

**Of Pen and Gun:
Political Practice and Identity in the Nationalist Youth Army, 1944-45**

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“[Youth Army] Enlistment Song” by Gong Junping (龔均平)

Young brothers!
Now is the time!
Our country is calling
The war horses are neighing
Still you don't rise up. What are you waiting for?
Still you don't rise up. What are you waiting for?
Quick, change into your fighting uniforms
Shoulder your tommy guns
Straddle your majestic steeds
Ride toward the battlefield
Sweep it clear of the enemy
Retake the land
Take our nation's flag
And plant it on the peak of Mount Fuji!
Plant it on the peak of Mount Fuji!¹

In their famous chapter on the Nationalist military in the Second World War Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby called Chiang Kaishek's soldiers “doomed men.” Their exposé of Nationalist military mobilization has been a cornerstone of Western academy's depiction of the Nationalist regime's wartime record. Yet, from late 1943 on, the enervated Nationalist government undertook to recruit and train “intellectual youth” volunteers in order to form an elite military force, commonly called the (Intellectual) Youth Army (YA). As F. F. Liu observed, in this Youth Army “China had for the first time summoned her social elite -- the educated class -- to bear arms in the nation's service.”² While there were a small number of female volunteers, who were routed into service and support units (medical, communications, etc.), the vast majority of the Youth Army volunteers were young educated males. This paper examines the political culture in the Youth Army to unpack the meanings of military service and citizenship in these elite units.

The Youth Army's political culture was dominated by a set of practices within the barracks that nurtured an identity as an elite citizen-soldier. These practices were a loose constellation of techniques for organizations to train and motivate political activists in Nationalist China. None of these were original or unique to the Youth Army as they were all found in other institutions, such as the

1. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 358-9.

2. F. F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China, 1924-1949*, pp. 143.

Boy Scouts, the Youth Corps, the KMT itself, and even the CCP. What made the Youth Army unique was the density and intensity of these practices and their close connection to two material objects, the pen and the gun. These institutionalized practices nurtured a particular self-identity among the youth soldiers. This composite self-image was the concrete content of the Nationalist citizen-soldier and entailed specific forms of expression and practice. The ideal Youth Army soldier was gendered (male), but more important here is how the volunteers' self-identity was both administratively and institutionally constructed and construed.

The volunteers' self-identity centered on two objects. The first was the gun, the key embodiment of modern soldiering, which was the focus of a cluster of intense symbolic meanings. The second was the pen, which was the heart of the Youth Army's political practices and culture: the Youth Army was a writing army far more than a shooting one. Producing propaganda was itself one of the key practices within the Youth Army. The creation, dissemination, and consumption of their own writings was one of the essential roles and functions of the Youth Army – it was woven intimately into the fabric of everyday life in the barracks. Thus, examining this propaganda for what it reveals about the self-images and the engendered mobilization of these elite citizen-soldiers is essential. A deep excavation of the political culture of the Youth Army, its practices and propaganda, brings to the surface not only the administrative means by which the state sought to mold the self-images of these men but also the contours and limitations of the result.

The Youth Army, 1944-49: A Short Synopsis

Unfortunately, the terms “Youth Army” and “Intellectual Youth Army” are used inconsistently by contemporaries and historians. The intricacies of nomenclature go far beyond the goals of this paper, but it is important to note that there were two distinct phases to the Intellectual Youth Volunteer Movement (IYVM): (a) late 1943 to late 1944 and (b) late 1944 to end of the war. Both phases of recruitment relied on a carefully devised mix of material and symbolic benefits to attract volunteers from among educated youths, a stratum that was increasingly stressed by rampant inflation and stagnant salaries. The early phase supplied educated volunteers to the Indian Expeditionary Force and the Chinese Expeditionary Force and was conducted largely through the conscription administration of the military. The volunteers for this phase have been the subject of renewed interest, with several recently publishing memoirs, because they saw action in the successful American-led campaign in Burma in the final year of the war. However, the formal designation of the Youth Army was a result of

the recruitment in late 1944 and this drive was conducted not by military institutions but instead by civilian institutions, such as the Three People's Principles Youth Corps, educational circles, and local governments. Begun in and motivated by the desperate days of the Japan's Ichigo Offensive, this second phase was a much larger effort, with some 100,000 volunteers, and it resulted in nine new divisions being formed as a distinct elite unit called the "Intellectual Youth Army". These divisions never saw action against Japan and while communist commentators are quick to conclude that this was because they were being prepared for the inevitable Civil War, it is more likely that they were being held in reserve for use in cooperation with a US-led offensive to retake China's coastal cities and an (eventual) US invasion of the Japan.³ The fact that they were not sent into the fray in 1945 meant that these divisions of intellectual youth volunteers were free for other forms of duty, primarily the production and dissemination of pro-Nationalist propaganda.

The Youth Army divisions were largely demobilized in 1945-6, but unlike its handling of conscript units, the Nationalist regime followed through on its recruitment promises to the youth soldiers, providing them with educational opportunities and job placement. Jiang Jingguo, who head of the Youth Army's political administration, established a national veterans organization that kept the volunteers in contact with each other and available for political agitation in schools, universities and urban areas.⁴ As the Civil War loomed, the Youth Army was revived, being filled with new volunteers around a core of former Youth Army officers; these new divisions fought on the Nationalist side, many fleeing to Taiwan in 1949. The Youth Army was thus loyal to the Nationalist state and its leaders. Although doubtlessly the regime's careful fulfillment of its promises to the volunteers did much to secure this loyalty, it was also built during the months of training the youth soldiers underwent and

3. For extended discussion of the motives behind the formation of the Youth Army and the Youth Corps' role in recruitment, see chapter five in Landdeck, "Under the Gun", pp. 246-348.

4. Anti-communist activities in schools often involved YA veterans during the Civil War years, and they were key elements in Jiang Jingguo's reform efforts in Shanghai; Landdeck, "Under the Gun", pp 456-64 and Zhou Shuzhen, *Sanqingtuan shimo*, pp. 299-308

the self-identities they constructed as citizen-soldiers in the barracks in 1945 as the war was, unbeknownst to them, quickly drawing to a close.

Political Technologies of the Self: Volunteerism

Military training attempted to map the state's desired attributes onto soldiers' bodies and minds, internalizing a set of youthful, vigorous, masculine norms, experiences, and idealized relationships that constituted a modern citizen-soldier fighting a national war. The youth soldiers were enmeshed in a suite of institutionally mandated practices that formed them into politically active citizen-soldiers.

These practices and methods did not originate in the Youth Army, but were drawn from disparate traditions of political activism. The Youth Army was a repository of political technologies drawn from other organizations, including Leninist parties and international fascism. For example, in Shanghai, both the KMT and the CCP had previously organized worker militias that used techniques the Youth Army would also rely on: the militias sought volunteers, required application forms, background checks, letters of recommendation from guarantors, and ran political and military training sessions, while militia men attended small group meetings, were subjected to shaming tactics, and engaged in self-criticism.⁵

In the Youth Army, a key technology was volunteerism. While the dominant mode of Nationalist participation had long been compulsory,⁶ the YA drew on a minor tradition of political mobilization. The intellectual youths shared an explicit individual volunteerism with the notorious Three People's Principles Youth Corps (YC) members, who were required to sign a pledge of loyalty to the

5. Perry, *Patrolling the Revolution*, pp. 110 and 128-9.

6. The Nationalists had a tradition of compulsory corporatist mobilization: the state, as the harmonious embodiment of disparate social elements, assembled representatives from various "circles" (*jie* 界) to participate in the ceremonies and rituals of political life. See Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, pp. 22-30, 118-25, and 207-29 and Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China*, pp. 37-142, 143-6 and 170-6.

Corps.⁷ Other groups, like the Fuxingshe (and its parent, the Lixingshe) used oaths and induction ceremonies, but these were held in strict secrecy. In contrast, the act of volunteering for the YA was always a public demonstration: the visible, social expression of the youths' private, individual resolve.

Political Technologies of the Self: Rituals and Physical Training

The YA adopted a series of four liminal rituals that marked a crossing over from a civilian existence into a new life as soldiers. The first was the act of volunteering. This ritual varied from place to place, but invariably the educated youth signed their names in a roster. In Chongqing large and elaborate rallies were held during which youths (of both sexes) would go to the front of an auditorium or up on a platform to enter their names on a register. In smaller communities, this ritual often consisted of a signup drive at a local school. The public display, full of ecstatic and intense emotions, was responsible for inducing many youths to volunteer out of peer pressure or an impetuous desire to participate.⁸

The second ritual of soldierly community was the "send off" for those being dispatched to their training bases. Local recruiting committees put up slogans and banners. Official personnel led the youths, often carrying flags themselves, to the station. Firecrackers were ubiquitous and young girls threw flowers at the volunteers. The streets along the volunteers' route were lined with people tossing oranges and gifts to the recruits.⁹

Drawing on a tradition of uniforms in schools, Boy Scouts, and Youth Corps cells, the third step in the sequence consisted of putting on the new army uniform alongside other men in the unit.¹⁰ Many youth soldiers felt that they transformed into soldiers at the moment they first donned their "modern gray cotton uniforms."¹¹ The final ritual was the solemn ceremony when rifles were distrib-

7. qz0095.mj1-96, n.p.

8. QNYZJJY, pp. 35-58. Even for those who preferred to forego the public ceremony, watching the public ritual often inspired the decision to volunteer; GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 343-5.

9. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 304; QNYZJJY, pp. 72-4; Wang Zicong, p. 55; QNYZJJY, pp. 63-8; qz0094.mj10-34, pp. 73-4 dated 7 November 1944; qz0061.mj15-4458, p. 39 dated 23 December 1944; qz0061.mj15-4550, pp. 10-1 dated 3 January 1945; and qz0055.mj3-245, pp. 226a-b dated January 1945.

10. Gulick, *Teaching in Wartime China*, p. 50; CQ YC's 2nd Reorganization and 1st Cadre Conference: qz0061.mj7-47, pp. 18-9 and 23-9 dated 5 August 1942; Chongqing's 6th District squad's 2nd Cadres Work Conference Report: qz0052.mj1-8, pp. 2-3 n.d.

11. QNYZJJY, p. 149 and HYQNJ, p. 50 and 67.

uted to the troops. After a speech exhorting the youth soldiers to “love [their] weapons”, representatives went forward to receive rifles on behalf of the whole regiment.¹²

These four rituals marked the youths’ adoption of a new role and identity, marking a separation from civilians and from the volunteers’ own past, a break that was so sharp and complete that it rendered them unrecognizable.¹³ One reporter addressed his newsbrief to the mothers of the volunteers: If you came here to see your sons, you certainly would not recognize them because they are completely different than before. First, their outward appearance has changed, their clothes are different – a gray uniform . . . a pair of grass shoes, no hair – a bald skull; a changed face – red and fat; their physique is also different – much matured! If they were before you, bowed and told you their recent news, could recognize your sons?¹⁴

This transformation was unmistakably gendered male; female youths who volunteered were denied a full transformation to a soldierly identity. One youth-soldier wrote of meeting an old flame, who had volunteered for the women’s auxiliary corps. When they ran into each other, the young woman, “looked [him] over from head to toe,” but still did not recognize her former boyfriend in his new soldierly self. Yet, he recognized her easily. Despite the changes she had undergone in her recruitment and training, she “still had the same way of skipping as she walked.” The transformation of the male was total, leaving him unrecognizable to those from his past; he was a completely new man, a soldier. The female recruit was changed, of course, but still recognizable. As she had not become a soldier like her male counterpart, the girl’s past civilian (and feminine) identity was not completely effaced or over-written, but just added to, leaving her recognizably “the same” in appearance and manner.¹⁵

Becoming a soldier went beyond rituals and costume and included a re-making of the body through exercise and drill.¹⁶ Thus recruits underwent intensive physical training after being inducted

12. HYQNJ, pp. 107-9.

13. All rites consecrate or institute an arbitrary boundary, by fostering a misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of the limit; Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 118.

