The Making of National Women: Gender, Nationalism and Social Mobilization in China’s Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937-45

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Drawing on materials from the Second Historical Archive of China, the Rockefeller
Archive Center, the Special Collection of American Bureau for Medical Aid to China, as well as
other published and unpublished materials gathered in mainland China, Taiwan and the U.S., this
dissertation discusses a broad spectrum of women of various social and political affiliations
performed a wide range of work to mobilize collective resistance against Japanese aggression.
Integrating women and gender into the exploration of the war and society of 1937-45, this
dissertation reveals that women’s social relief activities were as much about the emergence of the
patriotic female subject of modern women as they were about the wartime deliberations on
resistance and the making of the nation. Women portrayed themselves as national citizens who
shared half the responsibility for national reconstruction, and took civic pride in their patriotic
deeds. During the war, Chinese women gained greater mobility and visibility in public arenas,
and cultivated a profound sense of politicization in their relief work in the areas of nursing, war
orphan relief, front line service and propaganda work. Their public activities brought them into
leadership positions, which often demanded independent and strategic performances in order to
survive the deprivations of war. At the same time, women’s activities became the embodiment of
their commitment to the collective goals of the nation, which was a drastic change from their
May Fourth sisters’ championing of individual subjectivities and romantic love. Women were
often placed in a secondary position and their work was supplementary in nature to the battle
work of the soldiers, which was deemed as an ultimate masculine field that excluded women.
Thus this dissertation argues wartime conflict affirmed the gender segregation that perpetuated
the image of women’s non-essentiality.
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Archives
ABMAC  American Bureau for Medical Aid to China
RF     Rockefeller Foundation Archive
SHAC   the Second Historical Archive of China

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Introduction

Our hearts are palpitating
Our blood is boiling
We were mistaken for useless women in old times
At the new era, we are citizens of the nation!

Up, fellow women citizens
We will save the motherland from peril
By defeating the enemies of the nation

These are excerpts from a poem by Guan Lu (1907-1982) written in July of 1937, when news of the full-scale war between China and Japan reached Shanghai. The commencement of open hostilities between China and Japan threw China’s vast population into a state of panic and unprecedented human dislocation and suffering: Land was lost, houses were burned, families were destroyed, and millions were forced into exodus from their cities and villages.

Guan Lu’s poem was an ardent call to action to the women of China amid a nationalist fervor that had been intensifying since the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1931. By urging women’s participation in national salvation, Guan re-conceptualized the roles and obligations of women within a framework of national politics, challenging both the parameters of Chinese

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1 Guan Lu, Haiyan (Seagull), in Guan Lu wenji (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2001), 90.

domesticity and the modern femininity imposed by the colonial consumer commerce that characterized cities like Shanghai.³

Guan’s call to the women of China was echoed by a wide spectrum of social groups, including students, factory workers, housewives, clerks, and even peasants. They all sought to remake Chinese femininity in the face of Japanese aggression. Women from across Chinese society responded, taking up the task of national salvation as their civic responsibility and playing highly visible roles alongside men in national affairs. This dissertation investigates resistance femininity during the War of Resistance by looking into the Nationalist and Communist women who were part of the salvation movement. They served on the war front as nurses, were engaged in propaganda production, journalism, and education, and carried out social welfare services and war orphan relief. Their work, an integrated component of wartime Chinese society, serves as a window onto how gender shaped the meanings of the war and nation-building in modern China while offering opportunities to renegotiate women’s social values and roles.

Actresses in Shanghai’s prosperous film industry, including luminaries like Bai Yang, Qin Yi, Zhang Ruifang, and Li Lili, put their blossoming film careers on hold and organized mobile propaganda teams that traversed the vast hinterland of China to rally the people in support of the war. With male producers, playwrights, and actors, actresses organized single-act plays on the streets of towns and villages to encourage ordinary people’s support of China’s resistance.⁴


Through participation in the national salvation movement, these female movie stars, living and working in a highly commercial, modern city, recast themselves as women patriots who prioritized the nation above career and self-advancement.

This research intersects with discourses on gender and the state in modern China. Tani E. Barlow thoroughly investigates the making of Chinese female subjectivity against the backdrop of the semi-colonial environment and revolutions in the twentieth century. In her examination of Ding Ling and Marxist feminism, she argues that Chinese feminists

“presumed the subject of the Chinese women’s movement in the context of global politics. The Chinese national female subject was suspended between local warlordism and foreign imperialism. This national subaltern subject, funü, had to participate in beating back foreign capital’s domination of China’s infrastructure and recentralizing power because without a place to extend national sovereign rights, the freedoms promised women in eighteenth-century European Enlightenment theory would be meaningless.”

The deliberation of femininity and the making of the modern subject of funü were intertwined with the imagination of a modern nation state in China. Women were active participants in authorizing Chinese nationalism in the course of the twentieth century. Barlow does not include women during the Second Sino-Japanese War. This dissertation builds upon her research by demonstrating that Chinese women, refusing to be left behind, took actions to formulate resistance femininity in coalition with the Nationalists as well as the Communists during the war.

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6 Tani Barlow is not alone in bringing up the issue of the authorship of feminism and nationalism. Other scholars of women and gender in China including Wang Zheng, Susan Glosser, Christina Gilmartin, and others have researched the May Fourth Enlightenment and the Chinese women who were engaged in the nation-wide debates on women’s roles in Chinese revolution and social advancement.
This research is informed by the most recent study on global women during World War II as well. I found the research by Anna Krylova on Soviet women’s formulation of a wartime gender that embraced both femininity and masculinity illuminating in explaining Chinese women’s many attempts to enable their presence in numerous wartime public arenas. Drawing on women’s memoirs and diaries, Krylova argues that Soviet women were active agents in articulating an identity with new gender terms which enabled their military roles during the war. A history of Soviet female combatants during and after the war, Krylova argues, “is inseparable from a history of her distinctive perception of the World War II soldier as a spilt subject position, legitimately shared by men and women.” Similar to the Soviet women, Chinese women fought a gender war during and after World War II in order to be part of wartime politics and to remain in the historical memory as many attempts were made to erase them from the postwar narrative. I argue that Chinese women who were active in the resistance effort mobilized political and social resources to formulate a much more broadly defined identity in order to enable the many roles they assumed simultaneously during the war. Their taking a subjective position during the war was a drastic departure from the socially conservative roles prescribed by Chiang Kai-shek’s Nanjing government.

This dissertation also engages with the recent discourse among a growing number of scholars who have illuminated the critical role the War of Resistance played in China’s modern

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8 For a discussion on the postwar removal of women’s military roles in the War of Resistance, see Chapters One and Five.

9 For a discussion on Nanjing government’s political making of socially conservative image of women as the ideal female roles for Chinese women, see Xia Rong, Funü zhidaowei yuanhui yu kangi zhanzheng (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2010), 52-66.
state building. Rana Mitter argues that wartime welfare provision and mobilization significantly expanded the role of the state, while Diana Lary explores the depth and scope of refugee suffering in a state shattered by war. Stephen MacKinnon argues that the cosmopolitan construction of anti-colonial patriotism reorganized the civil society and renewed civilian support for the state. R. Keith Schoppa explores refugees’ experiences in Zhejiang Province, revealing that one’s native place connection played a pivotal role in shaping refugees’ ordeals in areas where the influence of the state had been severely reduced by the Japanese invasion. Danke Li’s book, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*, brought forth Chinese women’s voices whose stories have never been told. Her interviews with twenty women who lived in the wartime capital of Chongqing revealed that ordinary women were the ones who kept the households running despite the terrible loss and deprivation from the relentless Japanese bombing of the city. Her research shows that ordinary women’s choices had a profound impact on the war-torn society.

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13 Norman Smith discusses women writers and their wartime literary creation in the Japanese occupied
This study intersects with these discursive threads by documenting how women asserted themselves on many fronts of social and military relief work during the war. By focusing on those who ventured into the battlefield as nurses and frontline service corps members as well as those who stayed behind taking care of war orphans and the wounded, I cross Nationalist and Communist political boundaries to examine the nature of contested wartime gender regimes among both Nationalist and Communist women. Using a variety of sources, including wartime journals and newspapers, autobiographies and biographies, oral history materials as well as sources gathered from archives in China and the U.S., this dissertation documents women’s autonomy and creativity in reinventing themselves, while acknowledging the social and political norms that constrained women’s wartime activities.

Nationalist women used their resources and networks to establish social and military relief institutions on the provincial and national levels. They proved themselves effective in the two main arenas maintained by the government: war orphan care and soldier relief. Communist women worked their way to the rural areas, where they institutionalized wartime mobilization machines and established political links with peasant women. As an integral part of wartime resistance politics, both Communist and Nationalist women asserted their subjectivity in the deliberation of anti-Japanese nationalism and in the making of modern China. But the categories of their work mostly fell into the traditional realms of caring for and nurturing the weak (e.g. children, wounded soldiers, and women). Since masculine wartime regimes did not open up

Manchuria. His study tells the complex story of Chinese female writers and the Japanese colonial culture production in the colonial regime. Li’s and Smith’s study demonstrate that Chinese women engaged in various forms of femininity in different regions during the War of Resistance. My research joins theirs by adding resistance femininity into the mapping of Chinese women during the war. Norman Smith, Resisting Manchukuo: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Occupation (Vancouver: UBC press, 2007).

14 Scholars have paid attention to wartime mobilization initiated by the Nationalist Government; see Hans van de Ven, War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945 (New York: Routledge, 2003), 252-282.
wholly to Chinese women, political and military war work also served to reestablish and reconfirm existing gender norms.

Chinese women’s presence in national resistance politics can be traced back to 1931 when the Japanese military seized Manchuria in the Mukden Incident. From that point on, women had campaigned for firm responses from the Nanjing Government as well as for collective determination from the general public against Japanese colonialism. They staged protests in various forms by organizing student protests, mobilizing women’s salvation associations, and fostering a resistance culture in the press.\textsuperscript{15} The emotions they stirred were powerful and captivating. Shi Liang, a lawyer and activist for women in prewar Shanghai, tirelessly campaigned against the Nanjing government’s proclaimed non-action policy towards Japanese colonial expansion in central China. Shi Liang’s political activity resulted in her arrest along with six prominent male intellectuals on November 23, 1936, triggering a nation-wide discussion and demand for the removal of the non-action policy.\textsuperscript{16} This, in turn, led to the famous Xi’an Incident that forced the Nationalists and the Communists to agree to end the civil war and form the Second United Front.

Chinese women’s ardent response to the national crisis and their contribution towards Chinese war efforts impressed their male counterparts. The editor of the series “War of Resistance and Chinese Women” admitted that “women had broken the most compelling social norms of regulating their mobility in the past decade. They committed themselves to this


\textsuperscript{16} For a brief biography and more about the relief work conducted by Shi Liang, see MacKinnon, “Refugee Flight at the Outset of the Anti-Japanese War,” in Lary and MacKinnon, eds., \textit{Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China} (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 127-131.
country’s search for independence and freedom with their hard work and even lives. They have
created a truly memorable episode of history that belongs to them.”¹⁷ The response of supporters
showed women that the resistance movement was not only about being patriotic, but also about
potentially charting a new path by and for women.

Guan Lu and Shi Liang’s stories are illustrative of the formation of a subjective femininity
that linked women with resistance movements in China. The women investigated in this
dissertation suggested that they understood their strategic relationship with their local
communities and the nation during the war. They formulated the resistance ideology from the
angle of nationalism. As the war went on, women kept reinventing themselves, constructing new
roles to serve the collective good and to gain a social and political space for themselves. They
knew their chances of surviving the war depended upon their collective action.

Women who joined in the salvation movement enriched the meaning of nationalism by
injecting their feminine hopes, interpretations, and actions. Refusing to be bystanders, they
helped to construct the meaning of wartime nationalism. These activists for war relief included
housewives, career women, students, and political organizers from both the Nationalist and
Communist sides. Their cooperation was genuine at the beginning of the war, working under the
Second United Front against Japanese invaders. Eventually, however, deep-seated distrust
between the Nationalists and Communists led the parties to fail the women, leading to the
tragedy of the Wannan Incident in 1941. Consequently, the two political regimes intensified their
centralized control over party members’ political and social lives, making it more difficult for
women to operate their resistance work independently.

¹⁷ Bai Di, Kangzhan yu funü (Chinese Women and the War of Resistance), Wartime Comprehensive Book
series, Number 3,1-2.
Chinese women’s activities for war relief reflected variations in regional practices. Their programs was funded by various sources and affiliated with different political groups. As a result, their realm of activity and influence was not monolithic. Some extended their efforts to the national level, while others remained regional phenomena. For example, women who took care of war orphans were often left on their own to collect funds for their causes, and their influence tended to remain provincial, while military nursing educators in the Nationalist army and the communist women who established systems for the states had more opportunity to expand their social and political impact on wartime life.

Women were aware that their relief activities tested social and marital norms. While many purposefully aligned their work with the Nationalist and Communist states, they carefully played with gender norms and social expectations. Nurses in the army, for instance, established a system that enlisted them for military service. Married women established war orphan relief programs and constructed a home-school system to not only shelter but also educate “the citizens of China’s future.” Women operated within the traditional realm of women’s work, but managed to transcend certain norms to remake their public roles and transform their value to society and the state.

Women’s social relief work was indispensable in the early years of the war, filling the gaps in essential services when the government lost functionality to a great degree in the face of aggressive Japanese advancement. These women’s work also inspired a deeply wounded society while nurturing their own spirits in the face of trauma. As they provided much-needed assistance to others, they also helped themselves survive the suffering.

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18 Danke Li’s research on ordinary women in Chongqing proves that regional ties and connections were used by women for daily survival. Li, 31-32.
Women and the Discourse on Nation-Building

Chinese women who emerged out of the social and political environment created by the May Fourth New Cultural Movement of 1915-1927 were familiar with anti-colonial nationalism.\(^\text{19}\) As citizens, they believed that women’s opportunities for social advancement could only emerge in a post-colonial, modern nation-state. Their dedication to the resistance added new dimensions to the concept of nationalism. Examining nationalism through the lens of women’s experiences allows us to view the relationship between gender and nationalism as a phenomenon with its own history. This research indicates that educated Chinese women were concerned with world affairs. By the time of the war, they had accumulated significant knowledge of the strategic relationship between the conflict and China’s future. Their accumulation of knowledge can be attributed to the legacies of the May Fourth Movement of 1915-1927 as well as to the persistent discourse on world affairs in women’s journals and periodicals that later appeared in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. The May Fourth Movement linked individual attainment with national strengthening.\(^\text{20}\) Despite the fact that men


were authoring the May-Fourth discourse on women, the movement allowed a more lenient attitude towards women’s rights for education and social mobility.21

Since the late Qing dynasty, the search for a new national polity and the desire to establish a modern nation-state opened opportunities for women to assume public roles. In her research on May-Fourth women and feminism, Wang Zheng notes that the May-Fourth discussion on “nuquan (women’s rights, or feminism) included not only the right to be in the public arena, but also the right to work for the country.”22 Chinese women’s activism was therefore woven into anti-colonial nationalism from the very beginning. Despite the Nanjing Government’s attempt to restore certain aspects of Confucian gender morality through the New Life Movement in the 1930s, the May-Fourth generation of women activists continued the legacy of associating women with public and national affairs. For example, the major topics appearing in Women’s Life and Women’s Monthly included labor, peasantry, and the rural economy; the women’s suffragist movement, marriage, and career; and public education and Japanese military manipulation in Manchuria. In the meantime, women began assuming more visible roles as well. It was no longer unusual for women to become lawyers, professors, doctors, or journalists by the 1930s. Some entered the most exclusively masculine arenas such as science and banking.23 Although it was a phenomenon limited to major cities, this new trend nonetheless brought women throughout the country closer to public life.


22 Wang Zheng, 212.

By the middle of the 1930s, a new generation of female students joined their male counterparts to stage public protests against Japanese aggression in northern China. Coverage of their activities expanded the readership of women’s journals and periodicals in Beijing and Shanghai. In the shared endeavor of resisting colonialism, Chinese women and men used common languages. The discourse on national salvation and the conceptualizing of a collective nation drove the practice of political and cultural movements in the 1930s.

Historians have noticed the distinctiveness of the Chinese women’s movement. Christina Gilmartin raises objections to the direct application of Western criteria to determine whether social movements in the third world have a feminist character. Instead, she proposes to write third world women’s history with specific attention to localities and temporality. Based on her interviews with women activists of the 1920s, she argues that “modern feminist movements in the third world have been compelled by the realities of western hegemony to broaden their agendas by connecting their effort to end gender oppression with struggles for national liberation.” To study Chinese women we must acknowledge the reality of colonialism and how the feminist movements in China have been framed by the priority of nationalism.

Using gender as an analytical category, historians have revealed the pitfalls of the male dominated discourse of nationalism. Studying Chinese feminism requires examining the patriarchal legacies of China’s anti-colonial nationalism and revolutionary nationalism. Dorothy Ko warns against the pitfalls of the May-Fourth legacy that positioned Chinese women as pure

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24 Ma, 235-241.

25 Gilmartin, 6-7.

26 Yihong Pan argues that nationalism often took precedence over feminism during the War of Resistance. See Pan, “Feminism and Nationalism in China’s War of Resistance against Japan,” in the International History Review, 19.1 1997, 115-130.
victims of traditional culture and society.\textsuperscript{27} In her research on women of the lower Yangzi region in the seventeenth century, Ko reveals a feminine world of communication and cultural creativity. Meanwhile, Susan Glosser uncovers the ways that Chinese men purposefully constructed an interrelated picture of Chinese women’s plight and national suffering. By blaming the traditional extended family system for women’s subordination, Chinese men sought freedom from the yoke of paternal authority.\textsuperscript{28} This process also frequently exploited women as a cultural symbol in order to assign a proper place for them. In the War of Resistance, however, because women were part of the delivery system to redraw gender lines, they challenged norms.

Chinese women’s political and social activities during the war should be understood as an episode of China’s continuing search for modernity, a historical process that was characterized by enlightenment, reforms, revolutions, violence, failures, humiliation, and tragedies brought about by the difference in ideological-orientation between the Nationalists and the Communists.\textsuperscript{29} Modernity, as Joan Judge notes, “is an amorphous concept. It slides across chronologies, absorbs a range of contents, and is qualified with a plethora of adjectives.”\textsuperscript{30} The failure to create a single voice for women can be understood as an example of the fluctuating nature of modernity in the process of nation building.


\textsuperscript{28} Glosser, 77-78.


This dissertation examines the patterns of service that women contributed to China’s War of Resistance. It delineates four categories of major work that women conducted during the war: as members of the frontline service corps, as caregivers to the wounded, as nurturers of war orphans, and as mobilizers for the Communist Party in rural areas.

