

**TUO MAO: THE OPERATIONAL HISTORY OF THE
PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY**

By

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CANDIDATE'S CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled Tuo Mao: The Operational History of the People's Liberation Army and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed.....

Date.....

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A NOTE ON SOURCES AND TRANSLITERATION

Sources

The most important sources of public domain intelligence and commentary on China have until recently originated outside China. The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) stopped supplying university libraries with translated material in 1997 and a primary source of material from China was lost to researchers. Defence and defence-related material is readily available from China but there is a lack of qualified translators in this field. I have been fortunate in acquiring a source of Chinese defence magazines and have been translating these regularly since October 2003, presenting the results in *GI Zhou Newsletter* which I publish. This is the only source of English-language information on many Chinese weapons systems and articles on the PLA available to researchers in the field. The Russian translations have been almost all done by Stephen L. Sewell, to whom I am indebted.

Transliteration

Chinese names and terminology are rendered in China's official *pinyin* transliteration system. The exceptions are:

- (i) Source citations where names appear in the older Wade-Giles or other systems;
- (ii) The use of the name 'Canton' instead of 'Guangzhou' in the 'Canton Commune', a nomenclature which is also consistent the familiar name of Manchuria for *dongbei*, and Tibet instead of *Xizang*; and
- (iii) The names of historical persons, such as Sun Tzu and Sun Yat-sen.

SUMMARY

Tuo Mao translates literally as ‘shedding feathers’ but in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) it is the euphemism for removing the last vestiges of Mao Zedong’s vision for China’s armed forces. Mao envisaged letting an enemy strike deep into China and then be destroyed by a vast militia force using ‘People’s War’. His vision, to which the PLA only paid lip service, has been replaced by one employing modern combined arms forces, operating modular independent battle groups able to fight on and outside China’s land borders, hence the term ‘Shedding Mao’. It is the central argument of this thesis that by studying the operational history of the People’s Liberation Army, it can be proven that its operational art was forged in the period 1928-1937 and based on the Soviet Union’s doctrine of operational theory, continuing to this day. The significance of the thesis is that it revises and updates conventional thinking among external analysts about China’s guiding defence philosophy.

This thesis shows that the doctrine of Active Defence has been the overriding concern of the PLA since 1950 and not any form of People’s War. Active Defence is based on three basic principles: no provocation of other nations; no bases anywhere on foreign soil; and no seizure of territory. The PLA’s articulated doctrine in the 1950s was to ‘Protect the North and Defend the South’. In the 1960s this changed to ‘Lure the Enemy Deep into the Country’ in order to crush him with ‘People’s War’. In the 1970s, this became ‘Prepare to Fight Early and Fight Big’. By using examples of the PLA in battle this thesis shows how the doctrine changed in light of failures in battle. The post-Mao reorganisation of the PLA to rectify these faults turned it into a modern military force, building on this legacy by transforming itself into a hardened and networked military. The PLA has now reached a stage of its history where it can fully implement its operational art that took root in the theories espoused in the 1920s and 1930s through the Soviet model, and tried to be implemented in the 1950s and 1960s only to be thwarted by the Cultural Revolution. The People’s Liberation Army’s operational art, this thesis demonstrates, has now come of age.