14. HYQNJ, pp. 115-6. Other observers were similarly astonished at the speed of the transformation; GMWX, vol. 63, p. 362 and QNYZJJY, pp. 134-5.

15. HYQNJ, pp. 123-5. This obvious and telling gender differential calls to mind Duara’s analysis of the timeless woman as a necessary element, “the unchanging authenticity”, of the nation. Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, pp. 131-69. As we shall see, however, the Youth Army’s male volunteers too would lay claim to some “unchanging” core of idealized Chinese-ness.

16. KMT armies began promoting physical conditioning during the war, but real improvement did not come until the early 1950s; GJZGSG, vol. 3, p. 2023-9. Physical training was largely unregulated in KMT units,

into their units in 1945. According to William McNeill, practicing synchronized, rhythmic motions (“dance and drill”) forms the most basic of all human “technologies,” likely predating (or even laying the foundation for) language.¹⁷ While war dancing and other forms of “practicing” war were nearly omnipresent in the human past, McNeill argues that the technology of military close-order drill was a powerful element in the creation of mass armies. More germane for the Youth Army is McNeill’s contention that “muscular bonding” was politically significant from the nineteenth century on, not only in the form of mass demonstrations (dissent) but also as a form of citizenship: modern nations used calisthenics, gymnastics, organized physical training, and paramilitary training in schools as an expression of national might and excellence.¹⁸

Youth Army training drew on the experience and example of the Youth Corps' summer camps organized since 1939, which in turn had antecedents and models in both worldwide scouting and European fascist movements. Lasting a month and involving five hundred students, the Youth Corps camps helped youths develop strength and prowess through sports, hiking, military drills, and target practice.¹⁹ Political training in the ideals and methods of the Nationalist revolution took the form of lectures, small group discussions, producing wall newspapers, and other forms of printed propaganda materials. All these activities and techniques were exported to Youth Army from the Youth Corps.²⁰ The emphasis on drill and bodily training was part of a Nationalist tradition linking group solidarity and political citizenship.

Describing their training, youth soldiers often resorted to metaphors of “forging” or “tempering” to describe the transformation occurring during the training process. Their bases were “crucibles of

being left to each army and school to manage as the commander saw fit. The Youth Army units, however, were exceptions to this general situation.

17. Extended dance (and later drill) promoted group solidarity based on a shared “euphoric emotional excitement” that paid big dividends in hunts, community solidarities, harvest labors, and religious life. McNeill, admitting that his study is “superficial and incomplete,” argues persuasively that our closest primate relatives have no “group dance” and that the “emotional solidarity that dancing together arouses must have conferred an important advantage on those groups that first learned the trick of keeping together in time”; McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*, p. 23.

18. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*, pp. 9-10, 110-3, 123-7, and 146-9.

19. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 78.

20. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 89, 91, 119, 132-3 and 197-214.

the revolution. . . . Here we would all be cast and forged into steel giants of the revolution.”²¹ Rising early and other habits of military life began even before they arrived at their training bases. The volunteers’ daily schedule included a whole gamut of paramilitary drills and exercises, such as flag raising ceremonies, morning exercises, basic afternoon drills, target practice, and long hikes.²² Sport was another mode of physical training. Units organized sports teams that competed in with non-military and even foreign teams.²³ Soldiers engaged in vigorous activities: basketball, tug of war contests, scaling poles, standing around obstacle courses, marching in rank, doing gymnastics, and bayonet practice.²⁴ The youth soldiers took pride in leaving behind the leisure of their civilian lives: “the great dawn belongs to us soldiers, only to us soldiers.”²⁵ Running through quiet town streets after morning roll, they sang martial songs to “shatter the lonely universe” of the morning.²⁶ The results of all this physical training were obvious to everyone.²⁷ The volunteers became “mechanical men” with “lightning fast actions.”²⁸

Their physicality was connected to the outdoors and nature to form an outdoorsy manliness. Most bases were located in the rugged countryside around Chongqing, close to both mountains and rivers. Many had been used as sites for the Youth Corps' summer camps, and boasted of “gorgeous scenery.”²⁹ Training classes for political cadres, led by Jiang Jingguo, ran in the hills. “Jiang Jingguo chose a cold morning to forge [our] bodies by making everyone run up the slopes of Fuxinguan. He himself stripped to the waist and struggling ran at the head [of the column]. After finishing the run, he said, ‘he who runs first is a hero.’ Thus, that slope was called Hero Hill.”³⁰ A soldier in the 602nd

21. HYQNJ, p. 15 and 53; GMWX, vol. 63, p. 339.

22. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 196-8, 201-2, 207, 211-2, and 307-8.

23. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 309. Reportedly, several national records were broken by Youth Army soldiers at a postwar sports meet; Lai Zheming, p. 54.

24. Wu Guoyuan, ed., photographic plates.

25. HYQNJ, p. 97.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 86; see also, Zhang Guchu, p. 78.

27. HYQNJ, p. 116.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

29. QNYZJJY, p. 129. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 78, 92, and 117.

30. Lü Zhenhuan, p. 88. See also, HYQNJ, p. 183.

Regiment reported long training hikes in snow wearing “superior leather shoes”, a euphemism for bare feet.³¹

The youth’s accounts highlighted the contrast between the physical military life amidst nature with their former urban lives. The “fresh air” of the army bases is noted often. Chongqing and their urban pasts are painted as “gray”, “muddy”, and “foggy”.³² Visiting reporters wrote that they “left the crowded and unhappy characters of Chongqing to see these lively youths” in bases smelling of flowers and springtime air. Escape to nature was the cure for the youths’ tiredness and despair. One recruit exclaimed ecstatically: “Training in the wilds is real happiness! . . . Returning after training in the wilds, everyone’s spirits were excited, the entire troop sang loudly! When all you have is happiness, where is tiredness to be found?”³³

Political Technologies of the Self: Xunlian (Training)

The Nationalist military authorities applied a whole range of “hard” and “soft” techniques in the YA. Many were not military, but used in civilian political organizations as well. Julia Strauss has analyzed the importance of “training” (*xunlian* 訓練) for the Nationalists. A key component of political life after 1927, *xunlian* often conflated two different meanings: military or physical drill on the one hand, and civilian intellectual or technical training on the other. From the 1930s on, *xunlian* was associated with “a series of short-term training courses largely centred on the military with the announced objectives of rapid acquisition of technical military skills *and* indoctrination into the ‘revolutionary’ norms of loyalty and obedience to the central military leadership.”³⁴ As such, it was a means for organizations – notably the KMT party and government – to control and “generate commitment” from people. Thus, the soldiers’ bodies were not the only thing being trained in the camps; Nationalist leaders were determined to make political education a key part of the youth soldiers’ experience.

The Youth Army used both rituals and games, each imparting a different trajectory to the training experience. Rituals were scripted actions and served the purposes of internal integration, uniting the volunteers even with their superiors. Distinctions within the YA were minimized in the ritual

31. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 362-3.

32. HYQNJ, pp. 84, 134, and 138.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

34. Julia Strauss, “The Evolution of Republican Government,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 150, June 1997, pp. 344, 345, and 347.

sphere. In contrast, games reinforced the soldiers' volitional space. With their zero-sum nature – there are winners and losers in any contest – games stressed differentiation. Together, rituals and games delineated the social and political space of the volunteers.

Political work in the Youth Army was important to Chiang Kaishek, in part because it was a power base for his son. Despite this naked political motivation, political education in the YA also embodied a type of politico-military technology: nurturing thinking, independent, politically aware soldiers. This ideal was a combination of independence and discipline, of a developed mind and body working in concert, of political and battlefield awareness. Modern soldiers were to have a disciplined mind housed in a vigorous, forged, machine-like body, and to put both in service of the individual's national consciousness.

Much of the Youth Army's training activities, thus, were political in nature. Heir to a growing tradition of politicized education for soldiers that began with Sun Yatsen's 1921 speech on "The Spiritual Education of Soldiers" and deepened through the influence of German advisors during the 1930s, the range of political programs in the Youth Army was wide, including academic lectures by experts and ideological speeches focusing on Sun's Three Principles, the current state of the war and international politics, and even government social policies.³⁵ Morale Speeches (*jingshen jianghua* 精神講話) were offered three times a week and included personal visits from top leaders. In addition, the soldiers were put into a system of small group meetings and discussions that were drawn directly from Leninist political practice and thus shared by the CCP, the Youth Corps, and the more active cells of the KMT.

As head of its political administration, Jiang Jingguo set the repertoire of Youth Army political culture and practices, particularly the methods of propaganda production and the emphasis on autobiographical writing. During his years in Russia, Jiang Jingguo absorbed from the Russian Communist Party techniques that he imported into the Youth Army. One of these was the need for small group discussions.³⁶ A second was a commitment to individual and small-group propaganda production, including wall papers.³⁷ A related practice was autobiographical writing: diaries of thoughts and actions

35. GJZGSG, vol. 2, pp. 931-3.

36. To the students at Sunovka the curriculum seemed to be "Meetings First!"; Jiang Nan, pp. 38-42.

37. Jiang Jingguo himself wrote an acclaimed article for Sunovka's bulletin board, the Red Wall, titled "Reforming the Heart before Conducting Revolution." It was so well received that the 15 year old Jiang

were kept as the basis for self-criticisms that Sunovka students wrote and discussed. All these Russian influences Jiang Jingguo imported to the Youth Army via political cadres.³⁸ Individually produced stories and diaries for self-criticism both involved autobiographical writing. Thus, the YA was heavily engaged in writing itself, its failings, its successes, its past, and its future. Taking up the pen and writing about themselves was one of the Youth Army's central activities: the production of propaganda about itself.

Self-Writing: Propaganda of the Citizen

Benedict Anderson has argued that national communities are invented through imagination: first fictionalized and only then realized. The conceptual ground of modernity, “homogenous, empty time” shared by all, was spread by newspaper stories and books – links between stories were imagined, based on calendrical coincidence.³⁹ Other theorists, notably Anthony Giddens, have argued that self-narration is at the center of modernity, a key component of modern self-identity. Giddens highlights what he calls the “reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives.”⁴⁰ This project places the sense of self in terms of a “trajectory”; the person “*lives* a biography”, making decisions about how to live in a story of the unfolding of a self-identity.⁴¹ In this reflexive project of selfhood, autobiography and journal writing hold a special place as “a corrective intervention into the past, not merely a chronicle of elapsed events” but as “an interpretive self-history produced by the individual concerned . . . [that] is actually at the core of self-identity in modern social life.”⁴²

China had a long tradition of diary writing among the educated elite during imperial times, but the practice was widely promoted and enforced by educational and work institutions in the twentieth-

was made an editor of the bulletin board; Taylor, *The Generalissimo's Son*, p. 43.

38. Other Nationalist organizations, such as the Fuxingshe and the Lixingshe, adopted this practice; Wang Yüewu, *Cong zuoren dao zuozhan*, p. 53. Chiang had a Confucian take on this practice, recording his failings in regular “Self-reflections” (反省錄) – though these were intensely private documents. Youth Corps cells were to have “life-based self-criticism and mutual criticism”; qz0052.mj1-4, pp. 87-8 n.d.

39. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6 and 24.

40. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 5.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 14. Giddens continues: “A person’s identity is not to be found in behavior nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography ... [is an] ongoing ‘story’ about the self”; *ibid.*, p. 54.

42. Giddens, *Modernity*, p. 72 and 76.

century.⁴³ Students' daily or weekly journals were read and graded by teachers. The importance of the practice of self-narration is revealed by an (ironically autobiographical) anecdote related by Fei Xiaotong. In discussing the realities of rural life that make literacy a superfluous skill, Fei remembers his experience writing diaries for elementary school. After a few weeks of these assignments, the young Fei realized that his days were all alike, a routine of waking up, going to school, playing with friends, and going asleep. So, he began writing "same as above" in his diary. The teacher quickly tired of the cop out, despite its honesty, and prohibited it. At that point, Fei "had to make up lies."⁴⁴ Writing the self in narrative (as opposed to repetition and stasis) was so important that fabrications trumped truth. Such theoretical observations and anecdotes inform our reading of the Youth Army's propaganda: the youth soldiers' autobiographical stories fleshed out a self-story of national citizenry. Even "self-fictionalizing", the volunteers' disclosed how they wished to be seen in their writings.

During the selection process, volunteers wrote short autobiographies (*zizhuan* 自傳). This was a common device for evaluating a person for participation in Nationalist state structures, including candidates for KMT party membership and *baojia* personnel.⁴⁵ Such autobiographies were often formulaic and terse. Those written by Youth Army volunteers were not. Every division had an editorial committee that read the enlistee's self-narratives. Those with good content were to be published by the Youth Army's press and in government newspapers, while the rest were kept on file.⁴⁶ The volume of literary output by the YA suggests that this "self-writing" was an integral part of the the YA's purpose, a part of the package of technologies the Nationalist state used to coax a politically reliable body of citizen-soldiers into being.

The production of its own propaganda was essential for the Youth Army; from the outset, the volunteers were self-reporters, producing their own news, a role the Ministry of Information praised.⁴⁷

43. Sherman Cochran and Andrew C.K. Hsieh, trans., *One Day in China, May 21, 1936*, p. 51. In the 1930s, the Bank of China in Shanghai required new white-collar staff to keep diaries as part of their moral-occupational training; Yeh, "Corporate Space, Communal Time," pp. 108-9.

44. Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil*, p. 57.

45. Applicants to Whampoa were required to submit an autobiographical essay on their desire to serve their country; Fenby, *Chiang Kai-shek*, p. 68.

46. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 309; QNJS, vol. 2, p. 378; and GJZGSG, vol. 2, p. 928. The body of published writings by the volunteers include many which describe their lives, as well as the hows and whys of their volunteering. These are likely the pieces selected for publication by the editing committees.

47. qz0051.mj2-397 pp. 164a-6a n.d.

Two papers were printed and distributed until the youths were inducted into their units: *Youth Army* (*Qingnianjun* 青年軍) and *Female Youth* (*Nüqingnian* 女青年) were charged with describing the recruits' daily life, but they also carried editorials, art, poetry, and cartoons. After induction, each unit wrote and published its own wall newspaper (牆報), which were pasted up in and outside barracks. Units dispatched news briefs directly to newspapers, so that there was virtually daily coverage on the recruiting drive and YA units in major papers in early 1945.⁴⁸ Some units pursued a more literary approach. The 604th Regiment collected poetry, articles, essays, and lyric accounts written by the soldiers and published them in a small volume titled *Art in the Army* (軍中文藝). The euphoria was palpable. "Setting Out" (出發), by one Su Zimei (蘇子梅), exclaimed, "everyone had a happy feeling in their hearts. If we hadn't joined the Youth Army, I'm afraid during my whole life I wouldn't have had the chance for today!"⁴⁹

While not the only Nationalist group to use self-writing to motivate people, the Youth Army was uniquely prolific in doing so. Because the volunteers' took themselves as their subject matter, an examination of their writings is also look at their self-identities, the results of the political culture and practices within the barracks.

Self-Identities of Soldier-Citizens

If the Youth Army rituals marked the volunteers' transformation from civilian to soldier then the political technologies to which they were subjected formed the contours of the new soldier identity. The political technologies bore fruit in how the soldiers saw themselves and interacted with each other, with their superiors, and with society.

Military training not only added martiality to the youth soldiers, but also removed negative elements of civilian life. Heading Chiang's calls to wipe away China's shameful feebleness,⁵⁰ the volunteers drew on blood images to express their determination to leave behind the sloth and decadence that had invited foreign aggression. While Japan's invasion was fetishized in bloody cartoons and literature, the youth soldiers wrote positively about their own "hot blood."⁵¹ "Boiling blood" was a sign

48. QNJS, vol. 2, pp. 366-80.

49. CQMA materials (資料), magazine section (雜誌), #307, *passim*. The quote is from page 65.

50. See Chiang's speeches in HYQNJ, p. 1 and GMWX, vol. 63, p. 292 and 314.

51. HYQNJ, p. 47. For some examples of the fetishization of blood, see the graphic cartoons in *Guangzhou manhua* or in Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, pp. 101-5 and the poem "Chinese Are Not To Be Trifled

of patriotic anger, bravery, determination.⁵² Their surging, super-heated blood was to be sacrificial; one student, urged others to enlist by declaring that “only when one's own blood flows can we have true results.”⁵³

Youth soldiers contrasted the cowardice of those who abandoned China in its hour of need with their own bravery. One recruit vented his recently-discovered disdain for the soft life of the interior: “[My former friends] think that the army's usefulness doesn't go beyond protecting the secure interior, providing [protection] for those who are living as if drunk or enjoying their dreams! . . . The darkness of homefront society really makes one utterly detest it.”⁵⁴ Another explained that any “regular person can manage to do the usual jobs in an institution, so, I am willing to take this useful vigor of youth and make a direct contribution to the battle for protecting the country.” A third declared that he “cannot live an ordinary life, nor die an ordinary death.”⁵⁵

The youth soldiers lacked battle experience, but they were convinced that their new soldierly life had removed the causes of China's weakness. Barracks life forged a group identity: “military life is the only real collective life. Thirty of us sleep together on a single large bed.”⁵⁶ It also erased the acrimony and temptations of urban civilian life. Training was a “baptism” that cemented them as soldiers who were “married to their country.”⁵⁷ One reporter remarked at the remarkable transformation on the bases: “They are already soldiers. . . . They already have soldiers' consciousness and understand the importance of discipline. When they entered the army, everyone liked to be called ‘classmate’; now they call themselves soldiers.”⁵⁸

With” in Wang Yaping, *Zhongguo bing de huaxiang*, pp. 41-2.

52. HYQNJ, p. 10.

53. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 339. Blood images were gendered. Christina Gilmartin in her study of mass movements in the 1920s, has pointed out that women's relationship to the prevalent blood rhetoric in the wake of the 1925 May Thirtieth Incident was problematic at best; Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 135-6. Gilmartin is interested in female activists' perception of themselves as *targets* of violence due to their increased visibility. Youth Army sources lend support to this in that the hot, blood refers exclusively to male volunteers. Sacrificial blood was patriotic and masculine.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-40 and 345.

56. HYQNJ, p. 84.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-5.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

The YA soldiers felt themselves to be exceptional soldiers. They compared themselves favorably to the conscripts that made up the vast majority of the Nationalist armies. Their specialness was publicly confirmed by the celebrations of volunteering and being shipped to their units.⁵⁹ Far above peasant conscripts, they did not want to serve alongside “stupid people.”⁶⁰ Their intellectual capacity was their defining characteristic; mental prowess made them superior soldiers. But the youth soldiers did not stop there; they even looked down on Whampoa Academy cadets, who were “unlearned and without skill.”⁶¹ The most exciting aspect of the Youth Army was that the educational level of the soldiers greatly sped up the training process.⁶² One youth soldier boasted:

in the space of five days we mastered light machine guns. ... because of our high degree of knowledge and the ease with which we accept training. Therefore, the training cadres said over and over, 'China will certainly revive as long as it has you guys. Common soldiers have difficulty mastering the light machine gun in a year, but you have done so in just five or six days. This is just great!’⁶³

The ability to learn quickly was central to the recruits' self-identities as elite youth soldiers.

Modern Scholar-Warriors (Shi): The Reunion of *Wen* and *Wu*

For all their proud claims to be modern “scientific” soldiers, the youth volunteers were at pains to connect themselves to China’s past. Many scholars have pointed out that modern nations have required the construction of (Hegelian) History with an authentic antiquity as the national essence.⁶⁴ In line with this, Youth Army propaganda repeatedly invoked a revival of China’s ancient tradition of scholar-warriors (*shi* 士). In a conversation with a reporter, an officer opined that people had neglect-

59. Regular conscripts were supposed to enjoy send-off rallies, but this was almost never done.

60. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 291-2 and *Dagongbao*, 16 January 1945.

61. Deng Wenyi, *Maoxian fannan ji*, vol. 1, p. 112. Wang Ni, in his postwar novel about a Youth Army soldier on Taiwan, expressed unbridled disdain for the many uneducated, illiterate generals in the Nationalist army; Wang Ni, *Zouguo kongbu de shidai*, pp. 45-6.

62. Zhang Guchu, p. 78. The Youth Army’s instructors were trained under the US Army in Burma and emphasized practical skills through a rotation system of training; HYQNJ, p. 77; Liu Kaihan (1984), p.111; HYQNJ, p. 187; Wu Guoyuan, p. 7; and Huang Wei, p. 72.

63. HYQNJ, p. 78. Ironically, Maury Feld’s analysis of the Army of the Dutch Republic suggests that the revolutionary impact of the gun was based on the fact that firearms “economized on training and minimized individual skill and experience.” Technical mastery, easily and rapidly taught by manager-trainers using drill, replaced individual prowess and skill; Feld, *The Structure of Violence*, pp. 169-83.

64. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5 and 11, and the chapter “Memory and Forgetting” on pages 187-206; Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, pp. 3-82; and Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, pp. 131-70.

ed the *shi* character in the word soldier (*shibing* 士兵): “The spirit of the *shi* expresses the soul of China. . . . The spirit of the *shi* is to lead all; the *shi* have substance and soul. If we are to revive the nation we must first restore [their] grand spirit.”⁶⁵ Confucius and his disciples were appropriated as a “glorious tradition” for the youth soldiers to follow, an age when learning (*wen* 文) and martiality (*wu* 武) were united in the Six Arts (ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics).⁶⁶ A legacy of intellectual youth who, “whenever the country faced danger, would drop their brushes and pick up weapons to defend the country” was publicized.⁶⁷ Deng Wenyi, involved in all sorts of shady wartime activities on behalf of Chiang, said of the youth soldiers:

The intellectual youth are [now] armed, militarizing literate men. At the same time, although the officers and men are all martial men (武人), they all have rich culture within the army. The education of the Youth Army, with the Six Arts as the core, emphasizes rites and music, archery and charioteering, and does not neglect academic research in letters and mathematics. The unity of civil and martial handed down through China’s ages, complete education in both *wen* and *wu*, has been revived.⁶⁸

The youth soldiers’ mastery of the gun was the heart of uniting the civil and military arts. Calls for intellectuals to master weapons were an extension of a long-standing discourse going back to Li Hongzhang.⁶⁹ Mastering the martial object, the volunteers reunited the pieces of a “complete” (ideal) man in themselves. Chiang lauded the merits of a battle-scarred life, telling the volunteers a life under the gun was central to becoming whole men.