Chapter One examines women who voluntarily organized themselves into the Army Auxiliary Corps to offer aid to Chinese troops fighting in the lower Yangzi region, Wuhan-Changsha war zones, and Xuzhou Campaigns. They performed multiple roles in a supplementary capacity to the military campaigns, visiting households to enlist supplies from local communities, collecting and distributing medical supplies to soldiers, and washing and cooking for the army. Their writings on the war and their dispatches, which appeared in newspapers, established a connection between Chinese resistance soldiers and the civilian population.

Chapter Two investigates voluntary and professional nursing during the war. It argues that the spontaneous voluntary nursing at the beginning of the war helped to expose the severe medical problems faced by Chinese army and establish a need for professional nursing. These nurses, in turn, exerted great power in directing the establishment of military nursing during the war.

Chapter Three looks into the war orphan relief work conducted in Guangdong province by Wu Jufang. It traces the personal and political interests of women’s work in children’s services and education in the long years of the war. The chapter looks into the construction and expansion of wartime motherhood and evaluates its consequential impact on the education of war orphans. Motherhood was the site where gender norms were confirmed. While the wartime
making of motherhood linked mothers ever closer to the future of China, image of the mother was at the center of nationalism, making for its power in the shaping of the future generations.

Chapters Four and Five move away from Nationalist China focus on the CCP-controlled region. These chapters reveal the motivations behind women moving to the communist region and their incorporation into the CCP women’s work and cadre system. The CCP women played a crucial role in gaining access to rural women, who in turn formed a network to aid the CCP resistance. Though the work expanded their space of activity, rural women did not gain gender equality through their efforts.

A Note on Sources

Chapter One relies on the collection of wartime military operations in the Second Historical Archive of China and on women’s wartime publications by members of the Shanghai Working Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps and Hunan Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. Women’s wartime military roles were purposefully forgotten in the official narrative of the war. In mainland China, the female organizers behind the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps like Hu Lanqi and Xie Bingying were politically marginalized and even persecuted in Hu’s case. Hu Lanqi remained forgotten in the official memory in China. Xie Bingying lived an exiled life in the United States and remained unknown to her chosen society. Their wartime writings are examined carefully in this dissertation in order to reconstruct the subjective roles women took in enacting a complex gender identity that enabled women’s position in the military. These wartime writings along with archival resources map the movement of women’s radical activities on the front and are used to analyze the feminist and nationalist rhetoric of how women articulated of
their presence in masculine organizations. Women’s wartime publications include books compiled by Hu Lanqi and Xie Bingying (*Zhandi yinian, Zhandi ernian, Zhandi sannian, nubing riji*), and their news dispatches to journals like *Zhandi funü*, and *Funü gongming*.

Chapter Two utilizes materials gathered from the Rockefeller Foundation Archive Center and the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China to analyze the establishment of wartime military nursing by several professional nursing educators, mainly from the Nursing School of the Peking Union Medical College. The writing of Chapter Two was only made possible by a generous grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Archive Center, which housed a rich collection on the history of nursing in modern China. The materials gathered by the Rockefeller Archive Center are used for the first time to analyze women’s subjective roles in formulating the department of military nursing for Chinese army. This chapter offers detailed information on the dire medical challenges faced by the Chinese military during the war. They help us to understand the vision and the trailblazing nature of nurses in establishing a highly professional field for women during the war.

Chapter Three uses the collection compiled by the Women’s Federation (Fulian) on the Guangdong women’s movements; memoirs of war orphans who were educated at Guangdong Children’s homes and schools; and biographies of Wu Jufang by her daughter Virginia Lee to depict the construction of wartime motherhood as an idea and the establishment of wartime social welfare for war orphans.

Chapter Four utilizes the CCP newspaper (*Jinchaji Daily*), anthologies of the CCP women’s movements, and personal memoirs (*yige gemingzhe de huiyi*) to narrate the main ideology of the
CCP women’s wartime mobilization and the organizations and to discuss the institutions created by women cadres.

Chapter Five is based on the oral history materials (Zhanzheng yu funü) gathered by historians including Li Xiaojiang of mainland China in the 1990s to understand the bottom-up response of Chinese peasant women under the CCP regime. The oral history materials illustrate how individual women bridged the gap between the CCP regime and Chinese peasant women. These women’s voices tell how the language of nationalism and feminism were mobilized to endow peasant women with a national role and to politicize their traditionally domestic labor, including cloth-making and food preparation, to offer aid to the communist war effort.
Chapter One. Embodying and Propagandizing Revolutionary Femininity at War:
Xie Binging and Hu Lanqi’s Chinese Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps

In 1937, when the Second Sino-Japanese War erupted, two women—Hu Lanqi and Xie Binging—organized small bands of women to go to the front to serve the soldiers, and to educate Chinese peasants immediately behind the lines about the war. They were given semi-official status in the army and “were very successful in doing liaison work between soldiers and the people.”¹ Who were Xie Binging and Hu Lanqi? Why did they see the need for women to organize medical aid and civilian support for the military, when such aid was usually systematically coordinated by government or women’s organizations in other wartime nations? How did Hu and Xie’s Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps justify their presence and operation in the army on voluntary bases?

Despite their prominent roles in the Chinese resistance army, Xie and Hu remained unknown up until the middle of the 1980s when their wartime writings were re-published in the Mainland.² Their stories were conveniently forgotten because neither worked with the Chinese


² Both Xie Binging and Hu Lanqi were swept under the carpet in the mainland from the late 1950s to the early 1980s. Their anonymity was the result of various political campaigns in the Mao era. Xie Binging became politically taboo simply due to her adopted residence in Taiwan and the United States after the Civil War, while Hu Lanqi was labeled as a rightist and subjected to political persecution during the anti-rightest campaigns in the late 50s. Xie received renewed public attention in the early years of the reform era, when she became an increasingly popular subject of investigation for the history-making efforts of the non-party affiliated elements. Hunan People’s Publishing House, based in Xie’s home province, first published a collection of Xie’s wartime writing. See Xie Binging, *Xie Binging zuo ping ji* (A Collected Volume by Xie Binging), (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1985); for popular interests in Xie Binging, see Shi Nan, *Zhongguo diyi nü bing Xie Binging* (Xie Binging: A Famous Chinese Woman Soldier), (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008); Yuan Chunde and Li Ruiteng, *Nübing Xie Binging* (Female Soldier-Xie Binging), (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2002); Fu Demin, ed., *Xie Binging sanwen xuanji* (Selected Essays by Xie Binging), (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2004).
Communist women’s organizations. Neither did they receive academic attention in the English-speaking historiography in the same period due to issues surrounding the accessibility of Chinese archives and the blindness to women’s history in the China field before 1970s.\(^3\) By exploring Xie and Hu’s journey to the war from 1937 to 1941, this chapter argues that Xie and Hu embodied and propagandized revolutionary femininity in support of the state.

In modern Chinese gender studies, scholars have noted the defining feature of the semi-colonialism experienced by China in the first half of the twentieth century. In contextualizing political women’s activities, Wang Zheng suggests that the Chinese “Woman often has been linked with the state and the nation rather than with Man,”\(^4\) and Barlow echoes this notion, suggesting that “feminist thinking in modern Chinese history is an integral part of contemporary deliberations about the nation and its development.”\(^5\) In their research on gender and the making of a modern nation state, scholars often found that Chinese reformist and revolutionary intellectuals “inaquably” linked the state of women to the state of the nation.\(^6\) In other words, “the content of a semicolonial modernity was worked out partially in the course of discussions

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\(^3\) Mainland China only started to gradually open the door to western researchers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A group of U.S. researchers composed mainly of graduate students, for example, were among the first groups to be allowed to conduct long-term field work in China. For a first-person account of this earliest generation of researchers to enter communist China, see Vera Schwartz, *Long Road Home: A China Journal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).


\(^6\) Gail Hershatter, 2007, 1032.
about the modern woman.\textsuperscript{7} The semicolonial modernity subjugated the category of woman to the needs of the nation and nationalism, which fragmented the formation of a female subjectivity independent of national temporality.\textsuperscript{8} Chinese women activists’ attempts to construct a female subjectivity were therefore informed by a global politics dominated by colonialism, which forced these women to form an uneasy and inseparable bond with the nation. This was the case even with the most radical groups of women during the War of Resistance. Louise Edwards narrates how women suffragists had temporarily suppressed their voices against the state in demanding political equality in order to work with the Nationalist government to provide moral and material support to the resistance effort.\textsuperscript{9}

Chinese needs during the war were so great, and the supporting networks so inadequate, that many witnessed the desperate conditions of the Chinese population and began to coordinate aid on an amateur basis. Women activists understood that the resistance could be carried out more effectively with an understanding between the army and the people. The prevailing illiteracy and extreme poverty among Chinese peasants in the 1930s kept them distant from national affairs. In addition, Chinese soldiers were never held in high esteem by the people. The constant wars between warlords before Jiang Jieshi established the Nanjing government did nothing to improve the opinion held by ordinary people. In order to pull the nation together behind the struggle, the women activists, according to their own accounts, needed to educate the

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 1032, and Louise Edwards, 2000a.

\textsuperscript{8} For a discussion on the differing temporalities of nation and woman, see Julia Kristeva, \textit{Women’s Time}, in Hesford and Diedrich eds., \textit{Feminist Time against Nation Time: Gender, Politics, and the Nation-State in an Age of Permanent War} (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 23-39.

people about the war and spread patriotic messages to villages, and, more significantly, to establish a new image of soldiers as national saviors.

Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps were radically different from other wartime women’s groups in that they staged their work at the front and moved along with the armed troops. They performed a wide range of services including nursing, propaganda, espionage, transportation, washing, correspondence, and even cleaning the battlefield after combat. Even though they did not fight as soldiers, they were just as close to the front, and bore witness to the war from that unique vantage point. They were particularly visible in the streams of military campaigns in the lower and middle Yangzi regions from 1937 to 1939, witnessing the heroic and tragic defense launched by Chinese armies in Shanghai, Xuzhou, and Wuhan.

May Fourth Revolutionary Feminism in Exile

Xie Bingying and Hu Lanqi belong to the May Fourth generation, which initiated social and cultural campaigns to challenge Confucian traditions and gender norms.¹⁰ The education they received in girls’ schools fostered in them the May Fourth ideals of free love, the nuclear family, and women’s education and emancipation—a new set of language and thoughts aimed at

freeing women from the Confucian extended family and the patriarchal authority of their fathers.\textsuperscript{11} In 1926, Bingying and Lanqi joined the Northern Expedition as female soldiers.\textsuperscript{12}

During her journey north to fight against warlords, Xie wrote down what she observed and sent her essays to Sun Fuyuan (1894-1966), the editor of the Supplement to the Central Daily (Zhongyang ribao fukan). Reflecting upon her life as both a soldier and a writer, Xie said decades later, “I joined the Northern Expedition and fought the warlords partly to gain my country’s freedom, partly to gain my own.”\textsuperscript{13} In a time when China was politically uncertain and various widely-held beliefs were being debated, the practice of women being soldiers was a radical departure from social norms. Her essays immediately grabbed the country’s imagination, and she became a public name. While radicals and liberals celebrated Xie’s being a solider as a symbol of victory for Chinese women in gaining societal freedom, conservatives viewed her behavior as the utmost threat to gender norms and practices.

The stimulating and stirring themes of Xie’s writing were embraced by the commercial publishing industry, and the young writer became an overnight success. By the end of the Northern Expedition in 1928, the collected essays had been published in a book titled A Woman’s Soldier’s Diary, which was translated into English by Lin Yutang in the following


\textsuperscript{12} The Northern Expedition was the first joint effort of the CCP and KMT to overthrow the warlord armies in the north to unify China. The Northern Expedition army led by Chiang Kai-shek included a small number of women soldiers who were responsible for propaganda work and soldier relief. See Pingying Hsieh, \textit{Girl Rebel} (New York: Johns Day, 1940); and Christina Kelley Gilmartin, \textit{Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

year. In the middle of the 1930s, Lin’s daughters translated Xie’s autobiography into English as well, and the resulting volume, *Girl Rebel: An Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying*, was published by Johns Day, the publisher of Pearl S. Buck’s works on Chinese peasantry and society. Xie’s writings and her military experience soon gained an international readership and drew attention from an international circle of feminists.

At the end of the Expedition, Jiang Jieshi launched a campaign against the CCP and other activists. Refusing to conform to the conservative gender regime of the Nanjing Government, Xie and Hu went into exile in Japan and Germany, respectively, in the early 1930s, just as employment in both countries was hit by the Great Depression and the politics took a dramatic turn to the extreme right.¹⁴

Their overseas experience proved instrumental in affirming Xie and Hu’s anti imperialist imperatives. In 1935, they returned to China and found themselves in the increasingly intensive anti-Japanese National Salvation Movement launched by the May Fourth intellectuals and a new generation of students with knowledge of international issues in Europe and Asia.

**Embodying the Feminist Wartime Revolution: The Formation of the Chinese Women’s Auxiliary Corps**

What is revolutionary femininity? How was it practiced? I argue that the revolutionary femininity embodied by Xie and Hu rejected the idea of the nuclear family and domesticity. It demanded a voluntary and self-conscious women’s movement for national salvation, which was

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¹⁴ For a discussion on the expansion of Japanese empire, see Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
a bottom-up campaign to help the state. In their particular case, they proposed to rally collective action to aid the army, the most powerful apparatus of the state. Revolutionary femininity stood in sharp contrast with the state-sponsored good wife, wise mother image; it also departed from the individualism of May-Fourth liberal feminism. Revolutionary femininity encouraged women’s engagement with national political affairs, and women’s articulation of social issues.

The war served as an occasion for politically active women to become a visible constituency of the male-dominated state. When the war erupted in July 1937, Xie and Hu collected educated single women from Hunan and Shanghai to form Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps. They used their personal connections with the Guangdong Armies during the Northern Expedition to pave the way for women to step into warzones. Pragmatic considerations on the side of the army perhaps played a more significant role. The Guangdong armies positioned in the lower Yangzi region left the south in the summer heat of July in shorts and thin jackets. Less favored by the Nanjing government as a provincial army, they used women’s resources for their supply of winter jackets, medicines, and food.

Participating in the resistance activities did indeed offer an unprecedented opportunity for women to express themselves and to perform publically in the name of salvation. Ren Zaiyi, for instance, interpreted her newly gained freedom for social mobility this way: “under ‘normal’ circumstances, if a group of girls went to the streets to sing and make speeches, people would frown on them. However, no one would challenge us for doing propaganda work for the war."

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15 May Fourth liberal feminism was particularly represented by writers who were seeking rights to free love, marriage, and education. The most articulate women include Ding Ling, Lu Yin, and Ling Shuhua. In their works, they focused on the expression of selfness and sensual feelings as young girls and women. Their literary articulation as individual girls who yearned to pursue love and education free from the yoke of their family was viewed as a radical departure from Confucian gender norms. See Zhang Li, “Wusì shìqì nüxing xingxiang de zìwò shuxì yù jiàngōu” (Female writer’s literary articulation and the construction of female subjectivity during the May Fourth period) in Zhongguo xiandai wenxue (Modern Chinese Literature) (December 2007): 5-26.
efforts to save the country…Since we were single teenage girls without husbands or children to worry about, we were fearless by engaging in the activities to support the war effort.”\textsuperscript{16} 

Women who responded to the national crisis highly valued collective action. Given the propensity for societal suspicion towards women soldiers, Xie, who had been an adventurer in free love herself, purposefully restricted free love among her followers. In their behavior code, members of the corps were prohibited from developing romantic relationship with male counterparts. In the case of a violation of this agreement, a member would be criticized and “corrected” by the director of the corps. A member was to withdraw if a “violation” happened more than twice. The assistant director of the corps was forced to leave in 1938 because of her romantic involvement with a young officer. One could argue that the policy was unfair since the male counterpart was immune from this prohibition. The refusal of romance was not meant to deny women’s rights to pursue free love, but to prove that women were capable of disciplining their emotions. This purposeful act showed that Xie and other like-minded women were convinced that free love would damage their moral authority at the front. In order to fulfill an unusual role at the front among soldiers, they were willing to take steps to compromise. This act also marked a radical departure from their May Fourth counterparts who used the themes of romance and love to highlight individuality and independence from the Confucian value system.\textsuperscript{17} 

The first group of the Hunan Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, composed of seventeen members including nurses and students (sixteen women and one man), was designated to be

\textsuperscript{16} D. Li, 135.

affiliated with the Fourth Army, which was stationed in Jiading, Wuxi, and Suzhou areas. The initial goal was to offer Chinese soldiers medical aid, which was in high demand by the Nationalist Army. The military campaigns in the lower Yangzi region in Shanghai, Xuzhou, Nanjing, and Wuhan were brutal examples of human suffering in modern wars. Soldiers and civilians were equal victims of the conflagration. This was particularly true of Chinese peasant soldiers and the poor. The Nationalist Army only had limited medical service available when the open hostilities broke out in July 1937 (see Chapter Two). Lack of transportation heightened the situation. For example, during the Xuzhou Campaign in the spring and early summer of 1938, it usually took four to six days to transport the wounded soldiers to a surgery table in the field hospital located in Zhenzhou. The army medical service was convinced that for Chinese soldiers severe wounds meant death, and even minor wounds would deteriorate more rapidly than normal under the conditions. There was no reason at all to be optimistic about the survival chances of the wounded soldiers on the front. Indeed, many died painfully and tragically on the battleground and on the transportation routes.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a detailed witness report of Chinese soldiers’ suffering, see a personal letter by T.H. White. From T.H. White, Chungking, China – to David Hulburd, Feb. 20, 1941, Box 96, American Bureau for Medical Aid to China (henceforth ABMAC), Special Collection and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, Columbia University, New York.

