

**Title: To what extent did PLA's strategy lead to the victory in the Pingjin Campaign
during the Chinese Civil War?**

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Section 1: Identification and Evaluation of Sources

Pingjin Campaign was part of the three major campaigns launched by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) during the 1945-49 Chinese Civil War against Guomindang (GMD). The research question is: **To what extent did PLA's strategy lead to the victory in the Pingjin Campaign during the Chinese Civil War?** Source A, a primary source for detailed analysis, is *The Pingjin Campaign Experience: Memoir by Former GMD officials*, to commemorate the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) victory on GMD on the Chinese Civil War. This source is relevant to the investigation, because it introduces confidential conversations with senior-ranked military officials inside GMD during the war. Source B is the *Pingjin Campaign Documentary*, written by Bi Jianzhong, is hereof selected as a secondary source showing the CCP perspective on the Pingjin Campaign.

Source A (*The Pingjin Campaign Experience: Memoir by Former GMD officials*¹)

The book originates from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1996 in Beijing, where they were responsible for collecting the primary sources within Pingjin Campaign. The author is Fang Zhengzhi, a Colonel General Staff at the No.3 office of Northern China GMD Headquarter. Its purpose is to mention the critical events within the Pingjin Campaign from GMD perspectives. On this basis it is valuable because the information disclosed such as conference meetings and conversations between generals are highly authentic, since the author was an acquaintance of Fu Zuoyi, the major military leader for GMD during the war. These details allow us to understand the strategic plans of GMD, and the struggles for Fu when explaining the defeated situation for GMD during the

¹平津戰役親歷記：原國民黨將領的回憶：中國人民政治協商會議全國委員會文史資料委員會平津戰役親歷記：北京：1996 (*Ping Jin Zhanyi qinli ji: Yuan Guomindang jiangling de huiyi*. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1996.)

campaign. Source A has some limitations for this particular investigation because it only counts on the GMD perspectives, which they may have ignored the factors of CCP's strategy. Its publication of the communist source indicates certain level of bias, which might lead to the book's emphasis on describing the defeat for GMD to show CCP's misrecognition to current GMD party in Taiwan, and over-emphasize the superiority of CCP authority.

Source B (Pingjin Campaign Documentary)²

The book is written by Bi Jianzhong, a very experienced CCP member and former investigator of Military History within PLA Academy of Military Science, and published by Tianjin Renmin Publishing Co. Ltd in 1999, which is one of the major official publisher for the PRC government of official military documentaries. From this we can deduce its purpose is to provide a military analysis of the CCP's victory and why GMD had failed, through adopting valuable official primary source from CCP authority. On this basis it is valuable for an investigation of the key question because it presents the most authoritative official perspectives on why CCP won the battle by uncovering much details as the winning side of the campaign. It does have some limitations for this particular investigation because it might be subject to serious bias due to its official publisher background of the communist aspect. The documentary also fills with radical and subjective descriptions of events which might overstates the CCP's contributions.

²平津戰役紀實：畢建忠：天津人民：1999 (*Ping Jin Zhan Yi Ji Shi*. (1999). Tian jin: Tian jin ren min chu ban she)

Section 2 – The investigation

Introduction

The Pingjin Campaign refers to the last of the three major campaigns during the Chinese Civil War dated in 1948 November to 1949 January. It has significant importance as the campaign marked the final stage of the civil war, seeing the end of the Nationalists' dominance in the North China Plain and the robust momentum of the PLA in retaining territorial control on China. This investigation will analyze the extent of success of PLA's strategy in comparison to GMD's in this particular campaign, and look into other factors, including the level of morale and organisation, that possibly contributed to the CCP's ultimate victory. Multiple perspectives, notably the PLA side and Nationalists' side, extracted from several primary and secondary sources will be scrutinized to conclude that not only PLA's military strategy led to the victory, but also their organisation and planning.