If you want to fulfill yourselves, temper your bodies, realize the ambitions of your entire lives, undertake your great enterprise, and become an exceptional person of talent, then you certainly must come study and forge [yourself] in a life of battle. The battlefield is the only school where we can create the foundation for our enterprise. Amidst the cannon fire, we

65. HYQNJ, p. 181.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 1; also, GMWX, vol. 63, p. 62 and QNYZJJY, p. 9. The YA misappropriated the *shi*, who were not scholar-warriors, but the lowest level of the Zhou nobility, men whose “authority [was] based on noble descent and martial valor”; Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, p. 32.

67. HYQNJ, p. 1. Youth Army sources claimed that *wen* and *wu* parted ways in the Northern Song, with the *muji* (募集) or *mubing* (募兵) systems of military service; and tellingly, the foreign dynasties of the Yuan and Qing were devoid of intellectual youth; GMWX, vol. 63, p. 62 and QNYZJJY, pp. 9-18.

68. QNYZJJY, pp. 129-32, from an article published 25 June 1945, in the *Central Daily*. With militarized drill at virtually all levels of the educational system, schools were supposed to achieve the same goal; Xiao Xiaoqin and Zhong Xingjin, *Kangri zhanzheng wenhua shi (1937-1945)*, pp. 304-16. However, there is no indication that such ideas ever found any real resonance in the self-images of students. The YA was unique in this regard.

69. Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhonggong quanji*, pp. 70-2; quoted in Ssu-yu Teng and John King Fairbank, *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*, reprint ed., p. 70.

can increase and advance our wisdom, courageous spirit, and physical strength. ... You must know that after you join up, on the battlefield you will obtain even broader and more precious knowledge and education. In ancient times and modern, in China and abroad, there have been many mighty undertakings and noble persons, they were all forged out of the hardships of the warrior's life *among the forest of guns and rain of bullets*.⁷⁰

The youth soldiers were eager to master the gun.

Archery and charioteering were [the aristocracy's] duty. ... Archery was like today's firing machine guns or artillery; charioteering like today's driving tanks or airplanes. If one did not practice archery or charioteering, then one simply could not be counted as a warrior-scholar [*shi* 士]. ... All Confucius' disciples practiced archery and charioteering. This is no different than saying if [we] only want to attain to [the level of] Confucius' students, then all of us will practice shooting machine guns and artillery and driving tanks and airplanes. Several of Confucius' disciples even went to war.⁷¹

The speed with which the volunteers were trained gave credence to the Nationalist claims of a revival. Reporters were told with pride that barely forty-five days after beginning formal training the soldiers were already superior marksmen.⁷² Another student confessed that he had been afraid of guns, but now had mastered four different kinds of firearms and felt completely "soldierized" (*qiubale* 丘八了).⁷³ In official rhetoric at least, the volunteers were transforming civil officials' disdain for the military and simultaneously "bringing culture to the army."⁷⁴

The Nationalist state developed a variation on the long-belabored theme of the defects of Chinese culture which had rendered the nation "the sick man of Asia". China needed educated men but they had to combine this education with a physical vigorousness not found in the polluted, effete, and soft urban environment. The unity of civil and military arts (*wenwu heyi* 文武合一) was recast as the essence of Chinese culture. Historical precedents were paraded as China's authentic roots that modern men as citizens had to realize in themselves. The youth soldiers through their mastery of the gun-object were the first ranks of this new, complete Chinese man.

Military Familism: Men, Officers, and the Leader Cult

Believing they embodied the complete national man, the youth soldiers enjoyed a strikingly orig-

70. GMWX, vo. 63, pp. 289-90.

71. QNYZJJY, p. 9.

72. HYQNJ, p. 129.

73. QNYZJJY, p. 150.

74. GMWX, vol. 62, pp. 249-50.

inal relationship with their superiors, one which reworked the familiar family metaphor. But, rather than the pre-existing familial bonds of the Qing armies, the Youth Army familism was to be forged *in the units themselves* and thus consisted of emotive ties created by the common experience and close quarters of military life itself.

In one sense, familial and fraternal terms were nothing new for the Nationalists. Until Sun's death in 1925, the revolutionary movement had relied on "bonds of fraternity" among activists who traced their revolutionary parentage back to Sun. Ideological correctness replaced ties of emotion and personal connections: revolutionaries of both parties dropped the term "brother" in favor of "comrade".⁷⁵ Despite this change, familial metaphors were not abandoned completely. Chiang's interaction with his army was parental; he maintained a "familial relationship" with Whampoa graduates and cadets.⁷⁶

Youth Army units were communities of males in which the relationship between men and officers, and amongst the men themselves, were understood in familial terms, which would make the Youth Army a model to rectify the abuses common in the regular Chinese military where officers lived like royalty, not caring if their men died of starvation, cold, or lack of medicine.⁷⁷ In contrast, interpersonal interactions in Youth Army units were to be "school-ized" and "family-ized": officer-men relationships were supposed to be patterned on the teacher-pupil and father-son model, while the youth soldiers themselves were to relate as classmates and brothers.⁷⁸ Dai Zhiqi, commander of the 201st division, was fond of saying, "squad leaders are not only to be the lord [*jun* 君] of the soldiers, nor just their teachers, but their parents as well."⁷⁹ Direct coercive authority was to be limited to instances of military necessity. Predictably, Chiang Kaishek was the head of this patriline, regularly expressing his concern for the youth soldiers as his children.⁸⁰

Through his speeches, Chiang forged a direct connection with the youth soldiers as part of incul-

75. Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, p. 257 and also see Hans J. van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920-1927*, *passim*.

76. Chen Tingxiang, "Lun zhanzheng shiqi Guomindang de zhengzhi jianshe", *Kangri zhanzheng yanjiu*, 2:1999, p. 209. See also, Zhang Ruide, *Kangzhan shiqi di guojun renshi*, p. 153.

77. Wang Yuewu, *Cong zuoren dao zuozhan*, p. 35.

78. HYQNJ, pp. 89 and 41. Also, QNYZJJY, p. 145.

79. HYQNJ, p. 75.

80. XSCJ, pp. 129-30 or GMWX, vol. 62, pp. 180-8. See also GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 287-8.

cating faith in The Leader.⁸¹ In some government accounts, Chiang's voice becomes the motive power for the IYVM and YA: the youth volunteers responded to "the call of our highest leader's great personality."⁸² And indeed, the sound of Chiang's voice is mentioned and described often in Youth Army writings. Its effect was electric and drew recruits into almost trance-like states. A soldier recounted a speech by Chiang, saying that his "clear voice" spread out over the assembled soldiers and his "bright eyes seemingly illuminated our very hearts, we were that excited and moved."⁸³ Statements of this sort bring to mind the "speech ritual" of fascist leaders, as analyzed by Klaus Theweleit – the merging of the individual with a "larger whole" embodied in The Leader infused speeches with meaning for listeners.⁸⁴ The soldiers reported intense physiological reactions that accompanied any close encounter with The Leader: rising body heat, surging blood, involuntary smiling, blushing, and general agitation.⁸⁵

Egalitarianism, Democracy, and Self-Government

Although the officer-men relationship in the Youth Army was characterized in safe-sounding familial terms, it held dangers for the regime: an emphasis on egalitarianism existed in tension with paternal hierarchy. Officers were under orders to maintain easy relationships with the volunteers, who already felt that they were at least the equals of their superiors. This sense of equality could be debilitating in a military context.⁸⁶ More positively, the Youth Army was an attempt to "democratize" the

81. GJZGSG, vol. 2, pp. 935 and 938. For a perceptive contemporary discussion of Chiang's character, including the importance of his "personal discipline" for understanding the man and the "demigod" leader, see White and Jacoby, *Thunder out of China*, pp. 119-31. See also, Chen Tingxiang, p. 190.

82. qz0063.mj1-881, pp. 66-7 dated 30 May 1946. In other youth-oriented propaganda, Chiang's voice, his personal "call", brought into being the "spiritual fortress" of resistance against Japan and aroused China's men to enlist in the army. See Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan zhongyang tuan ganbu, ed., *Zhanshi Zhongguo qingnian xin dongtai*, 1945, p. 4 (CQMA, materials (资料) section, politics (政治类) subsection, item #739); this emphasis on Chiang's call is repeated again and again in this text as it recounts the origins of the IYVM.

83. HYQNJ, p. 16.

84. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies volume two: male bodies, psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, pp. 130-42.

85. For an account – which would be comic except for its utter sincerity – of Chiang's inspection of a Youth Army barracks which caught a soldier in a dirty uniform but not daring to change out of fear of getting caught naked or half-dressed, see HYQNJ, pp. 17-8. Other anecdotes are found in QNYZJJY, pp. 105 and 111-20.

86. Egalitarian citizenship led to a rift between soldiers and officers in the French military in World War One; Prost, *In the Wake of War*, pp. 53-4.

military through “self-government” (*zizhi* 自治). Despite its long history under the Nationalists, this term in the YA usually referred to the soldiers' assumption of responsibilities surrounding the purchase, preparation, and distribution of food.

A general informality dominated barracks and bases. Youth soldiers felt their relationship with officers was downright friendly. One writer noted that in the Youth Army “except on the drill ground . . . officers chat with the foot-soldiers, go to the theater and joke with them, and even play mahjong together or sing martial songs.”⁸⁷ Deliberate policy by military authorities, the informal atmosphere was encouraged by the fact that officers and men wore identical gray uniforms. One observer commented that a regimental commander in the YA was nearly indistinguishable from the soldiers, only his collar insignia set him apart.⁸⁸ The contrast with regular military practice could not have been more stark: warlord and Nationalist armies exhibited a sharp distinction between the drab, cheap cotton uniforms of the enlisted men and the smart, leather and feather bedecked uniforms of officers.⁸⁹ Nearly indistinguishable from his superiors, one soldier wrote that the easy relationship between his company commander and the soldiers “gave full play to the spirit of democracy.”⁹⁰

This atmosphere of “democracy” meant officers were more accessible not just to fun and games but also to criticism. Confrontations between the soldiers and officers could inflict significant loss of authority for the officers. In one unit, a soldier who had a grievance against a junior officer sought out a public confrontation, which resulted in permission for the soldiers to establish a self-government council and food committee.⁹¹

Food provision was far from a trivial matter. Military corruption frequently involved commanders embezzling supply funds. Commanders did not report casualties and so received extra ration funds for the dead soldiers or they dispensed little or no food to their units, pocketing the money

87. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 362-3 and HYQNJ, p. 79.

88. Even Jiang Jingguo's elite political cadres wore plain black insignia that minimized differences between them and volunteers, stressing their shared character as volunteers; Li Zhongshu, p. 106. QNYZJJY, p. 168 and HYQNJ, p. 79. In Europe, fascist uniforms symbolically expressed Fascism's social unity, specifically the “abolition of social differences”; Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, p. 39.

89. Lary, *Warlord Soldiers*, p. 52. The obvious difference encoded a distinction that was as much social as it was military, since officers came from an entirely different social stratum than regular soldiers.

90. HYQNJ, p. 50.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

while the soldiers foraged on their own. Consequently, dietary conditions in regular units were often abysmal. Soldiers rarely ate meat, and thus, lacked protein, vitamins and essential minerals. They suffered from a host of maladies brought on by prolonged malnutrition.⁹²

In YA bases, the soldier-run committees managed food provision. Food committees sold extra rice in the soldiers' rations to locals and then bought additional meat and vegetables with the profit.⁹³ The soldiers were thriftier than the military bureaucracy and so food was more plentiful and of better quality. Committees pointed out that they prevented corruption too, though they were not entirely successful on that score.⁹⁴ Self-government committees also held wider responsibilities, like handling research, recreation, benefits, discipline for infractions, and voicing the soldiers' opinions to their superiors.⁹⁵ Company commanders solicited the soldiers' opinions on daily life, such as what time to return to base from a Sunday leave or when to halt an evening social gathering that was going poorly.

