckt to Li Nai, 1 June 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/6.

271 See Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pg. 119. Kirby cites a memorandum by Bülow from 8 November 1933. The correspondence between Chu and von Seeckt in the fall 1933 demonstrates the increasing pressure to come to China. Chiang’s threat of replacing the German mission with a French one was not directly made to von Seeckt. Rather it seems to have gone to the Foreign Office. Curiously, von Seeckt received a letter dated 11 October 1933 from Walther von Reichenau requesting a meeting between the Reichswehrminister (Minister of War) Werner von Blomberg and von Seeckt. The two met in mid October. See BA-MA N 247/133. One can only imagine what was discussed at the meeting but it seems plausible that the Reichswehrminister stressed the importance of maintaining the Sino-German relationship. On von Seeckt’s decision to return to China see, Hans Meier-Welcker, Seeckt (Frankfurt: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1967), pgs. 667-670.
mission.272 A week later, von Seeckt penned a letter to Chiang saying that he would indeed return to China in March 1934.273

After returning to China in 1934, von Seeckt addressed the German advisors to quash any rumors. He told them that when he first traveled to China in 1933 he had no intention of replacing Wetzell but rather wanted to see a foreign land and the progress of the Chinese military under the watchful eye of the German advisors. In his address, he noted that unfortunately his replacement of Wetzell was the only way to save the mission.274 The dismissal of Wetzell and his replacement by von Seeckt demonstrate the importance of leading personalities for the work of the German advisors in China. Von Seeckt’s interpersonal skills and relations with Chiang and the Chinese leaders highlight the pivotal role of the head advisor and his personal relationships in the continuation of the mission’s activities. Wetzell’s failed relationship with Chiang jeopardized the mission. The Reichswehrministerium’s insistence that von Seeckt return to China speaks to the importance of the relationship with China for the German military and arms industry in the early stages of rearmament. Only von Seeckt, who so greatly impressed the Generalissimo, could save the mission.

272 Chu wrote to the Chinese Gesandtschaft in Berlin on 15 November 1933. A copy of this letter can be found in the von Seeckt Nachlass, see BA-MA N 247/133.
273 Letter from von Seeckt to Chiang, 22 November 1933, BA-MA N 247/133.
274 Von Seeckt’s Address to the assembled German advisors at Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA N 247/133.
Fixing the Mission:

Von Seeckt had been well aware of the rocky relationship between Wetzell and Chiang during his first visit to China in 1933, but he also recognized a number of serious problems with the mission’s work that went beyond the head advisor’s relationship with Chiang. When he took over as leader of the mission in April 1934, he sought to address them. These problems stemmed from the overwhelming tasks assigned to the head advisor, the unclear roles of the lower level advisors in the mission, and Sino-German friction.

While Wetzell’s brash personality was problematic, von Seeckt recognized that there was a serious problem with the position of head advisor, who had been tasked with too many diverse assignments. Wetzell had been expected to serve as a personal advisor to Chiang both in Nanking and on campaign, manage the German military mission, oversee the training of the Chinese army, and facilitate Sino-German trade. In 1933, von Seeckt was stunned by the enormity of Wetzell’s assignment and the fact that he worked without a staff. In his discussions with Wetzell, von Seeckt praised his efforts but pointed out that he could not understand how he managed all of these tasks without a staff. Von Seeckt had held a number of military positions in Germany, Austria, and Turkey and admitted that he never could have fulfilled the duties of these positions without a capable staff.\(^{275}\)

\(^{275}\) “Z. B. das Fehlen eines Stabes bei der Generalberatungsstelle. Ich sagte ihm [Wetzell] hierbei, das ich zwar China nicht kenne, dass ich aber bei meinen vielseitigen militärischen Stellungen, sei es in der Türkei, in Österreich oder bei der Reichswehr nie ohne einen wirklich arbeitsfähigen Stab habe arbeiten koennen.” Von Seeckt’s recounted these discussions in his address to the assembled German advisors at Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA, N 247/133, pg. 4.
During his 1933 visit, von Seeckt recognized the importance of the head advisor’s position, which served as the bridge between the German military advisors and Chiang and played a pivotal role in securing the Sino-German relationship. In his memorandum to Chiang, von Seeckt wrote of the enormity of Wetzell’s assignment and the need for a staff. He encouraged Chiang to clearly define and limit the responsibilities of the head advisor.\textsuperscript{276} Von Seeckt hoped that his advice in 1933 would help place Wetzell and by extension, the larger mission back on solid footing.

When von Seeckt took over the mission in 1934, one of his first priorities was to work with Chiang to define the role of the head advisor and establish a working staff.\textsuperscript{277} Von Seeckt sought to clearly situate the head advisor’s role atop the chain of command in the German military mission and within the Chinese power hierarchy. He was to be responsible solely to Chiang and the two were to meet regularly to discuss decisions regarding leadership positions within the German military mission, personal changes, the assignments of advisors, and the organization of the mission but ultimately, these decisions rested with the head advisor. The head advisor’s orders were to be issued in the name of Chiang and the Chinese military commanders were to recognize him as a representative of the Generalissimo.\textsuperscript{278} Von Seeckt defined his role as the manager of the advisors and the liaison between the German military mission and Chiang.


\textsuperscript{277} Von Seeckt’s address to the assembled German advisors at Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA, N 247/133. See also Bernd Martin’s private English translation of the GMD’s Office of Military History “Summary of the Work of the German Military Advisory Group in China,” BA-MA, MSG 160/12, pg. 6.

\textsuperscript{278} There are a number of documents that chronicle the hammering out of the contractual agreement between Chiang and the German military mission from 1934-5. See especially \textit{Neue Bestimmungen ueber die Chin. Personalangelegenheit und die Taetigkeit der Beraterschaft and Bestimmungen fuer die Dienstverhaeltmisse der Berater} (c. May 1934) in the Beraterangelegenheiten folder in BA-MA MSG 160/5.
Von Seeckt also acted early on to ensure the creation of a capable staff in the headquarters of the German military mission. The head advisor’s staff would be composed of both Germans and Chinese, who would coordinate the efforts of the mission with the needs of the Chinese military. The staff was to have a troop office to direct the mission’s activities and a separate department that would address industrial issues. The German officers in the staff were to have experience in a variety of fields including infantry, artillery, communications, engineering, motorized units, and aviation. Von Seeckt wanted the Chinese staff to connect the head advisor and the proper high-ranking Chinese authorities in order to ensure coordination in planning and the proper transmission of orders. Capable translators were also necessary for smooth cooperation. General Alexander von Falkenhausen effectively became von Seeckt’s chief of staff. He represented the interests of the German military mission and advised the high-ranking Chinese military commanders. He task was to ensure that the German advisory staff and the Chinese officers were working together. He was responsible to and a representative of the head advisor.²⁷⁹

Von Seeckt did not stop with defining the role of the head advisor and his chief of staff, but went on to ensure a clear definition of the duties and expectations of the lower level German advisors. Chiang’s request for von Seeckt’s thoughts on how to better use the German advisors to increase their effectiveness in 1933 suggested to the German general that Chiang was not satisfied with the work of the German advisors and their

accomplishments. Throughout his 1933 report, he emphasized the important roles the German advisors would play in reorganizing the military, training troops, creating an industrial base, and advising key political-military government ministries. To reassure Chiang, von Seeckt also pointed out that the German advisors worked with complete devotion to their assignment.\textsuperscript{280}

Von Seeckt wanted to reassure Chiang that the advisors were working diligently and would play an important role in China’s development and so ensure the continued employment of the German advisors in China; yet, he was candid in his report about potential of the German advisors as well as their limitations. He highlighted the importance of placing the right person in the right position that would best utilize their skills. All the German advisors were highly qualified in their field of expertise but they were not interchangeable. A German advisor that was skilled in training troops in the field might not be qualified to teach at the Kriegsakademie, just as experts in weapons technology might not be suitable for training troops. Von Seeckt recommended that the specific assignment of each advisor be nailed down before their departure from Germany.\textsuperscript{281}

Upon taking over the leadership role in the mission in 1934, von Seeckt sought to remedy any of Chiang’s doubts or dissatisfaction with the work of the advisors. Von Seeckt took a personal interest in the specific assignments of each advisor and hoped to ensure that each advisor was placed in the position for which he was most qualified and could be most effective. In nailing down the new contractual agreement between the

\textsuperscript{280} Von Seeckt, \textit{Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek}, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pg. 17.

\textsuperscript{281} Von Seeckt, \textit{Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek}, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pg. 18.
advisors and Chiang, von Seeckt also laid out a clear definition of the role of the advisors. The advisors were just that, advisors. They were not commanders of troops. The German advisors were accountable only for the position to which they were specifically and individually assigned by the head advisor. It was the duty of the Chinese commander, to whom the advisors had been assigned, to ensure that their recommendations were followed.282 This point in the contract divided responsibility between the German advisors and the Chinese officers.

While von Seeckt hoped to eliminate Chiang’s dissatisfaction with the German military mission by taking over as head advisor and by developing a contractual agreement between the Chinese and the German advisors, he recognized that some of the problems with the mission’s work had stemmed from Sino-German friction. This friction occurred at all levels from the Chinese reception of the head advisor to the low-level advisors and Chinese commanders in the field. Von Seeckt did not place blame on any one side for this friction, but rather he diplomatically pointed out to Chiang that such resistance to foreigners was natural on both sides and to be expected but that it needed to be overcome. The Chinese needed to become accustomed to German influence and methods just as the German advisors had to adapt to a foreign environment.283

Von Seeckt sought to actively address the issue of Sino-German tensions at all levels. At the highest level, von Seeckt’s Sino-German staff was one means of ensuring smooth cooperation between the German military mission and the Chinese commanders. He also insisted upon weekly meetings between himself, von Falkenhausen, Chiang, and

282 Bestimmungen fuer die Dienstverhaeltnisse der Berater, signed by von Seeckt BA-MA MSG 160/5
283 Von Seeckt, Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pg. 18.
the upper echelons of the Chinese military leadership.\textsuperscript{284} These meetings would facilitate communication at the highest levels. Chiang’s public support of the head advisor in front of his highest-ranking Chinese officers also lent credibility to the power of the head advisor as a representative of the Generalissimo.\textsuperscript{285}

At the lower levels, von Seeckt used the clear definition of the advisor’s role and the new regulations as a means to overcome friction. The new regulations clarified that German advisors were neither subordinate nor superior in rank to the Chinese commanders. They each had separate chains of command, yet were to work in a cooperative relationship. In the new regulations for the German advisors, von Seeckt stressed that cooperation at times required the advisors to display tactful restraint when working with Chinese commanders. The chief of staff was to ensure that the German advisors were working within the spirit of camaraderie with their Chinese counterparts. He was to ensure cooperative practices between both the Chinese and Germans.\textsuperscript{286}

Von Seeckt also created an outlet for addressing problems between Chinese and German officers. The chief of staff would be responsible for hearing complaints from German advisors and Chinese officers but was specifically instructed to use discretion when clarifying differences of opinion and not to discuss these matters in public. Should German advisors experience any problems with the Chinese officers with whom they

\textsuperscript{284} See von Seeckt’s letter to Chiang, 1 May 1934 in which he insists on meetings every Tuesday and Friday in BA-MA MSG 160/38. See also von Seeckt’s weekly schedules that include meetings with Chiang as well as other Chinese military commanders and German advisors in Krummacher’s notes in BA-MA MSG 160/5.

\textsuperscript{285} Von Seeckt’s address to the assembled German advisors at Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA, N 247/133 and Marschallbesprechung from 1 May 1934 to General Li Nai in BA-MA MSG 160/38.

\textsuperscript{286} \textit{Neue Bestimmungen ueber die Chin. Personalangelegenheit und die Taetigkeit der Beraterschaft} (c. 1935), BA-MA MSG 160/5.
worked, they were to notify the proper Chinese authorities, who would then deal with the problematic Chinese officer. Chinese officers who were dissatisfied with the work of their German advisors were to notify the proper authorities within the staff of the German military mission. Members of the German military mission would then go on to counsel, reprimand, or reconsider the assignment of the problematic advisor.287

His first visit to China in 1933 allowed von Seeckt to identify the various problems of the mission’s work beyond the falling out between Chiang and Wetzell. With this preparation, von Seeckt could immediately take action to address the problems when he took over the position of head advisor. He used his discussions with Chiang as well as the writing of new regulations and revisions to the contractual agreements of the advisors as a means of resolving the problems. He sought to clarify the organization of the mission and to clearly define the roles of the advisors at all levels and their relationship to Chinese officers. Rather than ignore or paper over Sino-German tensions, von Seeckt directly addressed the issue of friction. Von Seeckt’s reorganization of the mission proved that he was a much better organizer and manager than Wetzell had been. With Chiang’s support the mission’s activities soon began to thrive.

Situating the Mission in Nazi Germany:

While von Seeckt quickly resolved a number of the internal problems that had plagued the mission’s work under Wetzell’s leadership, he also had to navigate a new political dimension that stemmed from consolidation of power of the Nazi party in

287 Neue Bestimmungen ueber die Chin. Personalangelegenheit und die Taetigkeit der Beraterschaft (c. 1935), BA-MA MSG 160/5.
Germany. Von Seeckt needed to situate the German military mission in the new fabric of Nazi Germany. While von Seeckt was in charge of the mission, it quickly became a dumping ground (or a safe haven) for people who were inconvenient for the Nazis—himself included. He managed to reconcile the service of the German advisors in China as dutifully serving Germany even while navigating the vagaries of Nazi foreign policy in the Far East.

Von Seeckt’s dealings with the ever-problematic Nazi Party began long before he traveled to China. Any consideration of von Seeckt’s relationship with the Nazi party and Hitler between 1934 and 1936 regarding the German military mission in China needs to be placed in the broader context of the party’s development throughout the Weimar years. Von Rabenau, von Seeckt’s biographer, wrote that the general had announced after first meeting with Hitler in 1923, “in goals we were one in the same, only the path was different.” Following the Great War, both Hitler and von Seeckt identified with one another over the goal of rejuvenating Germany, especially its military might; however, they differed dramatically over the methods of restoring Germany’s status as a Great Power and the role of the military within the state.

Neither Hitler nor von Seeckt truly believed in the efficacy or the ideals of the Weimar Republic. Initially, Hitler rebelled against the Republic and was willing to employ force to destroy it as evidenced by the Putsch in 1923. The Nazis with their

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288 “Im Ziele waren wir uns einig, nur der Weg war verschieden,” von Rabenau, *Aus Seinem Leben* (Leipzig, 1940), pgs. 347-8. It should be noted that von Rabenau’s biography of von Seeckt is problematic. It paints von Seeckt as much more favorable to the Nazis than he probably was. The date of its publication in 1940 is cause for some skepticism of any of its claims regarding von Seeckt’s sensitivities to the Nazis. While this quote may be falsified or artistic license, it does convey an accurate sense of the parallel views of the two leaders.
paramilitary storm troopers (*Sturmabteilung*, the SA), were seen by many aristocratic Prussian officers, von Seeckt included, as low-class brutish thugs. Following the failed Putsch and his imprisonment, Hitler began to utilize more legal means by getting elected to the government, if for no other reason than to infiltrate the organs of power and destroy the Weimar Republic from within.\(^{289}\) Though he had almost complete control over the instruments of force within the state between 1920 and 1926, von Seeckt did not attempt to forcibly destroy the Republic. According to historian John Wheeler-Bennett, von Seeckt “was prepared, unlike many of his caste, to use the Republic for his own ends; and to co-operate with it as the existing constituted authority to restore the strength and power of those two institutions to which his devotion and loyalty were deep and unswerving, the German Reich and the German Army.”\(^{290}\)

While they both sought a German resurgence, Hitler and von Seeckt differed profoundly on their view of the military within the state. Von Seeckt saw the army as a state within a state. He withdrew the Reichswehr from the party politics of the Weimar Republic, believing it was above party politics (“überparteilich”). While the military should be apolitical in the party sense, it was still very much a political entity. Von Seeckt wrote:

> The army should be “political” in the sense in which I understand the word, i.e. it should grasp the conception of the “state”; but it certainly must not be “political” in the party sense. ‘Hands off the army!’ is my cry

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\(^{290}\) Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis of Power*, pgs. 86-87.
to all parties. The army serves the state and the state alone, for it is the state.\textsuperscript{291}

In von Seeckt’s logic, the army was the purest expression of the state. He understood the state or Reich as an organic, timeless entity. It was not to be confused with transient regimes such as the Weimar Republic—or the Third Reich for that matter. Hence, the army was to serve the interests of the Reich, which was not necessarily the government.\textsuperscript{292}

Hitler’s view of the military was fundamentally incompatible with von Seeckt’s. Even before the publication of Mein Kampf, Hitler called for the establishment of an authoritarian government. In February 1920, Hitler gave a speech announcing the platform of the Nazi Party, which at the time was still the German Workers’ Party (Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, DAP). He called for a national army of conscripts, in which every German male must serve, to replace the elite professional force that von Seeckt was in the process of creating. More importantly, in this speech was his articulation of the demand for “the creation of a strong central authority in the State; the unconditional control by the political central parliament over the entire Reich and its organizations in general.”\textsuperscript{293} In Hitler’s view, the army was an organization that needed to be brought


\textsuperscript{292} For his own words on the relationship between army and state see von Seeckt, “Heer im Staat” in Gedanken eines Soldaten. For a sound analysis of von Seeckt’s political views and how they affected the Reichsheer including its withdrawal from party politics while maintaining its political influence, see Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis of Power, introduction and chapter 2 and Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, chapter 10.

\textsuperscript{293} Part of Hitler’s Twenty-Five Demands from February 1920 are quoted by Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis of Power, pg. 161.
under the control of the central authority of the state. There was no leeway for von Seeckt’s army as a state within a state. Wheeler-Bennett pointed out that Hitler was never confident of gaining support of the Reichswehr.\footnote{Wheeler-Bennett, \textit{Nemesis of Power}, pg. 163.}

Given the similarity of their aims but their dramatically different views on methods, it comes as no surprise that von Seeckt was a problematic figure for the Nazis and Hitler. Von Seeckt had laid the foundation for Germany’s military resurgence and Hitler’s Wehrmacht in the form of the Reichswehr. He had even supported Hitler and the Nazi Party in the early 1930s, although he was somewhat skeptical about the measly Austrian corporal’s ability to revive and lead Germany. Even though he briefly supported Nazis, von Seeckt embodied the Prussian aristocratic elitism that Hitler despised. Hitler’s mistrust of the Reichswehr extended to its creator. Even though von Seeckt had long been retired, he still had great clout with the army and was thus a potential threat to Hitler and the Nazi Party once they were in power.

Von Seeckt’s travels to China from 1933 to 1935 came at a convenient time. He traveled to China with the Reichswehr and government’s blessing.\footnote{Von Seeckt’s papers contain a number of notes wishing him well on his travels in 1933 from the office of Reichspräsident Hindenburg, the Reichsminister des Auswaertigen, and from Minister of War von Blomberg. See BA-MA N 247/133 and as was previously discussed, the Reichswehr Ministry seems to have strongly encouraged von Seeckt to return to China in 1934.} Not only was he securing German trade and access to raw materials that were vital for rearmament in China, but he was also a half a world away from threatening Hitler’s consolidation of power with any of his remaining influence over the Reichswehr. Conveniently, von Seeckt was also not present in Germany during the SA purge in 1934, more commonly
known as the Night of the Long Knives.²⁹⁶ Had he been, he may well have been one of its many victims as Hitler used the purge to eliminate not only the SA but also prominent anti-Nazi conservatives. However, with von Seeckt in the Far East, he was no longer a threat to the Nazi party at home and they would not have to suffer the public relations crisis of killing off such a respected man. Interestingly, as a brief aside, during the Fritsch-Blomberg affair in 1938, Ian Kershaw writes that Hitler, in contemplating an effort to hush up Fritsch’s alleged homosexual acts and make him disappear from public politics, considered sending him away to China to serve as a military advisor to Chiang.²⁹⁷ It seems that China quickly became a place for the Nazis to dispose of inconvenient people.

Not all of the people who conveniently disappeared to China were of such a high profile as von Seeckt. A number of Jewish and partially-Jewish or Mischlinge German soldiers went to China to work as military advisors. On 28 February 1934, Blomberg issued the Aryan paragraph (Arierparagraph), which discharged non-Aryans from the Wehrmacht. Jewish soldiers, especially Jewish veterans of the First World War, had been a problematic category for the Nazis. There was something unsettling about disenfranchising and discharging men who were willing to fight and die for the Fatherland. Hindenburg had insisted that Great War veterans and their children be treated with respect and allowed to continue working even if they were Jewish. Jewish veterans were placed in a special category; however, it did not help those who were too young to

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²⁹⁶ For more on the Night of the Long Knives as an opportunity for Hitler to purge not only the SA but also political enemies (both on the right and left of the political spectrum) see Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), pgs. 31-41.
have fought. China became a place where these men who found themselves discharged could go to continue their military service, albeit unofficially.\textsuperscript{298}

Von Seeckt assisted these Jewish and \textit{Mischlinge} soldiers finding positions in China. According to historian Bryan Mark Rigg, General Ludwig Beck used his connections with von Seeckt to help several officers secure employment in China. In early 1934, Beck helped Major Robert Borchardt to find employment in China with von Seeckt. According to Borchardt’s wife, there were ten other officers in China who were in a similar situation, having been discharged from the Wehrmacht because they were not Aryan.\textsuperscript{299} Konrad Arnade traveled a similar path to China. An OSS informant, Wolfgang Bärensprung, reported that Arnade was dismissed from the Wehrmacht because he was not one hundred percent Aryan. Bärensprung went on to say, “However, the Reichswehr at that time spread its protecting hand over such people and sent him to China with the Military Mission.”\textsuperscript{300} Klaus von Schmeling-Diringshofen was another example. He was discharged from the Wehrmacht in May 1934 because he was a quarter Jewish and thus classified as a \textit{Mischlinge}. His father-in-law Otto Lohmann, an engineer, who worked

\textsuperscript{298} Bryan Mark Rigg, \textit{Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military} (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{299} Bryan Mark Rigg, \textit{Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers}, pgs 80, 83-84. See also the Robert Borchardt file, BA-MA (Bryan Mark Rigg Sammlung) MSG 209/1.