The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was composed of mixed generations of female activists. They included experienced women from the May Fourth generation along with a younger generation of students and female workers. These women refashioned themselves for the crossing of gender and spatial boundaries by leaving the city behind at the front: they bobbed their hair, discarded make-up, and dressed in military uniforms, refashioning the modern girl image that embraced the consumption culture of cosmopolitan cities.
The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was effective in mobilizing civilian resources. The military leader of the Guangdong Army was impressed, and, in early November 1937, asked Hu Lanqi to expand her group.\textsuperscript{19} Hu went to Shanghai and recruited eight female workers from YWCA night schools. Less religiously-oriented since the 1920s, the YWCA developed social programs to foster political consciousness in female workers. Thus, these workers were considered “ideal candidates” for the women’s auxiliary corps.\textsuperscript{20} The selection criteria were based on skills that were considered suitable for propaganda work or nursing care. Most of the recruits were able to speak dialects understood by the civilians in the surrounding areas of Shanghai. Their experiences with the YWCA club activities were highly valued because the skills helped them to stage street dramas, spreading the message to mobilize support from ordinary Chinese.\textsuperscript{21}

The hardships of military life posed physical and mental challenges for these women. They frequently marched with soldiers on foot, which was a tremendous demand on their physical strength. They were also exposed to poor sanitation and the dangers of communicable diseases that were pervasive among Chinese troops.\textsuperscript{22} Hu herself contracted malaria in Jiangxi in the summer of 1940, which eventually led to her inability to work on the front lines. Zhou Wennan, the youngest member of the Shanghai Women’s Auxiliary, lost her life to malaria after

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Xie Bingying, \textit{Kangzhan riji (Anti-Japanese Journal)} (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongzi, 1981), 225.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 1981, 210.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 1981,198; for a discussion on Chinese resistance and the use of street performance, see Chang-tai Hung, \textit{War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 45-88.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Xie, 1981, pp.56 and 298-301; Hu, 1988, pp. 156-7; Chinese male soldiers were subjected to the same difficulties and fell victim to malnutrition and bad sanitation along with the heavy casualty resulting from the military campaigns with the Japanese troops. \textit{See Folder EMSTS} (Emergency Medical Service Training School), Box 2, ABMAC.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
a mission to clean the battlefield. That she witnessed the loss of so many lives on the front was said to have traumatized her and contributed to her untimely death.

Women’s presence in the army relied entirely upon the personal attitudes of the highest ranking military officials on the field. The Nanjing government remained ambivalent toward women’s presence in the army: it neither encouraged military officials to recruit women as part of military operations, nor did it oppose women’s auxiliary activities. In the army, where women were present, they were, however, given semi-official status and received a monthly compensation. In other words, they wore uniforms and practiced military drills but were not expected to engage in military combat.23

The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps established a tangible connection between women’s groups and the army. The Corps managed donations from the Shanghai Women’s Association for National Salvation and the China Defense League led by Song Qingling, the widow of Sun Yat-sen.24

Women’s groups and the media expressed tremendous enthusiasm at the developments of the voluntary Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, and the public’s desire for news on the military operation at the front was insatiable. Women’s journals and newspapers in Shanghai, Wuhan, and Nanjing published every piece of dispatch they sent from the front. For example, *Fuü xinyun* (*Women’s Movement*), a Nationalist women’s journal, and *Funü shenghuo* (*Women’s Life*), a non-party affiliated periodical, accepted every single piece sent by members of Xie and Hu’s

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23 Ibid., 223.

army auxiliary corps. The practice of writing by the female auxiliary members, who were students or workers with limited education, produced several professional journalists after the war.

Offering primitive medical aid to the wounded soldiers was expected, but more importantly the women in the auxiliary corps functioned as liaisons between civilian society and the army. They mobilized local communities to offer food, water, and intelligence to the army, and organized peasant workers to help move wounded soldiers to the receiving stations.

They also aimed at mobilizing national support. For instance, Xie Bingying wrote an essay entitled “A Petition from the Wounded Soldiers,” in which she encouraged able-bodied medical personnel to go to the front to serve the army and asked women to collect medical items such as cloth dressing, cotton, iodine, and emergency bags for the wounded. In mobilizing for mass support, Xie aimed to establish a community of sentiment. She elaborated, “To help the soldiers is to help the nation. With the annihilation of our nation, there would be no space for individual life, wherein to protect our nation is to protect ourselves. Unite, my compatriots! We must stand to protect the Chinese nation with 5,000 years of history”

Xie and the others aimed not only for military relief, but also for declaring women’s capacity as soldiers. Women all over the country followed Xie and Hu’s example. In fact, women taking on the task of organizing efforts to facilitate medical aid and other army needs became a national phenomenon. Women’s associations successfully gained moral support from

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26 Hu, Hu Lanqi huiyilu, 156.

official authorities in organizing women to go to the front to function in a subsidiary capacity. For instance, the Yunnan provincial government supported women in Kunming, who were leaving for the Xuzhou Campaigns, by offering medical training. In Guangdong, Wu Jufang (1911-2000), the wife of general Li Hahun, led women activists who went to the De’an front in Jiangxi in October 1938, bringing with them medicines, milk powder, stamped envelopes, winter clothes, and other necessities. It should be pointed out that general Li himself specifically asked for certain items, such as the medicines and winter clothes. In recognition of these extraordinary efforts by women activists and women’s associations, the press—especially women’s journals—gave the issue much needed coverage.

Xie’s renewed adventure was an integral part of Chinese women’s resistance activities. A string of spontaneous, nationwide women’s movements to aid the Chinese army was coordinated by women’s associations and female activists. After examining women’s activities in military nursing, refugee relief, war propaganda, and children’s relief, Eva D. Spicer, a professor of religion at Jinling Women’s College, noticed that “it is not one class or group that is taking its share, but a cross section of the whole—from the peasant woman ... to the highest lady in the land; from serious well-trained students to girls who before the war had lived sheltered pampered lives ... During the first ten months of the war, activities developed and organizations multiplied in a more or less uncorrelated fashion.” Spicer’s observation demonstrates that women were a formidable presence in the patriotic movement at the outbreak of the war, but she also suggests that this force of resistance needed to be coordinated in order to achieve better results.


29 Spicer, 4.
Women’s involvement in the war effort constituted an integral part of a national patriotic movement that included men and women. In slightly less than half a year, after the government moved to Wuhan in December 1937, Wuhan accumulated patriotic intellectuals, students, government officials, soldiers, Nationalists, Communists, Chinese and foreign journalists, men and women, for the common purpose of resisting the advancement of the Japanese. Indeed, Jiang Jieshi, leader of the Chinese resistance, reached his highest point of authority by the summer of 1938 as the symbol of China’s unyielding intransigence. White and A. Jacoby observed that in the initial years of the war, Chiang had “the wholehearted and enthusiastic support of all his people.” Another western observer developed quite an optimistic view after witnessing the boom of patriotism from the general public: “Appraising the outcome of hostilities, we are convinced that the present situation is favorable to China. The basis of China’s future success in prolonged resistance is not found in Nanking, nor in the big cities, but in villages all over China and in the fixed determination of the people. The time must come when Japan’s military strength will be completely exhausted, thus giving us ultimate victory.” It was this enthusiastic devotion from ordinary Chinese people that provided hope to optimistic observers.

Xie and Hu’s bottom up model of female activism was institutionalized by the state. Provincial governments in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Hubei declared the establishment of provincial frontline service corps staffed by educated and unmarried women. In March 1938, the Women’s Committee of the Nationalist New Life Movement coordinated a national conference in Lushan, Jiangxi. The conference, convened by Song Meiling (Jiang Jieshi’s wife), expanded the idea of where women could work from

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31 Cited in Werner Levi, Modern China's Foreign Policy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1953), 222.
soldier’s relief to the arenas of children’s relief and refugee relief. The conference became a symbol of Chinese women’s determination to provide collective support to the causes of the resistance.

**Women Working for the Resistance Army in Supplementary Capacities**

The presence of female soldiers facilitated communication between troops and villagers, who came to view women soldiers as less threatening than their male counterparts. Xie encouraged her members to go to the villages and visit every household in the surrounding area. In their visits to village households, they carefully recast a heroic image of Chinese soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the benefit of the Chinese people. Japanese troops, on the other hand, were cast as the ruthless enemy who burned and killed Chinese people. The violence that was rampant in the lower Yangzi region convinced ordinary Chinese that Japanese troops were capable of imposing intense brutality upon civilians. Rural areas were no longer the safe havens they had been in traditional Chinese wars. Many villagers fled to urban centers such as Shanghai and Nanjing to escape the violence. Xie’s outreach work rapidly gained recognition from local communities, and she became well known to those who followed the news.

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33 Xie, XBYWJ, Volume 1, 277.

34 For a description of the Chinese rural population escaping the Japanese invasion, see Cui Yongyuan, Wo de kangzhan (My War of Resistance), episode 24, zhanhuo hongyan (women under the fire of war); Qian Zhongshu’s novel, Wei Cheng (The Besieged City) describes the relocation of the Fang family from Wuxi to Shanghai as Japanese troops advanced to the lower Yangzi region. Although it is a novelis, the story does provide a vivid description of the difficulty of life faced by the Fang family after the relocation. Qian Zhongshu, Wei Cheng (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1994), 118-136.

The lower and middle Yangzi regions were most impacted by the war. Chinese and Japanese troops fought fiercely for every town and city between these two parts of China. As a consequence, numerous refugees were
While stationed in the area surrounding Shanghai from September to December 1937, Xie maintained a close relationship with the Shanghai Women’s Association for National Salvation, coordinated by He Xiangning (1878-1972), the widow of an early member of the Nationalist party, Liao Zhongkai (1877-1925), who insisted on the principle of a democratic republic polity for China. Liao was assassinated by his political rivals in March 1913. After the death of her husband, He Xiangning surrounded herself with leftist Nationalists and other progressive figures and was appointed as the director of the women’s department of Sun Yat-sen’s Canton military government in 1924. In 1937, when the war erupted, He had been a well-respected figure for her organizational activities for national salvation in Shanghai. Together, Xie and He used their social reputation and influence to collect donations of medicine, food, clothes, and money from all over the country. Chinese citizens living abroad also made significant contributions in response to their call.

In addition to nursing, Xie and her group also focused on propaganda work. Xie considered the people’s war (min zong zhan zheng) to be crucial to China’s victory. By people’s war, she meant one that was supported whole-heartedly by ordinary people. Xie saw the necessity for the Chinese resistance army to build a bond with the great masses (min zong), because the latter would be able to provide the ultimate in resources and strength to the moving troops. The wisdom of gaining moral authority and material support from the population was generated from Xie’s experience in the Northern Expedition a decade earlier. She had seen that a

forced to flee from their home places, and most of them were entirely on their own. Ordinary people fled without a destination, and many were forced to move repeatedly during the hostilities because of the lack of safety throughout China. For example, Zhang Chunghe, a woman from a well-to-do family, fled from Beijing to Anhui in 1937 when the war broke out, and in the following eight years, she “made at least ten major moves and twenty small moves.” She escaped “with twenty pieces of luggage and several people—two children, two nannies, her husband, her mother-in-law, herself—and came home with five pieces of luggage and four people.” For a more detailed description of her wartime living, see Annping Chin, *Four Sisters of Hofei* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 168-72.
war supported by the people had more chance for a positive outcome than a war fought for the interests of a particular group.

Witnessing sacrifices, defeats, and hard-won victories in the battlefield, Xie developed a strong identification with soldiers and their suffering. On her short trips back to Wuhan and Chongqing, she had difficulty adjusting herself to life in the rear. She said, “I am not capable to live as an ordinary person anymore. Modern women’s perfumes remind me the smell of blood in the battlefield; noises from restaurants reminds me those soldiers bleeding and moaning in pain in field hospitals. I understand that it is equally important to work in the front and the back, but it would relieve me much more to get back to the front ... that is how I choose Xuzhou as my next destination after the retreat from Shanghai.”\(^\text{35}\) The trip to Xuzhou produced one of her best known works, *Patrol in the Fifth War Zone* (*diwu zhanqu xunli*), which introduced the victory of the Battle of Taierzhuang to her readers. In this essay, she also correctly predicted that Chinese troops were not capable of gaining further advantage from this victorious battle. Shortly afterwards, Chinese troops had to retreat further to the west.

Chinese soldiers, who had traditionally been perceived as equal to bandits by ordinary peasants, were portrayed as heroic and full of human warmth under Xie’s pen. Xie’s writings frequently captured touching moments between soldiers in the face of death. Xie conveyed the message that officers and soldiers were ordinary people who often expressed the desire to connect with their families. In her essay *Love Letters from the Front*, Xie depicted a contrasting moment of fire and peace. In a battle in late 1937, the building where Xie was interviewing a group of soldiers came under attack by air bombs. Explosions and fire convinced everyone that disastrous sacrifice could happen any moment. Xie suggested that each soldier write a note to

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\(^{35}\) Xie Bingyin, *Xie Bingying wenji*, vol. 1, 281.
their families. The officials all agreed to her idea and everyone wrote letters to their wives or parents. While waiting for the Japanese airplanes to leave, the officers decided to share the letters. It turned out that the content of the letters were strikingly similar. They all told their families that they were being attacked by air bombs, and it might be their moment of sacrifice. They implored their loved ones not to feel sorry for them in case they died, because they would be dying for the causes of resistance. This small example shows the humanity of soldiers in the cruelty of war: every soldier is somebody’s son, husband, or brother, and the bond between a soldier and his family could not be severed by war. Xie’s writing often conveyed this message.

Since Chinese soldiers had alarming illiteracy rates, Xie also saw the need to aid them in communicating with their families. According to an estimate, in 1935, half of the officers promoted from the ranks were illiterate.\textsuperscript{36} The proportion of illiterate soldiers among the general ranks was likely much larger. Thus, writing letters for soldiers to help them reconnect with their families became another routine for these female volunteers. Writing letters for Chinese soldiers was popular among educated Chinese women, and girl scouts were also encouraged to do the same for peasant soldiers.\textsuperscript{37} It was believed to be an important aspect of showing support to soldiers on the front.

Writing remained the major tool that Xie adopted to express what she observed about the War. Many of her writings were published in women’s journals, and her essays were also widely circulated in general newspapers and journals. Xie did not show a gender preference for women’s journals in publishing her essays. As the war progressed, women’s journals took a


\textsuperscript{37} Spicer, 7-8.
further step in editing and compiling written works by other members of the women’s service
corps as well. These works were the initial first-hand accounts of war, and introduced the front to
the rear. Their writing furthered the political purposes of arousing collective action and gaining
wider support from their audiences for the causes of Chinese resistance. Organizing the women’s
service corps was the real manifestation of Xie’s political aspiration, one that was born from
earlier years of revolution. And publishing was an effective way to publicize women’s pro-
military activities.

Other women also found writing to be a powerful and genuine way of expressing their
political views on war and national affairs. For example, Hu Lanqi not only wrote essays on the
war for newspapers and journals, but also encouraged members of her group to write essays for
the press. The result was the publication of books of collected essays in three consecutive years,
from 1938 to 1940, by the Life Bookstore, a progressive publishing house established by leftist
journalist Zou Taofen in 1932. Women’s writings on the war told a story of an unyielding China,
a nation which asked for collective and determined action from every citizen.  

Shanghai Working Women’s Army Auxiliary Corp (AWWAAC) and Hu Lanqi

Hu Lanqi, Xie’s fellow soldier from the Northern Expedition, followed a similar path
before and during the War of Resistance. Disappointed with the right wing of the GMD, Hu went
into exile and was imprisoned by the Nazi secret police force due to her involvement with
German Communist activities. Her release from German prison and subsequent involvement

38 For women’s writing on the war and Chinese resistance causes, see Hu Lanqi, ed., Zhandi yinian
(Chongqing: Shenghuo Shudian, 1939); Zhandi ernian (Jiangxi Jian: Shenghuo Shudian, 1939); and Zhandi sannian
(Jiangxi jian: laodong funüzhandi fuwutuan, 1940).
with left-leaning writers such as Maxim Gorky kept her an informed and determined anti-imperialist activist.

When China witnessed another wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations in 1935 due to Japan’s intensified advancement in Northern and Central China to secure its economic and political gains, Hu Lanqi was ready to re-enter the national stage of the anti-colonialist movement. When she arrived Hong Kong on April 1935, Hu renewed her political affinity with left-leaning Nationalists including He Xiangning, Song Qingling, and the exiled officials of the Fujian People’s Government (1933-1934). In 1936, Hu returned to Shanghai to organize activities for national salvation. She became a member of leftist circles and meanwhile maintained secret contact with CCP members such as Pan Hannian, Hu Yuzhi, Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Mei Gongbin, and Hu Feng. They met in cafes in the International Settlement to discuss plans to mobilize artists and journalists for the patriotic cause.

Hu Lanqi immersed herself in activities organized by women for national salvation. She was a frequent panel discussant for the meetings coordinated by Women’s Life, of which independent journalist and woman activist Shen Ziji (1898-1989) was the editor-in-chief. In these panel discussions, women talked about mass mobilizations for anti-Japanese movements and women’s role in these movements. Women’s political meetings and their common understanding of a united resistance drove He Xiangning to coordinate a general convention for women from various social and political backgrounds. At the convention, women activists

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39 The Fujian People’s Government was a short-lived anti-Jiang government. It was established by the 19th Division of the National Revolutionary Army, which gained fame for its resistance against the Japanese invasion during the January 28 Incident in Shanghai. The Army was deployed to Fujian to suppress Communists after the Shanghai defense, but instead they negotiated peace with the CCP. In alliance with other marginalized national leaders such as Li Jishen, they openly parted with Jiang and proclaimed a new government on November 22, 1933. The new government was suppressed by Jiang in January 1934.
unanimously agreed to organize the Shanghai Women’s Comforting Association for National Salvation (Shanghai funu weilao hui). Hu was recommended by He to be a member of the executive committee together with nine other women activists. Their patriotic messages reached a wide spectrum of women in Shanghai, and even attracted participation from housewives and petty citizens.  

Besides the organization and propaganda work that she carried out with the Shanghai Women’s Comforting Association for National Salvation, Hu decided to produce a pamphlet to spread the message of anti-Japanese to illiterate workers, peasants, women, and children, by using simple and direct language with the aid of visual images. With the financial aid and contributions from friends of the League of Left Wing Writers and Sichuan Provincial Association in Shanghai, Hu started publication of the pamphlet. She named her own publication Gimmick. Gimmick was not only circulated in Shanghai but also in Chengdu and Chongqing through the circulation channels offered by Hu’s Sichuan provincial fellow Lan Dezun, a successful businessman running a transportation company between Shanghai and Chongqing.  

On August 13, 1937, one month after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the war reached Shanghai. A stream of intensive battles in the surrounding areas of the city created a huge number of refugees fleeing their homes to the Shanghai International Settlement. The demand for news of the war was growing as more and more people were forced to flee their homes. Viewing the request for messages from the public, Hu stopped issuing Gimmick and dedicated her energy to developing a bulletin publication called The War Drum, which featured opinions, news of battles, and narratives from resistance soldiers. The War Drum was initially seen in certain parts

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41 Ibid., 9.
of the city, but as demand for it increased, Hu recruited volunteers to make hand-written copies, which were distributed to the Zhabei, Hongkou, and Jingan districts, the International Settlement, and the Bund. The distribution of news from Chinese resistance troops helped to keep residents and refugees informed. *The War Drum* was so popular among the people in Shanghai that its publication was continued in the International Settlement after Shanghai fell into Japanese hands.

