

The Historical Contribution and Contemporary Value of the Zhaxi Conference and Its Spirit

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Abstract: The Zhaxi Conference refers to a series of significant meetings convened by the Party Central Committee in Weixin County, Zhaotong City, Yunnan Province, following the Zunyi Conference. The Zhaxi Conference adopted a series of important documents such as the Zunyi Conference Resolution, and made new deployments in terms of organization, politics, military, strategy, and team building, continuing and implementing the spirit of the Zunyi Conference, propelling the Chinese revolution to a new stage of victory. The spiritual essence embodied in the Zhaxi Conference, as a branch of the Long March spirit, encapsulates the precious spiritual wealth of our Party. A thorough study and grasp of the Zhaxi spirit is of great contemporary value for promoting a profound understanding of the "two affirmations", continuing the spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists, and boosting Chinese-style modernization.

1. Introduction

The Zunyi Conference, as a turning point in the Chinese revolution, possesses significant historical significance, saving the Party and the Chinese revolution at a critical moment. The Zhaxi Conference, on the other hand, was a continuation and fulfillment of the Zunyi Conference, propelling the Chinese revolution towards a new stage of victory. Together, the two conferences witnessed the arduous journey of the Long March from defeat to victory, standing as two towering red monuments in the history of the Long March. However, compared to the Zunyi Conference, due to geographical and other factors, some people have limited understanding of the content and spiritual value of the Zhaxi Conference, and some even do not know about it. They overlook the fact that some of the resolutions left over from the Zunyi Conference were implemented and completed at the Zhaxi Conference. The Zhaxi Conference adopted a series of important documents such as the Zunyi Conference Resolution, not only continuing and completing the spirit of the Zunyi Conference, but also embodying the essence of the great Long March spirit. Therefore, under the new situation, conducting in-depth research on the Zhaxi Conference and its spiritual essence based on Chinese cultural thought holds significant theoretical and practical significance for the study and research of Party history.

2. The Historical Background of the Zhaxi Conference

Driven by the realities of the situation and the decision of the CPC Central Committee to change

its own system, the convening of the Zhaxi Conference was both a historical necessity and a practical imperative. After the Zunyi Conference, faced with the failure of the plan to cross the Yangtze River northward and the defeat in the Tucheng Campaign, the situation facing the Central Red Army was complex and intricate. This required the Central Political Bureau to convene a series of meetings to address current difficulties and make specific deployments for future strategies. The details of the transfer of command and specific strategic deployments left over from the Zunyi Conference also urgently needed to be implemented, which became one of the reasons for the Central Red Army to convene a series of meetings in Zhaxi. The more significant reason lies in the CPC Central Committee's need for changes to its own system. The "troop diversion" decision of the Tongdao Conference marked the first time that Mao Zedong's military proposals became the main topic at a central meeting, and the "three-member team" style of internal resolutions began to shift towards collective resolutions. The Liping Conference, dominated by the opinions of the majority including Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and Wang Jiaxiang, officially rejected the erroneous proposals of Li De and Bo Gu, adopted Mao Zedong's correct proposals, and determined the strategic decision to divert troops to Guizhou.[1] By the Zunyi Conference, the Central Revolutionary Military Commission was entrusted with absolute leadership over all military actions, and the resolution process of first formulating plans by the Central Revolutionary Military Commission and then deliberating and deciding by the Political Bureau meeting or its enlarged meeting had basically taken shape, with the collective command system becoming a fixed practice. The Zhaxi series of meetings were convened against this backdrop.

3. The Historical Contributions of Zhaxi Conferences and Their Spirit

The Zhaxi series of conferences were a direct continuation of the unfinished work of the Zunyi Conference, rectifying the "Left" adventurism of the time in terms of organization, politics, military, strategic lines, and team-building, thus propelling the Chinese revolution into a new phase of victory.