\textsuperscript{300} OSS report on the German Military Mission in China. Information provided by Dr. Wolfgang Bärensprung. Bärensprung, who had worked as a police advisor with the German military mission and then ended up in American hands during World War II, was interviewed by the OSS in 1942. The report can be found in NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.
with the mission in China, used his connections with General Starke to secure employment for Schmeling-Diringshofen in China as a military advisor.\footnote{File on Klaus Hennig von Schmeling-Diringshofen, BA-MA (Bryan Mark Rigg Sammlung) MSG 209/2. OSS report on the German Military Mission in China. Information provided by Wolfgang Bärensprung. NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.}

Many German advisors seemed uncomfortable the Nazi Party and its policies. In Bärensprung’s report to the OSS he noted that while many of the advisors leaned ideologically to the right, very few were Nazis. Some advisors were relatively indifferent but many were quite uncomfortable with the Nazi party; some even cursed the party outright.\footnote{One of the main purposes of the OSS’s interview with Bärensprung was probably to identify German officers who were unfavorable to the Nazi regime and could be turned as sources of intelligence. OSS report on the German Military Mission in China. Information provided by Wolfgang Bärensprung. NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.} While in China, von Seeckt also seems to have become increasingly disenchanted with the Nazis.\footnote{Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pg. 223 n. Von Rabenau’s biography claims that von Seeckt upon first meeting Adolph Hitler said “Im Ziele waren wir uns einig, nur der Weg war verschieden,” which translates to “In goals we were one in the same, only the path was different.” Von Rabenau’s biography however makes von Seeckt out to be very much in favor of the Nazis, which, given the time of its publication in 1940, makes the reader skeptical. See von Rabenau, Aus Seinem Leben, pgs. 347-8.} One can only speculate about the cause for this growing disenchantment—perhaps the Roehm Putsch or his concerns about the Jewish question.

Von Seeckt seemed extremely amenable to helping discharged Mischlinge soldiers. These men had served for years in the military. Many had joined when the 100,000-man army restriction was in place and thus joined the elite army (Eliteheer), which emphasized quality over quantity. Von Seeckt recognized the unique and valuable skill set that these men possessed would only benefit the mission’s work in China. Even after he left China in 1935, von Seeckt continued to receive letters asking for his assistance in securing employment in China. Posner, a medical doctor, wrote to von Seeckt saying life had become very difficult in Germany because he was not Aryan. He...
highlighted his military service and said he could work as a military advisor or in a
civilian hospital. He begged von Seeckt to help him find employment in China. Von
Seeckt put him in touch with Brinckmann, who was in charge of German personnel going
to China. 304

One can only speculate about why von Seeckt was so willing to help those who
had been discharged because of their non-Aryan status. Perhaps he felt a sort of
camaraderie with his brothers in arms. He understood their desire to serve the Fatherland,
but von Seeckt’s papers also contain letters from civilians requesting his help. 305 His
sympathies towards the Jews may have resulted from his increasing disenchantment with
the Nazis or maybe these Jewish appeals for help contributed to his disenchantment. His
wife Dorothee had been adopted by a Jewish family and there were suspicions that she
herself was Jewish. In any case, the Jewish soldiers may have been undesirable by the
Nazis but they still served the interests of the Reich. They worked to further German
interests in China, both those of German businesses as well as the military.

**German Foreign Policy towards China:**

Despite pressure from German industrialists and military officers who represented
a strong China-lobby in German politics, Nazi foreign policy in the Far East remained
quite vague during von Seeckt’s time in China. Officially, German foreign policy towards
the Far East was one of neutrality. Hitler was elected when German political and
economic interests were heavily focused on China. This political favoritism was

304 See Posner-Seeckt correspondence from February 1936 in BA-MA N 247/192.
305 See letters from Lili Scholz, BA-MA, N 247/191.
complicated between 1933 and 1935 as various ministries lent support to different business ventures in China—and not only with Chiang’s China but also Manchuria and the Canton regime. It was another case of competing bureaucracies in Nazi Germany and lack of clarity regarding the direction of German policy, both of which perpetually plagued the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{306} The growing interest of the Nazi government in Japan also complicated German foreign policy in the Far East. The German Foreign Office closely monitored Japanese press reports regarding von Seeckt’s role in China. The Japanese were alarmed by such a prestigious figure and esteemed German general traveling to China to assist Chiang in his goals of modernizing the military. As a result, the German foreign ministry expressed concern over von Seeckt’s return to China in 1934. In contrast, the \textit{Reichswehrministerium} lent its full support to von Seeckt and the activities of the German military advisors in China.\textsuperscript{307}

From 1933 to 1935, there was a great deal of confusion regarding German foreign policy towards China and Japan. Nevertheless, Germany’s involvement in the Far East continued to grow. In May 1935, the German legation in Beijing was upgraded to an embassy and moved to Nanking in June at the urging of Chiang, which demonstrated the increasing favor of Germans in China. Around the same time, Germany began negotiations with Japan that would ultimately result in the Anti-Comintern Pact. Gerhard

\textsuperscript{306} Gerhard L. Weinberg, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Policy, 1933-1939: The Road to World War II} (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), chapter 5, which provides a detailed account of the political-business intrigues in China.

\textsuperscript{307} See German Foreign Office files AA R 9208/2239 and AA R 9208/2246, which contain numerous reports on Seeckt’s trips to China and his Chiang’s request for him to return to China as well as Japanese newspaper clippings and reports from the German delegation in Japan regarding von Seeckt’s appointment in China. Von Seeckt mentions the full support of the \textit{Reichswehrministerium} upon his return to China in 1934 in his speech to the advisors assembled in the Kasino Fu Kwei Shan, 20 April 1934, BA-MA N 247/133.
Weinberg articulated the German dilemma well when he wrote: “With a growing interest in the two Far Eastern powers that were often in conflict with each other, could Germany maintain good relations with both and draw from each what it needed: influence and economic advantage from China, and political support from Japan?”

Germany had attempted to broker better relations between China and Japan but the effort was futile. Around 1935, German foreign policy began leaning towards Japan, although Hitler would not decidedly choose one over the other until 1938. Loud pro-Nazi elements within the German Foreign Office began to exert a stronger hand in German policy and they leaned in favor of Japan as the German ambassador to Japan, Herbert von Dirksen, began espousing the bright future of Japanese imperial expansion in the Pacific. While the Foreign Office favored Japan, the German army favored China as it saw potential for a future military ally and recognized the need for access to raw materials for rearmament.

Von Seeckt’s travels to and work in China came at a pivotal time for German foreign policy. Given the constant threat of Sino-Japanese conflict, he understood that German foreign policy in the Far East would soon reach a tipping point when the Nazi government would have to decide whether to side with Japan or China. Von Seeckt strongly lobbied for China. He realized access to China’s vast supply of raw materials would be a vital component of German rearmament. China also had the potential to serve as an ally in the fight against communism. Von Seeckt was well aware of the growing Soviet danger. According to Bernd Martin, “From Seeckt’s as well as from the other

308 Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy*, pg. 105.

309 Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy*, pgs. 104-5.
military advisers’ point of view, China was to become a strong anticommunist bulwark as well as a reliable trading partner and finally a political ally of the Reich.”³¹⁰ While an alliance with Japan provided one option for encircling the Soviet Union, von Seeckt also recognized China as having the same potential. Chiang had demonstrated his willingness to fight aggressively against the Communists in China. The German advisors were well aware about the aid the Chinese Communists were receiving from Soviet Russia and knew Chiang had a stake in limiting the swell of the communism.

In the mid-1930s, the Sino-German partnership had great potential to blossom not only into a strong trading partnership but also, eventually, a military alliance. At the time von Seeckt went to China, Germany was undergoing rapid change with the Nazi takeover. He situated the German military mission in Nazi Germany—even if it was on the outskirts. He also managed to navigate fickle German foreign policy in the Far East as best as anyone could. Perhaps part of the reason, von Seeckt worked so diligently to assist Chiang in reorganizing the military was because he recognized that a Sino-Japanese war could bring an end to the Sino-German relationship and he did not want Germany to lose the benefits of the relationship—especially its economic benefits.

A New, Renewed Focus on Industrialization in China:

The ability to work with the Nazi government in Germany was important for facilitating trade between China and Germany. For von Seeckt, Sino-German industrial exchange was one of the most important aspects of the relationship. He devoted his time

and energy into focusing on industrialization in China, seeing it as an area of great opportunity for Germany. War industries would be vital to support a new modern military in China and building an industrial base offered opportunities for German firms to establish factories abroad as well as to advise in their construction. It was clear to Chiang, von Seeckt, and the German Foreign Office that Wetzell had focused too heavily on military development and training at the expense of industrialization. Much to the pleasure of German businessmen and the Foreign Office, von Seeckt sought to address this issue when he returned to China in 1934.

Throughout his military career, von Seeckt had contemplated the complex military-industrial relationship. He witnessed the limitations of industrial production and their effects on military campaigns in the First World War. Following the war, he embraced the notion of a small elite military in part because of his beliefs about the limitations of supply. Von Seeckt argued in *Gedanken eines Soldaten* that armies worldwide would be capped in number as they ran up against the limitations of industrial production and supply as well as the cost of arming troops. He recognized that China suffered severely from having a massive military with virtually no industrial base to support it. In his memorandum to Chiang in 1933, he repeatedly advocated downsizing China’s military forces while emphasizing the need to be able to supply those forces with modern armaments.

Even in 1933, though he spent little time visiting factories or troops, from his correspondence with Wetzell and his meetings with the German advisors von Seeckt was

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312 Von Seeckt, *Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek*, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, see especially pgs 10-12.
well aware of the poor state of the Chinese war industry and the armaments of the troops. In his recommendations to Chiang in 1933, he highlighted the fact that Chinese leaders and German advisors could invest all the time and effort in the world into training Chinese troops, but soldiers without arms would have no value whatsoever in modern warfare, especially against the Japanese. Von Seeckt encouraged Chiang to devote significant resources into developing China’s industry. For the sake of its security in times of war, von Seeckt highlighted the fact that China needed its own industrial base, but it would take time to build factories and begin production. In the meantime, he pushed Chiang to purchase weapons from abroad. He also promoted the idea of engaging with European, especially German, firms to build factories in China as well as to purchase weapons at least until China’s own industrial base was established. He pointed out the primary purpose of these factories would be the production of war materials; however, during times of peace they could also produce consumer goods for general use. To coordinate the purchase of armaments and oversee the development of a homegrown war industry, von Seeckt recommended the creation of a weapons ministry under the War Ministry.

The upper echelons of the Chinese leadership recognized the importance of von Seeckt’s visit and advice for not only military purposes but also the future of industrialization. After von Seeckt left China in July 1933, Chu Chia-hua wrote a letter of

313 See letters from Wetzel to von Seeckt in BA-MA N 247/133 particularly those from 14 March 1932, in which Wetzel talked about the lack of artillery and air power and the letter from 3 August 1932 when Wetzel complained about the lack of communication and transportation infrastructure and the slow movement of information.

314 Von Seeckt, Denkschrift für Marschall Chiang Kai-shek, 30 June 1933, BA-MA N 62/9, pgs. 10-12. “A Summary of the Work of the German Military Advisory Group in China” also confirms these general points of discussion between von Seeckt and Chiang. See the Summary in BA-MA MSG 160/12, pgs. 3-4.
thanks to the German general. Chu highlighted the significance of von Seeckt’s visit for facilitating Sino-German exchange and bringing German science and technology to China. Many Chinese political and military leaders greatly respected von Seeckt. His visit and recommendations helped to revitalize Chinese faith in German science and technology and encouraged the Chinese to actively seek out German trading contracts.315

Von Seeckt’s attention to industrial matters distinguished him from his predecessor, Wetzell, who focused primarily on military development and saw industrialization as a side benefit and of secondary concern. Chiang wanted to replace Wetzell with someone who would take a greater interest in industrialization and military affairs as they related to the construction of a modern military. The Reichswehrministerium was also displeased with Wetzell’s lack of attention to industrialization. Even in terms of military procurement, Wetzell performed poorly in securing business for German industries.316 Von Seeckt, however, alleviated many concerns with his focus on industrial issues. Robert Chi Tsun, who escorted von Seeckt during many of his excursions in China, wrote to von Seeckt’s biographer von Rabenau that during his first visit to China, the German general spent a great deal of time discussing military-economic matters with Chiang. According to Tsun, “Both gentlemen were enlivened by the wish that the relationship between Germany and China would become stronger and that the economic cooperation must be expanded.”317 Von Seeckt’s attention to the relationship between military development and industrialization during

315 Letter from Chu Chia-hua to von Seeckt, 4 July 1933, BA-MA N 247/134.
316 Kirby, Germany and Republican China, 111.
his first visit to China in 1933 proved to Chiang that the German general was the ideal replacement for Wetzell.

When von Seeckt returned to China to take over as the leader of the mission, he devoted his attention to industry in China. According to his adjutant Krummacher, von Seeckt gave military recommendations only part of the time and even then, only during his first few months in China in 1934. He quickly delegated responsibility for military affairs to his second in command, General Alexander von Falkenhausen. Von Seeckt, recognizing the value of economic exchange, worked to promote Sino-German business and trade.\textsuperscript{318} Under von Seeckt’s leadership, Sino-German trade quickly became the cornerstone of the relationship. Both the German general and the Chinese Generalissimo recognized it was a mutually beneficial relationship. Tsun wrote that both men understood that China had rich reserves of raw material and manpower but had no industry, while Germany had limited access to raw materials and needed greater sales areas for its industrial products. Germany also had far greater experience with technology and organization from which China could learn and benefit.\textsuperscript{319}

Von Seeckt’s return to China in 1934 came at a pivotal moment for Sino-German trade. He had stressed the need for a period of peace to begin the stressful processes of military reorganization and industrialization. In 1934, when he returned to China, Chiang was concluding his final encirclement campaign against the Communists and while the Japanese threat was always present, there was a brief reprieve from hostilities. The

\textsuperscript{318} Letter from Krummacher to von Rabenau, Munich 18 November 1939, BA-MA N 62/7.

\textsuperscript{319} Robert Chi Tsun, report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 3. For more on industrialization in Germany, see Trebilcock, \textit{Industrialization of the Continental Powers}, chapter 2.
duration of von Seeckt’s tenure as head advisor was the closest China would come to finding a time of relative peace. Access to raw materials was also taking on a new level of importance in Germany with the Nazis in power and their policy of rearmament in force. China had raw materials that were desperately needed by Germany’s burgeoning war industry, which was exponentially expanding production in 1934 and 1935 to accommodate the demands of Nazi leaders.320

In order to secure a mutually beneficial Sino-German trade relationship, von Seeckt recognized the need for political maneuvering in Nazi Germany. In his discussions with Chiang, he recommended a personal friend, Hans Klein, to assist them in cementing the Sino-German trading relationship. Klein had great experience in organization and development of industry, but perhaps more importantly, had the trust of government circles in Germany.321 Interestingly, Klein was also the principal owner of HAPRO (*Handelgesellschaft für industrielle Produkte*). HAPRO, a private company created in January 1934, was essentially a quasi-official organization that coordinated German trade in China for the Reichswehr and economics ministries in order to suit the needs of German rearmament. It was modeled on Gefu and Stamag, which had been quasi-official yet private firms that dealt with German trade relations in Russia and Turkey in the 1920s.322

320 Von Seeckt, *Aus Meinem Leben*, pg. 681. Kirby discusses China’s wealth of raw materials, particularly tungsten and antimony, which were in high demand in Germany, see *Germany and Republican China*, pgs. 106-109.


322 For more on the formation of HAPRO and its role in Sino-German trade, see Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, pgs. 120-138.
For four weeks in the summer of 1934, von Seeckt, Klein, and Chiang met to hammer out the details and plans for Sino-German trade.\footnote{Robert Chi Tsun, report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 3.} Klein recognized the importance of coordinating economic activities and industrialization to make it more efficient. He recommended the establishment of an economic association or ministry to oversee the building of factories and the securing of business contracts. He also recommended more centralized control of the national budget and the creation of a national bank to regulate finances.\footnote{“A Summary of the Work of the German Military Advisory Group in China,” BA-MA MSG 160/12, pg. 16.}

According to Robert Chi Tsun, “the will of the Marshal, the personality of v. S. and the creative spirit of Klein ensured that a solid foundation for a rich future of cooperation between the two countries was laid.”\footnote{Robert Chi Tsun wrote “Der Wille des Marschalls, die Persönlichkeit v. Seeckts und dazu der Schaffensgeist Herrn Kleins bürgten dafür, dass damit der Grundstein einer zukunftsreichen Zusammenarbeit zwischen den beiden Ländern gelegt war.” See his report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 3.}

These planning sessions resulted in securing a number of contracts between the Chinese government and German businesses. One of the prominent examples is the Chinese contract with Junkers aircraft producing firm, not only for the purchase of aircraft but also for the establishment of a Junkers aircraft factory to be built in China.\footnote{中德合辦飛機製造廠合同案 (Sino-German Aircraft Manufacturing Agreement) 29 September 1934, Hoover Institution, GMD Collection, Zheng 7, Reel 3, folder 32.}

The ultimate achievement of the meetings was the signing of a secret treaty between the Chinese government and HAPRO. The “Treaty for the Exchange of Chinese Raw Materials and Agricultural Products for German Industrial and Other Products,” signed on 23 August 1934, solidified the exchange of Chinese raw materials for German industrial products. It was one of the first treaties in which China was accorded equal
status with a Western trading partner. It secured much-needed raw materials for German rearmament and provided the materials Chiang and the German advisors would need to pursue military modernization in China. The treaty was also one of von Seeckt’s highest achievements in China.\(^{327}\) Krummacher noted the great time and energy that von Seeckt put into his plans and in a brief aside mentioned he was glad that the great German general did not live to see the breakdown of the Sino-German relationship and the collapse of his plans for industrial development in China in 1938.\(^{328}\)

When von Seeckt left China in 1935 due to poor health, he and Chiang agreed that he would continue to work for Chinese interests in Germany. Von Seeckt continued to be active in Sino-German circles in Germany and involved with industrial exchange.\(^{329}\) He maintained his interest in Sino-German trading relations. Max Jlner, an employee of I.G. Farben who von Seeckt met in Shanghai in 1934, continued his correspondence with the German general even after his departure from China. Jlner kindly sent von Seeckt a copy of a report he wrote on the East Asian question for Germany and shared his thoughts with von Seeckt on how Germany could best capitalize on its trading relations with the Far East.\(^{330}\) His personal papers contain a number of invitations to participate Sino-German discussions of industry and business as well as to join Chinese delegations in their visits to German industrial firms like I.G. Farben.\(^{331}\) He also received requests for advice from

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\(^{327}\) Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, pgs. 125-126.

\(^{328}\) Letter from Krummacher to von Rabenau, Munich, 18 November 1939, BA-MA N 62/7.


\(^{331}\) See invitation from the China-Studien-Gesellschaft, 14 September 1935 to attend a talk on business and industry in BA-MA N 247/191. Invitation from the China-Institut, Frankfurt a. M. to von Seeckt, 8 August 189
German businessmen and industrialists. In April 1936, Dr. E. W. Haas wrote to von Seeckt to tell him that he would soon be traveling to China for the purpose of selling steel strap cartridges for machine guns (*Patronen-Stahlgurtes für Maschinenwaffen*). Dr. Haas recognized the great influence von Seeckt had in China and asked for his advice about which Chinese military authorities he should approach and forge relations with.\(^{332}\) Even after his departure from China, von Seeckt maintained his connections with the Chinese and was considered a China expert in German business circles.

Von Seeckt had made quite an impact on the Sino-German relationship by securing trade and business. He was acutely aware of the intertwined relationship between a military and its industrial base. His attention to industrialization in China renewed the status of the German military mission in China. Having been disappointed by Wetzell, the *Reichswehrministerium* and Chiang were both thrilled with von Seeckt’s attention to industrial matters and his work to establish business contracts. He reoriented the mission’s work by broadening its focus beyond operational military affairs to the larger infrastructure needed to support a new military in China. In doing so, he served both Chiang’s interests and those of Nazi Germany.

**Von Seeckt’s Cultural Interests:**

During his travels in China, much of von Seeckt’s time was devoted to business and advising; however, he also took an interest in China’s history and culture. His trip to 1936 to join a group of Chinese officials in Frankfurt as they tour the city and the I.G. Farben factory, BA-MA N 247/193.

\(^{332}\) Letter from Dr. E. W. Haas to von Seeckt, Genoa, 27 April 1936, BA-MA N 247/192.
China in 1933 was his first time in the Far East and he displayed a genuine curiosity and appreciation for the foreign culture that persisted through his time as leader of the mission. Throughout his excursions, von Seeckt contemplated the concept of time. His interactions with the Chinese people and visits to various sites of note demonstrated to him the difference between the often reckless forward looking nature of the Western conception of time and the Chinese understanding of time, in which the person was surrounded by the stream of time. Looking forward and backwards both had merit. Von Seeckt seemed to greatly appreciate the Chinese respect for the past. His contemplation of Chinese history and culture endeared him to Chinese colleagues and contributed to his well-rounded nature.

The Chinese placed a different emphasis on family than westerners. During his first trip to China, von Seeckt learned of the importance of family for the Chinese people. He became familiar with the Chinese Ahnenkult or culture of worshipping their ancestors. He recorded in his diary that for all their striving for modernity, the Chinese still had great respect for the past and their ancestors. Von Seeckt respected the desire of the Chinese to maintain their unique culture and traditions while striving to build a new and modern China. He was appreciative of the Chinese reverence for the past and pride in their ancestors’ accomplishments, unlike the West, where the lessons of their ancestors were often discarded in the race of forward progress.