This "democratic" atmosphere, even limited to areas that were not of military importance, was critical to the youth soldiers. The democratic command style contrasted with the coercive methods and the "feudal ideas of the warlords".⁹⁶ As one soldier remarked, they volunteered because they "wanted to fight for democracy, to sacrifice for democracy" and could thus expect to enjoy democracy within the military.⁹⁷ The soldiers followed orders and submitted to rigorous training because of the Youth Army's "self-government, self-management" culture and the "mutual respect" between themselves and their officers – without these the soldiers would withhold obedience.⁹⁸ Thus, the Youth

92. Most common were xerophthalmia (dry eye from lack of vitamin A, untreated it causes blindness), trachoma, skin infections, parasitic infections, and anemia; F.F. Liu, *A Military History*, p. 138.

93. Perhaps this practice was adopted from refugee students, who organized committees to plan and purchase food; Paul Mortiz, "I Visit Chinese Schools," *Far Eastern Magazine* 3:5 (May 1940), p. 7.

94. Wu Zhirong, p. 32; HYQNJ, pp. 25, 45-6, 76, 82, and 92-3. Lü, a political officer in the 202D stationed at Qijiang (Sichuan) engaged in the traditional form of military corruption: taking the pay and rations from the vacancies within his unit; Lü Zhenhuan, pp. 94-5.

95. HYQNJ, pp. 71-3 and 94. Naturally this freedom to voice opinions was limited to non-military matters; *ibid.*, p. 82.

96. HYQNJ, pp. 55 and 72; Wu Zhirong, p. 32. Division commanders sometimes held open meetings for recruits to raise issues and questions for the officers; HYQNJ, p. 69.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

98. HYQNJ., p. 38.

Army was a model of a democratic military of politically active soldiers, but the youth soldiers' cooperation and docility was conditional.

Domestic Peacemakers: Easing Civilian-Military Tensions

Every aspect of the Youth Army was shot through with political motives, both internally towards the volunteers and externally towards society; it was hoped that the Youth Army would erase soldiering's social stigma, uniting the army and society.⁹⁹ Animosity between communities and the military was a longstanding open sore for the Nationalists, marked by mutual disdain and fear.¹⁰⁰ Within the army, calling someone a “commoner” was a serious insult, more offensive than saying “Fuck eight generations of your ancestors!”¹⁰¹ Yet, even career military men admitted that the army and its lack of discipline were the real root of the problem.¹⁰²

The Youth Army was to repair the rocky relationship between the military and society. Unfinished barracks and multi-day training hikes meant that soldiers were quartered in schools, stores, and homes. Some bases were placed in sensitive areas to repair relations with local communities.¹⁰³ In urban areas, the Youth Army helped prepare for air raids and gas attacks.¹⁰⁴ In outlying districts, the soldiers undertook service projects, like clean up duty, road building and repair. The backwater town of Tongliang was “unbearably filthy”, with streets littered with “cow, horse, and kid shit.” Journalists remarked on the town's transformation once a Youth Army unit was stationed nearby: streets were clean and well-swept and walls adorned with beautiful slogans and Youth Army posters, newspapers, calligraphy, and patriotic cartoons. A soldier boasted that his unit had “built a bridge between the army and the people.”¹⁰⁵

99. Undated propaganda directive, qz0051.mj2-397 pp. 164a-6a. See also GMWX, vol. 63, p. 304.

100. As early as 1927, KMT leaders realized that they needed establish better relations between the army and civilians. Significantly, they starting with getting officers and men within the army to treat each other respectfully; Fitzgerald, p. 292, 300.

101. Zhang Tuowu, *Daima shuzu xuji*, p. 91.

102. Wang Yuewu, *Cong zuoren dao zuozhan*, p. 27 and 54.

103. The 639R (209D) was stationed in Ruijin, Jiangxi, which was selected to prevent any communist resurgence in an area with a history of successful organizing and to impress residents with a sympathetic and helpful National military, after the years of violence and destruction inflicted on them by extermination campaigns of the early 1930s.; Wu Guoyuan, p. 1-4.

104. GJZGSG, vol. 2, p. 930.

105. HYQNJ, pp. 33-4 and 151; see also, p. 130.

Much of the “bridge” between communities and the Youth Army existed only to the wishful-thinking youth soldiers. Rapes of local girls by Youth Army officers were not unheard of and were generally covered up.¹⁰⁶ And when youth soldiers drove prices up in an area, their divisions were sometimes able to pressure local authorities to give discounts to the soldiers, exacerbating local resentment -- hardly shining examples of military-civilian cooperation.¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, the youth soldiers were convinced that they were successfully remaking China’s interior. In the small booklet *Art in the Army* (軍中文藝), the men of the 604th Regiment wrote poems and short essays. Stationed at Qijiang, about sixty km from Chongqing, the youths wrote of their beneficial effect on the area. In their imagination, China’s interior was overgrown, neglected, unclean, useless, and wild -- a wasted space. They alone could clean it up, beautify it, build it up, and remake it as national land. A second theme was dreaming: poems are full of dreamlike qualities and titles often contain the word *meng* (to dream 夢). Repeated invocations of dreaming suggests an unconscious admission of a distinct unreality in their self-images and sense of mission.¹⁰⁸ The volunteers inhabited a lush dreamland, but many of their most intense dreams and fantasies centered on an object that both they invested with intricate meanings and a dominating importance, namely the rifle.

Men with Guns

Unsurprisingly, the rifle figured prominently in the rituals of becoming a soldier, the rhetoric of the state, and the imaginations of the volunteers. In one way this was unremarkable: militaries always impress on their soldiery the importance of their weapons. Yet, the cluster of fantasies and statements about the gun in the Youth Army was exceptional. The volunteers’ desire for the rifle was so intense that they fantasized about it in sexual terms, though they did not cast the weapon as a phallus, but as a

106. Lü Zhenhuan, pp. 92-3.

107. HYQNJ, pp. 89-90.

108. *Junzhong wenyi* (軍中文藝), n.d. (CQMA materials (資料), magazine section (杂志类), #307).

feminine lover.¹⁰⁹ Two poems, written by youth soldiers in the 205D, portray a feminized gun, a seductive and fetishized object.¹¹⁰

“Nightsong of the Plains” [草原夜歌]

A secluded and quiet night [一個幽靜的夜晚]
On the vast plains [在那蒼茫的草原上]
There is a beautiful lass [有一個漂亮的姑娘]
Laying in the grass beside a hero [躺在草原英雄的身旁]
He kisses her bountiful breast [他吻着她豐滿的乳房]
She throws him an enchanting glance [她擲給她迷人的眼光]
How joyfully the two embrace! [兩個人擁抱多麼歡狂]
Drawn out gunshots come to them [送來了拽長的槍聲]
Devils march into the village [鬼子們踏進了村莊]
With unbounded, joyous laughter, [it] becomes a killing field [無限的歡笑成了屠場]¹¹¹

“She” (她)

Young in years [輕輕的年紀]
A gentle and graceful figure [窈窕的身材]
Like a fresh beautiful flower [似一支美麗的鮮花]
She and I stand under a shady tree [我和她站在隱蔽的樹下]
 keeping watch to the ends of the earth [守望天涯]
She follows me close until the end [她終日緊隨着我]
I love her deeply [我深深的戀愛她]
She and I hold hands and talk secrets [我和她攜手密話]
On the long embankment roams a crow [長堤漫步着烏鴉]¹¹²

Yet, in contrast, Chiang Kaishek was directly associated with the Youth Army rifles: the memorial volume for the 639th Regiment contains a diagram of the “Chiang Kaishek model rifle.” The mod-

109. Rifles in western militaries have been invested with both sides of the sexual coin. In the U.S. Marine Corps’ famous chant, the gun is parallel to the phallus: “This is my rifle! This [gesture at crotch] is my gun! This is for fighting! This is for fun!”; Richard Allen Burns, “‘This is my rifle, this is my gun ...’: Gunlore in the Military,” *New Directions in Folklore*, vol. 7, 2003, online at: <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/6906> (accessed 2012). A British poet writing after World War One, captured the opposite attitude in the lines: “Marry it man! Marry it! / Cherish her, she’s your very own”; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 153, citing David Jones, *In Parenthesis*, New York, 1963 (first published 1937), p. 183.

110. Youth Army soldiers were not the only ones to cast the gun as as a feminine companion. The title poem of Wang Yaping’s *A Portrait of the Chinese Soldier* describes the Chinese soldier: “He had a beautiful companion / It was the steel gun on his shoulder”; Wang Yaping, *Zhongguobing de huaxiang*, p. 2.

111. QNYZJ, pp. 143-4.

112. *Ibid.*, p. 146. In the second half of line four, I read *tianya* (天涯), instead of *tianwo* (天渥).

speeches *about* the Youth Army, the tone here was a far cry from lofty political rhetoric – it was the voice of an elder giving young men advice about the trials of military training because he was personally involved in the success of each individual. He called for the volunteers to become “nameless heroes,” for only if China “has numberless, nameless Chiang Kaisheks, able to struggle and sacrifice” would it survive.¹¹⁵ The gun, a sign for Chiang, invoked his soldierly attributes and the youths were to overwrite their own names with his and thus erase the faults of China’s intellectual, effete culture and save the nation.

Difference and Equivalence: Constructing Meanings

The key to national salvation, and their contribution to the nation, was the single-minded focus of the Youth Army on the gun. Their military life was pure, rid of the economic and socio-sexual exchange-relations of civilian life. With no “mentally taxing exams” or “stifling and boring meetings” the youths felt free from the tensions of school and work: “our thoughts are purified, we don’t hope anymore for the licentious things so common in student days, and we don’t have golden dreams [of wealth] anymore.”¹¹⁶ They rejected civilian society’s dirty and enervating exchange relations of money and sex. The soldiers erased sexual impulses, except toward the gun itself; their writings exhibit a de-sexualized masculinity that excluded women completely or subsumed them in the totality of “the people.”¹¹⁷ The youth soldiers fictionalized themselves and their soldierly community as pure and free of monetary and sexual motives.

The volunteers were also convinced that they were elite soldiers, and the rifles were at the heart of this sense of superiority over the regular army’s conscripts.¹¹⁸ As “scientific talents,” the youth sol-

115. XSCJ, p. 129 and GMWX, vol. 62, p. 187.

116. HYQNJ, p. 84. Similar sentiments are found in GMWX, vol. 63, p. 338 and 362.

117. Precious few Youth Army sources contain any hint of sexuality. Actresses in a government-dispatched drama troupe entertaining a Youth Army unit were said to have “made the young men’s hearts go wild with joy”; HYQNJ, p. 68. One youth wrote of chance encounters with groups of female students while hiking in the mountains: “Such happiness! This iron training; this poetic life!”; *ibid.*, p. 121-2. Finally, a youth soldier met up with an old flame training at a nearby women’s camp. Struck by her beauty, he finds her salute overwhelming; *ibid.*, pp. 123-5. While there are some hints of tension when female students recruited male students, the three incidents above are the extent of the sexual tension in the writings by the volunteers. The military tradition in western nations has been an exclusively male community as well, but one with a wealth of sexual metaphors and references. For a psychoanalytical dissection of male-community and the dysfunctional sexual urges behind violence in the interwar German Freikorps, see Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1.