3.1 Organizational Aspect: Focusing on the Reorganization of the Party Central Committee's Military Leadership

The Huafangzi Meeting in Shuitian addressed the issue of the selection of the Party's highest leader, which had not been resolved at the Zunyi Conference. On the afternoon of February 5, 1935, the Central Political Bureau relocated to Huafangzi in Shuitian Town, Weixin County, and convened a Standing Committee meeting. The main purpose of the meeting was to address the two remaining unresolved issues from the Zunyi Conference: the division of labor among the Standing Committee members and the attribution of military command authority after the abolition of the "Three-Person Leadership." After thorough discussion, it was decided that Zhang Wentian would immediately replace Bo Gu as General Secretary, Zhou Enlai and Zhu De would be responsible for military command, and Mao Zedong would serve as Zhou's assistant in military command and participate in formulating strategic decisions. According to Chen Yun's recollections: "During the march from Zunyi to Weixin, it was decided that Comrade Luo Fu would replace Comrade Bo Gu in assuming overall responsibility. Comrade Zedong would serve as Comrade Enlai's assistant in military command." [2] The reorganization of the Party Central Committee marked the beginning of the Party's maturation, and the gradual formation of the first-generation leadership collective of the Communist Party of China, laying a solid organizational foundation for the Chinese revolution to enter a new phase of victory.

3.2 Political Aspect: Deliberating and Passing the Zunyi Conference Resolution and Communicating Its Spirit

The Dazhetanzhuangzi Meeting thoroughly fulfilled the second decision of the Zunyi Conference. From February 6 to 8, 1935, the Central Red Army convened a second Political Bureau meeting at Dazhetanzhuangzi, where it deliberated and passed the Zunyi Conference Resolution, and drafted the "Resolution Outline of the Enlarged Meeting of the CPC Central Political Bureau Summarizing the Lessons Learned from the Five 'Encirclement and Suppression' Wars" for reporting and communication. The Zunyi Conference Resolution further negated Wang Ming's "Left" adventurism and, for the first time, systematically summarized Mao Zedong's military thought, making it a programmatic document for the Red Army's operational command and laying a theoretical and ideological foundation for the Red Army to transition into a new phase of revolutionary victory.

3.3 Military Aspect: Deciding to Establish a Revolutionary Base in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, and Deploying Strategic Policies and Organizational Leadership for the National Soviet Areas and the Red Army

The Zhaxi Yuwangong Meeting decided to establish a revolutionary base in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. On February 10, 1935, the Central Revolutionary Military Commission passed the resolution of the Zhaxi Yuwangong Meeting and issued the "Order on the Downsizing of Various Armies," stipulating: "After reorganization according to the new structure, the surplus personnel... may be organized into guerrilla forces for local activities after propaganda and selection." Pursuant to this order, the Red Army's Southern Sichuan Guerrilla Force was officially established in Shikanzi, Zhaxi, on February 12, with Xu Ce serving as the Secretary of the Communist Party of China's Southern Sichuan Special Committee. On February 18, the local Xuyong Special Zone Guerrilla Force was ordered to join the Southern Sichuan Guerrilla Force at Xuyong Shuping, merging into a new Southern Sichuan Guerrilla Column. As a revolutionary spark planted by the Party in the border areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, the column actively engaged in guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines, developing local revolutionary armed forces. Facing the fierce onslaught of enemy troops, the column was unfortunately disbanded in Zhenxiong County, Yunnan Province, on November 26, 1936. The few soldiers who successfully broke through the encirclement also sacrificed gloriously in January of the following year. Thus, the Southern Sichuan Guerrilla Column, which had persisted in guerrilla warfare for two years on the borders of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, was disbanded. The column made outstanding contributions in tying down enemy forces to cover the Long March northward of the Central Red Army and combating local reactionary forces, profoundly influencing the revolutionary struggle in the border areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou.