Von Seeckt recognized the importance of family for the Chinese and endeared himself to his Chinese hosts and colleagues by taking an interest in their families. Robert Chi Tsun, who had often accompanied von Seeckt in his travels throughout China, was

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333 Von Seeckt, Tagebuch, entry dated 1 August 1933, BA-MA N 247/135, ser. 119-120.
impressed by von Seeckt’s desire to meet his family and the cordial gatherings they all had. Tsun wrote to von Rabenau that both Hans and Dorothee von Seeckt placed great value in getting to know Tsun’s family. They were able to converse with many members of Tsun’s family in German or French. Tsun cheerfully recorded how wonderful it was to see the old German general in the midst of playing children as he interacted with youngest members of Tsun’s family. 334

In addition to impressing his close Chinese colleagues by his interest in their families, they were also moved by his insistence on visiting many of China’s historical sites. Robert Chi Tsun reported with some surprise that von Seeckt climbed up the 6,000 steps of the holy mountain in Taishan, Shandong. 335 Long past his youthful days and not in the best of health, von Seeckt’s perseverance and insistence on experiencing one of China’s holiest places undoubtedly impressed his Chinese hosts. Von Seeckt internalized his experiences climbing the Holy Mountain and visiting the grave of Confucius. After his first visit to China, von Seeckt wrote to his sister Marie that “the East provides all sorts of things to contemplate and teaches that obviously all things change and yet there is an eternity to the entirety.” 336

The Great Wall embodied von Seeckt’s thoughts about the flow of time and the place of people and material objects in that stream. The monument demonstrated to von Seeckt how things change over time and yet it also spoke to the ability to withstand the

334 Robert Chi Tsun’s report to von Rabenau on Generaloberst von Seeckt in China, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 4.
336 “Der Osten giebt so allerlei zu denken und lehrt sinnfällig den Wechsel aller Dinge und die Ewigkeit des Ganzen.” Von Rabenau transcribed this letter from von Seeckt to Marie, dated 2 November 1933 in his notes for his biography. The transcription can be found in BA-MA N 62/66, pgs. 100-2.
test of time. It was a marker of the past. The Great Wall had made quite an impression on von Seeckt as he made several visits to it between 1933 and 1935. He was interested in China’s military history and the strategic value that the Great Wall once had. While the Great Wall had no meaning for modern warfare, it stood as a testament to China’s long history of military might. Von Seeckt’s Chinese colleagues were pleased to show him the monument that represented China’s strength, power, and historical achievements. Von Seeckt was indeed amazed at the size of the Great Wall and its ability to withstand the test of time. The Great Wall was a historical testament to China’s ability to master its material and manpower resources.337

While at the Great Wall, von Seeckt also became interested in the various groups of people that had migrated into China and influenced Chinese culture. He was especially interested in the Mongol invasions. He recognized the fusion of cultures, peoples, and traditions in China. Prior to visiting the Great Wall, von Seeckt had visited the Temple of Sleeping Buddha in Beijing. He noted the mixture of Indian and Mongolian influences and was intrigued by the cultural implications that various mass migrations and invasions had on China and its culture.338

Von Seeckt expressed a great interest in the physical representations of Chinese culture in its art and architecture. He spent time during both of his trips to China wandering around the palaces and temples in Beijing. He recorded in his diary in 1933 his disappointment with the Summer Palace. He wrote, “It was a disappointment, despite

its beautiful condition, but there was too much modern tackiness.”\[^{339}\] He pointed out that many of the exhibitions in the palace contained relatively new artifacts as the French had plundered it in 1860.\[^{340}\] For von Seeckt, newness was not necessarily better. In line with the German Romantics, he appreciated the classical and the traditional and seemed hesitant to embrace the modern. While his military experience demonstrated his willingness to use modern machines and inventions, he did not approve of blindly accepting new innovations simply because of their novelty; rather, they needed to be tested. After their value was proven they needed to be integrated with past achievements and institutions that have stood the test of time, less they stand out as tacky and unnecessary. The modern touches that von Seeckt saw as tacky and disruptive in the beautiful palace were perhaps a warning: a new, modern Chinese military should not be a tacky adornment on the beautiful classical Chinese society, rather it would need to be integrated into Chinese traditions and culture.

While he found the modern touches to the palace to be distracting, he was impressed with the architectural achievements that the Chinese had made as exemplified by the palace and the temples in Beijing. Robert Chi Tsun reported to von Rabenau that the German general would often stand in the middle of the parade ground in the palace and contemplate the majesty of the building in front of him. Von Seeckt even remarked to his Chinese companion that the Temple of Heaven was the best example of harmonious architecture.\[^{341}\] On his journey home in the summer of 1933, von Seeckt reflected on


\[^{340}\] Von Seeckt, Tagebuch, entry on 24 June 1933, BA-MA N 247/135, ser. 44.

\[^{341}\] Robert Chi Tsun, report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 3.
architectural style. He was awed by the “unity and harmony” (“Einheitlichkeit und Harmonie”) in the architectural lines of the palaces and temples as well as “the relationship between art and nature” (“Verbindung zwischen Kunst und Natur”) that the Chinese invoked in their buildings. Von Seeckt witnessed the achievement of the German romantic ideal of harmony between man-made creations and nature in Chinese architecture. He had a great appreciation for Chinese cultural achievements.

Von Seeckt’s interest in Chinese culture and people endeared him to a number of Chinese leaders. The German general took an active interest in getting to know China’s people—and not just its leaders. Tsun was impressed with the general’s social skill and finesse as he would often socialize with Chinese people he met on the street if they could speak English or German. Tsun reported that von Seeckt was always interested in talking to people and learning about Chinese culture, which won him many friends. One political leader, Tai Chi-tao, “especially treasured von Seeckt because of his great cultural knowledge.”

The first trip to China prepared von Seeckt well for taking over the position of head advisor a year later. Tsun, who was officially tasked with helping von Seeckt acclimate to the new environment when he returned to China in 1934, remembered “von Seeckt explained that he had already been able to obtain a good overview of the Chinese cultural, economic, and political life during his first visit even though it had been

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342 Von Seeckt, Tagebuch, entry from 3 August 1933, BA-MA N 247/135, ser. 128.
brief.”344 Von Seeckt had not only gained an understanding of China during his first trip, but he had also laid the foundation for a strong relationship with Chiang.

**Von Seeckt’s Relationship with Chiang:**

Both Chiang and von Seeckt mutually respected one another and the value of their personal relationship should not be underestimated as it facilitated the work of the mission. Though von Seeckt had great respect for Marshal Chiang, he expressed concerns about modernizing China. After departing from China in July 1933, von Seeckt took time to reflect on his experiences during the long journey home. He wrote of Chiang, “I lie not, the Marshal impressed me and I wish him truly all the best but I have my worries.”345 Von Seeckt went on to note that he was impressed with Chiang’s ambition and efforts to unify and modernize China but he recognized that it would be a difficult road ahead.

While modernizing China’s military and industry was a complicated undertaking, von Seeckt and Chiang built a close relationship over the course of the German general’s tenure in China.

During his first trip to China, von Seeckt began to grasp China’s great expanse and diversity.346 There were vast differences in the religious beliefs, socio-economic status, and political ideology of the peoples within China’s borders. There was a great disparity between the wealthy elite and the impoverished urban workers and rural

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peasants. Chiang’s China also struggled to overcome the various local and regional identities to create a unified sense of nation. Germany, too, had dealt with these issues to forge a unified nation-state in the nineteenth-century; however, the scale was significantly greater in China and the central government needed to overcome great distances in reaching out to the people.

Chiang had a tendency to reach out to the Western world for assistance to model his own country on the modern nation-states of Europe and the United States. Von Seeckt recognized this tendency as an opportunity for Germany and knew the German advisors could serve as a valuable asset for Chiang in achieving his goals; however, von Seeckt was quick to point out that lasting change needed to come from internal sources. Von Seeckt wrote of Chiang’s efforts to consolidate his power and set China on a path to modernity that “He must help himself. The recipe cannot be purchased from foreign lands, rather every country must eventually stand and grow on its own powers and based on its own model.”

The German advisors had the ability to bring European knowledge and tools to China but ultimately China needed to find its own path toward unification and modernization. China could not imitate Germany’s development. Its development would need to come from internal sources. Von Seeckt knew that his time was one of growing internationalism. While he saw the benefits of exchange across the globe, he also expounded upon the importance of maintaining national structures amidst the rising tide of internationalism. Von Seeckt’s views on the importance of national character

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347 “Er wird sich selbst helfen müssen, wie ja schliesslich jedes Land und durch die eigenen Kräfte und nach eigenem Vorbild besteht kann und sich die Rezepte nicht vom Ausland kaufen kann.” Von Seeckt, Tagebuch, BA-MA N 247/135, ser. 111.

348 Von Seeckt, The Future of the German Reich, pg. 24.
and the possibility for transnational exchange between nations were conducive to
Chiang’s goal of modernizing China via Western assistance all the while maintaining
China’s distinct national character.

The German general’s broad intellectual interests must have impressed Chiang.
The German general had learned the importance of personal relationships in foreign
advising during the First World War when he served in the Ottoman Empire and China
proved no different.\textsuperscript{349} Von Seeckt never experienced the difficult relationship that
Wetzell had with the Chinese Generalissimo; rather, von Seeckt’s relationship with
Chiang was reminiscent of the close relationship that Max Bauer had with established
with the Chinese leader. Von Seeckt was interested in matters outside of operational
military concerns and especially interested in fostering Sino-German trade. Like Bauer,
he had proven to take an interest in China’s politics and culture, which would
undoubtedly inform his advice to Chiang. Chiang’s insistence that von Seeckt return to
China to take over the German military mission lest it be cancelled stands as a testament
to his respect for and faith in the German general’s ability. The two leaders established a
working professional relationship as well as a friendship. Robert Chi Tsun reported an

\textsuperscript{349} Interestingly, in the First World War von Seeckt worked General Liman von Sanders in Turkey in the
Ottoman High Command with Ottoman War Minister Enver Pasha. General Liman von Sanders, a capable
field commander, had a stormy relationship with Enver Pasha; however, von Seeckt maintained a positive
relationship with the Ottoman war minister that facilitated the work of the German military mission. For
more on the contrast between von Seeckt and Liman von Sander’s relationships with Enver Pasha see
Ulrich Trumpener, \textit{Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918} (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1968).
“especially warm friendship developed between the two men, Marshal Chiang Kai-shek and Hans von Seeckt.”

At the center of their relationship stood Madame Chiang, Mayling Soong, who often entertained von Seeckt while Chiang was on campaign and served as a translator between the two. Though she could not speak German, the two could converse fluently in English. Von Seeckt seemed genuinely surprised and impressed by Madame Chiang. On his first visit to China, Madame Chiang frequently entertained von Seeckt while they waited for the Generalissimo to return from the front. Von Seeckt came away from these meetings with the impression that she was clever and politically aware. He recognized she was an important woman and in many ways the face of the nation. She wore typical Chinese dress yet she had been educated in America. She stood as a sort of symbol for modernity in China—a combination of Western knowledge with Chinese tradition. Von Seeckt was impressed with her intelligence and political skills. She was rather atypical of many women he had encountered. He wrote of Madame Chiang, “She is strongly interested in politics and politics for her means military affairs. She is surprisingly well oriented and despite my aversion to speaking about military and political matters with women, I quickly let go of my initial, restrained reluctance.” Von Seeckt believed military and political affairs belonged in the masculine or public sphere and were not proper topics of discussion for ladies but Madame Chiang had quite the effect on him and

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caused him to readdress his views on proper gender roles. He was impressed with her ability to converse knowledgably about such masculine topics yet to maintain her femininity. He recognized that she was perhaps her husband’s best colleague.\footnote{352 “Sie ist ihres Mannes beste Mitarbeiterin.” Von Seeckt, Tagebuch, BA-MA N 247/135, ser. 115.}

The German Foreign Office also recognized the important role of Madame Chiang. In a report from June 1934, Heinz Lautenschlager, a German diplomat, noted that von Seeckt, in the short time since his arrival, had established an “excellent position” with the National Government, Chiang, and Madame Chiang, who “was not unimportant.”\footnote{353 “Herr Generaloberst von Seeckt hat sich nach übereinstimmenden Aeusserungen von chinesischer, ausländischer, und deutscher Seite in der kurzen Zeit seines Hierseins eine hervorragende Stellung bei der Chinesischen Nationalregierung und insbesonders bei Marschall Chiang Kai Shek, sowie—was nicht unwichtig ist—bei dessen Gattin gesschaffen.” Report from Lautenschlager to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Peping, dated Nanking, 28 June 1934, AA R 9208/2239, pg. 1.} Because she was a woman, Madame Chiang’s power and influence was often disconcerting to German (and western) sensibilities; however, the Germans quickly realized the importance of forging close relationships with her because of the influence she wielded over Chiang.

Madame Chiang played a vital role in facilitating the relationship between Chiang and the head advisor. She had often served as a translator for Chiang and the German advisors. Even though she could not speak German she could converse in English with many of the advisors. She had Chiang’s most intimate trust. He had complete faith in her ability to accurately convey his goals and desires to his German advisors and as well as their advice to him. Given von Seeckt’s positive impressions of her keen political and military awareness, it appears that she won his confidence as well. Madame Chiang would often sit in on meetings between the German advisors, Chiang, and his high-
ranking military officers to ensure that the most important points and subtleties about military reform were properly translated.\textsuperscript{354} Given her intimate relationship with Chiang and her understanding of the Western world, she was perhaps the least intrusive filter of all the translators.

While von Seeckt had managed to quickly cultivate a close relationship with Madame Chiang and her husband, his time in China proved to be short. Von Seeckt’s health suffered terribly as a result of his age and the tropical Chinese climate, which was dramatically different from Germany’s. Because of von Seeckt’s failing health, he was unable to accompany Chiang on his final campaign against the Communists. In a display of friendship, Chiang went to visit the German general in his sick bed before returning to the front.\textsuperscript{355}

With his health failing, von Seeckt was frustrated by his inability to perform his duty and he longed to return home to Germany. Robert Chi Tsun believed that von Seeckt had fallen into a depression as a result of his poor health. He seemed to have great pride in the trust that Chiang gave him and feared he would disappoint the Generalissimo because of his poor health and his inability to work to the fullest potential. After great internal struggle, von Seeckt sent Tsun to plead with Chiang that the German general be released from his contract and allowed to return to Germany due to his ill health. Tsun reported that Chiang was confident that von Seeckt would regain his health and was hesitant to let him return to Germany. Ultimately, Chiang allowed von Seeckt to return to


\textsuperscript{355} Robert Chi Tsun, report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pgs. 4-5.
Germany in 1935; however, the two parties agreed that von Seeckt would maintain the title of head advisor and would return to China when he recovered to resume his assignment. Von Seeckt also agreed that he would continue to work for Chinese interests while he was in Germany.\textsuperscript{356} As a sign of friendship, Chiang gave a roll of silk to von Seeckt upon his departure but von Seeckt, thinking he would return to China, refused to accept the gift.\textsuperscript{357}

Unfortunately, von Seeckt never fully regained his health and was unable to return to China. He passed away on 27 December 1936. The Chinese leadership grieved over the loss of such a great man, who worked so hard for both his Fatherland and their country. Dorothee von Seeckt received a number of condolences from China after her husband’s death, including notes from the Chiangs.\textsuperscript{358} Von Seeckt was buried in Berlin but thousands of miles away, the Chinese held funeral services in which they honored the great man and his accomplishments.\textsuperscript{359}

The continued correspondence of many Chinese officials with his widow serves as a testament to the close relationship that von Seeckt had established with his Chinese hosts and employers. Her correspondence with Chu Chia-hua is especially telling. World War II interrupted their exchange of letters but they reconnected in the post-war period. In January and February 1948, Chu once again began writing to Dorothee. Chu updated Dorothee on China’s fight against Japan in World War II and their current struggle

\textsuperscript{356} Robert Chi Tsun, report on von Seeckt for von Rabenau, BA-MA N 62/7, pg. 5.
\textsuperscript{357} “Summary of the Work of the German Military Advisory Group in China,” BA-MA MSG 160/12, pg. 7.
\textsuperscript{358} See condolence letters and telegrams in BA-MA N 247/230.
against the Communists. He sympathized with the hard times that she was facing and noted times were difficult everywhere. During 1940 he attempted to send letters and some gifts to Germany but they never made it. In the fall of 1947, when Chu once again found Dorothee’s contact information he sent a packet of rations to help her through the difficult times. Chu wrote “For the past few years I have been deeply concerned with the welfare of my German friends.”360 In a second letter to Dorothee, Chu wrote that he was happy she received his New Year’s greetings and went on to say “You see we have not forgotten you and also the excellent work done by General von Seeckt in China.”361 Chu promised to relay Dorothee’s greetings to the Chiangs and told her they were doing well. Chu’s correspondence with Dorothee more than a decade after her husband passed away and his concern for her well-being during and after the war were a testament to the close relationship the von Seeckts developed with their Chinese employers.

Von Seeckt’s broad interest in China and his ability to forge close relationships with the upper echelons of the Chinese leadership offered a refreshing change from Wetzell’s days as head advisor. While von Seeckt’s interests in Chinese culture, history, and people do not speak directly to his ability as a military advisor, they did inform his decisions and relations with Chinese officials. The relationship he forged with Chiang facilitated the signing of Sino-German trading contracts and communication between the German military mission and the Chinese leadership. Von Seeckt’s appreciation for the past facilitated his understanding of Chiang’s goal to create a modern China while maintaining Chinese culture and traditions.

360 The quote is taken from a letter from Chu Chia-Hua to Dorothee von Seeckt, 3 January 1948. Also see, Chu’s letter to Dorothee from 21 February 1948. Both can be found in BA-MA N 247/251.
361 Chu’s letter to Dorothee from 21 February 1948, BA-MA N 247/251.
Conclusion:

Von Seeckt successfully restored the German military mission in China and pushed it in new directions. Under his leadership, the mission no longer focused merely on training Chinese army divisions but also concentrated on China’s industrial development. In bringing together military and industrial development, the German military mission strengthened the connection between China and Germany. The German military mission became a place to serve the interests of the fatherland abroad. Von Seeckt became a diplomat of sorts. In China, he established close relationships with a number of leaders and was able to push for German interests. In Germany, he represented a strong China lobby. The Sino-German connection, the personal relationships, and the plans for military and industrial development that von Seeckt established set the course on which the mission would continue under the leadership of Alexander von Falkenhausen.
Chapter 5: Alexander von Falkenhausen: Der Alte Chinese Prepares for War

In 1934, General Alexander von Falkenhausen traveled to China shortly after von Seeckt arrived to serve as his chief of staff. His trip to China was his third extended stay in the Far East. His previous Far Eastern travels in China and Japan (among other countries) had prepared him well for his assignment advising Chiang. Von Falkenhausen had more prior experience in East Asia than any other advisor. He had an interest in the diverse cultures of the region and took an interest in learning about its history, geography, languages, and societies. While in China, he further cultivated these interests. His knowledge about China impressed his Chinese hosts, employers, and colleagues and facilitated their cooperation. He also had a keen understanding of China’s political predicament—both domestic and foreign. Serving in China from 1934 to 1938, von Falkenhausen was tasked not only with modernizing the Chinese army but also preparing it for war with Japan, which seemed inevitable. Having previously served on assignment in Japan, he had an intimate understanding of China’s greatest enemy. He was the most qualified German advisor to develop strategic plans for a future Sino-Japanese war.

Experience and Interest in the Far East:

Von Falkenhausen first traveled to China in 1900. As a recently promoted lieutenant, he volunteered to take part in the punitive expedition against the Boxers.
While he arrived too late to take part in the heavy fighting around Tientsin and Beijing, he still worked on transport operations and led an assault against a weakly defended fort in which Boxers with swords and pigtails were no match for German firepower. While Von Falkenhausen’s biographer pointed out that later in life he characterized the expedition as barbarous and an “instrument of foreign greed,” there is no evidence to suggest that he opposed the war at the time. It was during the Boxer Rebellion that von Falkenhausen’s military prowess as a Prussian officer and his unique cultural sensitivity and interest in foreign civilizations began to merge. When not fighting, he took time to explore the imperial palaces and shops and acquired an interest in Far Eastern cultures.

While his experience in China sparked his curiosity in the Far East, he quickly developed a greater interest in Japan. He returned to Germany in 1901 and began general staff training. In 1904 with the start of the Russo-Japanese War, he began studying Japanese. Armed with his language skills, the German army sent him on assignment to Japan in 1910 to study its military. He gained a keen understanding of the Japanese military—its leaders, military thought and doctrine, and the psychology of its soldiers. Two years later in a follow-on assignment, he became the German military attaché in Tokyo and remained in Japan until the beginning of the First World War, when he returned to Germany. Unbeknownst to von Falkenhausen at the time, his experience

362 Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Sino-German Connection: Alexander von Falkenhausen between China and Germany, 1900-1941* (Amsterdam: van Gorcum 1978), pg. 7. The Boxer Rebellion is scarcely mentioned in the von Falkenhausen Nachlass and it seems that he often downplayed his involvement in the action when he served as a military advisor to Chiang.

363 Liang, *The Sino-German Connection*, pg. 7.

364 Liang, *The Sino-German Connection*, pgs. 7-8.
with the Japanese military would be useful later in his life as he found himself making war plans to assist the Chinese in their fight against the Empire of the Sun.