118. Wang Zicong, p. 56 and HYQNJ, pp. 34-5.

diers could wage modern war wielding scientific weapons.¹¹⁹ China needed them because in the “age of scientific war, the mechanical defeats human strength” and only they possessed the skills to master “the technical.”¹²⁰ Their education sped up training so they mastered the skills and knowledge of modern warfare in record time. In a piece titled “For the Mothers,” a second class private, Zheng Bingsen, wrote proudly that although the Chiang Kaishek model rifle appeared simple, it was complicated when disassembled, and yet, his unit “was able within one hour of instruction to understand the entire gun, and remember most of it. The breakdown and assembly of light machine guns were mastered in forty minutes.”¹²¹ The fact that they were so suited to modern warfare justified a widely touted equivalence between the volunteers and common soldiers. Chiang in an address to the volunteers declared that “an increase of one division [of you] is no different than an increase in strength of ten regular divisions.”¹²² This outrageous boast was understandably popular among the youths.¹²³

Text and Object: The Symbolic Capital of Reading Oneself

Youth Army agencies disseminated propaganda that the volunteers themselves were busy producing as part of the recruitment drive in 1944. After the drive was over (January 1945 in Chongqing) the propaganda machine continued to churn out press conferences, news briefs, radio programs, wall newspapers, cartoons, and art shows. The gun poems quoted earlier were part of a Youth Army exhibition in April 1945.¹²⁴ State publications, like the army’s *Saodong bao*, ran pieces on the

119. QNYZJJY, pp. 26-9.

120. HYQNJ, p. 87.

121. HYQNJ, p. 116. See also, *ibid.*, 86-7, 116, and 129-30; Zhang Guchu, p. 78; and QNYZJJY, pp. 27-9

122. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 291-2. Chiang Kaishek averred that conscripts were patriotic and physically capable but lacked “knowledge and skill”.

123. QNYZJJY, p. 29. Similar boasts were common: Zhou Kaiqing, *Sichuan yu dui Ri kangzhan*, p. 255. Ironically after years of strangling volunteerist activities, Chiang may in fact have been appropriating a trope originally used by Tao Xingzhi to argue for voluntary recruitment years before. Extending his involvement with orphan care and education, Tao had promoted volunteer enlistment efforts in Beibei. During the 1939 sessions of the People’s Political Council, he sponsored a proposal for the government to back volunteer drives, even those by “independent” groups and activists. His proposal (YZSL, vol. 2, pp. 418-21) contained the statement that each willing volunteer was worth ten conscripts. Unlike Tao, Chiang and the YA, however, were not claiming that it was only a matter of psychology, the willingness to serve, but that it was the mastery of a technical object, the gun, and the speed which with he attained that mastery, that endowed the youth soldier with a (theoretical) “value” of ten regular soldiers.

124. QNYZJ, pp. 142-8.

daily life, interesting stories, and “personal aspirations and feelings” of the youth soldiers. These were read voraciously by the volunteers in their units’ reading rooms, which shared the name (Chi-ang) Kaishek with the rifles they carried.¹²⁵ Arriving in their bases in early 1945, the youth soldiers were desperate for “spiritual food” (*jingshen shiliang* 精神食粮), a metaphor for magazines, newspapers, and books.¹²⁶

Hungry for reading material, the youth soldiers dined on the propaganda feast they were helping to prepare. They devoured the *Central Daily* (and *Supplement*) because it carried letters and essays written by the youth soldiers themselves.¹²⁷ This appetite for their own writing continued after the war with commemorative volumes.¹²⁸ Even before Japan’s surrender individual divisions published books -- the 201D’s was titled *Our Division Grows Up* (本師的成長) -- and the Youth Press (青年出版社) planned a series titled *Model Youth Collectanea* (青年模範叢書).¹²⁹ At least three volumes, including those on the Youth Army and Expeditionary Force, were printed in August 1946.¹³⁰ The editor, Liu Keshu (柳克述), explained that the series would showcase China’s long tradition of educated youth who “dropped their brushes and pick up weapons to defend the country.” The final volume was dedicated to the Youth Army, the most brilliant incarnation of this legacy.¹³¹ The Youth Army national administration also published a twelve volume series, entitled *Youth Soldier Collectanea* (青年軍人叢書). The editors claimed the books would ““emphasize historical facts, unadorned, not white-washed” and written in a “lively and succinct [style], in order to be suitable for youth to read.”¹³²

We do not know who bought and read these books, but it seems almost certain that it was pri-

125. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 303-4. See also, HYQNJ, pp. 163-6.

126. HYQNJ, p. 118.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

128. In 1946 the 639th Regiment published a volume of nearly 120 pages, with numerous photographic plates; Wu Guoyuan, p. 1.

129. Ten volumes on historical precedents of educated youth soldiers; eight biographies of revolutionary martyrs, like Zou Rong and Qiu Jin; four of collected stories of bravery by soldiers, airmen, Youth Corps members, and civilians; and finally, two volumes of on the Youth Army and the Indian Expeditionary Force; see front matter (unpaginated) in HYQNJ.

130. *Huoyue qingnianjun* (HYQNJ, 活躍青年軍), *Minjian zhongyong gushiji* (民間忠勇故事集), and *Yuanzhengjun zai qianxian* (遠徵軍在前線).

131. HYQNJ p. 2.

132. QNYZJJY, preface, p. 1; my emphasis.

marily the volunteers. Many volumes were mostly reprints of newspaper articles, of little interest to anyone except those who could see themselves in its pages. These books were part of the regime's bargain with the volunteers: their writing was published and circulated, and thus conferred prestige upon the soldiers. Ironically, the avalanche of autobiographical writing that marked the Youth Army experience was eventually marketed and sold back to the volunteers. According to de Certeau, reading is not the passive activity it is often assumed to be. The idea of "scriptural imperialism," that readers are captives to the authorial intention within the text, fails to account for the activeness of the reader, who

insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body. . . . This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient.¹³³

The Youth Army soldiers, however, were both author and reader. In de Certeau's analogy, they rented their own house. This was a unique position, granted to them by the state and its media.

Like the material, educational, and vocational benefits granted to the volunteers after demobilization in 1946, the books were an attempt by the state to fulfill its promises and retain the loyalties of youth soldiers. From the outset, the national administration of the IYVM ordered that material incentives were to be played down, and recruitment must "emphasize spiritual encouragement to excite youths' patriotic heart, their sense of responsibility, sense of honor; and make the utmost effort to avoid making material incentives (*daiyu* 待遇) the main subject of propaganda."¹³⁴ Recalling the commemorative stele of the imperial era, the state mandated that after their service ended, the volunteers' original schools or institutions were to erect tablets or monuments (碑) in their honor.¹³⁵ Post-war publishing merely continued this policy. In short, prestige was the coin with which the state paid the youth soldiers for their service. The Nationalist state repaid the Youth Army volunteers with distinction – or symbolic capital – encoded in the material objects of published texts.

The symbolic recognition lavished on the Youth Army was one of the few concrete expression of Chiang's much touted drive to make soldiers the model for all citizens, under the slogan of "Soldiers

133. Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. xxi.

134. Undated draft propaganda plan: qz0051.mj3-153, pp. 31a-3b.

135. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 329-30.

First” (軍人第一).¹³⁶ Emulating Chiang, the volunteers were to be exemplary citizens for China. This was not all empty sloganeering; such model-making could be effective, at least among those who were predisposed to accept it. One Li Shifang was undecided about volunteering, until he watched a friend turn into “a hero” and “disappear in the dust behind the trucks” on his way to a Youth Army base. Witnessing his friend’s transformation made up Li’s mind to volunteer.¹³⁷ Never as stringent or total as Maoist doctrine or practice would be, the Nationalist state mobilized the Youth Army as models or exemplars of politically active, state-supporting men. Not only were they model soldiers, but model citizens as well.

Lax Discipline and Delinquency

Thus far it seems the youth-soldiers accepted their new roles and identities completely. This was not the case. The bargain between volunteers and state involved offers, rejections, and counteroffers in negotiating the terms of the exchange. Even the autobiographical propaganda they produced suggests that the youths’ identity as soldiers was contingent and conditional. Their more urbane selves were not cast away so effortlessly. For example, civilian recreations remained enticing; volunteers spent their spare time poring over movie advertisements.¹³⁸ Units threw parties which invited nearby civilians, friends, and family.¹³⁹ Similarly, discipline in the Youth Army was also a mixed bag, with youth soldiers frequently behaving badly.

In theory, the youth soldiers’ had internalized the demands of external authority, and were supposedly self-policing. This “iron discipline ... came from spurring on each volunteering comrade's self-respect.”¹⁴⁰ One reporter recalled that during a nighttime exercise soldiers refused to enter an off-limits building to escape rain and cold. Another noted that “their slogan is ‘self-respect’ and if they do not maintain discipline, they punish themselves. This is far more effective than commands.”¹⁴¹

Despite this rhetoric, volunteering had in fact left psychological space for the youth soldiers to resist authority when they felt abused. The soldiers of the 207th got wind that they were to be trans-

136. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 291.

137. HYQNJ, p. 11.

138. HYQNJ, p. 118.

139. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 310.

140. HYQNJ, p. 136, 155-6, and 163.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

ferred to the Sixth Army fighting in Burma under American command. They put up banners, protesting: “We are Chinese; we won't wear American uniforms; we don't want American guns!” “We don't want the New Sixth Army! We Want the General Inspectorate [of the Youth Army]!” Pairs of grass shoes soon decorated the base flagpole. The commander tried to assuage the soldiers' anger by increasing rations; the soldiers dumped the food on the ground in contempt, which prompted the commander to lock up the organizers of the protest. The soldiers retaliated by refusing to drill. Realizing the situation was careening out of control, the commander released those in custody and, tellingly, the 207th did not see action in Burma.¹⁴²

A second incident occurred in Wenshan (Yunnan) at the send-off celebration for the local volunteers. The mother of one of the recruits began to weep, disrupting the joyous atmosphere. Her loud sorrow threatened the fiction of families united in sending their sons off to war by revealing publicly that some youths volunteered against the wishes of parents. One of the recruiting committee scolded the mother for causing a ruckus. In the face of repeated commands to board, one of the youths angrily retorted: “I have not yet put on my uniform nor eaten one day of rations. I volunteered to join up, [so] of course I can de-volunteer to be a soldier.” The soldiers all comforted the weeping mother; only when she quieted down and accepted her son's departure did they climb in the waiting vehicles.¹⁴³

The volunteers could de-volunteer themselves, or at least threaten to do so, granting them an important degree of agency. The youth volunteers appropriated, or allowed themselves to be molded into a certain pattern, but their new identity was always bounded by the fact that it was self-ascribed; they reserved the right to revoke their assent. Their status as citizen-soldiers was contingent on their continued approval and voluntary docility.