Hu did not limit her work to the distribution of *The War Drum*; she also joined army service teams sponsored by patriotic associations such as the National Salvation Association, the League of the Left-Wing Writers, Women’s Comforting Association for National Salvation, and the Home-Front Association for Resisting-Japanese. These patriotic groups brought medicine, food, and clothing to the surrounding areas of Shanghai where Chinese troops fought against Japanese aggressors at great cost. Besides providing logistical support to the army, these groups also offered comfort and entertainment to soldiers to keep morale high, by performing street dramas and singing patriotic songs with resistance themes. During these trips to the front, Hu learned about the many difficulties encountered by Chinese resistance troops stationed in the areas immediately surrounding Shanghai. Their most pressing problem was their inability to communicate with local people who spoke drastically different local dialects. Without support from civilians, the troops faced great difficulties in transporting the wounded and receiving messages.

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42 Ibid., 12.
43 Ibid., 12.
44 Ibid., 13-14.
During her visits to the warzones in September 1937, Hu witnessed the soldiers’ sufferings due to this lack of support, and decided to organize a woman’s service group to aid the army by facilitating the communication with local people. She talked to General Luo Zhuoying (1896-1961), the commander of the 18th Division Army, about the plan. At the time, Luo and his Guangdong army, which had just been transferred from Guangdong for the defense of Shanghai, were deeply troubled by misunderstandings with local people who spoke entirely different dialects. Moreover, many local people fled before the coming of the troops out of the fear of destructions brought by undisciplined soldiers. Being strangers to local terrains, Luo’s Guangdong army encountered many problems in its operations in the absence of any logistic support from local communities. In order to advance his operations, Luo needed messages on local topography and supplies.

Troubled by these problems, Luo was said to be “excited” about Hu’s proposal. He went further to seek support from Madam He Xiangning, who then resided in Shanghai and had given her open support to Hunan Women’s Army Auxiliary Corp. He Xiangning, the widow of the most respected leftist Nationalist martyr Liao Zhongkai, was a prominent woman’s leader and an outspoken critic of Jiang’s Nanjing government for its nonaction policy prior to the war. She was deemed the conscience of the Nationalist Party, and her support meant gaining authenticity and

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45 The Lower Yangzi region had been exposed to numerous war destructions historically. One of the most brutal examples of violence was the killing of civilian populations who were loyal to Ming by the Manchu army in Yangzhou city in 1645. The revenging killing lasted for six days. Many of the victims were children, women, and the elderly. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Lower Yangzi region again became a site which the Taiping rebellion and Nian rebels fought furiously for during their respective rebellions. An estimated million people lost their lives to the destruction brought by these rebellions. Most recently, the wars between warlords for personal gains plagued the area until Jiang Jieshi unified China in 1927. As a result of those destructive wars, ordinary Chinese people were not particularly fond of soldiers. In fact, their perception of soldiers was usually negative. This image of soldiers was best illustrated by a local idiom: “a good man doesn’t aspire to be a soldier, a good woman doesn’t marry a soldier.” For a discussion on the Yangzhou holocaust, see Spence, 35; for a discussion on the Taiping Rebellion and Nian Rebellion, and their impacts on Lower Yangzi region, see Spence, The Search for Modern China, 141, 171-80, 183-6.
righteousness from the resistance movement, which represented the will of the people. As an experienced military commander, Luo knew that morale among the soldiers was crucial for fighting against the much better equipped enemy. He expected that a women’s frontline service corps and their activities in medical relief, propaganda work, and logistic services would bring about positive results and boost the army’s morale.46

Securing the approval of General Luo, Hu wasted no time in recruiting candidates for the women’s frontline service corps. She used her connection with the YWCA in Shanghai and selected nine female workers. Hu’s action was followed by women’s press closely. Funü shenghuo, for instance, reported each move she made. The news on women organizing frontline service corps was shared by women’s associations in other parts of the country, and was widely echoed. Women’s nation-wide support was an indispensable morale booster to the soldiers on the hard-fought front. Some women leaders went on to gather and share even more work in refugee relief in the following years in Wuhan and Chongqing. There was indeed a deep value for collective action among these women in this time of national peril.47

Hu and the first group of ten members of the Shanghai Working Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps went to the front to support Luo’s 18th Division of the Chinese National Army in a supplementary capacity on October 5, 1937, two months after the Japanese launched a military attack on Shanghai and its surrounding areas. It was a trying time for the Chinese troops defending the Lower Yangzi region, where the Japanese armies had increasingly concentrated

46 Ren wu, “Remembering the Woman Soldiers of the Shanghai Working Women’s Army Auxiliary Corp,” Wenxuecheng, http://blog.wenxuecity.com/myblog/45976/200909/29039.html (accessed on October 10, 2010). Ren wu is the daughter of Ren Xiutang, one of the earliest members of the SWWAAC. She collected diaries, letters, and other oral and written materials on SWWAAC, and published these materials online at http://blog.wenxuecity.com/myblog/45976/200911/14068.html (accessed on October 10, 2010).

47 Shangguang gongpu, Jiuwang yundongzhong zhishifunü de renwu, in Women’s Monthly 4, no. 9,1936; and Hu, vol. 2, 3.
troops and ammunitions for a total attack. The Japanese aimed to seize Shanghai and its surrounding areas to secure further attacks on China’s inner and southern regions.\footnote{Qiu Xingxiang, A Memoir of General Luo Zhuoying on the Songhu Front, in Zhonghua wenshi ziliao wenku 4 (Chinese Library and History Data 4) (zhongguo wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1996), 77-80.} Realizing the strategic importance of these campaigns for the future, Jiang Jieshi and other military leaders mobilized troops from southeast China into defensive positions. By the time the first group of SWWAAC arrived the front, the 18\textsuperscript{th} division of Chinese National Army had fought fiercely against the Japanese advancement in Luodian, Baoshan, and Jiading at a great cost. Luo commented on these serious battles, saying, “The Japanese troops are fully prepared after decades of calculation and planning. They are much more advanced in terms of technology and munitions. We were forced to take the position for self-defense, nonetheless, we soldiers are determined to confront the enemy and use our flesh and bodies to defend every inch of our land.”\footnote{Ibid., 77.}

Despite his determination and dedication, Luo also admitted that his troops needed logistical support from the civilian population. Hu’s members, who were capable of using local dialects, helped to establish a nexus of communication between the army and the people. By doing so, these members confirmed and expanded the roles available to the female gender.

**Women Confronting State Gender Ideology**

By going to the front, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps had broken the most compelling social rule regulating the lives of women—to stay behind the front lines. They believed that their presence on the front would bring social meaning to the lives of Chinese women.
women. For example, Hu explained the social impact of women army auxiliary corps by saying, “today not only do I wear the army uniform again, but also bring with me sixteen girls to the front. Chinese women have always been belittled and dominated by feudal systems. The conservative elements do not trust that women could take the responsibility for salvation, nor do they consider women have the courage to go to the front.” Xie and Hu organized women’s front line service corps not only to provide military relief, but also to declare women’s capacity as soldiers.

The war gave Hu and Xie the opportunity to interpret the course of history from the perspective of the women’s movement that they inherited from the May Fourth Movement. They took the opportunity to address wartime women’s issues from their vantage point as female soldiers. While praising women’s activities in nursing, fund-raising, war orphan relief, espionage, and ammunition, they attributed women’s special suffering in the war to the traditional patriarchal family system that still prevailed in various parts of the country. In her address to the nation from the Central Broadcasting Radio, Xie told stories of women’s suffering that she witnessed on the front and condemned politically indifferent women who did nothing to contribute to China’s war effort:

women suffered much more than men in this war … they were raped, murdered, or committed suicide in extreme situations. The war took destitute women and made them homeless … yet there are women behind the line who were so short-sighted and only care for their family’s interests … Women’s suffering and weakness are caused by the patrilineal and patriarchal family system which prohibited them from education and physical training. The system only makes women helpless in face of such a grand scale disaster.\

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50 Xie, Kangzhan ri ji, 430.
Xie believed that women should be educated in order to be able to share the responsibility for national salvation with men.

Xie recognized general and specialized education as means for training women to contribute to the war effort, and advocated for general education to include topics such as the ideas of nation and citizenship, the nature of China’s war effort, the knowledge of first aid and preventative health, and the unification of women for national salvation.\(^{51}\) In her deliberations on women’s unification, Xie explained that “Chinese women were accustomed to being dependent on men, which stopped them from contributing to the national salvation … Women must be organized and unified in order to help themselves and the nation survive the war.”\(^{52}\)

Xie’s vision for China’s war effort was one that to stirred up an informed resistance against Japan and to continue to open up minds while mobilizing for national salvation. Despite her criticisms of Chinese women’s inadequate contribution to China’s war effort, Xie saw women as a collectivity with their own special political capacity. Realizing women’s potential required special training in mass mobilization, nursing, agricultural and industrial production, transportation, espionage, children’s education, military strategy, and planning.\(^{53}\) For instance, Xie emphasized that mass mobilization needed to be carried out with a sympathetic attitude and empirical knowledge of ordinary Chinese peasants.

The image of revolutionary femininity that Xie and Hu embodied and propagandized was socially accepted and popularized. The cover girl on the relaunched edition of the *Yong

\(^{51}\) Xie, 1984, 56-57.

\(^{52}\) Xie, *Kangzhan riji*, 435.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 437-40.
Companion, the most popular general interest pictorial of Republican China, was a revolutionary female soldier, armed with a gun and wearing almost no make-up. The ideal women were those who were willing to challenge traditional gender norms, embrace collectivity, and engage in agricultural and industrial production.

Nonetheless, women’s activism in the army was perceived as a threat to the male dominated state authority. When the war entered the stage of stalemate, tension between female activists and the military leadership escalated. Starting from early 1940, the army leadership put Hu and Xie’s movement to mobilize women’s and civilian’s support under constant surveillance. The two women were no longer allowed to initiate new programs for mass mobilization. Unable to fulfill their activist mission, Hu and Xie disbanded the women’s auxiliary corps in the spring of 1941.

Conclusion

Revolutionary femininity was not something new that grew out of the war. It was a radical variant of the May Fourth cultural renewal, whose rejection of the Republican state’s nuclear family (xiao jiating) ideal and the colonial consumption model of the modern girl proved too subversive for Chinese society during the 1920s and 1930s. The exigencies of the war opened up a space for the state to put these radical, subversive women to work. The Chinese Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was these radical women’s voluntary contribution to the Chinese state at war. But the relationship between the state and the radical feminist activists remained a contentious one, and ultimately led to the Auxiliary Corp’s disbandment. While the

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patriarchal state drew on the mobilizing power of the revolutionist women, they embedded a subtle critique of the dominant patriarchal structure in their wartime reportage and literature. By seeking to subvert the nation through gender and class, revolutionary femininity responded to the call of the nation, and also went beyond it.
Chapter Two. Rescuing the Dying and Healing the Wounded: Wartime Nursing and the Construction of Professional Femininity in the Army

With the outbreak of the war in 1937, public discourse appeared in newspapers and journals acknowledging that war had a special meaning for women. The discussion linked women with the war effort by pointing out the relevance to nursing of their accustomed supporting roles in family. Women’s journals such as Funü shenghuo (Women’s life) and Funü gongming (Women’s voices) and Zhanshi funü (Wartime women) called on Chinese women to join the war effort by in the nursing and caring for the wounded.¹

This chapter argues that conventional understandings of gender roles facilitated women’s entry into the nursing field, where they further developed the scientific, social, and cultural areas of the profession. In doing so, nursing leaders established a profession with a distinctive vision for its future that was linked with modern nation building. Nursing not only served as a vehicle for professionalizing women, but also served as a channel where civic-minded women could fulfill their aspirations and contribute to making history. During the war, Chinese women helped diversify the nursing profession into a variety of specialties where women could independently assess and evaluate care. At the same time, the large number of women becoming nurses reinforced the concept of nursing as an exclusively feminine field. The War of Resistance served as an occasion for both the affirmation and reconsideration of gendered assumptions that accompanied nursing.

¹ Zhanzheng yu funü (War and women), in Zhan shi funü (Wartime women) 4 (1940): 12.
This chapter begins with a discussion on voluntary nursing, which brought unprecedented public attention to the issue of Chinese soldiers’ suffering at the front and women’s nursing roles in the war. Next, the chapter discusses the establishment of military nursing and the important roles played by graduates of the Nursing School of the Peking Union Medical College. Voluntary nursing and the establishment of a preliminary military nursing system were not entirely separable during the war. Public discussion on voluntary nursing helped establish a more formal medical relief system for Chinese soldiers.

The need for medical personnel was tremendous when the war broke out. Open hostilities with Japanese invaders led to heroic sacrifices on the part of Chinese soldiers. Their sacrifices, often heroic and devastating, shocked Chinese as well as international observers. During the drawn out years of the war, Chinese army medical services were faced with a number of challenges, including a lack of medical personnel and supplies, poor conditions for transportation, bad sanitation (filth in the army and military camps), and rapidly spreading epidemics among the moving troops. Theodore H. White, the China correspondent for *Time* magazine, described some of these challenges in his letter to David Hulburd of the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China (henceforth ABMAC) on February 20, 1941.

He lies on the field till his comrades or the company stretcher bearers pick him up (2 stretcher bearers per company); on the field nothing can be done for him—he must be carried on past regimental headquarters (where there are 20 stretchers for emergencies), on past regimental headquarters to divisional dressing station(a farmhouse, a temple, a barn), where, if he is lucky, he may find a competent doctor to treat his fractured limbs, to tighten his broken blood vessels (which have been bleeding since he fell), to treat him for shock. But he does not rest here—he is still in the combat zone; from divisional dressing station he must still be carried on through the broken and roadless country, out of the zones of fighting to the communications zones, where the road begin again. Here in the communication zone he is passed on to the
collecting station—and here for the first time, after two weeks, he reaches an operation table.

It is on this stretch that the Chinese soldier suffers—from lines of combat to operating table takes, in most war areas, ten days to two weeks; in some war areas, it takes three weeks. I myself have seen these soldiers coming down from the hills on stretchers to the roads—their stretchers are open to the sun, dust gathers on them, flies swarm on them … the peasants along the way contribute their help in moving stretchers along, offering their backs; labor units are commanded.²

The combination of non-existent furlough, frequent forced conscription, and poor living conditions witnessed by White led, not surprisingly, to his view of Chinese soldiers as “doomed men.”³

The urgent need for medical personnel came not only from the army but also from the civilian population. Waves of fleeing refugees contributed to the already deteriorating sanitary conditions since mobile populations increased the risk of spreading communicable diseases such as cholera, dysentery, malaria, pneumonia, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis. Personal accounts left records of the challenges. Phil Greene, a professor at Hsiang-Ya Medical College in Changsha, wrote home that “the hazards of the journey are great … uncertainties of living conditions on arrival anywhere … sickness in these congested refugee centers … a vast problem.”⁴ Major transportation centers such as Changsha, Wuhan, and Yichan suffered from extreme pressure due

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² From T. H. White, Chungking, China, to David Hulburd, Feb 20, 1941, Box 96, American Bureau for Medical Aid to China (henceforth ABMAC), Special Collection and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.


to the sudden population surge. Lin Huiyin (1904-1955), the renowned architect and poet, wife of Liang Sicheng (1901-1972), wrote to Willa Fairbank of her exodus from Beijing to Changsha. In her letters, Lin described the danger and hardships of the journey in great detail. Refugees faced constant threats from bandits, hunger, air bombs, and robbery, along with numerous uncertainties resulting from the war. Lin’s family and other refugees who could afford bus transportation usually had to wait in bed-bug plagued small inns for days or weeks to get the tickets to their next stop, which often remained unknown until they were dropped off.  

The war did not discriminate between social class when bringing dislocation, homelessness, or hunger. Evidence, however, showed that the situation for the masses of poor refugees was even more miserable.  

The numbers and quality of trained medical personnel was anything but adequate, despite a marked improvement in medical education and public health development during the Nanjing decade. At the outbreak of the war, it was estimated that there were approximately nine thousand doctors and five thousand nurses, many of whom were trapped in occupied areas, in addition to a number of top quality medical schools and hospitals, which were located in

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6 Danke Li’s interview with women of wartime China allows an opportunity to learn about ordinary women’s experiences; one such woman was Liu Qunying, a high school student at Wuchan No.2 Girls’ School, who escaped the air-bombed city of Wuhan in October 1938. In order to receive protection for her family from bandits, she reluctantly allowed a male refugee to take advantage of her sexually. Li, 55-60.

7 The development of weisheng (modern hygiene) before 1937 was uneven in various parts of the country. A number of significant factors contributed to the implementation of modern hygiene. Ruth Rogaski, for example, examined the roles conducted by colonial administrations, intellectuals, modern commerce, and Chinese local authority in the forming of “hygienic modernity” in the treaty port Tianjing. Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004). For a chronological development of modern health in the Nationalist China, see Ka-Che Yip, *Health and National Reconstruction in Nationalist China: The Development of Modern Health Services, 1928-1937* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1996).
occupied areas as well. According to records, there were only about five hundred doctors available for the Red Cross medical relief planning, and only about fifty four military hospitals, which had a limited number of beds. This left the Army Medical Service the gigantic task of taking care of approximately five million men. As for medicine or medical supplies, China mostly relied on imports prior to the war. Therefore, when the Japanese occupied the east coast and severed the supply line, it was disastrous for the medical situation in Nationalist China. It was against this backdrop that nurses trained at various medical sites came into the theater for war relief.

Unlike the well-researched European and American nurses in World War II, their Chinese counterparts have received very little attention from scholars. This omission results mainly from a lack of primary sources. Chinese nurses seldom left written records such as diaries, letters, or memoirs due to political and social turmoil in the years following the war. Political pressure that denied services to the Nationalist Army in the mainland from the 1940s to the 1970s also

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8 For example, top medical schools such as the Peking Union Medical School remained operated in Beijing until the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. While many of the PUMC medical staff remained in occupied China, only 36 PUMC people were to be found in Nationalist China, some of whom were prominent in the work for wartime medical relief. The most remembered names are Lin Kesheng (Robert K.S. Lim), Zhou Meiying, and C.C. Chen. According to Huang Mao and Zeng Ruiyan, there were twelve medical schools that moved to Southwest China during the war, including the Central Medical School, Jiangsu Medical School, Hsiang-Ya Medical School and others. See Huang and Zeng, “On the Wartime Medical Schools Moving to Sichuan,” in Kangri zhanzheng yanjiu (Research on the War of Resistance) 1 (2005): 35-38.