While living in Japan, von Falkenhausen and his wife Paula took a vacation in which they traveled through Japan, Korea, and China. During their visit to China he showed his wife the sights that had enthralled him during the Boxer Rebellion, including the imperial palace, the old city walls, and the Forbidden City in Beijing. Paula was fascinated by the juxtaposition of the European settlements and traditional Chinese culture. She wrote of the Chinese houses with their bright colors and exquisite woodcarvings, as well as the curious practice of Chinese foot binding. She was intrigued by the city of Tsinanfu. Inside the old city walls it appeared as a traditional provincial Chinese city, but the European settlement lay immediately outside the walls. The German colony of Qingdao also appeared very European. The relics of China’s long history as well as the incursion of European influence in China fascinated both husband and wife.

During his work and travel in Asia prior to the First World War, it probably never occurred to von Falkenhausen that he would eventually take up residence and employment in China. He spent the first half the Great War on the eastern front and then served in Turkey. Following the war, he held a number of staff positions in the Reichswehr before retiring in 1930. Though his early career experience in Asia had by no means made him a Sinophile, he chose to return to Asia in 1934 to work alongside Hans von Seeckt in advising Chiang Kai-shek on military development and industrialization. His career experience prepared him especially well for working in China. He quickly

365 Paula wrote up a travel log about the trip in 1910. See “Reise durch Korea, Mandschurei, und China,” Fall 1910 in BA-MA N 246/22.
renewed his interest in the Far East and learned about China’s political situation, geography, and history.

Von Falkenhausen’s writings reveal his in-depth understanding of China’s internal affairs and politics. He appreciated Chiang’s efforts to unify the fractured land and consolidate his power. By the time of von Falkenhausen’s arrival in 1934, Chiang was well on his way to cementing his power as the sole authority in China as he was successfully completing his campaign against the Communists. Von Falkenhausen recognized that the Nanking government was quickly consolidating its power and it was only a matter of time until Canton was incorporated into Chiang’s China. The German government and industry’s lack of recognition of Chiang’s power often frustrated von Falkenhausen. He was also keenly aware of the fact that although the Nanking government had established itself as the central authority in China, there were still fissures and rebellious warlords. The Kwang provinces of Kwangsi and Kwangtung (collectively Guangdong) became increasingly problematic during his time in China.  

Though he had an adequate understanding of China’s internal affairs, von Falkenhausen was often hesitant to advise the Chinese on their own political affairs. He preferred to advise them solely from a military perspective. However, internal problems such as

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366 Von Falkenhausen discusses the Canton and Kwang province issues in detail in his letters to Berlin. See especially, letters dated 20 October 1934, 25 December 1934, 15 May 1935, 22 May 1935, 24 June 1935, and 30 August 1935 in BA-MA MSG 160/13. His personal papers also contain his reports and correspondence with the Chinese on the issue of the Kwang provinces, see his papers in BA-MA N 246/7 especially, the letter from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, dated Nanking, 19 September 1936 and his attached report Vorschläge fuer den weiteren Ausbau der Landesverteidigung nach Eingliederung der Liang-Kwang-Provinzen, Nanking, 12 September 1936; Letter from von Falkenhausen to General Liu Kuang, dated Nanking, 24 August 1936; letter from Chiang Chung-chen to von Falkenhausen, 18 August 1936; letter and attached report from von Falkenhausen to General Liu Kuang, Nanking, 23 July 1936; and the letter from von Falkenhausen to Generalleutnant Liu Kuang, Militär-Kommission, Nanking, 10 June 1936.
subduing or reincorporating difficult provinces often involved the use of force and von Falkenhausen had a broad definition of military affairs.\(^{367}\)

Not only was von Falkenhausen well versed in China’s domestic political struggles among the provinces and warlords, but he also became closely acquainted with China’s geography. His personal papers contain significantly more maps of China than any of the other advisors. He had numerous maps displaying the provincial boundaries and urban centers. Interestingly, a number of these maps contained both the Chinese characters as well as the transliterations of place names.\(^{368}\) His Japanese language skills prepared him to learn a little Chinese and to be able to recognize the characters for important places.

Von Falkenhausen’s map collection contained a number for military and industrial planning purposes. Some of the first maps he acquired of China showed its arsenals and iron works. He also had numerous maps that displayed China’s rail lines. These maps included rail lines that were already built and in working order as well as those under repair along with projected plans for future rail development. His maps marked the locations of troop collection points and troop reserves near railroads for rapid deployment to the front lines in the event of war. His military planning will be discussed on a more in-depth level shortly, but it is important to briefly highlight his geographic considerations in these plans. He considered the strategic locations of China’s industries

\(^{367}\) Letter from von Falkenhausen to Liu Kuang, Nanking, 9 January 1937, BA-MA N 246/8. He claimed to not be in a situation to judge matters with the communists and rebellious provinces from a political perspective but solely from a military point of view.

\(^{368}\) See von Falkenhausen’s maps in BA-MA N 246/10. The individual maps are often difficult to date but they appear to range in time from 1935-1938. Maps from 1934 of China’s iron works and arsenals can be found in *Eisenhüttenwerke und Arsenale Chinas*, BA-MA N 246/12.
and the need to defend those areas in his planning. His military plans heavily emphasized the use of railroads to deploy troops and keep them supplied. In planning defenses around Shanghai, he considered the geographic features of the area and found it ideally suited for defense. He also believed that planned floods around Hoangho could be an effective defensive tactic. He paid close attention to China’s rivers, coastal waters, and harbors in his planning for transport as well as creating obstacles for the enemy.\textsuperscript{369} His geographic knowledge of the foreign land made him a better strategic planner than his German predecessors in China.

His familiarity with China’s geography as evidenced by his map collection and strategic planning impressed his Chinese employers, as did his knowledge of history. Von Falkenhausen was well versed in history and often used examples from the Western and non-Western experience. In a discussion of power and authority, von Falkenhausen cited examples of past leaders. In times of emergency, the head of state was to have unquestioned authority and absolute control over all means of power. He cited powerful leaders from Caesar to Chinggis Khan and more recently Bismarck.\textsuperscript{370} Power and control over the state’s tools of violence and force spoke across cultural boundaries. Von Falkenhausen wrote in his reports to the Chinese leadership that ideally the head of state

\textsuperscript{369} These military plans can be found in N 246/7. See especially, \textit{Grunds{"a}tze der Landesverteidigung Chinas}, Nanking, 26 January 1935; letter from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935; letters from von Falkenhausen to Dr. Yui Davi, Nanking, 17 July 1935 and 24 July 1935; von Falkenhausen, \textit{Gesichtspunkte fuer die Verteidigung der Halbinsel Shantung}, Nanking, 4 November 1936; Report from Rave to von Falkenhausen, 24 March 1936; Memo from von Falkenhausen to Vize-Verkehrsminister Yui Fei-Pen, 26 March 1936; von Falkenhausen, \textit{Beurteilung der moglichen kriegersichen Massnahmen Japans gegen China}, Nanking, 1 April 1936; von Falkenhausen, \textit{Gesichtspunkte für den Nach= und Abschub}, Nanking, 27 May 1936.

\textsuperscript{370} Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Betrachtungen zur Regelung der Kommandogewalt}, Nanking, 6 September 1936, BA-MA N 246/7, pg. 3.
would be both a politician and soldier, like Fredrick the Great, Josef Pilsudski, or Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The implied comparison to Chiang Kai-shek was clear.371

Not only did von Falkenhausen use historical references in his discussions of power with Chiang, but he also used them in his military plans, which were undoubtedly reviewed by the Marshal and the highest echelons of China’s military leadership. In his efforts to convince Chiang that the largely Mongolian provinces of Suiyuan and Ninghsia were worth Nanking’s effort to re-take because of their strategic meaning for defense in northern China, von Falkenhausen referred to China’s own history. Von Falkenhausen recognized that many of the Mongolian provinces were not worth much to China, except for their value as important horse breeding areas. Otherwise they were dispensable. However, he pointed out that Japan had its own aims in expanding into the region. With control of the Mongolian provinces, Japan could cut China off from Russia as well as launch an attack on China that would descend from north to south. To make the threat clear, von Falkenhausen drew repeatedly on the example of Chinggis Khan, who had brought down the Chin Empire through his attacks on the same provinces.372 The Chinese had a deep reverence for the past and the experience of their ancestors and von Falkenhausen’s use of historical examples was an effective tool of persuasion in his correspondence and reports for the Chinese officials.

Von Falkenhausen’s local knowledge had a clear impact on his military planning and improved his ability to effectively advise Chiang and other high-level military


commanders. His interest in their country and his desire to learn more about the land impressed his Chinese colleagues. As a result, many had cordial relations with and respect for him. Von Falkenhausen’s curiosity about China was not fleeting. Throughout the remainder of his life, he continued to be an avid reader and kept up to date on Chinese affairs. He continued to monitor the work of the Chinese Nationalists even after they fled to Taiwan in 1949.\textsuperscript{373} While he may not have begun his career as a Sinophile, he certainly became one. Upon his eightieth birthday, in 1958, the \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, testifying to his affinity for China, referred to him as \textit{“Der alte Chinese.”}\textsuperscript{374}

**Personal Relations with the Chinese:**

While the Chinese appreciated von Falkenhausen’s genuine interest in their country, he also used his interpersonal skills and Prussian finesse, to cement his personal relationships with the upper echelons of the Chinese military and political leaders. Von Falkenhausen developed an especially close relationship with Chiang. He was not brash and hard headed like Wetzell had been. Like von Seeckt, von Falkenhausen had an aristocratic air about him that appealed to Chinese sensibilities. He not only cemented professional relationships with Chinese officials but also developed deep, long lasting friendships.

\textsuperscript{373} Von Falkenhausen’s personal papers in BA-MA N 246/23 contain various articles and pamphlets on Taiwan in the 1950s as well as the Communists in China. His correspondence with Erich Stoelzner after WWII demonstrated his interest in the continued fight between the Communists and Nationalists until 1949 as well as the Nationalist move to and development of Taiwan. See the correspondence with Stoelzner from 1947-49 in BA-MA N 246/14 and the E. Stoelzner file 1951-56 in BA-MA N 246/16. It should also be noted that von Falkenhausen even served as the chairman of the Deutsch-Chinesische Gesellschaft e.V. See the “Deutsch-Chinesische Gesellschaft e.V. 1957, Falkenhausen Chairman” folder in BA-MA N 246/15.

\textsuperscript{374} Liang, \textit{The Sino-German Connection}, xi.
Von Falkenhausen was fluent in several languages, which facilitated communication with the Chinese without the friction of using translators. His native language was German but he frequently corresponded with his Chinese friends and colleagues in English and French.\textsuperscript{375} His linguistic skills eased the burden of communication with Chinese officials, many of whom could speak English, German, or French fluently in addition to their native language. As was previously mentioned, he also studied Japanese and was by all accounts nearly fluent.\textsuperscript{376} Unlike any other German advisor, von Falkenhausen could communicate directly with Chiang, who had attended military school in Japan. While their Japanese may not have been perfect, it did provide them a means to converse with one another directly without a translator to filter the conversation.

While his Japanese language skills enabled him to communicate more fluidly with Chiang, their relationship also benefitted from von Falkenhausen’s interpersonal skills. He recognized that Chiang was a proud man and often times they would disagree. H. H. Liu wrote, “von Falkenhausen had had differences of opinion with the generalissimo on a number of occasions, but he usually bowed to Chiang’s final decision on the Chinese situation, with a loyalty and tact commensurate with his abilities as a soldier.”\textsuperscript{377} Tact was an important asset for the head advisor to possess, especially in his dealings with Chiang. Von Seeckt and von Falkenhausen had been inculcated with a sense of tact and

\textsuperscript{375} The von Falkenhausen Nachlass is filled with personal correspondence from the Chinese in German, French, and English. See BA-MA N 246.

\textsuperscript{376} Liang, \textit{The Sino-German Connection}, pg. 7. Lily Abegg commented in a letter to von Falkenhausen after World War II the she noticed he still knew perfect Japanese. See the letter dated 14 February 1948 in BA-MA N 246/14.

\textsuperscript{377} Liu, \textit{A Military History of Modern China}, pg. 162.
restraint in their aristocratic Prussian upbringing, unlike Wetzell, whose ego often clashed with Chiang’s. Von Falkenhausen recognized the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with Chiang for the sake of the mission and knew it was often worth backing down in disputes.

Von Falkenhausen also quickly learned how to manage Chiang. In a letter to Brinckmann in the summer of 1935, von Falkenhausen mentioned that he recommended several contingency plans should the Japanese attack. He and Chiang disagreed on some of the operational ideas. Rather than butt heads with Chiang, von Falkenhausen preserved the relationship by gracefully outmaneuvering the Marshal by visiting his wife, Madame Chiang. Von Falkenhausen told Brinckmann that he had a fruitful discussion with Madame Chiang and “she now stands with all her energy on my side.”378 Like von Seeckt, von Falkenhausen recognized the important role that Madame Chiang played. She was her husband’s best and most trusted advisor. She was also capable of diplomatically and subtly swaying the opinions of her oft-stubborn husband. A good relationship with Madame Chiang was just as important for the German advisors as one with her husband.

While von Falkenhausen learned to manage Chiang, he also learned to work with other Chinese officials. In his military planning, he would send drafts of documents to Chinese officers for them to review. Von Falkenhausen sent his report on “Reflections on the Defense of the Northern Front” to the Chinese to receive their feedback and thoughts on the progress towards achieving the planned defense. His invitation for feedback

earned him the respect of many officials. The fact that he went wrote several drafts of the report demonstrates his willingness to incorporate feedback and indicates his interest in cooperating with the Chinese rather than imposing German plans on them.\textsuperscript{379}

Beyond his professional relationships, von Falkenhausen also formed deep personal relationships with the Chiangs and many Chinese officials. Their friendships survived his departure from China, the Second World War, and the Nationalists’ defeat on mainland China and subsequent withdrawal to Taiwan. There was a mutual Sino-German sense of concern about their colleagues’ well being during the 1940s, which proved to be a turbulent decade in both countries.

During World War II, von Falkenhausen continued to monitor the war in China even though Germany was fighting its own war against China’s allies. He expressed his confidence in the ability of the Chinese to persevere. In 1941, he wrote to Yü Ta-wei “I have been following the achievements of your country under the proven leadership of the Marshal [sic] with great interest and admiration and I know that you have achieved much and will continue to do so.”\textsuperscript{380} Von Falkenhausen took pride in Chinese accomplishments. The Chinese army’s fight against Japan was in part a product of his own work in China. His efforts to follow the news coming out of the Far East, even though he was busy fighting Germany’s own war in Europe, are a testament to his

\textsuperscript{379} Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Betrachtungen zur Verteidigung der Nordfront}, Nanking, 9 March 1937. He sent this report to Li Kwuien Kang and received his feedback on 25 March 1937. He then sent the subsequent draft, dated 3 April 1937, and to Liu Kwang, Ho Yin Chin and Chiang Kai-shek on 5 April. This exchange can be found in BA-MA N 246/8.

\textsuperscript{380} “Ich verfolge mit Interesse und Bewunderung die grossen Leistungen Ihres Landes, unter der bewährten Führung des Herrn Marschalls, und ich weiss, Welch grosse Leistungen Sie vollbracht haben und vollbringen.” Letter from von Falkenhausen to Yü Ta-wei, Chef des Waffenamts, 4 July 1941, BA-MA N 246/13. It seems that von Falkenhausen continued to read war reports and keep up on the news from the Far East until at least 1943 as evidenced by his letter to General Kwei, Brüssel, 1 June 1943, BA-MA N 246/13.
concern about his Chinese friends and colleagues. Von Falkenhausen would often write
to his former Chinese colleagues annually on 7 July to commemorate the beginning of the
war in China.\footnote{7.7 commemoration letters from von Falkenhausen can be found BA-MA N 246/13 to Chiang Kai-shek, 7 July 1941; to Chen Chieh, 5 July 1940 and 7 July 1941; to Gen Kwei, 7 July 1941; to Ting, 3 July 1940 and 7 July 1941.} It was a shared experience. Von Falkenhausen had been in China for the
first and one of the worst years of the war in 1937-8. Little did he know at the outbreak of
war in China that he would return to Europe only to fight on the other side of the World
War.

The Chinese for their part seemed generally appreciative of von Falkenhausen’s
service and friendship even after his departure for China. Wolf Schenke, who had spent
much of the war in China, wrote to von Falkenhausen saying that throughout the war
years he had gotten to know many of his acquaintances in China and that the ministers
and generals always spoke highly of him.\footnote{Letter from Wolf Schenke to von Falkenhausen, Lübeck 18 August 1947, BA-MA N 246/14.} Many Chinese political officials and military
officers wrote warm letters to von Falkenhausen during the early war years thanking him
for his loyal friendship and service in China.\footnote{See von Falkenhausen’s personal correspondence with Chu Chia-hua, Wang Teh-Yin, Gen Kwei Yun-Chin and Chen Chieh-Poh among others in BA-MA N 246/13.} They would often send him their best
wishes for his birthday every October.\footnote{Telegram von Chen Chieh to von Falkenhausen, 8 October 1940; Telegram from Kwei Yun-chin to von Falkenhausen, 8 October 1940; telegram from Botschaftsrat Tan Pau-tuan to von Falkenhausen, 8 October 1940; and Letter from Wang Teh-Yin to von Falkenhausen, Berlin 6 November 1943 in BA-MA N 246/13.} The Chinese letters to von Falkenhausen
indicate their close attachment to the German general.
In 1941, von Falkenhausen’s correspondence with his Chinese friends trailed off as a result of the severing of relations between Germany and China.\textsuperscript{385} On 7 July 1941 he wrote to his old friend General Kwei commemorating the start of the war and bidding him a temporary farewell as the cutting off of Sino-German relations meant a temporary end to their correspondence. He noted to General Kwei that “politics can not destroy what we worked together for so long to forge: our friendship, and the faith, which I have for your country, people and leader and will have in the future.”\textsuperscript{386} Von Falkenhausen valued his relationships with the Chinese and believed that their deep friendships would survive the war.

He was indeed correct. His Chinese friends made efforts to locate him and continue their correspondence with him and his wife after the war. Following the war von Falkenhausen was imprisoned by the Allies to await trial as a war criminal. During his imprisonment, the Chinese frequently inquired about his well-being. One German advisor who had remained in China after the withdrawal, Erich Stoelzner, wrote to von Falkenhausen’s wife Paula in 1947. He told her that Chu Chia-hua had asked if there was anything he could do to help the general. Stoelzner reminded Frau von Falkenhausen that Chu had always been and continued to be a very good friend of the advisors.\textsuperscript{387}

Chu himself renewed his correspondence with General von Falkenhausen in the summer of 1947 expressing his joy at hearing the news from Stoelzner that von

\textsuperscript{385} There are a few exceptions as he was able to exchange a few letters until 1943. See his correspondence with Wang Teh-yin and General Kwei in 1943 in BA-MA N 246/13.

\textsuperscript{386} “Die Politik kann nicht zerreissen, was lange Jahre gemeinsamer Arbeit zusammengeschmiedet haben: unsere Freundschaft, und die Treue, die ich Ihrem Lande, Volke, und Führer gehalten habe und auch in Zukunft halten werde.” Letter from von Falkenhausen to General Kwei, Brüssel, 7 July 1941, BA-MA N 246/13.

\textsuperscript{387} Letter from Stoelzner to Frau von Falkenhausen, Shanghai, 16 July 1947, BA-MA N 246/14.
Falkenhausen had survived the war and was healthy. Chu continued to update von Falkenhausen on the wartime experience in China and conveyed his hope that good relations between China and Germany could be restored.\textsuperscript{388} Regarding von Falkenhausen’s imprisonment, Chu wrote to the General at the end of 1947,

\begin{quote}
After the V-J Day we have tried our best to make you free, and the Generalissimo also tried on several occasions, but in vain. These attempts, though unsuccessful, are symbolic of the goodwill and friendship from the Chinese and our appreciation of your work in China and I think you will be gratified with what we have done for you.\textsuperscript{389}
\end{quote}

His former Chinese colleagues were indeed still his friends and concerned about his well-being. They attempted to negotiate with the Allies for his release from prison and they attested to his good character. One former advisor who had served in China with von Falkenhausen, Nolte, wrote of the tragic irony of von Falkenhausen’s life. In 1938, Hitler had removed him from his post in China, which he was quite reluctant to leave. After being implicated in the 20 July 1944 plot against Hitler, he spent the last year of the war in Buchenwald concentration camp only to be liberated and then sent to a Belgian prison for six years.\textsuperscript{390} Perhaps Nolte should have begun the tragedy by noting that shortly after von Falkenhausen traveled to China, his nephew had been killed in the Roehm Putsch in 1934.\textsuperscript{391}

\textsuperscript{388} Letter from Chu Chia-hua to von Falkenhausen, Nanking, 19 June 1947, BA-MA N 246/17.
\textsuperscript{389} Letter from Chu Chia-hua to von Falkenhausen, 2 December 1947, BA-MA N 246/17.
\textsuperscript{390} Letter from Nolte to Herr von Egidi, 6 October 1958, BA-MA N 246/16.
\textsuperscript{391} Regarding the death of his nephew, see Krummacher’s letter to von Falkenhausen, Peitaiho Beach, 19 August 1934, BA-MA N 246/12.
During von Falkenhausen’s time in prison he renewed his correspondence with many old Chinese friends. They informed him about the worsening situation between the Nationalists and the Communists and the ultimate withdrawal to Taiwan. Though times were hard in China, von Falkenhausen’s Chinese friends continued to express genuine concern for their German friends. They even sent gifts of rations and cigarettes to the baroness much like they had with Dorothee von Seeckt.

Upon von Falkenhausen’s release from prison in 1951, the Chinese ambassador Wunsz King wrote to the General sending the best wishes of Chiang Kai-shek and inquiring about his health and situation. Von Falkenhausen warmly responded thanking him and Chiang for all they did for him while he was in prison. He also requested that King forward his “loyal devotion and expression of fidelity which I never changed and never shall change” to the Generalissimo. Von Falkenhausen demonstrated his unswerving devotion to Chiang and asked King to remind Chiang that he could be assured “that I never fail to do all I can for his country, his people and himself.”