Delinquent behavior was a result of the awkward position of the state vis-à-vis its elite citizen-soldiers. The Nationalist regime could not afford to lose the support of the youth soldiers, as a result “discipline” actually involved a degree of laxity as a condition for continued cooperation. The state was forced to accept areas of youth soldier delinquency: their docility had to be bought – it could not be coerced. Occasionally this was literally true: in at least one county the only method that prevented

142. Liu Kaihan, 1984, pp. 112-3. One wonders whether the soldiers' real motive was fear of battle.

143. Wang Zicong, p. 55.

trouble was rewarding the recruits with cash payments for good behavior.¹⁴⁴ This situation was tolerated because, by the very act of volunteering and accepting the rifles, the soldiers had already subscribed to the fundamental (political and logical) premise of the whole project: that the state was synonymous with the “nation,” with China and its people.¹⁴⁵

Ill-discipline was reinforced by a reluctance to mete out punishment. The state reminded commanders that the volunteers could not be treated like conscripts. The Chongqing recruiting committee cautioned that commanders “cannot rely on their usual attitude toward regular troops to deal with youths' casual offenses, [nor can you] use corporal punishment without first inquiring about the circumstances of arrest and [obtaining] authorization, [because this] will severely damage the youth volunteers' self-respect.”¹⁴⁶ Even verbal abuse was rare in the Youth Army.¹⁴⁷

State representatives were reduced to pleading with the volunteers to listen to their superiors, betraying an inability to compel obedience. As “intellectuals”, the youths found it galling to be commanded by officers who were less educated than themselves. Liang Hanco, the Minister of Information, begged the volunteers to put military concerns ahead of their personal feeling of distaste at being commanded by men far below them in education and social status.¹⁴⁸ Authorities had to secure the youths' voluntary support and submission, at times going so far as to make officers accountable to the soldiers.¹⁴⁹

The youth soldiers demanded further concessions from the military in the area of political education. Despite high hopes for their “political consciousness”, the volunteers proved resistant to overt indoctrination.¹⁵⁰ Jiang Jinguo's political bureaus initially offered only bland, pontificating lectures. Soldiers offered this scathing review of their unit's cadre:

144. Rong Bida, p. 54.

145. For a thorough analysis of the political symbology of the gun and text and the system of exchanges that was embodied within these material objects, see Landdeck, “Under the Gun”, pp. 390-412.

146. GMWX, vol. 63, p. 315; the exact date of this order is unclear.

147. HYQNJ, p. 81.

148. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 295-6.

149. For example, divisional officers in the 202D held a meeting in which some officers were grilled by the youth soldiers. Afterwards, the commander personally tried to get to the bottom of the complaints against the offending officers; HYQNJ, pp. 69-70.

150. Wu Zhirong, p. 32.

We are unsure if he underestimated our political understanding or if his own is limited to that old stuff [about the revolution]. . . . During the political cadre's speech, many comrades seemed to have let the sleep-demon make a surprise attack and weakly fell sleep. Naturally this shouldn't happen. . . . [But] modern youths long ago lost interest in insubstantial, empty theories. What they want urgently is to study practical knowledge. Intellectual youth recruits have this tendency to an even greater degree. The knowledge that comrades now demand is how to be a soldier, how to shoot a gun, drive a tank, and assault and kill the enemy. [We] don't want to come to this camp to hear admonitions on revolutionary determination or reconstructing the nation.¹⁵¹

Time and again the volunteers vented their frustration with such low-brow fare.¹⁵² The state accommodated them: units increasingly emphasized the cultural and recreational dimensions of political work in response to the volunteers' rejection of the sleep-inducing speeches. Political cadres changed tactics by dropping lectures in favor of artistic activities and sports.¹⁵³

Initially, social organizations were called upon to provide "spiritual nourishment" for the volunteers.¹⁵⁴ However, donations were not forthcoming, eliciting a storm of criticism from the volunteers who blamed the military for their boredom.¹⁵⁵ Used to Chongqing with its thriving bookstores, the desolate hill towns, which they scoured for reading materials, frustrated the youths. One volunteer, nicknamed "Soldier Poet", compared the base to an intellectual desert; without fresh reading material, living in such a cultural backwater was akin to "suffocation."¹⁵⁶ They sent delegates to commanders to demand that the military provide newspapers and publish a paper devoted to the Youth Army.¹⁵⁷

By February 1945 the situation was much improved. In one division, each company had 13 newspapers, eleven Chinese and two English, delivered to its reading rooms.¹⁵⁸ Youth soldiers were

151. HYQNJ, pp. 39-40.

152. Ibid., p. 56.

153. GJZGSG, vol. 2, p. 934; GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 309, 364-5; and HYQNJ, p. 40 and 166.

154. GMWX, vol. 62, p. 241.

155. HYQNJ, p. 63 and 87.

156. Ibid., p. 37.

157. Self-government committees petitioned for improved cultural materials, political training activities, and military drill; HYQNJ, pp. 93-4 and 71-3.

158. Ibid., p. 96. This was in marked contrast to the Sun Yatsen reading rooms in regular units, which were stocked poorly, if at all; Zhang Tuowu, *Daima shuzu xuji*, p. 113.

now seen reading during lectures and even on the drill field.¹⁵⁹ Political cadres began offering cultural activities, many outright entertainment: visits by dance troupes, dinner parties, movie showings, travelling drama groups, and in-unit theater productions.¹⁶⁰ At a dinner for local officials, the soldiers of the 602R put on a skit they had written. In the play, while Axis leaders attended a conference in Tokyo, the Allied attack on the Japanese islands began. As the Youth Army's final assault broke through, the Axis chiefs killed each other, the play ending with the youth soldiers singing triumphantly over the Axis leaders' bodies.¹⁶¹ Such activities showcased the changed nature of Youth Army "political education".

Despite these concessions, the Youth Army soldiers were still undisciplined. Authorities faced problems of desertion, unapproved leaves, and petty violence. These make only oblique appearances in the contemporary writings of the Youth Army, primarily in the rebuttals of rumors that they were causing trouble.¹⁶² Recent mainland accounts detail scandals and other forms of trouble-making, suggesting that Youth Army units were notorious: they heaped abuse on local residents and businesses, were generally rowdy, brawled frequently, patronized brothels, and refused to pay for goods or services.¹⁶³ In one incident involving youth soldiers who were smashing up brothels and bathhouses, police fired on the rowdy men, injuring one of them. In retaliation, bands of youths beat residents, and vented their anger by pursuing the county head through town, storming government buildings, beating the county's accountant, and finally breaking into the county head's residence.¹⁶⁴ Such incidents earned the Youth Army a label as one of the "four catastrophes" and a nickname as the "youth bug swarm" (青年蟲).¹⁶⁵

159. HYQNJ, p. 87. The Youth Corps ran a successful donation campaign to solicit contributions of books, one for each and every volunteer: 100,000 books for 100,000 youth-soldier; Ma Lie, *Jiangjia fuzi yu sanqingtuan*, p. 132. Either the YA units never saw these volumes, or they were incorporated as part of the renewed emphasis on providing cultural nourishment for the volunteers.

160. Lü Zhenhua, pp. 90-2; and HYQNJ, p. 166.

161. GMWX, vol. 63, pp. 364-5.

162. HYQNJ, p. 136 and 32.

163. See, as representative, Li Zhongshu, pp. 101-2; Huang Wei, p. 73; Zhang Kaixuan, p. 144; and Liu Kaihan, p. 110.

164. Huang Jiaqi, pp. 129-30.

165. Zhang Kaixuan, p. 144; Rong Bida, p. 54; and Zhang Zao, p. 126. The four catastrophes included KMT national representatives, reporters, and the Army Headquarters.

From the start, the state was hamstrung in dealing with the volunteers. As they collected in Chongqing in late 1944, the municipal police tried to curb a spate of “ruckuses”, by handing disciplinary authority over to the Youth Army itself, specifically its “self-rule patrols.” External agencies, such as the city police and regular military MP units, were to cooperate with the Youth Army, but they were ordered not to arrest Youth Army volunteers.¹⁶⁶ This policy did not last long, but civil authorities continued to be unable to deal with rowdy youth soldiers primarily because discipline continued to be handled solely within the Youth Army itself.¹⁶⁷

That lapses in discipline were tolerated highlight the compromises that the regime had to make to secure the continued cooperation of the youth soldiers. For this reason I argue that undiscipline in the Youth Army was fundamentally distinct from that of regular conscript units: the Nationalist state was committed to securing the loyalty and docility of the volunteers and as a result it had to cater to their civilian self-identities by granting autonomy within the larger field of “discipline.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, the process of cultivating citizen-soldiers was a give and take proposition: the youth volunteers were not lumps of inert clay to be molded as the state willed. The volunteers’ pre-existing identities as intellectuals allowed the state to make effective use of the technologies of self, but their status as volunteers and those same identities as intellectuals also imposed limits and restrictions on the state. That the youth-soldiers retained elements of their non-soldier lives and selves impacted how the state administered their training.

Gun as Rupture and Reminder: The Lingering Ambivalence of Civilian Nostalgia

The persistent disciplinary lapses were symptomatic of the conflicted identities and a real sense

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166. Police were only permitted to take down suspects’ names and unit designation for reporting incidents to the Recruitment Committee; Chongqing Municipal Police Bureau order to the 10th District Branch; qz0061.mj12-55, p. 50 dated 29 December 1944. See also qz0051.mj2-397, pp. 188-9 dated 14 December 1944.
167. qz0061.mj12-55, p. 62 dated 19 March 1945; qz0061.mj15-4478, pp. 1-27 dated February - August 1945; qz0055.j3-274, pp. 98a-9b, 106a-15a dated 24 January 1946; qz0061.mj12-55, p. 58 dated 28 March 1945; qz0059.mj2-65, p. 49 dated 13 August 1945; qz0104.mj1-93, p. 70a dated 18 September 1945; qz0061.mj15-4458, p. 45 dated 28 September 1945; qz0061.mj15-3385, pp. 42-8 dated 11 November 1947.
168. This resonated with the ideal soldier put forward in the military training manuals: disciplined, but with a sphere of autonomy on the battlefield. The irony was that the Nationalists were unable to combine this battlefield autonomy with political discipline; thus the ideal was never fully realized and brought in its wake a tendency to erupt in moments of its opposite pole, undiscipline, even among its most politically committed citizen-soldiers.

of loss that accompanied the volunteers' new role of citizen-soldiers. Even regime-run media and propaganda occasionally acknowledged that the volunteers' new identities were contingent and ephemeral. Written by a volunteer, a short piece in the *Central Daily Supplement* on 31 January 1945 illustrated the ambivalence well.

“Gray Night” by Li Tianhou (李天厚)

My night life, which ate away at my health for more than two years, met up again with me here last night – I was on sentry duty.

Carrying a gun, I paced back and forth in front of the barracks, recalling many past events, a succession of tangled and fresh memories. Formerly, in the deep of night, I would hold a soft brush and in the stove-warmed editorial office, work bent over my desk. But last night, standing under the sky as fine rain sprayed down, I shouldered a heavy and hard rifle and peered into the gray surroundings. It was as if I could see the face of every one of my past work comrades and could hear the light and crisp bell-sounds of people calling; I was completely intoxicated with nostalgia for the past.

The other sentry seemed to feel the same and he said, “Chongqing is still lively right now. The 8:30 movie should be letting out. The play at the Kangjiang Hall should just be at the climax!” I sighed in agreement, as this swept me away thinking even more of the sweet stories of the past. I thought again that right now was the tensest time for my co-workers in the editorial office; they were using all their wisdom and brain power to put out valuable and exciting written offerings before readers tomorrow.

“Memories are always sweet,” I agreed. But I couldn't help but catch an intermittent whiff of sourness [in my memories], so I didn't have the courage to keep reminiscing; I could only carry on with my present mission heart and soul. I surveyed every gray corner within my field of view, pricking up my ears at every tiny sound, like I was spying on the world's secrets. The nearby foliage, buildings, and mountain peaks were all hidden in the limitless gray; all was still as if dead. I felt disappointed and empty. Only the sound of the sluice gate on the Sanxi, some five hundred meters away, gave this dead field a bit of life. Was this a whisper or a sigh? Perhaps it was a jeer at my uselessness! [I] grabbed my gun; how is it that I can't shoot a single enemy?

Fed up with this silent loneliness, I took a clip of ammo and jammed it into my gun, preparing to test the might of this [Chiang] Kaishek rifle. But the other sentry stopped me saying, “Soldiers are easily startled at night!” He continued to tell me stories of past alarms, which were full of terror and danger. I finally relented.