9 T. H. White Folder EMSTS (Emergency Medical Service Training School), Box 2, ABMAC, Special Collection and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

10 Folder EMSTS (Emergency Medical Service Training School), Box 2, ABMAC.

11 The Nanjing Government attempted to install a paramilitary nursing training in high school curriculum before the war. For example, the Military Commission of Nanjing issued directives to high schools in the city and demanded the establishment of military training programs for female students. The training was intended as preparation for military conflicts; they were, however, inadequate. See Shoudu junshi weiyunhui gonghan (《首都军事委员会公函》), Nusheng junshi kanhu xunlian, gaozhong yixue shanxia mofandui xunlian banfa ji youguan junxun wenshu (《女生军事看护训练,高中以上学校模范队训练办法及有关军训文书》); and Nanjingshi guomin junshi xunlian weiyunhui1 gonghan (《南京市国民军事训练委员会公函》) file 4218, Series 648; the Second Historical Archive of China (henceforth SHAC), Nanjing.
precluded opportunities for oral history projects. Although these research limitations can be frustrating, there are some existing sources from which information can be drawn. This chapter, for example, chiefly relies on institutional archives of the Rockefeller Foundation International Health Division and of the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China.

There were two major avenues for women venturing into the field of nursing for war relief. One was voluntary nursing, a prominent phenomenon at the outbreak of the war that ultimately dwindled due to the prolonged nature of the war. The other was through professional nursing, which was driven by the emergent needs generated by the war. The development of public health in Nanjing during the prewar decade introduced the establishment of nursing programs as a formal branch in medical schools. Women’s nursing service to war relief focused on two major fields; one was providing curative care for Chinese soldiers at the front, the other was to deliver preventative health care. The latter often sent women nurses to refugee camps, war zones, and high-way stations where they evaluated medical needs and distributed medicine. The establishment of public health facilities was particularly important in Sichuan, where the wartime capital was located.

The training programs did indeed expand and introduce a modern notion of nursing to a wider part of China. They also laid a solid foundation for army medical service. Women played crucial roles in the process. Their achievement was highly visible as the war went on; as Song Meiling recounted of these women in her message to a women’s meeting in Sydney in February, 1938, “many of them can be seen at the front, as doctors and war nurses.”

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Voluntary Nursing: Embodying Nurturing Femininity in the Time of National Crisis

In the field of nursing, women demonstrated an immediate willingness to aid war efforts in supportive roles. After the war broke out, individual women and local and provincial groups organized small bands of women to go to the front to serve the soldiers and to educate the people directly behind the lines. These groups provided first aid for the wounded, and educated the rural population about the significance of the struggle with Japan. Such groups were organized by activists such as He Xiangning, Xie Bingying, Hu Lanqi, Jiang Jian, and many others. (See Chapter One for Xie and Hu’s Army Auxiliary Corps’ activities.) As Eva Dykes Spicer points out, Women’s Auxiliary Corps “were very successful in doing liaison work between the soldiers and the people.”\(^\text{13}\) Despite women’s enthusiastic participation, the quantity and quality of their service in no way met the needs of the army. The medical challenges, however, were made public and aroused concerns.

Some women felt that it was their responsibility to prepare the public for the war by educating them about nursing and basic medical care. In 1939, the progressive Life Bookstore issued the *Funü zhanshi shouce* (*Women’s Wartime Manual*), along with other publications introducing information about the War of Resistance and its long-term impact on China’s nation-building efforts.\(^\text{14}\) Such publications recognized that women’s first-aid knowledge was necessary during a time when soldiers suffered massively on the battlefield. This recognition helped weave women and nursing care together in the public imagination. Women offered bedside care, and their conventional roles as nurturers were now employed for the physical and mental health of

\(^{13}\) Spicer, 8.

the soldiers. In his extensive writings on how to solve the medical issue of the war wounded, Charlie Zhang, a doctor from the Central Medical School who served in North China in late 1937, requested that women show their sympathy towards wounded soldiers by using their traditional skills, which ranged from being nurturers to weavers. Women’s sympathy and their manual skills in cloth making could both be useful to hospitals.\textsuperscript{15}

Educated women initiated discussion in the press on women’s duties as national citizens for the War of Resistance. In her essay titled “These are What Women Compatriots should Prepare for the War of Resistance,” Cheng Cui specifically pointed out that female high school and college students should appeal to curriculum-design committees to include war-nursing courses, and that schools should also organize educated students into rescue teams to go to the front. Receiving military training should be understood as female students’ national responsibility. Educated women were expected to take on roles in the national salvation by conducting propaganda work among civilians as well as in the army.\textsuperscript{16} The association of women with war work illustrated an emergent sense of relevance and inclusion among the female population.

Regional connections prevailed in women’s organizations for war relief. For example, women from Shanghai, Yunnan, Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Hunan built a reputation in the realm of voluntary nursing and other army auxiliary work. These organizations, as well as their immediate association with relief work, were regarded as convincing examples of women’s spontaneous patriotism. Women organized through convenient geographical affiliations. This reflected the lasting impact of customary social networking patterns dominant in Chinese

\textsuperscript{15} Zhang Chali (Charlie Chang), \textit{Banyue wenzai}, vol. 5, March 10, 1938.

\textsuperscript{16} Cheng Cui, “Funü de zhanshi zhunbei renwu” (These are what women compatriots should prepare for the War of Resistance), in \textit{Funü gongming}, joint issue of no. 56 and 57, 21, reprinted in \textit{Zhongguo funü qikan hedingben}, 2677.
society. It also signified a new trend in which women began to recognize and associate with their sister groups from other regions. This trend represented a purpose for collective action beyond regional boundaries in the war against Japan.

Voluntary nurses provided more than bedside care. They wrote letters home for soldiers, many of whom were illiterate. The public press repeatedly reported on the phenomenon of educated women writing letters for illiterate soldiers. Girl Scouts took food to soldiers when street battles occurred in the city, carrying the wounded on their way back. Female students were called upon to make bandages for military hospitals. Charlie Zhang, who worked as a doctor for the Qilu Medical School as well as the United Medical Relief Corps of the Central Medical School, described women’s attendant roles in providing medical supplies for wounded soldiers during the battle of Baoding. He suggested that females had a special ability to fulfill the work of caring.

The boom in voluntary nursing at the outbreak of the war reflected a prompt response from the civilian society to the army’s sacrifice and losses. Relieving a soldier’s suffering became a method that women adopted to express their desire for collective action. Volunteer nursing in the early years of the war generated far-reaching reactions from the public. Exemplary role models, for example, were recognized in the press. Jiang Jian (1902-1940) was known as the “mother of the wounded soldiers” in Wuhan. Jiang assisted her husband, Zhou Mingdong, a western-trained medical doctor, in establishing the well-known “people’s clinic” (minzhong zhensuo) in Wuhan in 1938, when the city became the temporary location of the Nanjing government. She volunteered for medical relief and used her social connections to organize relief work for

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wounded soldiers and war orphans. She served as head nurse in the 5th Military Hospital in Wuhan. In addition to volunteer nursing work, she committed herself to the Wuhan women’s circle for refugee children’s relief, which had already drawn Nationalist, Communist and non-aligned women around the country to its cause. Jiang was appointed president of the 5th Children’s Homes and Schools in Hechuan, Sichuan after Wuhan fell in October 1938, and was known for refusing the salary provided by the government for her social work with refugee children.

Jiang’s devotion to Chinese troops and refugee children drew press attention, and many wrote stories about her and highly commended her spirit of giving. Young women followed her example and served in the army as volunteer nurses. When Jiang died at age 38, in 1940, her story became a national sensation and she was viewed as the embodiment of a patriotic mother. Wartime writer and journalist An’er paid tribute to her by writing “The Song of Mourning” (ai’ge) for children to sing to memorialize her:

Ah, the mother of the wounded,  
In the season of Patriotism,  
Suddenly and quietly, You are gone.  
You healed the wounded soldiers,  
Returning them to the battlefield.  
...  
Rest in peace, the nanny of the era.  
Look, your children are armed,  
In the dawn of freedom,  
We extol your virtues.

Our country is suffering,  
Yet, you are leaving us behind.  
Ah, great mother Zhou!  
Your spirit of serving the soldiers,  
And your love for war orphans,  
Moving the heart of every child of China.
The final victory hasn’t arrived,
Yet you are gone.

…

We will follow, emulating your spirit of sacrifice,
We shall inherit your unfinished wish,
Together, we continue to resist the enemy and build our country.
We promise to comfort your soul with the ultimate victory.\textsuperscript{18}

This mourning song was sung by school children nation-wide, and the press created another series of reports about her. The name of Jiang Jian appeared in newspapers and journals and her story was widely circulated. Her reputation as a patriotic sensation grew with the continuing publication of her deeds in the military hospitals and war orphanages. Decades later, a former refugee child of the 5\textsuperscript{th} Children’s Home named An Yangde described a scene of mourning her death, in which war orphans sang songs with tears running down their cheeks, paying tribute to their fallen ‘mother’. An said, “Even half a century later, when I sing the song of mourning, I still can’t help breaking down with tears.”\textsuperscript{19} During the war, children as well as adults were easily motivated by pain, anger, and suffering. Mourning became a shared, public event in Jiang’s death. For men, women, and children in Chongqing, which was under Japanese air attack, remembering Jiang’s life not only celebrated her sacrifice, but built a shared sensation of patriotism. Mourning was not the closure of an event, but a means for gaining the strength needed for further survival.

Jiang Jian’s death was employed to promote unification, and her feminine devotion to the resistance cause was written into the linear history of the nation. In her essay remembering Jiang, Deng Yingchao wrote the following warning:

\textsuperscript{18} An’er, \textit{An’er wenji} (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2008), 64-65.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 65.
Jiang Jian’s death is a loss to the national reconstruction, a loss to the Chinese nation, and an equal loss to Chinese women … Born to a well-off and respectful family, she was not arrogant, instead she had a natural demeanor of being affectionate, which drew people to her naturally. She had firmly committed herself to the War of Resistance and National Reconstruction without thinking about her own interests. All she cared about, day and night, were the wounded soldiers and refugee children! Her spirit of sacrifice and strong will were invaluable … Jiang Jian was the role model for Chinese women … The best way to remember her is to follow her path. We are going to remember her with real action and advancing our work to a higher level. Only by working harder, can we fill up the emptiness left by her death. Long live the spirit of Jiang Jian!\(^{20}\)

The widely-circulated public discussion on women’s contributions and voluntary nursing gained the profession wider exposure and stirred an increasing interest in it. These essays used direct and forceful words to express passionate emotions aimed at cultivating a spirit of resistance. Jiang’s devotion and sacrifice were remembered in words that were usually used to honor a soldier’s heroic death. Such writing aimed to inspire a complexity of emotions, including sadness and pride, and in so doing, to inspire collective action, which was believed to constitute the only chance to stage an effective resistance. However, voluntary nursing could not promise consistency in its quality of medical service, and more professional and systematic nursing care with centralized coordination would soon be needed.

\textbf{Military Nursing}

The war brought the development of nursing education into a sudden state of crisis.\textsuperscript{21} According to a report from the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China, the immediate, destructive effect of the war on medical education was “almost incomprehensible … The remainder have been either suspended, destroyed, or forced to remove, in instances thousands of miles. This is an almost complete national disruption. Consequently it is all the more surprising to find that the majority of institutions have maintained their identity and reestablished themselves successfully, particularly in the instance of ‘national’ school.”\textsuperscript{22} Joining in the exodus of the nation to southwest China, numerous Chinese colleges and universities relocated to Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, along with their students, libraries, and teaching instruments.\textsuperscript{23}

The Nationalist government executed a policy of wartime conscription of medical personnel. Graduates of medical colleges and nursing schools were required to join the army or civil medical service, with the exception of the fifteen percent of these students who worked at their schools.\textsuperscript{24} The distribution of the remaining eighty five percent of medical graduates was as follows: forty percent went to the army’s medical administration, thirty percent were sent to the National Health Administration (NHA), and fifteen per cent went to the Red Cross Relief


\textsuperscript{22} Folder U.S.C. Annual Report, Box 74, ABMAC. For more detailed information on the damage brought by the war to nursing education in China, see Medical Education in 1937 (the year ending June 1938), General Situation, Folder 28, Series 601, Box 3, RF 1, RAC.

\textsuperscript{23} The Nationalist Government mobilized governments, factories, schools, and colleges to move to southwest China after the war broke out. China witnessed a national exodus in late 1937 and 1938. For a research on this national movement, see Su Zhiliang, \textit{Qu da houfang: zhongguo kangzhan shilu (Let’s go to the Great Rear: A Record of Chinese War of Resistance)}, (Shanghai: Shanghai remin Publishing House, 2005).

\textsuperscript{24} For those high school students who received paramilitary nursing training in Nanjing, the government kept records for conscription purposes. When the war broke out, however, it became hard to enforce the conscription when the population started to flee the city. See Ershishi nian dierqi gexiao junshi kanhu xunlian qimian nusheng mingdan (《二十四年第二期各校军事看护训练期满女生》), file 4249, series 648, SHAC.
Commission. Half of the graduates from midwifery schools were required to work in the National Health Administration. Therefore, graduates of nursing schools were implicated in a coordinated, nation-wide program of medical work and relief.

In addition to conscription by the government, young students voluntarily answered the call to become medical personnel. The Red Cross Society Medical Relief Corps attracted volunteers from junior and senior high schools and colleges. Zhou Meiyu, a colonel in the Army Medical Corps, observed that female nursing students answered the call with greater enthusiasm in comparison with male students. Zhou attributed it to unmarried girls’ exemption from direct family responsibilities: “unlike men who usually take the economic responsibility for their families, they do not have such worries.” Zhou was not the only one who noticed the spontaneous volunteerism from female students. On the eve of the final moment of Changsha’s fall on October 29, 1938, Phil Greene, a professor of the Yale-China Association at Hsiang-Ya Medical College, wrote, “the town is moving out fast. Our pupil nurses all got panicky and struck for some hours. The graduate nurses worked like anything and the pupils came back … we are moving all who want to go.”

Nurses in public health stations, medical schools and their affiliated hospitals, and missionary hospitals took part in the medical treatment of the wounded soldiers and civilians.

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26 The list of the graduates from the Medical School of the Central University could be located in the Second Historical Archive of China. See Yingzhen zhanshi weisheng renyuan yike ji yake biyesheng mingdan (《应征战时卫生人员医科及牙科毕业生名单》), file 4440, series 648(2); and Yixuyuan xuesheng congjun mingdan (《医学院学生从军名单》), file 4441/16J-3230, series 648(2), SHAC.

Despite suffering from bombing damages while the city was under air attack from July to December 1937, the Nanjing Health Demonstration Station took a large responsibility for medical relief. The out-patient clinic alone received 1,335 cases in July, 2,851 in August, and 644 in September. The out-patient clinic alone received 1,335 cases in July, 2,851 in August, and 644 in September. During these three months, they had seventy-one special calls, most of which were for those people who were badly wounded by the explosion of the Japanese bombs.28 Nurses in other parts of the country offered care to seemingly limitless war casualties and refugees. While they were under attack in 1937 and 1938, nurses in Shanghai, Changsha, Wuhan, and Guangzhou performed similar medical duties in their posts.

Though various records suggest that a large number of medical personnel remained in the occupied zones, cases of women escaping to join the nationalist army service existed.29 Very often they took the actions on their own. Daisy Chan was a nurse at the Queen Mary Hospital in Hong Kong when the Japanese army attacked the city on December 8, 1941. After the city fell and the Japanese army tightened their control over Chinese medical personnel, she decided to escape to Nationalist China. She waited for a couple of months to allow her bobbed hair to grow and braided it as a peasant woman would do. On the two-month journey to Chongqing, she encountered life-threatening dangers and witnessed fellow refugees being gunned down by invading Japanese soldiers. With a strong sense of survival, Chan reached Chongqing and started

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28 “Annual Report of the Public Health Personnel Training Institute, July 1937 – June 1938,” Folder 62, Series 601, Box 6, RF1, RAC.

29 For example, records of Chinese Medical Board, Inc. showed that most medical personnel of the Peking Union Medical College remained in Beijing and supported themselves through private practices. See “A Brief outline of Western Assistance to China During 1943-44 in the Field of Medicine and Health,” Folder 1037, Box 143, RG IV2B9, CMB., Inc., RAC.
working for the medical service of the American Volunteer Group. She was remembered as the Chinese nurse who provided nursing care to U.S. forces in China for the longest period.  

Some students who were overseas found similar motivation and returned to join the Nationalist medical effort. Owing to their postgraduate training in nursing education and administration, some of them became highly sought-after wartime nursing educators and leaders. At the outbreak of the war, two nurses from the Peking Union Medical College were on fellowship in the United States. Returning to China, Lin Sixin went to the National Central University in Chengdu, where she became Dean of the School of Nursing and head of a training course for nursing teachers and superintendents. Lin also served as the Secretary of the Nursing Association of China. She became a major voice for Chinese nurses during the war. Lin’s fellow PUMC alumnus Chen Chi returned to be the Assistant Superintendent of Nurses at Northwest Hospital and the Dean of the School of Nursing at Lanzhou. Both were also active PUMC alumnae who knitted a network of their own during and after the war. They were truly the essential personnel for developing wartime nursing in China’s remote southwest and northwest regions.

The advent of refugee medical personnel made it possible for the Nationalist Government to establish a rudimentary medical-relief system in southwest China. Particularly significant was the development of the National Health Administration, which opened up new venues for delivering nursing care and was operated at the national as well as the provincial levels. The newly established highway stations, mobile anti-epidemic units, and the Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Corps (MRC) rapidly absorbed the limited number of nursing personnel for

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30 For a personal account of Chan’s nursing experience during the War of Resistance, see “A Chinese Nurse in Kunming,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 45, no.7 (July 1945): 531-2.
medical work and relief for refugees, soldiers, and ordinary civilians. Nurses in these locations were called upon to take on heavy responsibilities. In the highway stations, they gave bedside care, supervised the clinics, directed the work of the auxiliary staff, and taught when necessary.31

The war conditions demanded heroic deeds and courage. Working at the front meant the constant shifting of working locales as military campaigns maneuvered. Nurses were not entirely free from the brutality of war. For example, the Ninth Unit of the Red Cross Society was stationed in the Changsha warzone, which was the major battlefield in the years of 1938 and 1939. As the war went on, medical personnel—including nurses—found themselves confronting life-threatening dangers. Miss Wang Xiaoyi died young in a battle, and Miss Yang Gexin barely escaped from enemy fire with a wounded soldier after two of her horses were confiscated by the enemy. In a moment like this, nurses were required to perform as soldiers in order to survive.

Sacrifices were inevitable when the cruelty of war was pervasive. Military nurses came across life-threatening dangers and many paid the ultimate price. A significant number of Chinese nurses provided medical care for the British army in Hong Kong and Southeast Asian war zones. A recorded number of over two hundred Chinese nurses died in the line of duty. Very often they died young, under tragic and heroic circumstances. According to the records made available by the Nurses War Memorial Chapel of the British Commonwealth, the causes of death for nurses in the Hong Kong Medical Services were often heart-wrenching: they were “lost at sea”; “presumed drowned at the fall of Singapore”; “died in civilian internment camp, Sumatra”; and, in the case of one nurse, “killed when H. E. bomb hit hospital but not withstanding loss of blood and pain, she refused to leave her patients and carried on tending and calming them in a

ward where windows have been blown out.” These simple and short sentences describe the last moments of life for countless war nurses, and reveal the human cost of war.