Von Falkenhausen’s wartime and post-war correspondence with his former Chinese colleagues reveals the deep friendships that they had formed while working together. Neither distance nor war severed their relationships. It is interesting to note that

392 See the extensive correspondence in BA-MA N 246/14 and N 246/17.
393 See Chu’s letters to General and Frau von Falkenhausen from 1947-1949. Based on their correspondence a number of Chinese sent gifts of rations, tea, and cigarettes to Paula in the post-war period including Colonel Wang, Hsueh Chi-hao, Gen. Kwei Yun-chin. These letters can be found in BA-MA N 246/17.
394 Letter from Chinese Ambassador Wunsz King to von Falkenhausen, Bruxelles 9 April 1951 and letter from von Falkenhausen to Ambassador King, 23 April 1951, BA-MA N 246/17.
395 Letter from von Falkenhausen to Ambassador King, 23 April 1951, BA-MA N 246/17. After von Falkenhausen’s release from prison there was even some discussion of Chiang sending him financial support. See Letter from Miao Pei-chi to von Falkenhausen, 7 May 1951, BA-MA N 246/19.
while he spent a similar amount of time living in Japan as China, approximately four years, his personal correspondence contains no record of old Japanese friends. Considering the alliance between Japan and Germany during World War II it is ironic that his closest foreign friends were in China. Von Falkenhausen’s close relationships with numerous Chinese officials facilitated his work as an advisor. He had the trust of the high-ranking leaders and was willing to cooperate with them to develop and implement plans for industrialization and military modernization.

**Sino-German Trade and Politics:**

Like von Seeckt, von Falkenhausen worked diligently to promote industrialization in China and Sino-German trade. Yet, the Sino-German trading relationship was closely tied to domestic politics on both sides. Von Falkenhausen’s efforts to facilitate trade were often frustrated by Germany’s domestic and business politics. While he negotiated large contracts between the Chinese government and German firms, the products that arrived in China were often faulty. Germany’s failure to understand China’s domestic political fissures stifled his efforts to facilitate trade. Von Falkenhausen needed to be more adept than his predecessor at navigating the political currents in Germany and China in order to ensure the continuation of the mutually beneficial trading relationship; however, his work for China often brought him into conflict with the Nazi Party.

In late 1934, with an end to the military campaigns against the Communists in sight and a warming of Sino-Japanese relations, the time was ideal for carrying out the massive military reform of the Chinese army. German plans for the Chinese army called for a large portion of the army to be demobilized and the remaining core of the military to
be re-armed and re-trained. In line with the coming reorganization of Chiang’s military, von Falkenhausen assisted in negotiations for a large contract through HAPRO between the Chinese government and various German war industries. The contract, valued at approximately fifteen million Mexican dollars, was for Rheinmetall guns and artillery, Mauser rifles, communications equipment from Siemens, optics from Zeiss, motorized vehicles, and even a handful of tanks as well as munitions.396 These arms would be necessary for arming the new Chinese military and training them in modern warfare.

While von Falkenhausen seemed pleased with the large size and monetary value of the orders, he also expressed some concerns over the increasing difficulties in Sino-German trade. He wrote to Brinckmann, who was working in Berlin on behalf of the German military mission, that it was extraordinarily difficult to get such a large order pushed through in China. He attributed much of these difficulties not to financial issues in China, but rather to Chinese uncertainty over the German political and economic situation.397 The Nazi government had been in power for over a year and the Nanking government was rightly concerned about its increasing friendliness towards Japan. Concern over German-Japanese relations, and hence the uncertainty about the Sino-German relationship, led to hesitancy in China to depend on German industries for supplies, as the Nazi government could cut off trade at any time.

Von Falkenhausen had a keen understanding of the complexities of foreign policy in the Far East. He understood the reasons for the vagueness of Nazi foreign policy in the region and the benefits of not allying with one side in the Sino-Japanese struggles, but he

396 Von Falkenhausen discusses this contract in a letter to Brinckmann, dated 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pgs 3-4.

nevertheless pushed for a closer relationship between Germany and China. In March 1935 he wrote to Berlin that it was in the Far East, particularly in China, where the Japanese and Anglo-American interests played out against one another. He saw China as an especially important area for the expansion of German interests. He wrote “Our policy should be friendly with Japan, without unilaterally committing ourselves to one side, and we should concentrate on our activities here, keeping in mind that China is the single, last great sales area in the world, where we have a great opportunity in sight. Under no circumstances, should we repeat what happened between us and Russia.” Ahead of his time, von Falkenhausen recognized the importance of Asia for global politics. He believed in maintaining friendly relations with both Japan and China. He recognized Japan was the current Great Power in the region but that China had the potential to catch up and overcome Japan if given the proper tools, which he wanted to see come from Germany. He saw the promise of the Chinese markets and knew that Germany was presently in a position to cement a favorable relationship with the potential Asian superpower.

International trade and foreign policy were closely intertwined. Von Falkenhausen recognized Germany’s position as being at a crossroads—whether to pursue a relationship with Japan, the established Great Power, or with China the rising Great Power in Asia. He did not want to see China go the way of the Soviet Union, succumbing to communism and experiencing a breakdown of relations with Germany. In 1933, the

Nazi government broke off the military’s covert relationship with the Red Army as well as trade contracts for the production of tanks and aircraft. He did not want to see China fall to the Communists as a result of a lack of support from the West. Von Falkenhausen hoped Germany would pursue friendly relations with both Japan and China for the time being. He knew it would take time for China to grow strong enough militarily and industrially for the German government to recognize its value as an ally and trading partner. Until that time, von Falkenhausen figured that a vague German foreign policy in the Far East was the best one could hope for even though it had the unfortunate side effect of uncertainty for trade.

Chinese uncertainty over the German government’s Far Eastern policy was not the only factor hindering Sino-German trade. Nazi economic and commercial measures were also problematic. Von Falkenhausen recognized that Germany was facing stiff competition to win Chinese contracts from the Americans, Italians, and British among others but the prices of German products that were marketed to China did not reflect a general awareness on the part of German industries as to just how competitive the market was. German prices were highly inflated, which made competition on the world market difficult if not impossible. Von Falkenhausen was frustrated by the Nazi’s institution of the Reichsausfallbuergschaft trading policy, which according to him meant, “that the state paid the suppliers the difference between the home (German) price and the offers of foreign competitors. The firms had to offer their goods at the home price, and the
‘Reichsausfallbuergschaft’ only came into effect when they were able to present the lower offers of foreign competitors. This led to absolutely grotesque transactions.”

Many German firms took the Chinese market for granted. They sold subpar products to China at high prices. The Germans were losing out to the Americans in terms of selling motorized vehicles to the Chinese because the Americans sold them at much more affordable prices. Many of the German arms that were shipped to China were also defective. In October 1934, von Falkenhausen complained to Brinckmann in Berlin that he had to tell Chiang to send an order of Bofors flak guns back to Germany. In an order of twenty flak guns, sixteen pieces in the shipment were defective, rendering the guns unusable. Von Falkenhausen described the incident as a “special calamity.” Yet, the problem of German firms sending defective weapons to China continued. In May 1935, von Falkenhausen again complained to Berlin about substandard weapons shipments to China. He cited a recent Mauser shipment, which he had opened himself only to find broken pieces and shoddy workmanship. He described the shipment as “shameful.” His own reputation was on the line. He pointed out that they had worked hard to secure the contracts between the Chinese government and Mauser and that it was an embarrassment for the firm and for Germany to send such poor products abroad.

401 Von Falkenhausen described the defective shipment of guns as “eine besondere Kalimität.” See his letter to Brinckmann, Nanking 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 4.
was ashamed to admit that there were foreign firms that exported better weapons at cheaper prices to China.  

As a proud German nationalist, von Falkenhausen was embarrassed by the poor display of German business, technology, and workmanship. He recognized the competitiveness of the Chinese market. He attempted to reconcile his service in China with his sense of duty to his homeland, but he found that task increasingly difficult in the business sphere. He knew his duty in China was to recommend the most useful and economic products for the Chinese. Von Falkenhausen admitted that this often brought him into conflict with the Nazi Party members, “who claimed that I had not represented German interests sufficiently.”

Given the poor quality of German arms that were shipped to China and the high prices, he had difficulty recommending the purchase of German arms. Von Falkenhausen pushed Berlin to send the best possible products and advisors to China. He took full responsibility for the things that were sent to China. He pointed out that Germany needed to send the newest weapons as well as advisors who were up to date on them, “or else the Chinese officers, who return from Germany and strongly support German things, will know more than the advisors,” which would be quite the embarrassment. While von Falkenhausen recognized the international competition for Chinese markets and the potential of a secure Sino-German trading

relationship in the future, the German businesses seemed unaware of the competition as evidenced by their high prices and defective shipments.

In addition to failing to appreciate the value of the Chinese markets, the German government and industries’ failure to understand China’s internal politics also marred von Falkenhausen’s efforts to secure Sino-German business contracts. The Canton affair was particularly difficult. The affair involved Germany selling arms to Chiang’s rivals in Canton, who were attempting to establish their own government in China. In late 1934, with Chiang in a strong position and relative peace in China, von Falkenhausen recognized it was time to make progress on large business contracts. He wrote that to secure contracts and ensure military and industrial progress in China, Germany must remain loyal to the central government and assure Nanking that no more material would be sent to Canton.  

Von Falkenhausen was repeatedly frustrated by the failure of the German government to understand China’s internal political fractures and appreciate Chiang’s strides in consolidating and unifying China. Germany did not seem to recognize his efforts to bring Canton under the control of the Nanking government. German firms, pursuing economic opportunity, sought to arrange business contracts with these outlying provinces. By sending arms to Canton and Kwantung, they were in effect arming Chiang’s enemies. There were even German advisors in Canton. While Canton had been one of the major staging areas for the GMD in the Northern Expedition, in 1931 the provincial governor and commander of the 4th Route Army General Chen Jitang (Chen

405 Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 25 December 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 3.
Chi-tang) turned against Chiang and began a separatist movement. In 1934, much to Chiang’s dismay, Hans Klein conducted trade negotiations with both Canton and Nanking. A handful of advisors who previously served in Nanking separated from the mission and went to work in Canton, including Generals Fritz Lindemann and Hans Sehmsdorf. Interestingly, the Reichswehrministerium, perhaps unaware of the complicated nature of Chinese politics and the potential consequences, supported German armaments trade with Canton. The German Foreign Office on the other hand adamantly opposed Klein’s dealings with Chen and the defection of German advisors to Canton but there was little they could do about it. It was only in 1936 that Chiang, through political maneuvering forced Chen to flee to Hong Kong and reincorporated Canton into Republican China. The presence of German advisors in Canton naturally led to friction in the Sino-German relationship.

In a display of the German government’s ignorance about the delicate domestic situation in China, the Reichsluftfahrministerium (German Aviation Ministry) wrote to von Falkenhausen asking him to assist with the arrangement of German business contracts in Canton. Von Falkenhausen pointed out that he could not assist the German government or industries with their business in Canton as it was not only against his contract with the central government in Nanking, but also a “great disloyalty.” Von Falkenhausen clearly saw his duty and loyalty as resting with Chiang and the Nanking government and believed that in the long run, Germany’s interests were best placed there.

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406 The activities of the Canton advisory group are documented in the file “Die Beraterschaft in Kanton, 1934-36” in BA-MA MSG 160/16. For more on the Canton regime, see Kirby, Germany and Republican China, 127-133.

as well. He pointed out that all advisors who had contracts with the central government were not allowed to work for Canton. He wrote that it was not merely an economic matter but a military one, which made his own position more difficult and had the potential to create great danger. German supplies to Canton could provoke an uprising or lead to Chiang’s mistrust of his German advisors.  

Von Falkenhausen was frustrated by the German government’s failure to understand Chinese internal politics on even a basic level and its unwillingness to recognize the Nanking government as the sole and legitimate government of China. In a letter to Brinckmann, he pointed at that official German documents to the Chinese government were always addressed to “the Chinese governments in Canton and Nanking” or “the Marshals Chen Chi-tang und Chiang Kai-shek.” He wrote that it was incorrect for Germany to accept that there were two governments in China. Even Japan recognized the Nanking government as the sole and legitimate government of China and no longer dealt with the provincial governments (except for its puppet regimes). Von Falkenhausen was astounded that Germany of all places would still recognize the Canton government. He admitted that a year or two earlier it may have been acceptable, but by 1935 the situation was quite different. Chiang had consolidated his power and it would only be a matter of time until Canton was brought under the control of the Nanking government.

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The German military mission in China played a central role in facilitating Sino-German trade, but doing so required significant political maneuvering in both China and Germany and was not without difficulties. The German efforts to play a major role in Chinese aviation provide an instructive example as to von Falkenhausen’s difficult experience coordinating Sino-German trade contracts with the work of the German military mission in China. In December 1934, von Falkenhausen wrote to Berlin that the Germans had been completely eliminated from the aviation arena in China by the Americans and Italians. While there seemed to be few prospects for gaining ground for Germany, von Falkenhausen continued to pursue these interests. He talked often with General Chen, the head of the aviation office (Chef des Flugamtes) and advised him on air strategies for China. Chen believed there was much to learn from the instructive German example of government involvement in and support for aviation as demonstrated by the establishment of the *Reichsluftfahrtministerium* as well as the nationalization of aircraft-manufacturing firms such as Junkers. There were still talks of the construction of a Junkers factory, which had been postponed but von Falkenhausen continued to emphasize the necessity of starting such a project during a relatively stable time for China.\(^{411}\)

While it seemed that there were few prospects for German involvement in Chinese aviation, von Falkenhausen continued to push the issue with Chiang and other high-level officials but not without frustration. In fall 1934 a Chinese commission led by Colonel Mow traveled to Germany to inspect its aircraft production facilities. Upon the

\(^{411}\) Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 25 December 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 5.
return of this commission from Germany, von Falkenhausen met with Colonel Mow, who spoke of a “Chinamüdigkeit” or China-weariness among the German aircraft-producing firms. The firms he visited were tiring of the Chinese commissions, which they thought were boring and unproductive. Von Falkenhausen wrote angrily to Berlin that it was no wonder that the Germans were losing out in the aviation arena to other countries that were less “China-weary”.412

Von Seeckt, before his departure from China, also confirmed that the Germans were losing in their efforts to cement a foothold in Chinese aviation. In January 1935, he wrote to the head of the Reichswehrministerium, von Blomberg, that the Americans and Italians were increasing their influence on Chinese aviation, while the contract for a Junkers factory in China had been cancelled. Von Seeckt had spoken personally with Chiang, who claimed that he still wanted German assistance with the development of aviation but he needed to buy the best available materials and arrange for the construction of the best factories in China. Chiang had wondered if the German government might intervene and encourage the German aviation industry to provide favorable contracts to China. Von Seeckt probably recognized that the German government could not intervene with private business contracts but wrote to von Blomberg with the hope that the Reichswehrministerium could encourage the major aircraft-producing firms to offer better prices and goods to Chiang.413

412 Excerpt from a letter from von Falkenhausen (presumably to Brinckmann), Nanking, 5 February 1935, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pgs. 4-5.
Despite the difficulties, von Falkenhausen persisted in the aviation arena. In March 1935, he wrote to Berlin that though the Italians had a monopoly over Chinese aviation, the Germans were winning back some ground. Chiang accepted many of von Falkenhausen’s proposals regarding the air force, and though contracts had been signed for the construction of an Italian aircraft factory in Nanchang and the purchase of thirty Italian bombers, the Chinese also agreed to the construction of a Junkers factory in Changsha. By May, the Chinese had agreed to purchase a number of Ju-52s, an aircraft that was easy to fly and could be used as a transport plane or a medium bomber with minimal alterations. While the Chinese agreed to purchase German aircraft, they insisted that the Italians learn to fly them so that the Italian instructors could then go on to train the Chinese pilots. Von Falkenhausen noted that a German instructor and mechanic would remain on hand to assist the Italians. This instance speaks to the fluid and competitive nature of the markets in China. The Italians believed they had cemented their monopoly over Chinese aviation, but there was still some wiggle room as von Falkenhausen’s persistent efforts demonstrated.

Throughout his time in China, von Falkenhausen worked to secure German trading interests even though his homeland often made doing so difficult. During von Falkenhausen’s first year in China in 1934-5, von Seeckt was also there and managed most of the industrial matters, although von Falkenhausen’s correspondence with Berlin demonstrates his early interest in industrial affairs and his continued efforts to secure

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Sino-German trade after von Seeckt’s departure. Von Falkenhausen’s first year in China proved to be a crucial time. It was a time of relative stability and peace and thus, prime for beginning the massive restructuring of the Chinese military and industrialization, which would involve major business contracts. Von Falkenhausen realized that the business conducted during his first year in China would have a lasting impact on trade relations and the Chinese military.

Reorganizing the Military:

When General von Falkenhausen arrived in China in the summer of 1934 to serve as von Seeckt’s chief of staff, von Seeckt stepped back from working on military matters to focus on strengthening the Sino-German trading relationship. Von Falkenhausen took charge of the mission’s task of training and reorganizing the Chinese military. His timing for taking over the military mission’s work was ideal, as China would experience a brief period of peace with the conclusion of the encirclement campaigns in 1935 and before the start of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Under von Falkenhausen’s leadership, the mission made significant progress in training the Chinese military. Von Falkenhausen understood China’s strategic situation and therefore focused primarily on defensive tactical and operational exercises.

Von Falkenhausen witnessed the last of Chiang’s encirclement campaigns against the Communists in China; however, it took significantly longer to complete than von Falkenhausen had initially anticipated. In October 1934, von Falkenhausen wrote to Brinckmann in Berlin that after several raids during the summer the general offensive against the Communists had been launched in early September. He highlighted that fact
that a number of modern weapons including Bofors artillery and bombers had been utilized during the campaign and that the area occupied by the Communists had been overpowered in such a way that it became uninhabitable. Ultimately, however, a significant portion of the Communist forces had escaped from the encirclement, fled toward the west, and regrouped in Szechuan.\footnote{Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 2.} While the Chinese had latched onto the German affinity for overwhelming fire power, they had yet to embrace mobile warfare. Nevertheless, von Falkenhausen was hopeful that a period of respite was in sight when they could begin acting on the plans for demobilizing and rebuilding the Chinese military.\footnote{Letter from von. Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 2.}

The construction plans (\textit{Aufbaupläne}) for the Chinese army had been outlined by von Seeckt and approved by Chiang, yet it was von Falkenhausen who would implement them. The construction plans called for the simultaneous dismantling of the current army of some 200 “divisions” and building of a modern operational army (\textit{Operationsheer}) of ten divisions.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen places the word division in quotation marks as the divisions of Chiang’s army varied greatly in size and quality. Many of these “divisions” could more accurately be described as self-standing brigades.} The divisions of the current army would be reduced to sixty for regional defense, road construction, and the like. The new ten-division army would be a framework combining the basic elements of a modern army—infantry, artillery, aviation, engineering, communications, and motorized units—with an officer corps trained in the conduct of modern warfare. Von Falkenhausen saw the task at hand as creating a strong
framework or skeleton (Gerippe), which could then be quickly filled in.\textsuperscript{419} This was the basic principle in the formation of the Reichswehr by von Seeckt, which was essentially the skeleton of the Wehrmacht in 1935—a cadre-system that could be rapidly expanded.

Hampering the plans for the dismantling of the old army and creation of a new one was the failure to fully complete the campaign against the Communists, much to von Falkenhausen’s frustration. In February 1935 von Falkenhausen wrote that they were ready to tackle the demobilization of divisions, which meant decommissioning them altogether, assigning them to public works projects, or retraining units to be incorporated into the new divisions. Yet, at least sixty to eighty regiments would be left outside consideration for demobilization, as they were needed to oppose the Communists in Szechuan. He hoped the campaign in Szechuan would not last as long as the one in Jiangxi, but noted that the vast distances and difficult geographic features of the land meant that it would still take time.\textsuperscript{420}

In May 1935 the Communist campaign had yet to be fully completed. Von Falkenhausen wrote optimistically to Brinckmann that he believed that the Communist campaign would be completed by the fall; yet, in a confidential letter to Dr. Lautenschlager at the German embassy, von Falkenhausen expressed his true feelings of frustration. He wrote that undoubtedly the Communists could have been completely surrounded and destroyed last fall. The failure to destroy the enemy resulted from the breakdown of the Hunan troops, which were of superior mass but failed to pursue the

\textsuperscript{419} Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pgs. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{420} Excerpt from a letter from von Falkenhausen (presumably to Brinckmann), Nanking, 5 February 1935, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pgs. 1-2.
escaping Communists, as well as to Cantonese intrigues against Chiang and the Nanking government. Canton had been known to covertly support the Communists in an effort to weaken Chiang. The overall success of the campaign strengthened Chiang’s position in domestic politics, but they also illustrated the poor quality of the provincial troops.  

While von Falkenhausen was frustrated with the duration of the campaigns, he did not let it deter him from the task of reorganizing the Chinese army. Even though the Communist fight continued, von Falkenhausen made substantial progress in creating a modern military for China. In late 1934, he was optimistic that the German advisors by early 1935 would prepare nine mountain artillery units (Abteilungen), seven field artillery units, two units of heavy field howitzers, two motorized artillery (Rheinmetall) units, one engineer regiment of three battalions, one tank battalion, and five flak batteries. He also believed that further coastal and river defenses as well as fortifications would be built in the following year.