The Huafangzi Conference redeployed the strategic guidelines and organizational leadership of the Soviet areas and the Red Army across the country. Due to the erroneous leadership of Wang Ming, Li De, and others, the Party Central Committee and the Soviet areas across the country had been in a state of disconnection from the beginning of the Long March to before the Zunyi Conference. Under the urgent situation of the revolutionary situation, Zhang Wentian, who succeeded as the General Secretary, organized a discussion on the deployment of the Soviet areas across the country at the Huafangzi Conference and urgently sent a telegram to Xiang Ying and forwarded it to the Central Bureau to redeploy the strategic guidelines and organizational leadership of the Soviet areas and the Red Army across the country.[3] The telegram instructed Xiang Ying, Chen Yi, and others who remained in the Central Soviet Area to organize and establish a sub-committee of the Revolutionary Military Commission, which was responsible for determining the basic guidelines for strategic and tactical operations, and major military issues must be reported to the Central Revolutionary Military

Commission for discussion and decision-making. At the same time, the Party Central Committee sent instructions to the Central Bureau of Gannan regarding the persistence of guerrilla warfare, urging them to immediately change the current organizational form and combat methods, proposing the guerrilla warfare principles of "occupying mountainous areas, flexible maneuvering, ambush attacks, and achieving victory through surprise." This reversed the military guidelines of "regularization" and "positional warfare" that dogmatism had mechanically emphasized in the past. Since then, the guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines led by the Central Soviet Area and other Soviet areas had a clear guiding direction, and the organizational form also transformed from the Soviet area form to the guerrilla area form.

4. Strategically: Changing the plan to cross the river and laying the foundation for the correct military route of the Red Army

The Zhaxi Conference decided on the operational guidelines for the Red Army to cross the Chi Shui River twice, break through the encirclement, and turn to attack the Guizhou Army. On February 9, 1935, Mao Zedong proposed at the Zhaxi Conference the operational guidelines of crossing the Chi Shui River twice, focusing on attacking the Wang Jialie division stationed in Zunyi and Guiyang and the Xue Yuezhou-Zhou Hunyuan division. The troops immediately acted according to Mao Zedong's operational guidelines, achieving a great victory at Loushan Pass on the 25th and retaking Zunyi City in the morning of the 28th, marking the first major victory since the Long March. The second crossing of the Chi Shui River became the factual starting point for the Red Army to achieve victory in the Long March, proving through practice the convincing persuasiveness of the Zunyi Conference and the Zhaxi Conference in correcting the military route and reorganizing the organizational form. Subsequently, the Red Army continued with one stroke, crossing the Chi Shui River from east to west for the third time in Guizhou, Maotai, creating a false impression of crossing the Yangtze River northward to seek opportunities to escape from the enemy. Then, they returned to cross the Chi Shui River four times and headed south to the Wujiang River, achieving the military goal of breaking through the siege of the enemies in Sichuan and Yunnan. On March 31, the Central Red Army successfully crossed the Wujiang River, marking the successful conclusion of the "Four Crossings of the Chi Shui River" campaign.

5. Team Building: Downsizing and Expansion of the Central Red Army

The Dahetan Zhuangzi Conference proposed issues related to the rest and downsizing of the troops. According to the recollections of Yang Shangkun, who served as the political commissar of the Third Red Army Corps at that time: "Due to the large number of people falling behind in the march of the Red Army, on February 7, Peng Dehuai and I suggested to the Military Commission: 'Turn to Zhaxi (now Weixin), Yunnan, in the Sanxing region where the chickens crow at dawn, to reorganize the troops and establish a base in the border area of Sichuan and Guizhou.' The Military Commission adopted our opinion and issued this 'Instruction to the Corps on the Policy of Transforming the Red Army into a Development Area on the Border of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou' on the same day." According to the "Order of the Central Military Commission on the Downsizing of the Corps" issued on February 10, 1935, more than 30,000 Red Army troops were downsized to 17 regiments. The reorganization in Zhaxi not only achieved the downsizing of the troop formation system and the lightweighting of material equipment, but more importantly, achieved the "lightweighting" of officers and soldiers' thinking. At the same time, the expansion movement of recruiting new soldiers was carried out, inspiring 3,927 sons and daughters of Zhaxi to join the ranks of the Red Army through practical actions such as fighting landlords and distributing floating wealth, greatly enhancing the combat.[4]