Suddenly, a tiny spot of flame approached from afar, and gradually I could hear a faint cough. Solemnly, I called out, “Password!”, shattering the endless gray silence. The reply came back, “I've come to relieve you.” Actually, we still had not been given a password, it was all just to shake off the boring emptiness.

I gave the gun and ammo to him, lowered my head and returned to the sleeping quarters. From the town came three melodious strikes of the gong. I looked at my watch, it was just midnight. I thought to myself, just about now my coworkers at the newspaper would be having a midnight meal. The same night, but two different kinds of lives, both have left a

deep impression on my memory.¹⁶⁹

Li's longing for Chongqing's nightlife was an urbane man's desire to be free from the emptiness of military life. His forlorn evening spotlights the gaps in the Nationalist rhetoric: the gun was not only the concrete manifestation of the government's legitimacy and the youth soldiers' new identity, but also a symbol of the soldiers' alienation from civilian society. Despite the ecstatic affirmations in the Youth Army writings, the gun was also experienced with a sense of loss that poked through in the quiet moments while standing sentry amidst the fog of a cold, gray night.

The persistent desire for civilian life and farcical admission of playing at being a soldier, are found in other Youth Army accounts. One volunteer was sensitive to the idea that he had adopted a role in a theatrical production, rather than a genuine identity. He recalled, at the start of the war, performing in a patriotic play, in which he acted the part of a soldier. Now, seven years later, he had "jumped off the stage and gone from drama to the real." But, like a costume, his new military uniform was not reality: he had just "put on a fake skin." He and his fellow soldiers appeared authoritative and awe-inspiring, but actually they were living too comfortably, making him suspect that he was (again) only acting a role on a stage. He scoffed at the idea, put forward by his unit's political cadre, that the youth soldiers had relinquished their old identities as teachers, students, and journalists. The cadre's speech was illogical because they were soldiers for a set time only; after their service was over, the volunteer remarked pointedly, "professors will still be professors, journalists will still be journalists" and, of course, students will still be students.¹⁷⁰

Li Tianhou's impatience with the military life and his longing to return to his "stove-warmed" office, to theater excursions and midnight meals with co-workers, were cracks in the ideological mirror of citizen-soldiers. The gun, that central object of the volunteers' new identity as soldiers, marked the loss of these civilian joys. Such moments of slippage doubtlessly encouraged the regime's scrupulous attention to fulfilling the material promises it made to the volunteers. Those benefits along with the symbolic capital and status that it lavished on them prevented those cracks from shattering the mirage completely and thus, successfully secured the long-term loyalty of the volunteers, but they could not completely paper over the fractures even in its own propaganda.

169. HYQNJ, pp. 113-4.

170. HYQNJ, p. 54-5.

Conclusion

In stark contrast to the naked coercion of conscription and the massive labor projects of the war effort, the Youth Army mobilized volunteers. Throughout the war the regime remained unable to find ways to reach the vast majority of Chinese men except in harsh, extractive ways – the state’s conscription administration “bargained with” communities, not individuals.¹⁷¹ Having inspired young, educated men to sign up for duty, the Nationalist state was not, and could not be, content with the volunteers’ pre-existing identities; it attempted to shape them into elite citizen-soldiers through a suite of practice within the barracks, in class rooms, and on the drill ground. Adopted from other political organizations, these rituals and practices (or political technologies) helped form politically active and responsive individuals. That these youth volunteers would go on to be some of the most loyal defenders of the KMT regime and its leaders during the Civil War suggests the overall success of the project to mobilize these intellectual youths.¹⁷²

The volunteers’ identities were intimately bound up with two objects. Sexualized and desired, the gun and mastery of it was the validation of the volunteers’ social, educational, and military superiority, their fitness to be the citizen-soldiers China so desperately needed. And yet, it was the pen that they wielded on behalf of the Nationalist regime, writing prolifically about themselves and their guns. This writing was not only their main service to the state, used as propaganda, but also a key vehicle for the regime’s symbolic repayment for that service. In return for their service, the Nationalist state recognized these young men as exemplars, models of citizenship, for the entire country. This prestige was materially encoded in the books written by the youth soldiers’ pens, books that were primarily autobiographical. These texts describe in detail how the Youth Army volunteers, molded by the Nationalist technologies of political selfhood, adopted a sharply etched self-image as citizen-soldiers. Mastery of the gun imparted a martiality to their intellectual accomplishments; they reunited *wu* with *wen* into a complete, ideal national man.

The war years were a period of intense uncertainty and confusion about gender roles. Women experienced an unprecedented visibility and validation as vital to the war effort, in both rhetoric and

171. See chapter 4 in Landdeck, “Under the Gun”, pp. 187-245.

172. The Youth Army was in many ways the fulfillment of the Nationalists’ pre-war plans for a nationalized military, one made up of men who had accepted a direct relationship to their government in their duty to serve the country; see chapter 1 in Landdeck, “Under the Gun”, pp. 19-74.

social activities.¹⁷³ And yet, they were increasingly vulnerable as well. The Japanese soldiers were only the most obvious victimizers. Chinese men preyed (both sexually and violently) upon the vulnerable women around them and the rich and powerful in Chongqing openly took temporary “war wives” (抗戰夫人).¹⁷⁴ (Postwar movies in coastal cities portrayed the war as a massive failure of men to fulfill their duties to their wives and families, particularly those left behind in occupied territories.¹⁷⁵) In cartoons and patriotic drama, the Japanese invasion was frequently portrayed as a rape of women, a metaphor for the war that feminized the entire nation.

In this confused wartime gender landscape, the Youth Army volunteers saw themselves as a re-incarnation of China’s tradition of warrior-scholars, the *shi*. This is particularly interesting in the light of Duara’s contention that the unchanging national essence (the “subject” that allows a national History to be constructed) is, in China’s case, a feminine one. For Duara, the antiquity at the center of the constructed nation is gendered: the nation’s unchanging essence was cast as the mothers, wives, and daughters of its male citizenry.¹⁷⁶ And yet, the volunteers for the Youth Army contrast starkly with this expectation of a feminine National essence. The mantle of service that they took on when they donned their uniforms was colored with the dye of the ancient past – they cast themselves as modern warrior-scholars, the re-embodiment of the *shi* tradition. The rifle was the key marker of this re-incarnation, and its total rejection of money and sex, the symbol of regained male (and national) purity.

Within the resurrected martial body, however, the volunteers believed they held modern minds. They felt themselves to be scientific talents and democratic men. Their self-worth demanded that in some important ways they be treated as the equals of their officers and political leaders and that their relationship with their superiors be adjusted and put on a different footing. In addition, as men with superior mental abilities, they demanded – and were granted – a degree of autonomy and self-management unprecedented in the Nationalist military. The fragility of their new citizen-soldier identity - - or rather its conditional / contingent nature -- induced the regime to tolerate lapses, ill-discipline,

173. See, for example, the biographical stories in Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*.

174. See many of the oral histories in Li Danke, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*.

175. Pickowicz, “Victory as Defeat: Postwar Visualizations of China’s War of Resistance”, in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, pp. 365-98.

176. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, pp. 3-82; and Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, pp. 131-70.

within even its most touted and committed citizens. Even more problematic for the government was the fact that the volunteeristic appeal was limited to a small, already elite, body of young men.

Ultimately (and perhaps unsurprisingly), realizing the ideal of citizen-soldiers, even as conflicted and ill-disciplined as it was, remained restricted to the youth volunteers. In some ways a precursor of the extreme Maoist emphasis on exemplars,¹⁷⁷ Nationalist authorities hoped the youth soldiers would inspire a national revival by fundamentally changing people's attitude toward military service. In a piece titled "The Transformation of the Public Mood," the author admitted that among most Chinese people the general view of military service could be seen in the anecdote of an old man breaking his leg but rejoicing since he was no longer in any danger of being dragged into the army. Contrasting the story to the enthusiasm of the student volunteers, the author concludes with the remark that the stark difference between them was enough "to make one suspect that these [two attitudes toward military service] did not in fact come from the same nation [*minzu* 民族]."¹⁷⁸ Commander Dai Zhiqi of the 201D, stationed at Bishan, lamented the elitism and separation of the youth soldiers from the people: upon donning their uniforms the volunteers "changed, becoming different from regular people."¹⁷⁹ What Dai failed to notice, however, was that the youths' act of volunteering, their docility and loyalty toward the regime, were a result of these youths' distance from the experience of the vast majority of Chinese in the interior. Indeed, how far the Youth Army was from the everyday experience and reality of commoners can be seen in a short anecdote written by a perceptive volunteer, Zha Ning, whose unit conducted labor service in the nearby county town.

I worked together with a young housewife. From our talks I found out that she had escaped from Songjiang and that there were still many family members in occupied territory. 'What did you do before [joining the army]?' she started off asking me. 'I [worked] in a newspaper office.' 'You don't seem like a worker, your hands are so clean.' 'Yes, I wrote.' 'Oh!', she continued, asking, 'Isn't writing good? Why did you want to join the army?' This was her final, long-pondered question. She wanted a clear answer. I worked and at the same time told her [my story] in detail. In great surprise, they [sic] finally said, 'You are not like them [the other volunteers] in [your reasons for] becoming a soldier.' 'No, I'm just like them. [I

177. Under Mao, state efforts at model-making would reach bear an impossibly heavy burden of inspiring superhuman efforts from Chinese citizens. In an interesting parallel to the Youth Army, the Maoist state's deep suspicion of money and market was behind this almost complete dependence on honor and respect as motivation, a nearly total reliance on models for people to emulate; Donald Munro, *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China*, pp. 137, 139-42, and 156.

178. GMWX, vol. 62, pp. 243-5.

179. HYQNJ, p. 46.

want to] fight just like [them], exert myself for the nation just like [them].’ ‘Oh . . .’¹⁸⁰

There was a deep and unbridgeable chasm between the motivations of the youth volunteers and this townswoman. Zha was confident that his explanation of his loyalty and patriotism, his identity as a model citizen-soldier, demonstrated unequivocally certain truths to the woman, but her reply was one of flat incomprehension. One suspects that she (and the millions of potential Chinese citizens in the hinterland) remained unmoved, simply unable to comprehend the Youth Army’s loyalty to the Nationalist regime which never found a way to strike a meaningful bargain with, or extend a convincing vision of citizenship to, anyone except the privileged, and very male, intellectual youths.

180. Ibid., pp. 101-2.

Abbreviations (in notes) and Bibliography

All citations of *archival* documents from the Chongqing Municipal Archives (CQMA) follow this format: the document group (*quanzong* 全宗) number follows “qz”; the sub-group and folder number (*mujian* 目卷), divided by a dash, follow “mj”, and finally a page number for the specific document. If a date is available, it is included after the citation, sometimes only the date the document was delivered to the receiving office is available (or legible) and this is noted by “(rec’d)” after the date.

CQ	Chongqing
CQMA	Chongqing Municipal Archives
GJZGSG	<i>Guojun zhenggong shigao</i>
GMWX	<i>Geming wenxian</i>
HYQNJ	<i>Huoyue qingnianjun</i>
IYVM	Intellectual Youth Volunteer Movement
QNJ	Qingnianjun (Youth Army)
QNJS	<i>Qingnianjun shi</i>
QNYZJJY	<i>Qingnian yuanzhengjun jianying</i>
XSCJ	<i>Xuesheng congjun</i>
YA	Youth Army (<i>Qingnianjun</i>)
YZSL	<i>Yizheng shiliao</i>

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