To demonstrate the progress that the Chinese troops were making under the German advisors, von Falkenhausen arranged for massive military exercises, the first of their kind in China. At the end of 1934 von Falkenhausen wrote to Brinckmann that he arranged a large defensive exercise in Nanking. Initially, von Falkenhausen had some concerns about the exercise. It was the first time that Chinese troops participated in a large military exercise and Chiang along with representatives from thirteen provinces were present to observe it. Overall, von Falkenhausen was pleased, if not relieved, by the

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strong performance of the Chinese troops in the exercise. He noted that it drew Chiang’s attention and, for the first time, the Generalissimo was able to see what a fully developed defense in depth battle would look like. Chiang and the provincial representatives witnessed first hand the progress of the Chinese troops under German supervision. Chiang was so impressed that he ordered more military exercises like this one, including one that would encompass both positional warfare (Stellungskrieg) and war of movement (Bewegungskrieg).423

The military exercise in late 1934 was a test not just of the ability of the Chinese troops but also of the German advisors. The exercise demonstrated the ability of the newly trained Chinese units to coordinate with each other as well as the cooperation between the Chinese commanders and their German advisors. Given the rise of Sino-German tensions and the decline of the German military mission’s work under Wetzell, it was important for von Falkenhausen to use this exercise as an opportunity to impress Chiang and show that the German military mission was an effective tool in modernizing his military. The Chinese commanders and political leaders were sometimes hesitant to embrace new methods, but the exercise displayed the benefits of modern military defensive doctrine and technology. It cemented a strong foundation for further development and Sino-German cooperation on the field. It also signaled to the provincial representatives that Chiang’s military power was quickly becoming a force with which to be reckoned.

A year after the first exercise, the German advisors arranged another massive field exercise in December 1935 to test the progress of the Chinese troops. Von Falkenhausen noted in a letter to Brinckmann that this was the largest exercise of its kind to ever take place in China, with three divisions maneuvering over the course of six days. This exercise included more modern weapons than the previous one. It involved tanks, aircraft, and flak batteries. Again von Falkenhausen had some anxiety over the performance of the Chinese troops before the exercise but in the end was pleased with their maneuvers and the lessons learned. He pointed out that the reorganization of the Chinese military was still at the beginning stages, but that ten divisions would soon be ready.424

These exercises served as showcases for the Chinese military. They demonstrated the ability of the Chinese troops to perform effectively on the contemporary battlefield using imported German arms and tactics. They signaled effective cooperation between the German advisors and Chinese commanders. The strong performance of the military served as an indicator of Chiang’s increasing military power as he had monopolized control of the national military. It was a signal of power to domestic opponents. Even a U.S. military intelligence report on the Chinese military in late 1936 noted that the Germans were pleased with their progress in training the Chinese army and believed it would be ready to give a good account of itself against Japan after another six months.425

This assessment would be put to the test soon enough.

**War Planning:**

In line with his work on modernizing the Chinese military, von Falkenhausen also spent a great deal of time preparing the Chinese military for a future war with Japan. While serving as the German military attaché in Tokyo prior to World War I, von Falkenhausen developed an intimate understanding of China’s greatest enemy and its military. He was realistic in his assessment of Japan and China’s respective military capabilities. He knew that Japan had a stronger military force than China, but he believed that the Chinese army could put up a strong defense. He also believed that a strong Chinese defense could bring Japan to the negotiating table in the event of war.

Upon first arriving in China, von Falkenhausen identified and assessed the main threats to Chiang: the Communists, warlord states, and Japan. In early 1935, von Falkenhausen submitted his recommendations for China’s national defense. In this report he focused on Japan. He justified this focus by highlighting the fact that although Chiang was still actively campaigning against the Communists, they had largely been subdued and no longer threatened the operations of the main Chinese army. He also pointed out that though states such as Kwantung and Kwangsi were engaged in subversive activities against the central government, a resolution and the full incorporation of these areas under the purview of the Nanking government seemed likely in the near future. Hence, von Falkenhausen felt free to devote his energy to making war plans for a future war.
between China and Japan. He believed China could wage an effective defense against a Japanese attack so long as Nanking could achieve internal unification.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Grundsaetze der Landesverteidigung Chinas}, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pg. 1.}

Shortly after von Falkenhausen’s arrival, there was a brief warming of Sino-Japanese relations, if for no other reason than both countries needed time to build up their military power for a future war. Von Falkenhausen recognized that a period of peace was mutually beneficial for both Japan and China. For China, the time was ripe to begin acting on the construction plans (\textit{Aufbaupläne}) that the German advisors had made for the creation of a modern army.\footnote{Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 2.} Japan, too, needed time to prepare its military to wage war against China. Von Falkenhausen believed that Japan would use the time to prepare, arm, and train twelve modern divisions at home along with seventeen reserve divisions that could be used to wage war against China.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Beurteilung der moeglichen kriegersichen Massnahmen Japans gegen China}, Nanking, 1 April 1936, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 6-7.}

While von Falkenhausen recognized that time helped both China and its enemy, he still supported Chiang’s efforts to improve relations with Japan, as China ultimately had more to gain from the period of respite. Von Falkenhausen encouraged Chiang to pursue improved relations with Japan even though it went against popular opinion. Many political and military leaders in China disapproved of a friendlier foreign policy towards Japan as they saw the island nation-state as China’s eternal enemy. In a 1934 letter to Brinckmann, the liaison between the German military mission in China and the \textit{Reichswehrministerium} in Berlin, von Falkenhausen wrote that Chiang’s foreign policy
was to come to a modus vivendi with Japan. Naturally, such a policy must be conducted in secret because the general opinion in China was strongly opposed to Japan. While Chiang’s policy was not publically supported, von Falkenhausen believed the Generalissimo was pursuing the correct course as China needed time to stabilize internally and develop its military might.\(^{429}\) With Chiang pursuing “Verständungspolitik,” a policy of understanding with Japan, the time was ideal to begin the massive reorganization of the Chinese military as the advisors and the Chinese leadership became less concerned with an impending Japanese attack.\(^{430}\)

While he encouraged China to pursue friendly relations with Japan so that the advisors could continue working to modernize the Chinese military, von Falkenhausen never lost sight of the fact that improved relations would be fleeting at best. Just because relations had improved did not mean that Japan and China were allies. Japan, too, had its motives for a temporary peace. He explicitly warned Chiang not to become complacent. He understood that Japan was China’s main enemy. He pointed out that Japan would try to stifle China’s development and growing national unity.\(^{431}\) He believed that a Sino-Japanese war was inevitable and that China must fight to win every day of peace possible in order to continue strengthening its military force and defensive measures so that its military forces could be better prepared when war finally came.\(^{432}\)

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\(^{429}\) Letter from von Falkenhausen to Brinckmann, Nanking, 20 October 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 1.

\(^{430}\) Von Falkenhausen discusses Chiang’s “Verständungspolitik” in a letter to Brinckmann, Nanking 25 December 1934, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 2. In February 1935, von Falkenhausen wrote that they were finally ready to begin the massive reorganization of the Chinese military. See his letter, presumably to Brinckmann, dated Nanking, 5 February 1935, BA-MA MSG 160/13, pg. 1.

\(^{431}\) Report from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 2-3.

\(^{432}\) Von Falkenhausen, *Beurteilung der möglichen kriegerischen Massnahmen Japans gegen China*, Nanking, 1 April 1936, BA-MA N 246/7, pg. 11.
In his reports and letters to Chiang and other Chinese military officers, von Falkenhausen offered a realistic assessment of Japan’s strengths. Japan would need to mobilize its whole military in an attack on China. They had the ability to mobilize 1.2 million men in approximately eighty divisions and they had about 2,000 aircraft. One of the most significant areas of Japanese superiority was their armaments industry, which included aircraft factories. Their armaments were modern and sufficient (at least for a war against China). He wrote that while the Japanese army was well disciplined, they were not completely modernized. They were still working on motorization and mechanization. The Chinese navy could not compete with Japan. Japan’s navy had effective control of the seas and their transportation from their home islands to the mainland could not be disturbed.⁴³³

While von Falkenhausen’s assessment of the Japanese military was somewhat bleak for the Chinese, he pointed out that other factors needed to be taken into consideration. Von Falkenhausen recognized that there was the possibility, albeit a remote one, of outside intervention. The world was in turmoil and most attention was focused on Europe and the Italian-Abyssinian conflict. The Washington 9-Power Treaty was essentially dead and with the Italian withdrawal from the League of Nations, that institution had lost much of its power. Securing direct support for China would be difficult, but if China proved its willingness and ability to fight Japan, it might be possible to gain the support of another power. If China had direct support from another

power, Japan would have to reconsider an attack.\(^{434}\) For instance, if Russia were to lend support to China, Japan would have to change its plans of attack, as it would require a substantial portion of its forces to remain in Manchuria to defend against a Russian attack. Von Falkenhausen also pointed out that while direct support from the United States and Britain would be difficult to secure, a Japanese attack on China could draw them into the struggle given their interests in Chinese markets.\(^{435}\)

Von Falkenhausen also highlighted the tense financial situation of Japan. If Japan were to attack China, it could not sustain a long war financially. To make matters worse for Japan, if it were to wage war against China, it could no longer rely on monetary support or weapon deliveries from the United States and England. Von Falkenhausen went on to say that it was in China’s best interest to hold out against Japan and make the war last as long as possible. He believed a long war would require Japan to come to the negotiating table.\(^{436}\)

Believing that Japan could not sustain a long war and that a strong defense might encourage international intervention, von Falkenhausen went to work planning a defensive strategy. Von Falkenhausen’s first compilation of recommendations for national defense in January 1935 laid the basis for the defensive measures and plans that the German advisors would work with the Chinese to enact over the next few years. He was realistic in his assessment of the Chinese military forces. He knew that they were not yet able to fight a modern war in 1935 but soon with proper preparation they could wage

\(^{434}\) Report from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 7-9.
\(^{435}\) Grundsaetze der Landesverteidigung Chinas, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 2-4.
\(^{436}\) Grundsaetze der Landesverteidigung Chinas, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 3-4.
an effective defense against a Japanese attack, which would compel the Japanese to commit increasingly strong forces and more material resources to its campaign. For one of the first times in its modern history, Japan would be devoting a significant portion of its manpower and material without being assured of a victory.\textsuperscript{437} Von Falkenhausen explicitly told Chiang that China must fight like it had in 1932 in Shanghai in order to ensure its survival and encourage international intervention.\textsuperscript{438}

One of his first steps in planning the Chinese defense was to consider the possible routes of a Japanese attack. Having spent so much time Japan in his early career, von Falkenhausen was one of the most qualified experts to speculate on potential Japanese war plans. He conjectured that there were four likely avenues of approach. The first, which von Falkenhausen believed was the most likely, would descend down from Manchuria into northern China, targeting the Chili and Shansi provinces, notably the cities of Tientsin and Peiping. The Mukden-Tientsin railway would be the most significant line of advance and supply. As a second option, an attack could be launched against the Shandong peninsula. The Japanese could utilize the Mukden-Dairen railroad as well as the sea-lanes from Korea to move and supply their forces. This attack would go around the Yellow River obstacle with the objective of occupying the province of Shandong and Jinan (Tsinan) and gaining control of the Jinan-Nanking railroad. A third possibility would be an attack in the direction of Chekiang. It would go around the Yangtze obstacle, directly towards Nanking. The Japanese force would be in China’s heartland between the two rivers. Von Falkenhausen believed this attack was less likely

\textsuperscript{437} Report from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{438} Report from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 13.
because of its weakness of being based on sea-lanes. Von Falkenhausen suggested that a fourth attack could be launched by the Japanese up the Yangtze River, which would effectively divide China in two.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Grunds"{a}tze der Landesverteidigung Chinas}, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 5-6. It seems that initially in 1935, von Falkenhausen believed a Japanese attack up the Yangtze was the least likely; however, he seems to have later reconsidered and given more weight to this possibility as he pushed the Chinese to devote a significant amount of resources into defending the Yangtze.}

With these four possibilities of attack, von Falkenhausen went ahead planning the defense. Since von Falkenhausen believed Japanese attacks against northern China and the Shandong peninsula were most likely, defensive preparations were made accordingly. He based the main defense from the Yellow River, while stationing a handful of troops in the north in Chili and Shansi to face an initial attack from Manchuria. Von Falkenhausen believed that this area in the north was suitable for defense in depth. He argued that a skillful and energetic defense could delay the enemy’s attack for weeks. He believed these troops should form a coherent line of defense, utilizing city walls when possible. He understood that retreat would be unavoidable and that the purpose of the troops in Shansi and Chili was not to defeat or stop the enemy attack but to slow it down. During the gradual and unavoidable retreat back to the main defense at the Yellow River, the retreating Chinese troops must destroy the rail connections between Tientsin-Jinan and Peiping-Chengchow to prevent their use by the enemy, measures that needed to be prepared during peacetime.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Grunds"{a}tze der Landesverteidigung Chinas}, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pg. 7.} This recommendation for the front line defense against a Japanese attack from the north demonstrates von Falkenhausen’s great faith in the ability
of the Chinese troops as he was essentially proposing a fighting retreat, a difficult maneuver for any army given the often demoralizing nature of such a maneuver.\textsuperscript{441}

The bulk of China’s forces would be between the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. The main direction of the defenses would be against an attack from the north with some forces dedicated to protecting Shandong and Chekiang. While the Chinese defense was to be based on the Yellow River, the mass of the Chinese forces would be nearby on the Yangtze ready to deploy north using the rail lines. Von Falkenhausen recognized that a defense on the Yellow River would be endangered by a Japanese attack on Shandong and he therefore pushed Chiang to place a strong defensive force located on the peninsula that would utilize fortifications and artillery positions. He also believed it would be valuable to prepare fortifications and artillery positions that could hinder a Japanese landing at Chekiang.\textsuperscript{442}

Von Falkenhausen’s defensive plans were largely based on the mobility of the Chinese troops. He saw the Yellow and Yangtze rivers as basing areas, in which the main army and reserves could be based and then quickly deployed forwards by utilizing China’s rail lines and rivers. He realized that railroads in China were limited and the distances were much greater than in Europe, but nevertheless still based his plans around them. He strongly recommended building additional rail lines to aid rapid troop deployments and supply. Throughout his time in China, he continued to push the importance of railroads for military maneuvers and logistics and the need to build

\textsuperscript{441} Report from von Falkenhausen to Chiang, Nanking, 12 August 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pg. 5.
\textsuperscript{442} Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Grundsaetze der Landesverteidigung Chinas}, Nanking, 26 January 1935, BA-MA N 246/7, pgs. 6-9.
additional rail lines. Unlike Wetzell who advocated the building of a road network during the encirclement campaigns against the Communists, von Falkenhausen advocated rail development. Japan was a different enemy. It could quickly mobilize and deploy its forces in mass at multiple locations in northern China and along the coast. In a war against Japan, Chiang’s forces would have to engage in combat in a much larger area across the country. They were no longer limited to fighting in one region as they had been in the campaigns against the Communists. Chiang’s forces needed railroads to bridge the long distances.

Von Falkenhausen also recognized the potential danger of grouping the Chinese army between the Yellow and Yangtze rivers as the Japanese forces could drive straight up the Yangtze towards Nanking. Von Falkenhausen emphasized that in 1935, there was nothing to stop the Japanese forces from moving up the Yangtze into China’s heart. He strongly recommended that the Chinese use the time of peace to prepare measures for closing the Yangtze, such as establishing coastal defenses and laying mines. Starting in late 1935, Chinese forces were massed in the appropriate areas and defensive preparations were made. Some forces were still required to quell domestic unrest in western China but von Falkenhausen recommended limiting those forces to between sixty


and eighty regiments, while using some 300 regiments in the preparations for defense against a Japanese attack.  

After outlining plans for defensive measures, von Falkenhausen sought to reassure Chiang about the strength of a defensive force. He pointed out that he had lived in Japan for five years and was well acquainted with the tactical and operational mentality of the Japanese officers and the psychology of its soldiers. While the Japanese were militarily superior to China, von Falkenhausen pointed out that he was experienced in fighting with numerically and materially inferior forces. He explicitly pointed out that his World War I experience in Russia and the Middle East was similar to the situation China faced against Japan. He managed to hold out with weaker troops who were materially inferior and had longer supply lines than their opponents.

Von Falkenhausen also pointed to the current example of Germany in 1935. He noted that Germany’s military force had been severely reduced after the Versailles Treaty, yet France did not sleep well because it feared a German resurgence. He claimed that even with its reduced military forces, Germany would still not be conquered because the whole country has taken an interest in national defense. The German people prepared to fight an enemy. Not only was this report meant to inspire hope, but also to highlight the importance of mobilizing the nation and people in a war of survival against Japan.

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447 *Die deutsche Landesverteidigung* (not dated), BA-MA N 246/7.
China would have to fight fiercely in a war against Japan. It would have to mobilize its military forces, economic resources, and people to resist a Japanese onslaught. Von Falkenhausen pointed out that the Chinese must defend forward and not cede any ground without a fight. He was worried that China’s resistance would mean that it would face the brunt of Japanese material superiority, but the potential of China losing its material resources and industrial areas if they ceded too much ground was of far greater concern. He believed that with a sufficiently prepared defense, “the assailant will not be able to break the resistance at first assault, as we are comparatively strong in infantry and machine-arms.” Von Falkenhausen suspected that once Japan encountered “real resistance,” it would reconsider its efforts at expansion on the Asian mainland. He hoped a valiant Chinese defense would quickly bring Japan to the negotiating table and thus prevent a full-scale Sino-Japanese war. Von Falkenhausen was correct, but his thinking did not take into account the Japanese capacity to ignore strategic realities by pursuing an unwinnable war.

Conclusion:

While at first von Falkenhausen was hesitant to embrace China, he quickly became enamored with the country. He saw the promise of China’s development and securing a German role in assisting China’s military modernization and industrialization. China had the potential to quickly become a trading partner and possibly even a future

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military ally. He worked diligently in cementing the Sino-German relationship both in China and Germany. Von Falkenhausen had a tenuous relationship with the new Nazi government and recognized its growing affinity for Japan. He recognized that a full scale Sino-Japanese war would likely bring an end to the Sino-German relationship, as Germany would inevitably have to choose sides. Through China’s military modernization, von Falkenhausen hoped to create stability in the Far East. A stronger Chinese army, capable of defending its homeland, could quell Japanese expansionist tendencies on the Asian mainland and bring Japan to the negotiating table, if not lead to foreign intervention in the Far East. While von Falkenhausen believed that a Sino-Japanese war was inevitable, he hoped it would be merely a limited incident and not develop into a destructive total war. Ironically, his work modernizing the Chinese military, advising Chiang, and planning China’s strategy for a war with Japan were significant factors in the transformation of the Marco Polo Bridge incident into a total war.
Conclusion:
World War II and the End of the German Military Mission in China

For nearly a decade, the German military mission had been training Chinese troops, facilitating the importation of modern arms to China, and assisting in the development of China’s own industrial base. In the summer of 1937, its constructive efforts were halted as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident escalated into a full scale Sino-Japanese war and the first phase of World War II in Asia. The German military mission inadvertently contributed to the escalation of the incident into war. They had trained Chiang’s best troops but more importantly, they had given Chiang and his army the confidence to engage Japan. Von Falkenhausen’s memos and reports to the Chinese leadership before the war illustrate his faith in the ability of the Chinese troops to hold out against a Japanese attack. In 1937, he was confident they could defend against an attack. Chiang may well have decided to stand down and allow a local settlement after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, much as he had done after the Battle of Shanghai in 1932, had von Falkenhausen not reassured him about the strength of the Chinese defense and the possibility of gaining international attention and assistance.

The first battles of the war tested von Falkenhausen’s estimations of the ability of Chinese troops to resist a Japanese invasion and his calculations that real resistance would force Japan to come to the negotiating table, as it could not afford to be embroiled
in a long war in China. The first year of the war demonstrated that von Falkenhausen had overestimated Japan’s willingness to negotiate, but it also revealed Japan’s underestimation of China’s ability and commitment to resistance. The Chinese forces suffered devastating losses at Shanghai and Nanking, but continued the war for another eight years. While Germany took a stance of neutrality and even attempted to mediate a settlement during 1937, the German military mission actively advised Chiang and other Chinese commanders throughout the first year of the war and, on occasion, even fought with the Chinese troops. While the Japanese had always been wary of the German advisors’ presence in China, in 1938 they began to demand their withdrawal, probably as a result of their success and effectiveness.
Marco Polo Bridge Incident:

World War II in Asia began on 7 July 1937 with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in northern China near Beijing. This incident did not necessarily need to escalate into a full-scale war. Like the Mukden Incident in 1931, the Battle of Shanghai in 1932, the Great Wall incident in 1933, and the Xi’an Incident in 1936, it could have been contained and remained a limited affair. As in the previous cases, many in Japan, China, and throughout the world expected a quick cease-fire followed by negotiations and Japanese territorial gains, which would restore a tense but stable state of affairs in East Asia. Many factions within Japan did not want to see the country become embroiled in a full-scale war and worked to prevent the escalation of the incident. However, Chiang, heeding von Falkenhausen’s advice that Japan could not afford a long, costly war and that only China’s willingness to fight would secure international assistance, refused Japanese terms and decided to make a stand. It appears that both sides miscalculated.