Main Body

One of the major factors leading to the victory of CCP in the Pingjin Campaign was their brilliant military tactics, which is widely acknowledged by contemporary sources as pivotal in explaining their eventual victory in civil war. Prior to the start of the Pingjin Campaign in October 1948, noticing the decline of military power of Fu Zuoyi's GMD army in the Northern territory by the PLA military committee, Mao decided to collaborate the North-eastern army and Northern army together to destroy the GMD troops within the areas of Beijing and Tianjin and at that time prepare for invading Eastern China. According to Mao's telegram in 31 October 1948, he stated, "We are ready to take Pingjin area to move the majority of troops to the area of Changjiang, and establish the Political Congress in summer

next year (1949)”³, whilst the source is limited due to the heavy official bias mentioned, as well as its position as a drafted telegram mentioned by Mao, it does contain value because it shows that PLA had already started their planning to invade Beijing and Tianjing by mobilizing their troops on Beijing for invasion into the south. More importantly, this telegram reveals Mao’s intention to eliminate the GMD forces gradually by months. Christopher Lew, a scholar on the Third Chinese Civil War, shared similar view by mentioning that “Mao and the PLA ordered Lin to take full advantage of Fu’s ill-fated sortie by capturing Shanhaiguan”⁴, where Mao captured the northern territory. It is appreciated that Lew has highlighted these factors with detailed investigation on the civil war through official documents, which might have clouded his judgement due to the lack of primary sources. Furthermore, sources based on GMD perspective provides worthy insights, in revealing Chiang’s tactical mistakes. According to Hau Pei-tsun, a politician in support of GMD, in his ‘6 assumptions’, Chiang had made unrealistic judgments on the military circumstances, notably the deployment of “300,000 troops in Yingkou and Huludao to protect the barrier from communists”⁵ and the PLA’s unexpected movement from western provinces. Hau is highly appreciated for highlighting GMD’s failures in formulating military tactics with reference to Chiang’s evaluations, although his argument might subject to bias for its unofficial and unrecognized position. Nonetheless, these sources all help to justify that military tactics was an essential element for CCP to win in the campaign and likely the civil war. The extent of such success can be attributed as to Mao’s planning and Chiang’s failure.

³Source B: 平津戰役紀實：畢建忠：天津人民：1999 (*Ping Jin Zhan Yi Ji Shi*. Tian jin: Tian jin ren min chu ban she, 1999.)

⁴Lew, Christopher R.. *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War, 1945-49: An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

⁵Yang, Tianshi. *Zhao xun zhen shi de Jiang Jieshi: Jiang Jieshi ri ji jie du*. Xianggang: San lian shu dian (Xianggang) you xian gong si, 2008.

The implementation of plans by the PLA forces is arguably of equal importance with the planning process in determining the extent of success in the Pingjin Campaign. In 1948, Mao initiated the strategy of taking over Taiyuan and successfully trapped Fu Zuoyi's troops within the province, thus allowing the PLA's North-eastern troops to enter into Pingjin districts. The military plan to first capture Fu's troops, cut all the connections between Pingjin region and other areas, and gradually destroy the GMD troops was effectively implemented and fulfilled the initial aim to avoid direct confrontation with the strong GMD forces in Pingjin area⁶. This underlines the insightful military organisation by Mao as well as the PLA as the strength of GMD troops was fatally weakened and the communist obtained considerable amount of weapons from the prisoners of war. With these captured weapons, Mao could fight with the southern GMD troops in a flowing way. This is particularly emphasized in Bi's *Pingjin Campaign Documentary*: "from 1948 November 9 to 27, Mao initiated the plan to trap Fu Zuoyi troops in Pingjin Area, leading to Fu Zuoyi army become 'frightened bird' to 'a bird in the cage'"⁷. Notwithstanding its highly subjective descriptions, it does contain values because it exemplifies the success of Mao to trap and weaken Fu Zuoyi whose resources had been fatally reduced due to the halted connections with other troops outside Pingjin area by the PLA. Conversely, Fu "failed to counter-attack PLA troops due to the huge strength of PLA at that time"⁸, which again reinforces the brilliance of PLA's strategy in reducing the Fu's military power through capturing his troops, thus catalysing the

⁶ 隔而不围，断敌退路. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://www.quanxue.cn/ls_public/juezhhan/juezhhan85.html

⁷Source B: 平津战役纪实：畢建忠：天津人民：1999 (*Ping Jin Zhan Yi Ji Shi*. (1999).