Zhou Meiyu and Army Medical Nursing Training Programs

Despite Chinese women’s devotion to nursing, medical care in the Chinese army, compared to contemporary standards, was primitive. Neither the quality nor the quantity of available care could meet the heightened wartime needs. The army had a very poor reservoir of nursing personnel for any emergency, much less for a full-scale war charged with massive casualties from both the army and civilian sides. As a stark illustration of this point, the Central Military Medical School located in Nanjing only had “a dozen student nurses in training” on the eve of the war. As a result of this lack of medical personnel, Chinese soldiers and draftees faced disastrous consequences from battle wounds: “An abdominal or head wound meant certain death; an infected gash meant gangrene.” The Chinese army’s suffering from the inadequacies of medical care drew attention from civil-minded medical professionals. Many saw this need as an opportunity to devote themselves to China’s resistance through their medical expertise.

One woman played a special role in developing military nursing for Chinese troops in the war. Zhou Meiyu was one of the most important nurses who used her medical training, expertise and, networks to establish nursing training programs in the army. Zhou was born to a family of

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33 Shan Chenying,《南京陆军军医学校医院概况》 ( the Nursing Service of the Central Military Medical School, Nanking, in the Nursing Journal of China, Vol 17, no. 2 (April 1936).

34 White and Jacoby, 138.
railway engineers. She spent her childhood in a northern Manchurian city and later in Beiping. The family sent her to the Birdgman Girl’s School, the first girl’s school in Beijing, which was established in 1864 by a Christian missionary named Birdgman. Her education at the Birdgman’s Girl’s School enabled her to successfully pass the English requirement of the Nursing School at Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) in 1926, and soon Zhou enrolled in the nursing program. After graduating from PUMC School of Nursing, she went to Dingxian to join the rural experiment initiated by James Yan (aka Yan Yangchu, 1890-1980). In Dingxian, Zhou was a member of the rural public health program and committed her time to health administration and planning.

At the outbreak of the war, Zhou Meiyu served as the director of the nursing unit of the Chinese Red Cross Society Medical Relief Corps (MRC), which was led by Dr. Lin Kesheng (Robert K.S. Lim), Zhou’s teacher and colleague at PUMC. MRC was the most prominent organization offering medical relief to Chinese troops when the war broke out. They hired nurses from various arenas in an attempt to cope with the growing medical needs. Nurses were assigned to dressing stations, army hospitals, the Chinese Blood Bank, and high-way medical relief stations. In these posts, nurses were usually the first medical personnel the wounded soldiers would see. These women performed crucial roles in saving soldiers’ lives.

Zhou’s work in nursing was supported by Dr. Lin Kesheng. Prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war in 1937, Lin, an internationally renowned physiologist at Peking Union Medical College, had realized the urgent necessity for China to prepare medical personnel in the event of conflict with Japan. His realistic view about China’s potential medical crisis could be attributed to his previous experience in Europe. Born to a privileged Chinese family in Singapore, Lin

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35 The city of Beiping was renamed as Beijing after the Communist Party took over the mainland.
obtained a B.A. and Ph.D in physiology from the University of Edinburgh. During his sojourn in Europe, he was conscripted into the medical service in France during World War I. Unlike many of his politically inactive PUMC colleagues and students, Lin had been overtly political and patriotic in the 1930s in an environment of increasing Japanese military threat. In 1933, he organized a medical relief team to provide medical aid to Chinese armies defending Fort Xifengkou on the Great Wall. During his tenure at PUMC, similar to public health specialists Jin Baoshun and C.C. Chen, he was an ardent supporter for implementation of the so-called medical policy of State Medicine, a government-sponsored public health system aimed at providing medical care to urban as well as rural populations through government-coordinated networks.

The major focus of Lin’s medical relief corps was to offer medical aid to Chinese troops, supplementing the work of the Army Medical Corps by increasing “the number of operations, X-Ray, dressing, ambulance, and anti-epidemic units of the Red Cross Society of China; and to unify and coordinate the work of other relief organizations, whether Chinese or foreign.” The Red Cross Society had seventy-four units in operation. Each unit had a staff of twenty medical, nursing, and other personnel, with a monthly budget of NC $105,800 and HK $70,000.36

During Lin’s tenure as the director of the Red Cross Medical Relief Corps, Zhou Meiyu was one of his most dedicated supporters. Both held a similar belief that the development of modern medicine should be applied to the causes of resistance.

Identified with Lin’s upholding of State Medicine, Zhou Meiyu distinguished herself with a life-long dedication to public health and military nursing. Speaking about her choice of public health nursing for the Rural Mass Movement, she explained that her motivation was Yan

36 “Training of Public Health Personnel in 1939 – 40, An Annual Report Public Health Personnel Training Institute, Kweiyang, China,” Folder 63, Box 6, Series 601, RG1, RAC.
Yangchu’s talk on the rural population’s role in strengthening China. Yan believed that China’s advancement relied on the improvement of rural society. Zhou “was deeply moved by Yan’s ideal” and saw the value of dedicating her nursing education to working for social improvement through the establishment of public health programs in China’s countryside. After working two years in public health nursing in Dingxian, Zhou sought advanced training in Public Health Nursing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and gained her Masters degree in two years.

Zhou viewed nursing as a meaningful tool to better Chinese society. During her work for the rural health service in Dingxian, she published an essay on rural public health nursing in the gonggong weisheng yuekan (The Monthly Journal of Public Health) in 1936. In her writing, she made the following claims:

Public health is a social project and its successful implementation relies on several factors … Public health nursing is a crucial tool for implementing public health policies. Public health nurses respond to administrative as well as technical work, and establish effective communication between health administration and techniques. The tools of public health nursing introduce and popularize knowledge of modern health to the general population. In doing so, it integrates health work with other social programs.

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37 Yan Yangchu was known as James Yen by his contemporaries. He was a Chinese educator and social activist known for his programs and work in rural reconstruction and mass education. He initiated a series of programs to put his philosophy of rural reconstruction into practice first in China and then in many other countries.


39 Ibid., 106-107.
Modern nursing, according to Zhou, was not solely a medical domain. It answered to the needs of the people and the country as a means for social transformation by way of community health. This perceived social meaning of the profession satisfied her own aspirations as an individual citizen:

Material and cultural life in rural China was poor, nevertheless, our work in the field of public health is growing day by day. Relieving villagers’ suffering from disease, and laying a foundation for our country’s future citizens (children) make our efforts rewarding. Our health work has benefited school children, who develop healthier physique and vigor under the supervision of the program. We seek national prosperity through improving the quality of everyday life. To only improve one’s personal interests is far from adequate.  

Zhou’s writing and career plan demonstrated her belief in civic responsibility. When news of the eruption of the war reached Dingxian, she made the decision to resign from her position in Dingxian in order to serve Chinese resistance armies and their medical needs. She believed that the opportunity for continuing her dedication to rural health was slim when the country was under siege. As a trained medical worker, Zhou believed that her destiny was to “contribute my training to the country” despite a deep personal interest in rural health work.  

Yan granted the resignation immediately while retaining the position for her as a gesture of appreciation for her dedication to rural health education in Dingxian.

Leaving Dingxian for Changsha, where major government offices were temporarily located, Zhou instantly immersed herself in the medical relief work conducted by the Red Cross Society

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40 Ibid, 112.
41 Ibid, 42.
Medical Relief Corps (MRC). During her service at the MRC, Zhou traveled widely in war zones ranging from Hubei, Hunan, and Guangdong Guangxi to Sichuan, and the Guizhou provinces, offering her expertise in preventative health nursing and nursing administration to army medical services. Her work was of a demonstration and counseling nature. She applied her previous experience in community preventative health to the army’s health administration; in other words, she believed that effective preventative measures would protect the Chinese army from the threat of communicative diseases, a wide-spread problem among Chinese troops at that time. Zhou established a program in which nurses taught sanitation and nutrition to the army. This program emphasized maintaining hygiene and preparing food properly for the troops to prevent the prevalence of spreadable diseases.

During her extensive visit to different divisions of the Chinese army, she found the unqualified medical service and inadequacy of medical personnel shocking:

In the field hospital in Qianjiang, Guangxi, patients were lying on the ground. We were told that over a hundred of patients died from dysentery and malaria every day … Patients did not get adequate attention. Patients did not receive proper cleaning, some of them were simply lying on excrement … It is a common knowledge today that patients with dysentery can only take fluid food otherwise they would die from intestinal perforation. Soldier nurses and villagers who took care of the wounded simply fed their patients steamed rice without knowing these meals may lead to catastrophic consequences …

I also found that many attendants to soldiers were children of eight or nine years old. They were known as child soldiers (wawa bing). The assigned battalion commander explained that adults had all gone to the front and they had to recruit children to take care chores in the wards such as fetching water or distributing medicines …

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42 Ibid., 54-59.
It was against this worrying backdrop that a series of training programs were launched and coordinated by the Wartime Medical Bureau. The Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Corps played a significant role in supporting military medical personnel training. The CRCMRC was particularly strong in providing experienced medical personnel to staff teaching and administrative positions in the newly established training programs.

The Emergency Medical Service Training School (EMSTS) was organized jointly by the Ministries of Military Affairs and the Department of the Interior in 1938 because the need for medical personnel was so urgent. The idea was to offer supplementary technical training to the existing personnel in the army medical service and to provide speedy technical training for new personnel. Dr. Lin Kesheng, the Director, brought Zhou Meiyu with him to the new post, where she was appointed the director of the Nursing Unit. Located in Tuyunguan, Guizhou province, the EMSTS offered expedited training for nursing officers, who were required to take a total of 194 hours of instruction in areas such as war sanitation, medicine, war nursing, surgery, military training, and army medical and Red Cross organization. Nursing students receiving such additional training were slated for positions in the National Health Administration as supervisors of nursing and as head nurses in hospitals, and were expected to staff in the nursing, curative, or preventive units in the Red Cross Society.

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43 Watt, 78.
44 Zhang and Luo, 43.
45 China Handbook, 672.
46 “The Emergency Medical Service Training School, June 1938 to January 1939,” Folder 63, Box 6, series 601, RF1, RAC.
The EMSTS teaching program was known for its emphasis on quantity to meet war needs. In other words, theoretical courses were put aside, while practices were emphasized. Zhou Meiyu and other nursing heads led the lectures in principles of diet, disinfection, and sterilization; isolation techniques for the treatment of communicable diseases; preparation of operating rooms; nursing ethics and routines; personal hygiene; and curative nursing care. Upon finishing the above lectures, students were sent to wards and clinics to practice in these areas professionally.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Zhou was appointed as a field consultant to medical units in the army’s subdivisions. The aim was to inspect and evaluate nursing care and medical conditions of field hospitals, and to offer expert opinions for improvement of the medical services. Her duties included supervision, demonstration, and collecting data from field work. These experiences contributed to her analysis of wartime nursing and the medical situation in China at large. Widespread epidemic brought by the movement of troops and refugees emphasized the need for public health nursing. Based on this recognition, Zhou emphasized preventive medical nursing in her curriculum design for the EMSTS training programs and offered more opportunities for students to gain clinical experiences.

Zhou was known for her determination and strong commitment to nursing education and leadership. Her PUMC alumni Xu Aizhu described her as a woman dedicated to nursing education with “unlimited amount of energy, spirit and courage.” Upon the establishment of EMSTS, Zhou simultaneously created the Guiyang branch of the Nursing Association of China.

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47 Zhang and Luo, 70-74.

48 Letter dated April 3, 1941 from Xu Aizhu to Elizabeth Tennant, office of the Rockefeller Foundation. Folder 53a, Series 601, Box 5, RF 1, RAC.
(NAC), hence renewing communication with the larger nursing community. Despite wartime difficulties, NAC continued advancing the nursing profession through the publication of its own journal and the organization of annual meetings. The establishment of the Guiyang branch in the middle of the war brought back a sense of normality and boosted morale. Zhou’s PUMC background was beneficial in obtaining funds and resources from the RF and the American Bureau for Medical Aid to China (ABMAC) for nurses training at the EMSTS. In their selection of programs to fund, the RF usually put more trust in the recommendation of PUMC alumni and graduates. The need for trained nurses was something that RF medical experts and the Commission on Medical Education agreed on. The Commission materialized this vision by securing and allocating funds for fellowships and stipends for the training of medical midwives and nursing teaching personnel(s). Meanwhile, the RF expressed the hope that “the Foundation will continue to subsidize the Commission along the lines of compilation, translating and printing of medical textbooks and reference books.” The Commission enlisted Zhou Meiyu and other PUMC nursing graduates in the task of developing periodicals on nursing. A package of seventy-two books and journals financed by the Rockefeller Foundation were provided in 1942. The RF solicited expert opinions from well-known nursing educators in an effort to compile the book list. Fully recognizing the hazardous risk in sending materials to war-blocked southwest China, decision-makers in the RF explained that “the point is we must get on with this project and take some chances, just like getting war materials to the front, because nursing education in

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49 Annual Report of the Commission on Medical Education from July 1939 to December 1940, Folder 28, Series 601, Box 3, RF 1, RAC.

50 Grant No.6, Commission on Nursing Education, Commission on Medical Education of the Ministry of Education, Chungking, China, Folder 29, Series 601, Box 3, RF 1, RAC.
China, with consequent effect on morale and quality, is at least 3 to 5 years out of date.\textsuperscript{51} The dedication to improving China’s medical situation through education did not lessen, despite the isolation that resulted from the war.

A large part of Zhou’s effort was dedicated to improving the recognition of nurses. She refused to accept the stigma of nursing as an affiliated or inferior field to medicine. Zhou worked on fostering the notion of nursing as an indispensable unit of modern medicine while simultaneously gaining equal recognition for women with their male counterparts. Nursing, she felt, should not be regarded as an inferior profession because of the predominance of female participants. Her work was integral to defining a new identity for women who worked in the profession, as well as to establishing professional standards for the Nursing Association of China.

Zhou was not alone. Other nursing educators found themselves in a battle against stigma and social bias surrounding nursing in southwest China as well. The dean of PUMC Nursing School reported the difficulty of recruiting students from local families due to the societal tendency to link nursing with domestic service. Usually mothers were the primary opponents of the choice for educated girls to receive nursing training.\textsuperscript{52}

Zhou’s individual story during the war was representative of wartime military nursing at large. Her work on nursing administration and education as reflected in the \textit{Women’s Wartime Manual} evinces an attempt to establish military nursing. This proved to be a process full of challenges due to wartime shortages and social stigma. Zhou, an experienced nurse with a

\textsuperscript{51} Interoffice correspondence dated September 22, 1942, from M.C. Balfour to MET/HP, Folder 29, Box 3, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.

\textsuperscript{52} Zhang and Luo, 8.
Female Nursing Educators and Wartime Nursing Development

Similar to the pioneering role Zhou took in military nursing, a generation of women who had received their training in the late 1920s and 1930s entered into the forefront of medical service during the war. The war highlighted the demand for professional medical personnel, including nurses who had received systematic training with clinical experience. When medical missionaries were leaving or being detained by Japanese troops after the eruption of the Pacific War, Chinese women who received their nursing education and professional experience in the 1920s and 1930s began to take leading roles in developing nursing education and administration.

In addition to Zhou, one small group of women from the PUMC School of Nursing assumed significant administrative roles throughout the field of nursing. They were highly sought after for wartime positions due to the qualified training in nursing education and leadership they received from PUMC. The best-known PUMC graduates included Zhou Meiyu, Yan Panjingzhi, Nie Yuchan and Xu Aizhu. Besides Zhou Meiyu’s position as Dean of the School of Nursing at Kuiyang National Medical Center, Yan Panjingzhi fostered and led a cooperative program between Nurses Association of China and China Red Cross Society; Nie Yuchan (Vera Nie) directed PUMC School of Nursing as the first Chinese woman to assume the position; and Xu Aichu (Bernice Chu) was the secretary of the Technical Committee on Nursing Education of the
Commission on Medical Education. Together, they shaped the direction of nursing education during the war, and their influence extended beyond the war years.

PUMC was founded in 1905, and the China Medical Board—the subsidiary organization of the Rockefeller Foundation—assumed full financial responsibility for the college in 1915. PUMC was modeled after the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and put training quality at the top of its agenda. The PUMC Nursing School had a team of well-established faculty from around the world. The elite training had received both criticism and praise. Opponents argued that the elite training made it impossible for the poor to afford the education, and, further, that the small number of graduates resulting from the strict selection criteria could hardly meet China’s medical needs. Supporters, on the other hand, welcomed the high quality standard of training and its potential for training a generation of medical leaders for China. Despite the continuing dispute between PUMC supporters and opponents, PUMC graduates became increasingly prominent medical figures starting in the early 1930s, and they continued to play leading roles in modern health in both the mainland and Taiwan after 1949.

PUMC was forced to close at the end of 1941 when the Pacific War erupted. However, the School of Nursing re-opened at Chendu with the full support of their alumnae and the “deep interest of the Trustees and Friends” of PUMC, in co-operation with West China Union University. Nie Yuchan, PUMC 1924, acted as the Dean and readjusted the school to the wartime environment. The school operated in Chengdu for three years, from July 1943 to June 1946. During that period, the school admitted four classes of undergraduates and one class of postgraduate students. The PUMC School of Nursing helped the West China Union University in
setting up a new hospital, which was then used as a practice field for PUMC students. The Nursing School moved back to Beiping in the middle of 1946.  

The exile to Chengdu presented a world of shortages for the PUMC nursing staff and students. Besides being a mere guest of the West China Union University, they also witnessed China’s greatest need for medical and public health personnel. These cruel realities challenged the pre-war vision of elite training, which overwhelmingly emphasized quality. Nie Yuchan admitted that while maintaining the competitive standards of nursing education, the PUMC School of Nursing felt “the need for modifications in the pattern of nursing education, to meet the particular demands at present made on the nursing profession and to cope with our national situation.” By admitting the transformed social reality and acknowledging China’s appalling medical situation, Nie started to address the need for change in her communication with the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation.

In addition to assuming teaching and administrative positions in nursing schools and colleges, PUMC graduates played major roles in the Nursing Association of China (NAC), the professional organization on the national level. NAC was formed by missionary nurses in 1908. By the late 1930s, Chinese nurses composed the majority of its membership. NAC made regulations on nursing programs and coordinated certification tests nationwide. The significance of the national certification tests was that it allowed nurses who passed the exam successfully to

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53 Beipei was today’s Beijing.