On the night of 7 July 1937 the Japanese conducted military training maneuvers outside Beijing. The Japanese were entitled by several treaty agreements to conduct such maneuvers and it was common for them to do so in northern China; however, they were supposed to secure permission from local Chinese officials. On the night of 7 July, no Chinese official had been informed that the Japanese were conducting maneuvers. Hearing gunfire from the blanks discharged by Japanese rifles to simulate combat conditions, Chinese forces in the area fired upon the Japanese. There were no casualties but the next morning a Japanese soldier was missing. The Japanese commander, assuming the missing soldier (who was later found unharmed) had been captured by the
Chinese, ordered his forces to attack the town of Wanping. This attack led to several skirmishes between Japanese and Chinese troops in the area.\footnote{Spence, \textit{The Search for Modern China}, pgs. 444-446.}

Following the shooting at the Marco Polo Bridge, the local Chinese and Japanese commanders worked to negotiate a settlement. According to Dreyer, the Konoe government, in line with the high army and navy leadership in Tokyo, hoped to prevent war in China in 1937 in order to focus on military modernization. While the Japanese armed forces were more modern than China’s, they still could not compete with the Great Powers. The Japanese leadership hoped to avoid war with China so that they could continue modernizing their forces in order to be able to survive in a war with Russia or Britain.\footnote{Dreyer, \textit{China at War}, pg. 211.} While the Konoe government worked to prevent further hostilities, according to Iriye it succumbed to the pressure of public opinion that demanded punitive action against China for the shooting. Prime Minister Konoe supported the army’s plans to send three divisions from Japan to China as an insurance against future hostilities. Ironically, the cabinet approved this measure on 11 July, the same day local commanders agreed to a cease-fire.\footnote{Iriye, \textit{The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific} (New York: Longman, 1987), pg. 42.}

Like the Konoe government, Chiang also faced the pressure of public opinion at home. In December 1936 Zhang Xueliang, the former warlord ruler of Manchuria before it was occupied the Japanese, engineered Chiang’s kidnapping in Xi’an. Zhang wanted Chiang to stop fighting the Communists and focus China’s resources to fighting against Japanese encroachment. The Xi’an Incident resulted in a temporary cessation of
hostilities between the GMD and CCP in order to form the Second United Front to stop Japanese aggression. After the Xi’an Incident of 1936, public opinion had become much more adamant about halting Japanese imperial expansion in China. The Communists also pushed for active opposition to Japanese aggression via the use of force. The day after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the Communists appealed to the people to resist Japanese aggression. While the Chinese and Japanese commanders developed a cease-fire agreement, Chiang refused to endorse it, calling for a settlement negotiated by the central governments. He took a hard line against Japanese aggression and sent four divisions to northern China, appealing to the signatories of the Nine Powers Treaty for assistance, and declaring in a speech that no more Chinese territory would be surrendered to Japanese control. According to Dreyer, Chiang’s declaration was nothing new and it is no surprise that the Japanese failed to take his rhetoric seriously.

On the brink of war, T. V. Soong, foreseeing the pending disaster, said to a Japanese envoy:

The Japanese military still hold to their preconceived ideas about the Chinese army. They think that if you hit us once we will surrender and do what you want. The Chinese army has studied hard since the Manchurian Incident. It has been trained by the Germans and we have spent much to modernize. It knows that it is stronger and has the confidence that it will not be beaten this time. So the Japanese army underestimates the Chinese army and the Chinese army overestimates itself. Here is where the great danger lies.

453 For more on the Xi’an Incident, see Spence, The Search for Modern China, pgs. 420-424 and Dreyer, China at War, pgs. 202-205.
454 Iriye, The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific, pg. 42.
455 Dreyer, China at War, pg. 211.
Chiang’s firm stand against Japanese aggression was based on the estimation that the Japanese would not be willing to risk war with China. By 1937, China was politically more cohesive and stronger militarily and economically than it had been in the 1931 Mukden Incident, the last major Sino-Japanese confrontation. Von Falkenhausen had been optimistic about China’s chances for success in a defensive war against Japanese aggression and gave Chiang the confidence he needed to resist. In contrast to the Munich conference mentality that would overtake Europe a year later, von Falkenhausen’s assessment that the Japanese could not afford a full-scale war with China and would back down as soon as they encountered real resistance played no small part in Chiang’s decision to militarily resist Japan. Chiang also recognized Japan’s increasing international isolation and hoped that by demonstrating China’s ability to resist, as von Falkenhausen suggested, the Great Powers would exert more pressure on Japan to back down on its territorial claims in China.\textsuperscript{457} Chiang was confident in the military effectiveness of his German-trained troops. He wrote to his son Ching-kuo on 24 July, “Do not be distracted by the Japanese invasion. I have the means to counter them.”\textsuperscript{458} The means were his German-trained divisions, especially the 87\textsuperscript{th} and 88\textsuperscript{th} Divisions, which he immediately dispatched to Shanghai to halt the Japanese advance.


\textsuperscript{458} Translated quote from Taylor, \textit{Generalissimo}, pg. 146.
The Battle of Shanghai:

The Battle of Shanghai in 1937 brought to light the miscalculations made by both sides. Chiang overestimated Japan’s willingness to back down from a fight, its instinct for self-preservation, and the rationality of its political-military decision-making. The Japanese, having failed to learn the lessons from their last battle with Chinese forces at Shanghai in 1932, underestimated their opponent’s military capability and willingness to absorb casualties and instead expected a quick victory. These miscalculations came to a head with the devastating Battle of Shanghai in 1937, foreshadowing the horrors of prolonged urban warfare and the later battles of Stalingrad, Manila, and Berlin.

After nearly a month of skirmishes in the north, hostilities escalated in Shanghai in mid-August. Two Japanese divisions disembarked at Shanghai on 13 August. Dreyer noted the disembarkation was legally appropriate given Japan’s long-standing treaty rights; however, Chiang’s build-up of Chinese forces in the city openly defied the 1932 settlement, which prohibited a Chinese military presence in Shanghai. Chiang’s public defiance of the treaty signified that he was opting for full-scale war with Japan rather than a local settlement of hostilities in northern China.

There were a number of reasons for Chiang’s decision to make a stand at Shanghai. According to Chiang’s biographer, Jay Taylor, the most significant military objectives were to draw the Japanese away from northern China, slow the advance on Wuhan, and keep open lines of supply between China and the Soviet Union. In northern China, the Japanese could bring to bear the full weight of their mechanized forces in the

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plains. However, the urban battlefield negated the advantages of the more modernized Japanese troops and offered better prospects for Chinese forces. Beyond military objectives, Chiang used the Battle of Shanghai for political and psychological purposes as well. Given the international concessions in Shanghai, he correctly believed the fighting in the city would draw international interest, further opposition to Japan, and assistance to China. He also sought to rally the Chinese people by protecting one of the country’s wealthiest and most modern cosmopolitan centers. He would go on to use the severe losses of Chinese troops in Shanghai to demonstrate Chinese willingness to sacrifice and their determination to fight on.460

Chiang committed between fifty and seventy-one divisions to the city totaling some 500,000 and 700,000 troops.461 These forces included Chiang’s German-trained and armed divisions as well as all of his specialized units such as artillery and air support. Initially, Chiang’s forces were successful in pushing the Japanese marines back to into a defensive perimeter near the wharves of Shanghai during the first weeks of the battle; however, Japanese naval guns held back the elite Chinese forces while additional divisions landed.462 The Japanese deployed ten divisions of approximately 300,000 forces during the course of the three-month long battle, which pitted numerically superior


461 Given the varying standards for a Chinese division the actual number of Chinese divisions and troops are difficult to calculate. Millett and Murray place the number at some fifty odd divisions of 700,000 troops in *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2000), pg. 159, while Dreyer places the number at seventy-one divisions with 500,000 troops in *China at War*, pg. 218. Frank Dorn places the number of Chinese troops engaged in the Battle of Shanghai at 500,000 and Japanese at 200,000 in *The Sino-Japanese War*, 74.

Chinese forces against technologically superior Japanese forces, and resulted in a bloodbath.\footnote{Millett and Murray, \textit{A War to Be Won}, pg. 159.}

The German advisors had been instrumental in the defense of the city. Since the 1932 battle the Chinese had set up numerous defensive measures based on German advice on the outskirts of Shanghai, especially near the coast. Much of the defense had been based on the plans drawn up by von Falkenhausen between 1935 and the start of the war. Many German advisors had been actively involved in the battle assisting with anti-air defenses, artillery, and closely advising commanders in the field. Von Falkenhausen himself had been at the fronts in northern China and Shanghai and would fall back to Nanking and Wuhan all the while advising Chiang.\footnote{Wuhan is often referred to as Hankou (or Hankow) in both the primary and secondary sources. Liu, \textit{A Military History of Modern China}, pgs. 162-3. The Chinese defense is discussed in the OKH report \textit{Erfahrungen und Betrachtungen aus dem japanisch-chinesischen Feldzug 1937/38}, 15 March 1938, BA-MA RH 2/1848. Bärensprung discusses the close involvement of many advisors in the opening battles in his OSS file on German military mission in China, NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.} In the midst of the battle, in display of their appreciation for his service, the Chinese government bestowed the \textit{Yun-huei Orden II Klasse mit grossem Ordenzband} on von Falkenhausen. The award was accompanied by a private letter from General Li Nai congratulating von Falkenhausen on the honor and personally thanking the German general for his service in and commitment to China.\footnote{Two letters from General Li Nai to von Falkenhausen, Nanking, 12 Sept 1937, BA-MA N 246/8.} The German advisors in general displayed great commitment to the Chinese war effort.

The German advisors were also impressed with the Chinese commitment and will to resist displayed in Shanghai. The advisors noted the exceptional bravery of the Chinese
forces in the face of Japan’s material superiority. According to Liu during the battle, one of von Falkenhausen’s reports was circulated as a secret Chinese army document. This report illustrated von Falkenhausen’s belief that while the tenacious Chinese defense was valiant and courageous, it was also ill advised because of the massive casualties that resulted. Liu noted that Chiang and the German advisors conceived of the value of human life quite differently. The German advisors never understood Chiang’s willingness to sacrifice so many lives in futile attacks on the Japanese. Liu wrote, “The German advisers were at complete variance with the Chinese concept of ‘live and die in defense.’”

Ironically, many German advisors who would return to Germany and fight on the Eastern Front would gain a much deeper understanding of this concept beginning in December 1941.

The advisors recognized that while the Chinese suffered heavy losses in Shanghai, the Japanese did too and reported “the bloody losses of Japan, with all its dead, are meaningful.” According to Taylor, in the early days of the battle two Japanese divisions suffered 4,000 casualties in the course of just a few days. The German advisors, in the midst of the battle, believed that Japan was finally starting to recognize that it could not count on easily defeating the less-modern Chinese forces and that it

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466 This undated report was probably written by von Falkenhausen in the midst of the Battle of Shanghai. See Zur Lage, BA-MA MSG 160/8, pg. 3.
467 Liu, A Military History of Modern China, pg. 163.
468 Zur Lage, BA-MA MSG 160/8, pg. 3.
would have to prepare for an increasingly long, hard war. They hoped their plan to bring Japan to the negotiating table was working.\(^{470}\)

The Chinese troops in Shanghai maintained a strong defense and high morale through October. Only after the Japanese landed an additional three divisions south of the city on 7 November and launched a surprise attack did the Chinese defense break.\(^{471}\)

Casualty estimates for the Chinese forces over the three-month battle range between 150,000 and 300,000.\(^{472}\) More important than the number of casualties is the fact that Chiang’s best divisions had been destroyed in the battle and most of his best German-trained officers and soldiers were among the casualties.

While Chiang’s forces had suffered irreparable losses, the Battle of Shanghai strengthened the Chinese will to resist and demonstrated their near reckless resolve to continue the fight against Japan to the international powers. Von Falkenhausen was still confident in the ability of the Chinese troops to continue to defend the country and to continue the war. The losses at Shanghai had not been for nothing. The three-month battle gave the Nanking government time to relocate to Chongqing, a small but significant portion of China’s industrial base was moved to the interior, and Chiang was able to transfer his headquarters to Wuhan. Chiang hoped that by fighting at Shanghai he could slow the Japanese advance to Wuhan, and, indeed, he did. The Battle of Wuhan

\(^{470}\) *Zur Lage*, BA-MA MSG 160/8, pg. 3.

\(^{471}\) An OKH report on the Sino-Japanese War noted the fierce resistance and high morale of the Chinese forces in Shanghai. This report was likely based on information from the German military mission. See *Erfahrungen und Betrachtungen aus dem japanisch-chinesischen Feldzug 1937/38,* 15 March 1938, BA-MA RH 2/1848, pg. 24. On the Japanese landing and Chinese retreat, see Dreyer, *China at War,* 2 pgs. 18-219.

\(^{472}\) Taylor places Chinese casualties around 187,000 (*The Generalissimo*, pg. 150) while Dreyer and Ch’i put it at 300,000 (*China at War*, pg. 218 and *Nationalist China at War*, pg. 43).
would not take place until a year later in October 1938. As the Chinese forces withdrew from Shanghai, they retreated to Nanking, where, at Chiang’s order, they would continue to resist.

**The Fall of Nanking:**

Chiang’s forces withdrew from Shanghai and fell back to Nanking in mid-November. Many of Chiang’s commanders and von Falkenhausen advised against making a stand there. China’s forces were depleted after Shanghai and holding Nanking would require immense sacrifice for little, if any, strategic gain. Yet Chiang, considering the symbolic importance of the city as the new capital and the model of the future for China, ordered his forces to fight for the city. Chinese forces, led by Chiang and assisted by the German advisors, defended the city for three weeks. One advisor, Lieutenant Colonel (Oberstleutnant) Aderholt, was in charge of anti-air defenses around the city. His batteries reportedly shot down over a dozen Japanese aircraft. As the defenses began to crumble, another German advisor, the *Mischlinge* Robert Borchardt, led the retreat of what remained of Chiang’s mechanized forces. On 7 December, Chiang, his wife, and von Falkenhausen left the city leaving Tang Shengzhi in command of the defense. Tang refused to surrender to the Japanese and on 12 December ordered his remaining forces to break out of the Japanese encirclement. He left behind the bodies of 70,000 Chinese soldiers who had given their lives in defense of the capital city.

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473 OSS file on German military mission in China, information provided from Wolfgang Bärensprung NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.

The end of the Battle of Nanking only marked the beginning of violence in the city. Japanese troops entered the city on 13 December and launched a six-week campaign of terror against the civilian population—the rape of Nanking. Estimates for the deaths of noncombatants range from 100,000 to 350,000. Many died horrifically after being set on fire, bayonetted, raped, or buried alive.475 Dreyer writes that the political purpose of the Japanese was to destroy the capitol city of Nanking, the symbol of progress of Republican China, and to intimidate the Chinese into surrendering. As is often the case, terror only hardened the will of the Chinese to resist.476

The reports of the German military mission recorded the Japanese brutality and bestiality in Nanking. The advisors were horrified by the actions of the Japanese army and its campaign of terror.477 While the German advisors had left the city, moving to Wuhan with Chiang, they too were victims of the systematic material destruction and property damage by Japanese forces in Nanking. One report noted that the Japanese soldiers paid no respect to foreign flags, not even the Nazi flag, on the houses.478

475 Chang, *The Rape of Nanking*, introduction. Chang’s book provoked an emotional reaction from many readers and was one of the first works to draw mass attention to the Rape of Nanking. Joshua A. Foegel seeks to provide an academic historiographical context for the massacre, which for so long remained in the shadows of history. His edited volume *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) is a response to the attention garnered by Chang’s book and critically examines the historiography of the Rape of Nanking and its place in history.

476 Dreyer, *China at War*, pg. 220. John Rabe, a German civilian in the city who worked for Siemens, reported the gruesome details of the Rape of Nanking in his diary. Rabe, a Nazi-party member, returned to Germany in the spring of 1938 and sent a report of the Japanese atrocities to Hitler. Shortly after sending the report he was arrested by the Gestapo although he was soon released. He lived to see the end of WWII and witness the Soviet takeover of Berlin, where he again played witness to horrific brutality but noted it paled in comparison to Nanking. An edited version has been published in English, see Erwin Wickert, ed and John E. Woods, trans. *The Good Man of Nanking: The Diaries of John Rabe* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2000).


houses of the advisors were looted and plundered just the same as the other buildings in the city.479

By the end of 1937, after the battles of Shanghai and Nanking, the German advisors observed that both the Chinese and Japanese forces had been worn down. Both sides had suffered massive casualties after hard-fought battles. German advisors had been active in both engagements. While some advised behind the lines, others worked in combat zones. After relocating to Wuhan, von Falkenhausen wrote to Chiang in December 1937 and listed advisors who had been active in combat zones in and around Shanghai and recommended them for a commendation.480 In the spring of 1938, many of the German advisors were given medals by Chiang in recognition of their service.

Nanking marked a turning point in the war. After the battle, the German advisors noted a lull in operations as both sides regrouped. The Chinese reorganized their forces and prepared to fight a guerilla war against the Japanese invaders.481 Von Falkenhausen supported the reorganization of troops into groups that would wage a guerilla war against the Japanese, while larger units would be reorganized.482 He likely figured that with the


Second United Front, however superficial the cooperation between the Communists and Nationalists, the Communists could take charge of the small war campaign while the Nationalist forces regrouped and reorganized to fight Japan conventionally. Even after the losses of Shanghai and Nanking, von Falkenhausen remained optimistic that the war was not lost for the Chinese and they could continue to fight the Japanese for a long time.\footnote{Von Falkenhausen, \textit{Kurze Beurteilung der Lage}, Hankow, 15 December 1937, BA-MA N 246/8. Von Falkenhausen’s optimism is reiterated time and again in his reports to Chiang and the Chinese commanders in 1938, see BA-MA N 246/9.}

Just as there was a shift in China’s military strategy, there was also a change in German diplomacy. Throughout the battles of 1937, Germany sought to mediate a settlement. Its positive relations with both countries meant it was well suited to act as a middleman in negotiations, but neither Japan nor China would budge in their demands. After the fall of Nanking, the German relationship with Japan became noticeably closer.\footnote{On the shift in German Far Eastern diplomatic relations, see Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, chapters 9 and 10.}

\textbf{The Battle of Taierchuang:}

Despite the fact that the Nazi government was pursuing an increasingly pro-Japanese stance, the German advisors continued to work with the Chinese army throughout the spring of 1938. They assisted in quickly training and reorganizing new divisions to replace those that had been lost and they also advised Chinese commanders on campaign. The \textit{Kesselschlacht}, or battle of encirclement, at Taierchuang is of noteworthy interest. The Chinese forces, with the assistance of the German advisors,
achieved a significant victory at Taierchuang in April 1938. Not only was it a battlefield victory but it also raised the morale of the Chinese forces and the will to resist among the people. While the success of the battle furthered the Chinese war effort, it also resulted in the withdrawal of the advisors.

As 1937 turned into 1938, the Japanese, looking to attack Chiang’s new headquarters at Wuhan, began preparing to take control of key railroads to support such an attack. China’s paucity of railroads and lines of communications only added to their strategic importance. In January and February 1938, Japanese forces began moving towards Xuzhou (Hsuchow), an important rail junction and home of Li Zongren’s (Li Tsung-jen) headquarters. The Japanese forces approached from the north, east, and west, attempting to envelop Li’s troops in a German-style Kesselschlacht; however, the battle came to a head in March at Taierchuang, where Li’s forces, with the assistance of the German advisors, were able to encircle and destroy the Japanese 10th Division.485

The battle entailed intense street fighting, foreshadowing the grim battle of Stalingrad. On 7 April, approximately 2,000 Japanese troops fought their way out of Taierchuang, leaving behind some 16,000 corpses and the equipment of the 10th Division.486 According to a report from the German military mission written after the battle:


486 Dreyer, China at War, pg. 227.
Despite its material inferiority, [the Chinese army] delivered a devastating blow here on the battlefield to Japan. Japan had declared, like so often before, of fighting a Tannenberg-like battle, it had never previously been successful; now they themselves have suffered one. The meaning of this battle goes far beyond pure military results. In general, it is the first battle of annihilation in this war and the first defeat, which the Japanese army has suffered since it came into existence.487

The German advisors observed a substantial increase in the willingness of the people to sacrifice and the unanimous support of Chiang with the victory at Taierchuang. The advisors hoped that their strategy of drawing Japan into a war of attrition, which it could not afford, would soon bring it to the negotiating table. The report noted the increasingly desperate attempts of Japan, through false reporting, to combat war weariness at home as well as to fool the world powers about the country’s waning enthusiasm for its war in China.488

While success at the Battle of Taierchuang marked a highpoint for the Chinese resistance, it also sealed the fate of the German advisors. While the German advisors had been advising Li and his troops in Shandong, the German Foreign Office was in serious negotiations with Japan about German economic interests in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. Japan demanded that in order for Germany to secure its economic interests in northern China, it needed to cease its support of China. Fox pointed out that the military advisors were one of the main issues at the forefront of these negotiations and suspects it was related to the defeat of the Japanese troops at the hands of German-trained


488 *Zur Lage*, Hankow, 11 April 1938, BA-MA, MSG 160/8, pg. 3.

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and -armed Chinese forces at Taierchuang.\textsuperscript{489} The insistence on the part of the Japanese that the German government withdraw the advisors speaks eloquently to their effectiveness. In mid-April, von Ribbentrop, having consulted with Hitler, made the decision to withdraw the advisors from China.

\textbf{Withdrawal:}

The initial order for the return of the German advisors was transmitted from Berlin to the German military mission via Trautmann in Wuhan at the end of April 1938. It appears the order originated within the German Foreign Office during conversations between Hitler and von Ribbentrop. The \textit{Kriegsministerium} did not protest the withdrawal possibly because the Führer had assumed control of the German military by taking over the office of the Minister of War in February 1938 after the Blomberg-Fritsch affair. The withdrawal of the advisors was more complicated than von Ribbentrop had anticipated. The advisors were recalcitrant as many wanted to continue working in China. Von Falkenhagensen responded to the initial order to return by outlining the financial and contractual problems the advisors would face if they suddenly broke their contracts. He noted that all of the advisors had private contracts, many of which ran through 1939 and 1940 that could not be unilaterally broken.\textsuperscript{490} Throughout May, Trautmann worked to salvage what was left of the Sino-German relationship, though Berlin made that virtually impossible. Beyond the order for the withdrawal of the advisors, Göring had ordered all

\textsuperscript{489} Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, pgs. 310-312.