Tian jin: Tian jin ren min chu ban she)

⁸ Source A: *The Pingjin Campaign Experience: Memoir by Former GMD officials (Ping Jin Zhanyi qinli ji: Yuan Guomindang jiangling de huiyi*. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1996.)

CCP's ultimate victory. The PLA's strategy within Pingjin Campaign gained valuable resources and territories for Mao's PLA side, and sparked their emergence of dominance in the later stages of the civil war. This is supported by the telegram drafted by Mao to Lin Biao and the Revolutionary Military Commission of CCP⁹, in which Mao detailed the step-by-step procedures of taking over GMD-controlled territories, such as 'order troops in Yellow River'¹⁰, despite the outcomes turned out to be slightly deviated from the original plan. Conclusively, PLA's planned strategies were all fulfilled, as their forces adopted the military opportunities created to capture the entire Northern China and further push the Nationalists into retreat to the south.

Apart from the PLA's successful strategic planning and military execution, their soaring morale is also another crucial factor that led to their success in the Pingjin Campaign. Morale affects the ability of the troops as it determines the mentality among the soldiers to fight and for instance the CCP caught well within this category. Consequently, with the combination of military strategies and planning, PLA forces were more determined to carry out the plans, as shown by the successive operations in capturing districts of territories controlled by GMD. Bi in his work reveals the atmosphere of a military reflection conference held in Nanjing in August 1948 where there "are sitting lines of generals, depressed and speechless. Their mentality is filled with resentment, fury, hopelessness", owing to the "consecutive losses of battles in the northern region", "They have lacked the hope to fight for the PLA troops within the Pingjin area".¹¹ This source, although it is exaggerated due to the

⁹ Appendix: "The Concept Of Operations For The Peiping-Tientsin Campaign1." Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, 1961, 289-93. doi:10.1016/b978-0-08-022983-6.50048-6.

¹⁰ Appendix: "The Concept Of Operations For The Peiping-Tientsin Campaign1." Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, 1961, 289-93. doi:10.1016/b978-0-08-022983-6.50048-6.

¹¹Source B: 平津戰役紀實：畢建忠：天津人民：1999 (*Ping Jin Zhan Yi Ji Shi*. Tian jin: Tian jin ren min chu

the origin of the source as written by PRC officials, is still valuable in exposing the low morale for GMD at that time. In contrast, Bi also mentions the situation of a PLA conference in March 1948: “the conference is only a farm with 3 houses, but people within the conference are spontaneous, and delighted to celebrate the opening of conference”¹². This communist source, despite subjectivity exists, still has values in showing the contrast on morale between the CCP and GMD. Derek Bodde, an American observer, also said that ‘PLA has done probably the greatest demonstration of Chinese military in history due to PLA’s morale’¹³, indicating morale as one of the dominant factors of the CCP winning the Pingjin campaign and civil war, although the origin might not be able to see the inner picture of the campaign due to its American identity. The above historiographies substantivize the argument that the PLA troops were more determined to win, in contrast to that of the GMD’s which contributed to the communist victory in Pingjin Campaign, reflected in the their final victory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Sun Tzu, an excellent military strategist, once stated, “who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.”¹⁴ The PLA caught the underlying changes on the situations on both parties, and won Pingjin Campaign through PLA’s military strategy, organized planning and morale, which helped them grabbed the chance of success. By this investigation, this marks the conclusion that PLA’s strategy is an essential factor of just winning Pingjin campaign, but not the civil war. Instead, the PLA’s and GMD’s military tactics and morale also drives the

ban she, 1999.)

¹² **Source B:** 平津戰役紀實：畢建忠：天津人民：1999 (*Ping Jin Zhan Yi Ji Shi*. Tian jin: Tian jin ren min chu ban she, 1999.)

¹³ Lynch, Michael J. *The Chinese Civil War 1945-49*. Oxford: Osprey Pub., 2010.

¹⁴ The Annotated Art of War (Parts 6.28-34: Varying Tactics)

victory of the campaign and war.