54 Vera Nieh, “A Brief Account of the PUMC School of Nursing During and After World War II – A message to Its Alumnae,” in “Alumni News,” No. IX, Alumnae Association School of Nursing, Peiping Union Medical College, Peiping, October 1948, Folder 711, Box 99, CMB, Inc., RAC.
practice in any part of the country without being constrained by local certification tests. As a consequence, these tests greatly promoted the mobility of Chinese nurses.\footnote{Zhang and Luo, 24-25.}

Since its establishment in the early 1900s, the presidency of the NAC had been continuously staffed by missionary nurses, who had introduced the concept of modern nursing into China. In 1936, Yan Pan Jingzhi, PUMC 1928, became the first Chinese woman to take the position of President of the NAC. Under Pan’s direction, the NAC continued to serve as an instrumental organization for nursing students during the war. It continued to host standard examinations for nursing graduates to gain certification. In the meantime, it promoted nursing education by publishing, translating, and printing nursing materials. Through its work, however limited, NAC continued to foster a professional community for nurses, who were appreciative of the NAC’s efforts in such trying times. These written messages from nurses were published in a special section of the NAC journal called “News from our N.A.C. Headquarters. Letters from our nurses,” at the end of each issue. One nurse wrote, “thanks for your letter and the Nursing Journals which have just arrived. It is indeed a pleasure to read and again feel in contact with others of our profession … If all the N.A.C. did for us was the printing, translating and publishing our books it would be well worth our while to belong to it, but we are glad to remember all the other things you are doing for us too.”\footnote{“News from our N.A.C. Headquarters: Messages from some of our members,” The Nursing Journal of China, vol. 20, no. 2, 1939.4, 116, CMB, Inc., RAC.} In the July 1939 issue, another nurse wrote, “we get the journals regularly and read them from cover to cover, and are glad to keep in touch with all our N.A.C. Members.”\footnote{Ibid., vol. 20, no. 3, 175.} One nurse wrote to the editor that “it was not with a little pleasure that I learned that the N.A.C. was still functioning in spite of all the trying times and I
am now permitted to become a member,” and another expressed her pleasure “over the new textbooks which have recently been translated.” 58 The function of NAC indeed offered a measure of normality for war-disrupted career life.

Translation and compilation of medical books and literature was another important aspect of NAC’s conservation effort. NAC’s administrative team was well aware of the destructive consequences of war. The war had already destroyed medical collections in some of the medical schools in the war areas, and it was therefore necessary to make up the loss. Furthermore, NAC administrators considered that “the Chinese medical terminology and valuable references and literature should be translated without delay in order that modern medicine will no more be considered as ‘foreign medicine’ by the average Chinese public.” 59 Editing and compiling nursing literature had its political purpose “to help the conserved personnel bring about a mental satisfaction and consequently to synthesize their thoughts.” 60

Supporting PUMC alumnae in light of their active roles in wartime nursing proved highly rewarding for the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. PUMC staff and alumnae’s continuing dedication to modern health education directly contributed to the RF’s decision to continue providing support to wartime China. Despite the war in Europe diverting much of the resources, the RF continued its financial aid in various forms to fund Chinese medical needs. One important facet of the RF’s financial support was related to personnel training. Because the PUMC was closed down by the Japanese army, the RF chose to fund Chinese government-sponsored training programs like the Sichuan Provincial Health Department

58 Ibid., vol. 21, no. 2, April 1940, 112-13.
59 Ibid., 3.
60 Ibid., 3.
and the China Red Cross Society. The funding programs were facilitated by Dr. Liu Ruiheng (aka Dr. J. Jeng Liu), the president of the PUMC, during the war. These funding programs aimed to promote medical education and foster a generation of leaders in medicine.

Perhaps the cooperative programs between the Committee on Medical Education of the National Health Administration and the Rockefeller Foundation International Health Division and its Far East Office can best illustrate the nature of the support. In 1941, the China Program grant-in-aid to the Committee on Nursing of the Commission on Medical Education made available a grant of LC 25,000 for purchasing nursing textbooks and periodicals. This grant of US $800 was estimated to provide about 150 items, with subscriptions to medical journals for a two-year period.  

Balfour, the director of the International Health Division, trusted this issue to Ms. Mary E. Tennant. Professional opinions on the list for a nursing library were sought from a number of outstanding nursing professionals including Barnice Chu, the chairman of the Committee on Nursing in Chongqing; Gertrude E. Hodgman of Vanderbilt School of Nursing; Hazel Corbin of the Maternity Center Association in New York city (Miss Hazel Corbin, director); Anna D. Wolf, the director of the School of Nursing and of the Nursing Service at Johns Hopkins Hospital; and Margaret E. Conrad, a professor of nursing at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia Medical Center. The book list published by the National

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61 N.Y. Letter No. 275, M.C. Balfour to Mary E. Tennant, October 24, 1941, Folder 29, Box 3, Series 601, RG1
Also see N.Y. Letter No. 302, From Charles N. Leach to Mary Elizabeth Tennant, November 14, 1941, Folder 29, Box 3, Series 601, RG1. Chinese medical students and their capability for using English evolved from the complex history of modern medicine’s introduction by European and American religious and philanthropic institutions. Which language should be used in teaching medicine became an increasingly controversial issue in the late 1920s and 1930s. For example, with a growing number of Chinese faculty members hired by the PUMC, the Ministry of Education recommended promoting Chinese language usage in PUMC classrooms, which proved an uneasy task in PUMC curriculum design. For a discussion on this, see Bullock, 97-103.
League of Nursing Education had also been consulted.\textsuperscript{62} The compliers from these institutions suggested purchasing the most essential as well as the most recent publications for the relocated medical institutes in China.

In her reply letter to the RF office, Gertrude Hodgman, director for the School of Nursing at Russell Sage College, stated that “the list you sent we made up in Peking some time again and on the whole it seems to me a very good list. There are later editions of a large number of the books list and I am sure you would want to get the latest education in each case.”\textsuperscript{63} As the notorious inflation in Chongqing drained much of the reserve funding, an emergent aid in the amount of $25,000 was set aside and later appropriated to the Commission on Medical Education, Ministry of Education, Chungking, for emergency aid to the medical college to purchase foreign scientific literature.\textsuperscript{64}

The cooperative program also extended assistance to nursing students through financial aid. One hundred and six students received local fellowship grants for durations varying from four to twelve months from the Rockefeller Foundation China Program, and in 1943, fifty-five students again received the same kind of financial support for a duration of six months from the latter through the National Health Administration.\textsuperscript{65} Despite difficulties generated by isolation, the continuing communication with the outside world was thus maintained through this unique bond.

\textsuperscript{62} “Annual Report of the Commission on Medical Education from July 1939 to December 1949,” Folder 28, Box 3, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.

\textsuperscript{63} Letter dated December 5, 1941; from Gertrude Hodgman to Helen Payne, Folder 29, Box 3, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.

\textsuperscript{64} “Memorandum: Emergency Aid to Medical Institutions – Proposed Action Resolved,” Folder 26, Box 3, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.

\textsuperscript{65} “China Program: Local Fellowship Grants by Institutions, 1941-1942,” p 4-5, Folder 151, Box 15, Series 601, RG, RAC 1.
Chinese nurses also shared their experiences with their American counterparts through publications in major English nursing journals. Their writing appeared, for example, in the *Journal of Nursing*, based in the United States. A Mrs. Liu, working for the Blood Bank at Kunming, introduced her daily work and major medical challenges to the readers of the *Journal of Nursing*, which was chiefly read by American nursing students and practitioners.

**Conclusion**

Women assumed leading roles in developing nursing education and training in the country during the war. Their understanding of the profession and their vision of linking nursing with China’s social and military health laid the foundation for both the wartime and the post-war planning of the military nursing. Their empirical experience in the army led them to cope with the immediate needs of the nation while designing short or long-term strategies in shaping the educational and training programs for nursing. Meanwhile, they maintained a vision for the future of the profession by linking nursing not only with curative health care but also with preventive care.

Working as nurses in the warzones as well as in the rear of China’s southwest regions did not mean absolute isolation from the outside world. Rather, these nursing leaders were often exposed to a volatile community that incorporated input from the local population, the provincial health administration, the National Health Administration, and international organizations. Medical personnel with various backgrounds worked together for a larger program that was categorized as national reconstruction by the nationalist regime. These medical personnel could be Harvard-trained Chinese doctors; Chinese medical veterans from European warzones of the
First World War; regional advisors from the Rockefeller Foundation International Health Division; Officers from the China Medical Board; National Health Care administrative officers from Chengdu and Chongqing; or local Chinese medicine practitioners from various magistrate levels. This brought varying perspectives into the practice of nursing. Different factors came into play in shaping the profession for women, from patriotism for war-torn China, to the aspiration to make an independent life, to career development. Nursing became an increasingly woman-dominated profession.

The emphasis on women and medical care underscored women’s relevance within a more professional and applied realm of nursing care. Necessity created opportunities for female nurses, who gained ascendency through strategic planning to meet the demands of war. Female nurses experienced the kinds of spiritual and social empowerment also seen in the experiences of other women who contributed to war relief.

Nurses were perhaps one of the most widely traveled professional groups during the war. The exposure to China’s vast geographical regions and to the general suffering of soldiers and civilians had a lasting impact on the conceptualization of military nursing. The development of educational and training programs built a base for the nationalist military medical service. The contributions of highly professional women—especially by some of the leading graduates of the PUMC Nursing School who joined military nursing efforts—helped establish a standard that was compatible with contemporary requirements. Nursing leaders developed a moral authority in binding nursing with China’s fight for independence and national strengthening. The development of nursing in wartime China was not purely a matter of modern medicine, but also a matter of politics. Women actively asserted their subjectivities during these years, as the field of
nursing developed. They were the group who gave new meaning to this profession, one that was integral to the development of China as a modern nation-state.
Chapter Three. Patriotic Motherhood and China’s Future Citizens: Wu Jufang and Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools

In 1992, Dr. Virginia Li witnessed the reunion of her eighty-one year old mother with a group of a thousand seniors in their sixties and seventies:1

When all the speeches were done, applause followed her to the exit door. She stationed herself at the exit and hugged each one as they came through. They embraced her, not wanting to let go, saying: “Mama, come see us again.” “Mama, without you, I would not have survived … I would not be alive today.” “Mama, take care of yourself.” Among them were teachers, journalists, engineers, managers, a director of the bureau of light industry, and a chief justice of the Supreme Court of Guangdong province.

After the banquet and which lasted two hours, the gray-haired men and women performed on stage—dancing and singing old songs they had sung when they were children.

The next morning her children came to see their Mama off at the train station, bringing their children and grandchildren with them. Seven red banners—each three meters long—with white characters, were held up with stretched hands representing the seven Homes and Schools that had flourished during the war years … Then came the singing, “Mama, we say good-bye now…” The singing started from the back and was picked up by everyone assembled. This was the same song the refugee children sang more than half a century earlier … The grey-haired men and women clung to their Mama like kindergartners on the first day of school.2

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1 I am grateful to Dr. Virginia Li for her generous gift of two books about her mother and the wartime Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. Her books made the writing of this chapter possible.

2 Li Zhen, *From One Root Many Flowers* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003). This was the third and the last reunion made by Wu Jufang, the President Mama, with previous warphans. Ms. Wu Jufang passed away in her New York City apartment on December 10, 1999.
Dr. Virginia Li’s affectionate and passionate memoir of her mother’s life reveals an episode long forgotten, due to political hostilities between the GMD and the CCP, in the official history constructed in mainland China. The hundreds of seniors who came to see their “Mama” off were once “warphans,” a term used by women from the war to describe displaced children and orphans whose plight was an immediate result of the brutality of the war from 1937 to 1945. The legacies of the Civil War (1946-49) and the political movements in the following three decades exerted a powerful impact on the direction of collective and individual memory. As a result, certain parts of history were purposefully suppressed and forgotten. Prominent communist women like Deng Yingchao and Song Qingling’s activities on behalf of refugee children were included in the official history. However, many more Nationalist and non party-affiliated women who once rescued, fed, and educated thousands of war orphans remained a taboo topic during the same period. Much less is known about how these women managed to pool resources together for the survival and education of the war orphans under their care. This chapter studies the organization of the little known wartime Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools and evaluates the strategic planning by Wu Jufang, the president of the homes and schools.

The scenes described by Li are about the celebration of motherhood, the reunion of a mother and her children, and the deep sense of a family’s togetherness. It is significant that so many former refugee children shared one symbolic mother. The aim of this chapter is not to reveal and interpret a woman’s wartime efforts in providing for the twenty thousand children who came under her care and supervision in Guangdong province, but, rather to explore the agency that women took in integrating their efforts into a collective action much desired by the state, thus revealing the interconnection between women’s relief work and Chinese nation-
building amid the war. This chapter also discusses the meaning of wartime patriotic motherhood and its implications.

Conveying a better sense of the historical context requires a brief introduction. The outbreak of the full-scale conflict in July 1937 forced many Chinese people to flee to the unknown, and a large proportion of these refugees were children. Children were most vulnerable to the cataclysm. Due to the absence of accurate institutional registration of deaths and an incomplete picture of the demographic changes that the nation was suffering, even today the number of Chinese children who were killed, injured, disabled, or made homeless in these conflagration remains unknown. Even less understood is the psychological and physical impact on this particular generation. A series of numbers issued by *L’impartial* offers a glimpse of the pervasive trauma suffered by children. According to *L’impartial*, as of September 1938—a year

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3 For essays and books on war and memory, see Feifei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu, eds., *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

4 According to the official information provided by the Nationalist Government in China Handbook (1943), the number of school children alone impacted by the war was 6,483,000. 129,700 primary schools were forced to close down and more than 257,000 teachers and officers were infected, China Handbook, 703. *L’impartial* (*Dagongbao*) issued a statistic in September 1938, according to which the number of children killed/murdered during the conflict by the time was no less than 100,000; the number of children displaced and dispersed by the war was no less than 400,000 (*L’impartial*, September 14, 1938).

Historians have noticed that systematic figures on wartime losses and damages are unavailable as no comprehensive statistics have ever been conducted. Today, researchers rely chiefly on missionary observations, personal accounts, local gazetteers, memoirs, and the collection on war damages compiled by the nationalist government after the war (which remain an inadequate resource because of the limited coverage in geographical locations). For a brief discussion on these particular issues, see Diana Lary, “A Ravaged Place: the Devastation of the Xuzhou Region, 1938”; and Stephen MacKinnon, “Refugee Flight at the Outset of the Anti-Japanese War”; both in Lary and MacKinnon, eds., *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001).

The development of public health in Southwest China continued to encounter problems due to lack of accurate statistics on births, death, and other demographic shifts. The correspondences between the Rockefeller Foundation offices and corresponding Chinese officers, for example, revealed this issue. See, for example, “National Institute of Health, Chungking—Requests to the IHD of the RF for Financial Aid in 1945,” prepared by C.K. Chu, November, 1944, Folder 53c, Box 5, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.

The Chinese Mass Movement also painfully admitted the lack of accurate registration of the population. In its Annual report, it stated, “China has been quoted as having a population of four hundred million for nearly a century! It is disgraceful but true that as a nation we have extremely hazy ideas (and in fact only guesses) with regard to our population. Even a hsien does not have exact figure!” in the “Annual Report of the Chinese Mass Education Movement, 1938-1939,” p 9, folder 80, Box 8, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.
and two months after the outbreak of the full scale war—the number of children who lost their lives to the war and its disastrous consequences was no less than 100,000, and more than 400,000 were displaced by the war. Another statistic given by the Chinese Preschool Children’s Association (zhonghua ziyou hui) estimated that there were half a million refugee children deprived of parents and awaiting relief.\(^5\) The brutality of war—murder, slaughter, rape, bombing, and fire, together with hunger and disease—created pervasive panic and trauma among civilians, who were dispersed and displaced.\(^6\) The amount and dimension of relief work suppressed the capacity of conventional relief channels and demanded alternative measures be adopted by Chinese society to cope with this man-made disaster.

The Nationalist government was unprepared for the relocation and repatriation of the refugees at the beginning months of the war.\(^7\) Civilians were left on their own to make the choice between leaving for unknown territories or staying behind and awaiting an unpredictable future. Various records and research suggest that people with resources were more likely to leave for China’s interior following the movements of the Nationalist government. However, city poor and peasants lacked the necessary means to seek safety afar and thus took their chances staying put.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Zhanshi funü shouce (Wartime Women’s Manual), (Chongqing: Funü shenghuoshe, 1939), 51.


\(^7\) Relief work for children was conducted by some local charity associations as well as some spontaneous organization by local and Catholic missions. See China Handbook, 781.

The Nationalist Government set up highway stations offering water, food, medicine, and other necessities for refugees after the outbreak of the war. But the demand exceeded what the government was able to provide. Major relief work was organized by the National Relief Commission (zhanshi zhenji weiyuanhui). For a general survey of the wartime relief work, see Yip, “Guomindang’s Refugee Relief Efforts, 1937-1945,” in Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Ricardo K.S. Mak, eds., China Reconstructs (University Press of America, 2003), 84-102.

\(^8\) Oral history materials and memoirs suggest that significant numbers of the population sought safety in the countryside. Other sources suggest that men were more likely to leave for the interior following the move of their
There was no organizational or institutional effort for the repatriation of children on a national level to “safe zones,” as was organized in the U.K before the outbreak of the war. It was not until the full-scale conflict broke out in July 1937 that the Women’s Advisory Committee of the New Life Movement started to initiate national relief work under the calling of Song Meiling. In July 1937 and May 1938, Song convened the Kuling Conference, which called for orchestrated actions for relief work. Although these attempts were, as the Nationalist authority explained, “uncoordinated and independent of all control,” Song and others’ efforts are worthy of investigation.

Such as it was, relief work was coordinated by various organizations, such as commercial councils, associations for provincial fellows (tong xiang hui), and missionaries, as well as provincial and municipal authorities. In addition to the relief work conducted by these employers or the GMD. As a result, women and children were left behind on their own means. For a research paper on this topic and its social impact, see Lu Fangshang, lingyizhong weizuzhi: kangzhan shiqi hunyin wenti chutan (Another false unit: A Preliminary Research on Marriage During the War of Resistance), in jindai zhongguo funüshi yanjiu (August, 1993). Chinese post-war cinema attempting to reflect upon the war of resistance also captures the phenomenon of women living in the occupied zones alone while their husbands worked in the wartime capital of Chongqing. See Li renxing (1949) directed by Chen Liting and Yijiang chunshui ciangdongliu (1948) directed by Cai Chusheng.