\textsuperscript{490} Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, 313. After WWII, former advisor Generalleutnant Hans Erich Nolte attested to the complicated nature of the withdrawal of the advisors and the issue of their positions as servants of the German state or private persons. See Nolte, “Deutsche Militaerberater in China 1931-1938,” 27 October 1954, BA-MA MSG 160/38.
German arms shipments to China to cease and to add insult to injury, in mid-May, Trautmann received notice of the Treaty of Friendship between Germany and Manchukuo that was to go into effect on 22 July.\footnote{Fox details the swift decline of the Sino-German relationship in the spring 1938, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, chapter 10.}

Throughout May 1938 von Ribbentrop applied increasing pressure on the German advisors to return home. According to one advisor, Konstantin Meyer, von Falkenhausen worked to delay the withdrawal of the mission for as long as possible, but he was only able to hold it off for two months.\footnote{CSDIC Report on interrogation of Konstantin Meyer December 1944, NARA II RG 165, Entry Number 179, Box 667, Folder 1, pg. 3.} On 13 May von Ribbentrop insisted von Falkenhausen and the advisors return to Germany as quickly as possible. He demanded that Trautmann and the advisors work with the Chinese government to ensure their release from their contracts and instructed them to explain to the Chinese officials that their service was inconsistent with German neutrality, as it appeared that German officers were actively aiding China’s war effort.\footnote{Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, pg. 317.} Trautmann attempted to work through diplomatic channels to delay the withdrawal by suggesting a gradual rather than a sudden withdrawal, but von Ribbentrop did not take kindly to this proposal and issued orders for the immediate compliance with his order as if it were Hitler’s express order. Von Ribbentrop even threatened Trautmann’s position as the German ambassador in China.\footnote{Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, pg. 318.}

Von Falkenhausen had many concerns about the implications of the withdrawal of the advisors. The leader of the mission was concerned about the ability of the advisors to find employment and make a living in order to care for their families upon returning to
Germany.\textsuperscript{495} In mid-June, von Falkenhausen wrote to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) in Berlin requesting that the advisors be given corresponding positions in the Wehrmacht. He included a roster of the advisors and noted that he could give all of them the highest recommendation as they worked diligently in China under difficult circumstances and achieved great things with regard to the progress of the Chinese army.\textsuperscript{496}

Another issue of particular concern regarding the recall to Germany was the matter of the non-Aryan advisors. According to Fox, Trautmann asked von Ribbentrop about these advisors, but von Ribbentrop avoided a direct answer saying they should stop advisory work in China.\textsuperscript{497} Dr. Wolfgang Bärensprung, who worked in China, noted that the issue concerned von Falkenhausen too. He reported that after the recall became unavoidable, von Falkenhausen sent a telegram to the Reichswehr Ministry asking about the Jewish and non-Aryan advisors. The Reichswehr Ministry responded, “They shall return, they will be taken care of, too.”\textsuperscript{498} Konrad Arnade, a non-Aryan advisor, against all advice, returned to Germany. According to Bärensprung, within a few weeks of his return his money had been confiscated and he had been threatened to leave Germany or

\textsuperscript{495} Letter from von Falkenhausen to the Deutschen Botschaft in Hankow, 20 May 1938, BA-MA MSG 160/9.

\textsuperscript{496} Letter from von Falkenhausen to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht in Berlin, dated Hankow, 15 June 1938, BA-MA MSG 160/9.

\textsuperscript{497} Fox, \textit{Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis}, pg. 319.

\textsuperscript{498} OSS file on German military mission in China, report on Alexander von Falkenhausen by Wolfgang Bärensprung NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.
be sent to a concentration camp. He ended up moving to Bolivia and worked as a military advisor there.\textsuperscript{499}

Arnade’s case seems atypical for the non-Aryans who returned from China. While many were initially conflicted about leaving China for an uncertain fate in Germany, they were often able to serve in the Wehrmacht. Klaus Schmeling-Diringshofen, who had been discharged in 1934 because he was a quarter Jewish, was eager to return to Germany and fight for the Fatherland. After returning to Germany in 1938, Hitler approved Schmeling-Diringshofen’s application for the \textit{Deutschblütigkeitserklärung} (declaration of German blood) and reactivated him as a captain. Ironically, Schmeling-Diringshofen sacrificed his life for the Third Reich. He was killed in action during the first month of the German campaign in Poland in September 1939. His coffin was draped with the swastika flag as he was buried with full military honors in Poland alongside his fallen comrades.\textsuperscript{500} Robert Borchardt, another \textit{Mischlinge} in China, also returned to Germany in 1938. Bärensprung reported that Borchardt initially had difficulty finding employment in Germany because of his Jewish blood. Rigg’s files seem to confirm his initial difficulties as Borchardt, a retired major, worked for the War Research Center attached to the General Staff but as a civilian rather than as an officer. He then went to Spain, where according to Bärensprung he fought with the Fascists, while Rigg believes he worked with the Abwehr conducting special operations. Either way, Spain would have been a convenient place for the Nazis to utilize the skills of a non-Aryan without having to deal with the matter publicly.

\textsuperscript{499} OSS file on German military mission in China, information provided from Wolfgang Bärensprung NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929.

Ultimately, Borchardt was granted a *Deutschblütigkeitserklärung* and went on to fight in World War II much to the embarrassment of his sister and father, who had spent time in Dachau. Borchardt fought in a mechanized unit in North Africa under Rommel and was even awarded the *Ritterkreuz* in August 1941. He survived the war, probably because he fell into the hands of the British and spent the remaining war years in a POW camp.501

The non-Aryans were not the only ones who were conflicted about leaving China and concerned about Germany’s future in Nazi hands. Krummacher, a Nazi himself, reportedly cursed loudly when he was given the recall order. The Chinese, although willing to release the advisors from their contracts, also offered them continued employment in China. Many of the advisors considered staying in China and at least five did.502 To hasten the return of the advisors, von Ribbentrop threatened to revoke the advisors’ German citizenship and seize their property.503

The increasingly threatening wires from Berlin were in response to von Falkenhausen and the advisors wavering in their willingness to return to Germany. After the war, von Falkenhausen said that the German government had threatened him with “expatriation, confiscation of my property and imprisonment of my next of kin unless I

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501 OSS file on German military mission in China, information provided from Wolfgang Bärensprung NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929; Borchardt Folder in the *Bryan Mark Rigg Sammlung*, BA-MA MSG 209. Rigg, *Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers*, pgs. 239-40.

502 OSS file on German military mission in China, information provided from Wolfgang Bärensprung confirms that many of the German advisor were hesitant to leave, NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929. The article clipping, “Thanks to the German Experts” *Shun Pao*, 26 May 1938 confirms the willingness of the Chinese government to continue to employ the German advisors. The clipping was place in BA-MA MSG 160/9. Erich Stoelzner, “Period after the Departure of Most of the German Advisors from Wuhan in June 1938,” Hoover Institution. Erich Stoelzner Collection. Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, pgs. 236-7.

503 Stoelzner, “Period after the Departure of Most of the German Advisors from Wuhan in June 1938,” Hoover Institution, Erich Stoelzner Collection. Letter from Dr. Rosen on behalf of General Nolte to Rechtsanwalt Dr. Reues, Bonn, 6 April 1956, BA-MA MSG 160/38.
left immediately. The Marshal, who set great value on being able to retain at least my services (and I was resolved to stay in China and become a naturalized citizen) recognized, in a most generous manner, that I could not take it upon myself to plunge my next of kin into misfortune, and agreed to our leaving.”

While von Falkenhausen may have been willing to sacrifice his German citizenship, his family was another matter. Chiang had been hesitant to release the German advisors from their contracts, but after von Falkenhausen reported that the Nazi government threatened the families of the advisors who stayed, Chiang allowed the advisors to return to Germany. Von Falkenhausen, having lost one relative in the Night of the Long Knives, recognized the gravity of the threat and appealed to the Chinese respect for family. It appears from the Chinese press reports on the recall that they were sympathetic to the difficult situation faced by the advisors.

On 24 June 1938 von Falkenhausen issued his final address to the German advisors in China. He recounted how, for the last decade, more than 130 German men came to China to assist with its military development, eight of whom had given their lives while serving China and the Fatherland. He explained that the end of mission’s work resulted not from the Chinese government cancelling their contracts, but rather political developments. The Chinese government was nothing but pleased with their work. Von Falkenhausen believed their time in China had been a great experience as he reminded...

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them, “We can look back on our work and achievements with pride and satisfaction.”

He reported to the advisors that they had earned the highest recognition and gratitude of the Chinese officials and Chiang Kai-shek. He eloquently expressed to the advisors that they could return home “knowing that we, as old German soldiers, have done our duty.

… The activities of the German advisors in China will go down in the history of Germandom in the Far East as a further glorious chapter of hard work and German efficiency.” His last address was a simple one-page document, but in it he highlighted the cooperative nature of the German military mission. The advisors had worked with the Chinese to build a better military. In doing so, they served both German and Chinese interests. They had served dutifully and could return home proud of their accomplishments.

The Chinese, though disappointed to see the advisors return to Germany, expressed gratitude for their service. A number of Chinese newspaper articles regarding the withdrawal of the advisors publicly thanked them for their service. Common themes ran throughout the press reports. The Chinese officials sympathized with the difficult predicament of the German advisors, who left not by choice, but by order of the German government even though many wanted to stay. While German policy had swung in favor of Japan, the advisors sympathized with China in its struggle against Japan. The Chinese hoped that though the advisors were returning to Germany, they could continue to work

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in their homeland to educate people about China and build support for the Sino-German relationship.\(^{508}\) The Chinese press predicted that the recall of the German advisors would not adversely affect the war effort. One press article, written to instill confidence in the Chinese war effort, noted that von Falkenhausen, before departing, “predicted that China, under the leadership of Generalissimo Chiang would not be defeated.”\(^{509}\)

On 5 July 1938 the German advisors departed from Wuhan on a special swastika-marked train. The Japanese celebrated the departure of the advisors as a victory.\(^{510}\) Yet, even after the advisors left, the Chinese continued to reap benefits from their work. German expertise had been a vital component in the growth of China’s war industries. A number of German-built factories and arsenals continued to function and supply valuable munitions to the Chinese army as they were among the first to be relocated to China’s interior after the war broke out.\(^{511}\) In addition to industrial production, the advisors wanted to see their work training the Chinese army continue. Upon departing China, one of the advisors handed over a number of reports on the abridged training program of Chinese divisions and assessments of the performance of the Chinese army in the war to the Americans. It seems plausible that Schmeling-Diringshofen had been the one to hand them over. Bärensprung noted the close relationship between Schmeling-Diringshofen and Captain Sutherland, Stilwell’s adjutant. It appears that Stilwell himself had been the


\(^{510}\) Fox, *Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis*, pg. 324.

\(^{511}\) Kirby, *German and Republican China*, pgs. 218-9.
While the German military mission was withdrawn from China in 1938, the Sino-German relationship was not severed until 1941. Throughout 1938, as Germany’s relations with China worsened, Trautmann and many within the Foreign Office encouraged the Nazi leadership to reconsider the Sino-German relationship on economic grounds. Allying with Japan and cutting off Sino-German trade would be a great financial loss to Germany. Chinese raw materials were especially important for German rearmament and industrial output. Hitler and von Ribbentrop initially hoped to make up the difference by dividing the spoils of northern China with the Japanese; Japan, however, proved less than amenable to this idea as the war dragged on through 1938. As Kirby pointed out, “Despite all of Germany’s efforts to secure a preferential position in North China, the Reich actually suffered proportionally greater losses than any other country in its trade with the region. Germany’s share of North China’s imports dropped from 18 percent in 1937 to 6 percent in both 1938 and 1939.”

Given the swift decline of Chinese imports and Japan’s recalcitrance in trade negotiations with Germany over Japanese-occupied northern China and Manchukuo, German-Japanese relations experienced a cooling in 1939 while German industries continued to send arms and munitions to China in exchange for raw materials. While

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512 OSS file on German military mission in China, by Bärensprung, NARA II RG 226 Entry No. 210, Box 255, Folder no 10929. The notes, assessments, and training schedules translated by Stilwell can be found in NARA II RG 165 Entry no. 65 MID report 2009-255.

513 Fox documents the appeals of Trautmann to Hitler and von Ribbentrop and concern over the loss of the Chinese markets in Germany and the Far Eastern Crisis, chapter 10. Kirby documents Germany’s efforts and failure to secure preferential treatment in trade with Japanese occupied northern China in Germany and Republican China, pgs. 239-44, quote taken from pg. 243.
Göring had prohibited arms shipments to China in the spring of 1938, various liberal interpretations of the order allowed for continued shipments. A new HAPRO agreement was even signed in October 1938 ensuring continued Sino-German trade. German industrialists, failing to benefit from the Japanese occupation of northern China, increasingly stood in support of renewed German relations with Chiang’s China. While the start of the European war in the fall 1939 complicated matters, it was not until 1941 that Sino-German relations and trade were completely cut off with the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the Chinese declaration of war on Germany.  

Impact of the German Military Mission:

For a decade, the German military mission had worked to modernize the Chinese military and industrialize China. Through the course of their work they contributed to the development of an increasingly close Sino-German relationship. China had much to gain from German technical and military expertise and Germany benefitted from its sales in the Chinese markets and access to China’s vast supplies of raw material. The rise of the Nazis in 1933 added a new dimension to the Sino-German relationship. But even the Nazis, with their affinity for Japan, could not deny the value of Sino-German trade, especially for the German war industry and their policy of rearmament.

The German officers who dutifully served Chiang in China also believed they were acting in the service of the Fatherland. They believed they were cultivating not only

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514 The official Taiwanese history of the German military mission in China attests to the continued shipments of arms and improved relations between 1939 and 1940, “A Summary of the Work of the German Military Advisory Group in China,” BA-MA MSG 160/12, pg. 53. Kirby, Germany and Republican China, pgs. 244-53.
a trading partner, but also a future ally and bulwark against communism. Given the Nazi ideological hatred towards communists and the Soviet Union, China was in many ways a natural ally. Chiang had his own problems with the Chinese Communists and their support from the Soviet Union. Although the Chinese army was rapidly improving under German guidance, it would have taken well into the 1940s before China would be ready to fight a war against a Great Power—hence, the Nazi-preferred alliance with Japan. The Second United Front in 1937 and subsequent aid from the Soviet Union for the Chinese war effort only encouraged Nazi efforts to forge a German-Japanese alliance. For the Nazis, with their anti-British and anti-Soviet stance, Japan seemed like the better option as an ally as it threaten the British Empire and the eastern Soviet Union, even though many officials within the Wehrmacht and German industrialists pushed for closer Sino-German relations. Ultimately, prior to World War II it was in Germany’s best interest to encourage stability in the Far East (or at least between China and Japan) and to continue its policy of neutrality in order to reap the benefits of relations with both China and Japan.

The German military advisors recognized the Nazi affinity for Japan and knew that a Sino-Japanese war would require Germany to choose sides. They believed a modern Chinese military would deter Japanese aggression. They thought their work would help create stability in the Far East so that Germany could continue its positive relations with both Asian powers, at least until China was strong enough to become the preferred ally in the fight against communism. Ironically, their work in China contributed to the transformation of a limited Sino-Japanese incident into a major war, which
ultimately laid the groundwork for the Communist takeover of China in the postwar period as well as Germany’s own defeat on the Eastern Front in World War II.

The German advisors contributed to Chiang’s decision to not settle the Marco Polo Bridge Incident diplomatically, but rather to make a stand against the Japanese at Shanghai. Chiang was confident in his German-trained troops. They had performed admirably against the Japanese at Shanghai in 1932 and had time to improve since then. The troops had continued to impress Chiang in the large training exercises designed by the German advisors between 1935 and 1937. Von Falkenhausen was also impressed by the forward strides made by the Chinese army. Prior to the war, his reports and memos display his confidence in the ability of the Chinese army to hold out against Japanese attacks. Von Falkenhausen undoubtedly influenced Chiang’s decision to go to war in 1937.

Von Falkenhausen’s reports and contingency plans for a war with Japan reveal he believed Japan could not afford a long war in China and that as soon as the Japanese encountered real resistance they would begin negotiations. This proved to be a costly miscalculation. Several times during the Sino-Japanese War, Japan attempted to negotiate with China, often through Germany; these negotiations, however, often broke down quickly, in part as a result of the lack of unified command and established civil-military relationship in Japan as well as Chiang’s recalcitrance towards Japanese demands. Through the course of World War II, it became increasingly clear that Japan, indeed, could not afford a long war in China. The China Theater continued to consume Japanese manpower and material resources throughout the war much to the dismay of the Axis.
In constructing his foreign policy in the 1930s, Hitler envisioned a future German attack on the Soviet Union supported by Japan. The Anti-Comintern Pact and the increasingly close relationship between Germany and Japan in early 1938 reflected his belief in the value of an alliance with Japan in his campaign against the Soviet Union. Yet, as the German-Japanese alliance was solidifying in early 1938, the Wehrmacht seemed to have its doubts about the military capabilities of its ally in the Far East.

Reports from the German military mission and OKW confirmed their doubts about Japan’s military capability. One of the reports of the German military mission from February 1938 noted that in terms of quality, the Japanese army did not compare to any of the European forces except for maybe Italy, as the unnamed advisor noted based on his experiences with the Italians in the Great War. In March 1938, the OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres) received a secret report titled “Experiences and Observations from the Sino-Japanese Battlefield, 1937/38.” This report was likely based on information provided by the German military mission and was possibly even written by one of the advisors. The report assessed the Chinese and Japanese forces engaged in battle, but significantly more attention is devoted to the Japanese forces and their modern arms and state of mechanization. The report concluded by noting: “An experienced and knowledgeable observer of the battles (especially the battles of Shanghai and Nanking) is

515 Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy*, chapters 13 and 27.


of the opinion that the Japanese army is no match for a European opponent—in which in this case one can also count the Russians.”518 Clearly, the OKW was looking forward to consider the utility of Japan in a war against the Soviet Union.

If the reports from the Sino-Japanese War were not enough to cast doubt on Japan’s ability to fight Russia when it could not even decisively win against China, the Nomonhan Incident, also known as the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, confirmed the OKW’s suspicions. During the Battle of Nomonhan in summer 1939, Japanese elite divisions proved to be no match against Soviet armor and aircraft.519 Much to the Germans’ dismay, the Japanese would never again take the offensive against the Soviets in the war. The Japanese forces were consumed by their campaign of conquest in the Pacific as well as embroiled in a long war against China, to which the German advisors had inadvertently contributed. Without the Japanese military putting pressure on the Soviet Union in the east, the full weight of the Red Army came to bear on the Wehrmacht, eventually leading to disaster.

Given the general hatred towards communism in the German officer corps, it is ironic that though they tried to build China as an anti-communist bulwark, they inadvertently contributed to the expansion of communism in Asia. The German advisors’ miscalculation about Japan’s willingness to negotiate led to a prolonged Sino-Japanese


war, which paved the way for the Communists to take power in China 1949.

Interestingly, as early as 1938 the German advisors were already concerned that the Sino-Japanese War was paving the way for communism in China. A report following the Rape of Nanking expressed the German advisors’ concern that the brutality of the Japanese, who professed to be fervent anti-communists, was paving the way for communism in China. Another report from April 1938 expressed the mission’s concern that the longer war lasted with Japan, the more the groundwork was laid for the spread of communism in China. The German advisors were concerned that after suffering such heavy losses in 1937-38, Chiang’s forces would be too weak to overcome the Communists, who were organizing the small war against Japan. According to Gerhard Weinberg, in 1937 many German political and military officials were concerned that the Sino-Japanese War would push the Chinese Nationalists and Communists closer together while Chiang would become increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union for aid.

Despite the Second United Front, the Sino-Japanese War provided a theater where tensions between the Nationalists and the Communists played out. Though nominally united in the fight against Japan, the Communists were more than willing to sit by and watch as Chiang’s conventional army was nearly destroyed fighting the Japanese in 1937-38. Chiang has often been criticized for sitting idly by in Chongqing as the Communists fought the remainder of the war, yet this interpretation is also off base. While Chiang’s forces would never again fight with the zeal they had shown in the first

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521 Zur Lage, Hankow, 11 April 1938, BA-MA, MSG 160/8, pg. 3.
522 Weinberg, Hitler’s Foreign Policy, pg. 415.
year of the war, the Communist contribution to the war effort is often exaggerated. From 1938 to 1940, the Communists did launch an effective insurgency campaign against the Japanese; however, according to Dreyer, the insurgency reached its high point in 1940, after which it was merely a low level threat to the Japanese as the Communists focused on survival, organization, and political expansion. Dreyer noted, “Contrary to both the propaganda of the time and to many accounts since 1945, most Chinese leaders did their best to sit out the Second World War militarily, while using the situation to position themselves for the resumption of civil war once the Japanese had departed. This generalization applied to the main Nationalist group… and to the communists.”523 Both the Nationalist and Communist forces tried to avoid fighting the Japanese in order to regroup. Unfortunately, while the Communists managed to organize and largely preserve their forces between 1941-5, Chiang’s forces once again suffered devastating losses in the 1944 ICHIGO offensive. With the end of World War II, the Chinese Nationalists and Communists resumed their own war with each other. The Communist political organization, coupled with the losses of the Nationalist forces in repeated Japanese assaults on conventional battlefields, undoubtedly contributed to Chiang’s forces inability to overcome the Communists, resulting in their flight to Taiwan in 1949.

The Germans worked diligently to train Chiang’s forces to fight Japan in the 1930s; however, Japan was a conventional enemy whereas the Communists were not. Part of China’s success in World War II against Japan stemmed from the GMD-CCP’s ability to force Japan to fight a hybrid war across the full spectrum of operations from counterinsurgency to conventional warfare. German advisors made a significant

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523 Dreyer, China at War, pgs. 306-7. Emphasis added.
contribution to half of that equation. The German experience in China presented the opportunity for the Wehrmacht to learn about counter-insurgency warfare, urban warfare, and the futility of stand-and-die orders but it appears that it failed to incorporate these hard lessons into its institutional collection of knowledge as the German military was forced to learn them once again on the Eastern Front in World War II. While Chiang lost his country to the Chinese Communists in the aftermath of the war, the German advisors also found themselves scattered as their own country was divided with part of it falling under the communist Soviet sphere of influence.
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