6. The Time Value of Xizhi Meeting and Its Spirit

To promote a profound understanding of the decisive significance of the 'Two Upholds' in the new era and to safeguard the Party's centralized and unified leadership."The historical practice of the Chinese Communist Party's revolution and construction has proven that the correctness of the organizational line will directly affect whether the Party's cause can be smoothly advanced. Under the leadership of "left-leaning" errors, the Red Army suffered consecutive defeats from the fifth anti-encirclement and suppression campaign to the early stage of the Long March, and the spark of the new democratic revolution nearly extinguished. As an important part of the strategic transformation of the Long March, the Xizhi Meeting further consolidated the guiding position of Mao Zedong's military thought, and the victory at Loushanguan marked the beginning of the Long March's transition from failure to victory, achieving a great turning point in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. On January 21, 2020, when inspecting Yunnan, General Secretary pointed out: "The Xizhi Meeting reorganized the Party Central Committee's leadership, especially military leadership, and propelled the Chinese revolution towards a new stage of victory." [5]This profoundly reflects the tremendous contribution of the Xizhi Meeting to the new democratic revolution, guiding the establishment of correct war guiding ideology and an outstanding command leadership collective, ensuring that China's revolutionary cause progressed steadily on the right track and ultimately achieved a great victory. As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, to respond to the international situation of unprecedented changes and meet the needs of building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, the 19th CPC Central Committee's Sixth Plenary Session formally put forward the important political judgment of "two upholds," which also shines with the Party's centennial struggle experience, including the Xizhi Meeting. The historical practice of the Xizhi Meeting profoundly reflects the far-reaching influence of the leadership core and guiding ideology. The Party and the country cannot lack a strong leadership core, and the Party's guiding ideology cannot be divorced from reality. This constructs the historical logic for the proposal of "two upholds," promotes the integration of "two upholds" and "two safeguards," and has important enlightenment value for resolutely upholding the centralized and unified leadership of the Party and firmly adhering to the Party's leadership position in the construction of socialist modernization in China in the new era.

To enrich the spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists and contribute to the construction of modern Chinese civilization. In his report to the 20th CPC National Congress, General Secretary profoundly pointed out: "We should widely practice the socialist core values, promote the spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists originating from the great founding spirit, conduct in-depth propaganda and education on socialist core values, deepen patriotism, collectivism, and socialism education, and strive to cultivate new generations who will assume the great task of national rejuvenation." The spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists has been renewed over time, encompassing the great struggle spirit exhibited by the Party during various historical periods of the Chinese revolution, construction, and reform. Although the "Xizhi Meeting Spirit" is not directly mentioned, the "Long March Spirit" and "Zunyi Meeting Spirit" mentioned both encompass the revolutionary activities spirit of the Central Red Army during the Xizhi Meeting in Yunnan. The Xizhi Meeting was a continuation and final completion of the Zunyi Meeting. It not only completed the resolutions of the Zunyi Meeting but also continued the spirit of the Zunyi Meeting, forming excellent spiritual qualities such as upholding the truth, fearing no sacrifice, and heroic struggle, raising a great banner of belief on the subsequent revolutionary path. The Long March Spirit, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Front Spirit, and the Anti-Japanese War Spirit are all inheritances and developments of its spiritual qualities. Therefore, from the Zunyi Meeting to the Xizhi Meeting, not only was the truth of Marxism about to be extinguished on Chinese soil illuminated, but it also

profoundly embodies the continuation and inheritance of the spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists. Therefore, the inheritance and promotion of the "Xizhi Meeting Spirit" have an inherent role in enriching the spiritual lineage of the Chinese Communists and developing a continuous, innovative, unified, inclusive, and peaceful modern Chinese civilization.

7. Conclusion

To remember the glorious qualities of the CPC's history and gather a strong joint force for building Chinese-style modernization. Chinese cultural thought emphasizes: "We must utilize red resources well, inherit red genes well, and pass on the red land from generation to generation." Culture serves as a country's soft power, and cultural prosperity leads to national prosperity. All the achievements made by the Party in its centennial struggle are attributable to combining the basic principles of Marxism with China's specific realities and the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

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