Section 3 - Reflection

Overall, I have learnt the role of different historians representing different perspectives, where CCP gives out official documents for recognition, however the investigation is subject to bias. One issue raised by this study relating to the methods used by historians is the challenge of bias and misrecognition within the sources. For example, GMD perspectives gives out the evaluation of Pingjin Campaign and the primary sources, while it might not be recognized by the field of history. Western perspectives gives out a balanced and detailed analysis of the campaign, while it is not primary source, which might be deviate from the reality. I tackled this issue by justifying their historiography through more primary sources that relate to Pingjin Campaign, such as telegrams and conversations. I also adopted particular telegrams and conversations' records, in order to prove the truthfulness of chronology of Pingjin Campaign at that time. Through this process, I reached the conclusion to use many sources to prove my investigation is truthful, while the bias and misrecognition helped me find different aspects of resources in order to justify the historical facts and provided reference for my perspectives.

As a historian, it might be hard to obtain relevant primary sources within the investigation, due to the lack of evidences kept during the civil war. In terms of this particular study, this issue manifested itself in the following manner, that it is hardly to know the truth of how the Pingjin Campaign develops. Therefore, I have adopted the primary sources from the general public, instead of from the perspectives of CCP and GMD, such as journals and newspaper articles reporting Pingjin Campaign. Although these sources are subject to bias as the media at that time might support either one-side at that time, for example, CCP's journals

emphasize on their victory in civil war and downgrade the GMD position, it still provides me valuable opportunity to explore more deeply within the facts of Pingjin Campaign.

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Appendix

"The Concept Of Operations For The Peiping-Tientsin Campaign1."

6. This method is generally the same as that you used in the fighting along the line through Ihsien, Chinchow, Chihsi, Hsingcheng, Suichung, Shanhaikuan and Luanhsien.

7. In the two weeks beginning from today (December 11-25), the basic principle is to encircle without attacking (in the case of Changchiakou and Hsinpao-an) and, in some cases, to cut off without encircling (in the case of Peiping, Tientsin and Tungchow, to make only a strategic encirclement and cut the links between the enemy forces, but not to make a tactical encirclement) in order to wait for the completion of our dispositions and then wipe out the enemy forces one by one. In particular, you must not wipe out all the enemy forces at Changchiakou, Hsinpao-an and Nankow because that would compel the enemy east of Nankow to make a quick decision to bolt. Please make sure you understand this point.

8. In order not to prompt Chiang Kai-shek quickly to decide to ship his troops in the Peiping-Tientsin area south by sea, we are going to order Liu Po-cheng, Teng Hsiao-ping, Chen Yi and Su Yu, after they have wiped out Huang Wei's army, to spare the remainder of Tu Yu-ming's armies under Chiu Ching-chuan, Li Mi and Sun Yuanliang

(about half of which have already been destroyed) and for two weeks to make no dispositions for their final annihilation.

9. To prevent the enemy from fleeing towards Tsingtao, we are going to order our troops in Shantung to mass certain forces to control a section of the Yellow River near Tsinan and to make preparations along the Tsingtao-Tsinan Railway.

10. There is little or no possibility that the enemy will flee towards Hsuchow, Chengchow, Sian or Suiyuan.

11. The main or the only concern is that the enemy might flee by sea. Therefore, in the coming two weeks the general method should be to encircle without attacking or to cut off without encircling.

12. This plan is beyond the enemy's range of expectation, and it will be very difficult for him to discern it before you complete your final dispositions. At present, the enemy is probably calculating that you will attack Peiping.

13. The enemy always underrates the energy of our army and overrates his own strength, though at the same time he is like a bird startled by the mere twang of a bow-string. The enemy at Peiping and Tientsin will never expect you to be able to complete the above dispositions by December 25.

14. In order to complete these dispositions by December 25, you should inspire your troops in the next two weeks to ignore fatigue, to have no fear of depletion of numbers and have no fear of cold and

hunger; after these dispositions have been made, they can rest and consolidate and take their time in attacking.

15. The sequence of attacks will be roughly the following: first, the Tangku-Lutai sector; second, Hsinpao-an; third, the Tangshan sector; fourth, the Tientsin and Changchiakou sectors; and, lastly, the Peiping sector.