11 Women’s activism for military campaigns was seen in other historical moments as well. For example, women were already actively organizing activities for war relief in nursing, provision of logistics, recruitment of soldiers, and propaganda works. For further research of women’s roles in the Northern Expedition aiming to unite the fragmented China under warlords, see Christina Kelley Gilmartin, Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); for a discussion on women’s resistance activism before the outbreak of the full-scale conflict, see Susan Glosser, “Women’s Culture of Resistance: An Ordinary Response to Extraordinary Circumstances,” in Yeh and Henriot, eds., In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 302-324).
conventional channels, Wuhan—the temporary wartime capital—also witnessed a boom of voluntary relief work conducted by women’s associations.\textsuperscript{12} Refugee relief was an immediate concern and drew attention from all sectors, including enlightened intellectuals, women suffragists, leftists, international observers, and Nationalists. A political desire to maximize results from limited resources drove Song Meiling to call for a national conference of women leaders from various political and social backgrounds to orchestrate women’s relief work;\textsuperscript{13} the conference was convened in Kuling in May 1938. Fifty women activists and leaders from all over the nation—including representatives of the Nationalists, Communists, and Democratic parties, the Women’s Patriotic Association for National Salvation, and non-aligned personnel representing a wide spectrum of women—joined the discussion. The aim was to establish an all-inclusive relief network with centralized Nationalist leadership.

The ten-day conference designated the Women’s Advisory Committee of the New Life Movement as the lead organization of all Chinese women in “war work and reconstruction”; all Chinese women’s organizations were to link themselves with it as affiliates. A standing committee of nine women was established and the program was formerly inaugurated on July 1, \textsuperscript{12} For a discussion on Wuhan in 1938 as the temporary capital for the war of resistance, see Stephen Mackinnon, “The Tragedy of Wuhan, 1938,” in Modern Asian Studies 30, no. 4, (October, 1996): 931-43. Mackinnon convincingly argues for the existence of an atmosphere of “free spirit”—exempted from authoritarian governance—before the fall of the city on October 22. According to MacKinnon, four major factors were accountable for Wuhan being truly cosmopolitan, international, as well as democratic: first, the displacement of the Nationalist government and its lack of ability to impose authoritarian governance in such a short time period; second, the political will for a united front of resistance; the coming of international sympathizers and their efforts to support and propagate Chinese resistance; Chinese intellectuals and their enthusiasm for mass awareness movements. The tragedy of Wuhan lay in the fact of an abrupt halt of this “free spirit” with the falling of the city. After the Nationalist government moved to Chongqing, it increasingly intensified censorship, which eventually alienated a significant number of intellectuals, and eventually devastated the Nationalist regime.

\textsuperscript{13} A phenomenon meriting attention and further research is that women’s journals such as funügongming, funü shenghuo relentlessly called for women’s collective actions for refugee relief. Women activists Shi Liang and Shen Zhijiu contributed to this theme frequently. Meanwhile, they were also active in organizing women’s national salvation associations. To what degree they helped to ferment the national morale, subsequently helping to drive the Nationalist government into taking political steps toward moving to the front stage, merits further research. For a discussion on Shi Liang’s role in refugee relief in the early years of the war, see MacKinnon, 118-35.
1938 in Hankou. The members of the standing committee were: Madames Jiang Jieshi, Kong Xiangxi, He Yingqin, Chen Cheng, Feng Yuxiang, Ma Chao-chun, and Zhang Zizhong, Dr. Wu Yifang, and Dr. Tseng Pao-seng. Clearly, wives of high-ranking Nationalist administrative and militia personnel composed the majority of this committee. Over the years, Madame Jiang became the spokesperson and the most visible “mother” of war orphans.

Under the umbrella of the Women’s Advisory Committee of the New Life Movement, three organizations engaged in the relief work for war orphans since the outbreak of the full-scale war. They were: 1) the National Wartime Association for the Care and Education of Children, under the leadership of Madame Jiang Jieshe; 2) the National Wartime Association for the Relief of Children; and 3) the National Children’s Welfare Association.

Of these three organizations, the National Wartime Association for the Care and Education of Children (zhanshi ertong baoyu hui) drew wide public attention for its universal participation, nonaligned nature, and the high-profile Madame Jiang, who served as its spokesperson. It was a team effort by women activists who had arrived in Wuhan since the full-scale invasion of Japanese troops, and was followed and further developed by provincial women. These women activists were Li Dequan, wife of Feng Yuxiang and an activist in her own right from the May Fourth generation; An E, leftist novelist and playwright; Tang Guozhen, a woman suffragist; Guo Xiuyi, an educator and General Huang Qixiang’s wife; Cao Mengjun, the author of the well-known essay “Save the Children” (jiu jiu haizimen); Shi Liang, the only woman of

14 The nonaligned nature of this organization was short-lived as the Second United Front failed its promise for a collective resistance as a consequence of the ongoing military competition between the CCP and the KMT. Those CCP women who revealed their political affiliation during the short-lived United Front were forced to escape, while others continued to work without revealing their political identities. For more information on this episode, see personal accounts and memoirs, *Cimuban de ai: Zhao Juntao he zhanshi ertong baoyuyuan* (Motherly Affection: Comrade Zhao Juntiao and the Wartime School for the Care and Education of Children) (Beijing: Zhongguo funü Publishing House, 1991).
the famous, patriotic “seven gentlemen” and an established lawyer who often defended leftists and intellectuals in Shanghai before the war; Chen Bo’er, a well-known actress and leftist; Shen Zijiu, the editor-in-chief of *Women’s Life*; Liu Qingyang, an editor for women’s magazines and a social activist; Deng Yingchao, wife of Zhou Enlai and herself a Long March veteran and woman activist; Meng Qingshu, wife of Wang Ming and once the most widely-read writer for women’s socialist activism in Yan’an; and of course, Song Meiling. The unification of women activists from various backgrounds for war orphan relief transcended the ties of local networks, professions, political affiliations, and class. This action was unprecedented. It was indeed the determination of concerned group of women that made relief work possible in 1938 in Wuhan, a city whose character, according to MacKinnon, was cosmopolitan, international, democratic, and infused with a patriotic “free spirit.”

Nonetheless, the blur of political boundaries reveals precisely the ways in which discourses of nation-building inform and even enable an alternative angle to re-examine the nature of the second United Front against the backdrop of Japanese invasion, as well as the essence of the war orphan relief work by women. In pointing out these hidden affinities and complicities, I do not mean to deny the real divergence between the political positions with which these women were associated. Indeed, to do so would only simplify women’s political activism in modern China, and would leave non-aligned women’s social activities out of realm.

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15 For a thorough list of the women and their designated roles in this organization, see *Zhanshi ertong baoyuhui guicheng*, 33-40.

16 Historians have interpreted the Second United Front from the angle of a master narrative of the military history of the CCP and the KMT. It has been interpreted solely as a loose political bond between Chinese men. Traditional interpretation omitted women’s role completely. A significant number of them, including Communist, Nationalist, and non party-aligned women, answered the request of the United Front. They organized fundraising drives, formed a women’s frontline service corps, and offered nursing for soldiers. A comprehensive understanding of the united front, its social impact, and women’s activities should be considered.
of inquiry completely. One of the dangerous consequences of doing so would be to reach a simplified conclusion about children’s relief work as the immediate result of a state-directed modern project, while overlooking a cluster of complicated and often contradictory factors that came into play in organizing relief work. It was the children’s precarious situation and the perception of children as the reservoir of the Chinese future that made war orphans an imminent social and national concern, and that informed attempts to create a realm of patriotic motherhood transcending political boundaries. However, in daily practice, the operation of wartime refugee child centers relied on factors beyond political affiliation. What mattered at the outset of the war was to depict the need for collective action.

A major undertaking of Chinese intellectuals, along with many other wartime projects, was creating a national portrait of the plight of children and the country’s future. In his interpretation of the initiative for an institute for war orphan relief, Shen Junru (1875-1963) made this statement:

Children are tomorrow’s citizens and soldiers for national emancipation. For the purpose to win over national independence and to build a democratic country where our people can conduct happy and free life, we should start with our children and take good care of them! Besides care and nurturing, we should prepare them for national construction, inspire their national awareness, instruct them with the training for communal living, and equip them with the education fitting the theme of our time.

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17 Recent research demonstrates that women who were not associated with the Nationalists or the Communists had also played an active part in women’s movements. For example, Louise Edwards’s research on the suffragist movement demonstrates that non-aligned women were active participants from its initiation during the May Fourth Movement, and continued to carry on this activism to the end of the War of Resistance in 1945. Edwards attributes this activism to women’s collective identity as a special social group with its own political demands. See Edwards, 2007.

18 Zai, 28.
Shen’s words conveyed an optimistic vision of victory for China as a new plan with which to build a new nation. The journey to China’s future independence, democracy, and prosperity should be guided by a sense of historical continuity with an emphasis on the generations to come. Children were the future, and women were the ones to swing the cradle, not only in the tranquility of baby’s nursery, but, also in the tumultuousness of war.

This rhetoric also found official expression by the Nationalist authorities. In calling for Chinese women’s work for war relief, Song Meiling stated that “while during war time the men are the fighters, it is the women who bear the brunt of carrying on at the rear. We must encourage the men and let them know that we are in our own way holding on and not letting them down; that we are just as ready to give up everything, even our lives, to support our fighters at the front … the fighting morale of our men at the front depends on how much support the rear offers.”¹⁹ Linking women to military endeavors, this message designated women’s role as supportive, self-sacrificing, enduring, and nurturing. To further propagate the ideal woman as the supportive and caring mother of fighters, Song Meiling reexamined idealized images of mothers in Chinese history, emphasizing women who had “given themselves to the upbringing of their children for the welfare of the nation.”²⁰ Mencius, Ou Yangxiu, Fan Zhongyan, and Yue Fei, were some of the selected examples, because as prominent figures in Chinese history, their mothers had all been “widowed in early life, and, despite poverty and uncontrollable vicissitudes, brought up their sons to become great men.”²¹ Whether a child’s upbringing—which was tied in

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²⁰ Ibid., 40.

²¹ Ibid., 41.

Mencius was a significant figure in developing the thoughts and ideas that were later to be known as Confucianism. One of his most influential ideas was his belief that human beings were born with benevolence,
Song Meiling and others’ account to the country’s future—was supervised rightly or wrongly was a task that fell upon women’s shoulders. A mother’s quality would be judged by the future accomplishments of her children, and by the generation to come.

The national crisis heightened this emphasis on women’s motherly roles, and compelled women to apply their perceived feminine attributes toward national salvation and relief work. How should we come to understand women’s eager identification with this national crisis—which still gives rise to constant political tension between China and Japan—at its incipience, when it was a matter of survival and death for numerous individuals? If the concept of nationhood is nowadays constructed under the framework of “imagined community,” how did these women understand what it meant to be part of a nation? What were the empirical and imaginative elements in their construction of the nation? I will attempt to answer some of the questions by examining a wartime mother’s journey from 1937 to 1945.

**Regional Variations for the Care and Education of War Orphans**

Women’s activism centering on national salvation started before 1937 as part of the nation-wide discussion about national salvation and women’s social roles in an atmosphere of increasing Japanese military hostility. Women’s publications had essentially participated in the

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and that “everyone has a heart that is sensitive to the sufferings of others.” In accordance with his interpretation of human nature, Mencius proposed that kings rule with benevolence (renzhi), which became a popular political strategy adopted by Chinese emperors and was later combined with ideas from the Legal School as well. Ou Yangxiu was a prominent scholar-official during the Northern Song period. Ou was best known for his literary reform, which advocated for a more material reflection of social and political realities. Fan Zhongyan was a prominent political and literary figure of the Northern Song period. He was known for his political efforts in renovating the Song government and initiating military campaigns to defend the northwest borders. Yue Fei was a military general of the Southern Song period, who defended against the invasion of the Jurchen of the Jin dynasty. After the wronged accusation from his political competitors, he was executed by the emperor despite his efforts to resist the dynasty’s enemy. Since then, he has been viewed as a model of loyalty and patriotism.
national discussion since the Mukden Incident in 1931. For example, Shanghai witnessed a rise in women’s political culture with a boom of women’s journals such as Funü Gongming and Funü Shenghuo, which aimed to cultivate national awareness, invoke collective action and promote women’s rights. The essays in these publications reveal how educated women strove to integrate female voices into the national discourse of salvation, and how they gained ascendancy under conditions of collective frustration and trauma, experienced both nationally and individually. The roles of women in the workplace and the domestic sphere provoked heated and multi-faceted debates linking the question of women’s proper place to issues of women’s rights, citizenship, and nation. Though the prolonged argument did not result in a definite consensus on women’s proper place, many agreed that women were equal national citizens (guo min) to men, and that women should take public roles for national salvation.\(^2\) For example, in October 1931, Funü Gongming dedicated a special issue to protesting Japanese invasive military actions and to “awaken[ing] Chinese.” The issue condemned Japanese invasive actions and, more importantly, it proposed “fundamental works” that women could do to support anti-Japanese actions. The titles of the essays, such as “Women’s Natural Responsibilities in the Voice of National Salvation” (jiuguo sheng zhong funu zhi tianzhi) and “The Basic Works that Women Can Do for National Salvation” (jiuguo sheng zhong funu ying zuo de jiben gongzuo), clearly illustrated clearly this political impetus. In Beijing in 1935 and 1936, female students were just as active as men in the demonstrations against the Nationalist non-action policy. These women, in a contemporary observer’s words, “shared with their men the privilege—if it can be counted that—

\(^2\) Jiuwang Tekan Special Issue for National Salvation, in Funü gongming, October, 1931.
of showing their courage by standing up under the blows of the police, and by going with the men to prison.”

Scholars have argued that the 1930s was a critical moment in forging a new perception of societal space that was, in Lean’s words, “a unified organic entity that could propel national development.” Both Michael Tsin and Eugenia Lean argue that a discursive link between society and nation was forged during the late Qing, when the term (she hui) was translated into Chinese political thought as a neologism from Japan. Late Qing reformers such as Liang Qichao, for example, depicted a society formed by individuals motivated by common political morals that could benefit the nation. During the May Fourth period, new culture movement writers conceived of society as an alternative space to fight against the conceived yoke of extended family and clan, and continued to emphasize its central importance to nation. It was not until the 1930s that intellectuals for the first time bestowed “a truly ontological status upon the concept of society.”

The war was understood as a special occasion for realizing the hypothesis that women had a role to play in society for strengthening the nation. With the first shots of the war, women responded to a nation-wide movement to support Chinese war efforts. They did not shy away from the impending military confrontations or doubt that China would emerge successful. They believed that there should be a righteous war of self-defense waged against Japanese aggression.

23 Spicer, 2.

In addition to personal accounts and memoirs, women students’ active roles in this nation-wide demonstration, centered in Beijing in 1935 and 1936, was also recorded by various films. For example, the scene of women students and their equally passionate speeches on national awareness could be seen in the forty-two-episode documentary series Yi cun he shan yi cun xue (One inch of land, one drop of patriotic blood), (Taibei: 1995).

24 Lean, 89.

25 Lean, 89.
Their passion was not confined to written words; women in Shanghai and Nanjing organized voluntary women’s military corps for regular meetings and training in order to be prepared for approaching hostilities.\textsuperscript{26} Tan Sheying claimed that “as equal national citizens with men, how can women fall behind in loving this country? This is the only chance for women to fulfill the responsibility of a citizen to contribute to the national salvation, and women should not avoid it.”\textsuperscript{27} In other words, women activists aimed to pursue and propagate public opportunities through finding solutions for China’s problems.

This search for public roles found an immediate response in the Nationalist government’s attempt to enlist women’s support and service for the war. Indeed, the propaganda on women’s participation was made into a significant political affair. Though women were not conscripted, they were persuaded and encouraged to join the department of political affairs, chiefly for propaganda work along with other jobs that were temporarily open to women during the threat of total war. As political educators, women’s major tasks were to educate the general masses about the nature of the war, to ensure support from Chinese masses (lao bai xing), and to maintain fighting morale among the soldiers.\textsuperscript{28}

It was Song Meiling’s high-profile commitment to the issue of relief work that brought about institutional support and organized work opportunities for women after the outbreak of

\textsuperscript{26} Special Issue for National Salvation (jiuwang tekan), in \textit{Funü gongming}, October, 1931.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{28} For those women who worked in the propaganda team in the Nationalist army, their wartime work remained unexplored. No serious academic work has been dedicated to them in English literature. Meanwhile, women were found to serve for similar purposes in the CCP army.

Hung’s work on wartime popular culture, however, provided a thorough review of the work done by Chinese cartoonists, journalists, wood-carving artists, and actors. Their work aimed at nurturing a collective political will for resistance gained strong currency during the war and has transformed the landscape of Chinese popular culture. Hung, 1994.
hostilities. In so doing, she opened up channels leading to public service for educated women in a systematic manner, and garnered a certain degree of stability from vocal governmental support. Song committed herself directly to child relief to exemplify what Chinese women could do for the country, and took on two additional major jobs relevant to war relief: the National Chinese Women’s Association for War Relief (zhonghua funü weilao ziweli kangzhan jiangshi zonghui) and leadership of the New Life Women’s Advisory Committee (xinshenghuo funü zhidaowei yuanhui). Major newspapers and women’s magazines voluntarily propagated Song’s activities for war relief; she was seen in major newspapers attending to the wounded in a hospital, making speeches to women’s gatherings, and even making clothes for soldiers and working on a sewing machine herself. Her exemplary devotion to her country as a good wife and a wise mother was viewed as the “foreign equivalent of an American woman,” and led to her highly-acclaimed international role as China’s ambassador to the United States in 1942. As she navigated a broader world of public service and diplomatic missions, her daily administrative work was accomplished primarily by women who followed her step in the New Life Women’s Advisory Committees.

The mandate was entrusted to the provincial Women’s Advisory Committee on the New Life Movement. As such, provincial women’s organizations were chiefly responsible for organizing schools and homes to educate and provide for war orphans. The New Life Movement was a Nationalist attempt to revive Confucian values in order to prevent further Communist expansion, in light of the Communist Party’s political weakness of calling Chinese women back to the home. The scope of this chapter is limited in its ability to offer a thorough understanding

of the work conducted by Women’s Advisory Committees, but I will undertake a preliminary re-examination of one particular branch of the New Life Movement during the wartime, focusing especially on its efforts to protect and provide for war orphans. Women showed tremendous initiatives and creativity in this work, which should not be understood solely as a response to political mobilization. Again, regional variations should be acknowledged in order to avoid oversimplifying the complex dimensions in different geopolitical regions arising from varying degrees of pressure from military confrontations.\(^\text{30}\)

Despite the fact that Song and others attempted to unify and coordinate regional work, the Nationalist relief work for children was essentially challenged by the traumatic war situation as Japanese troops dominated in battle. The Japanese invasion shattered the existing geopolitical pattern and complicated the relations between the central government and local military leaders. There were fully occupied areas; semi-occupied areas (Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hunan, Hubei, Fujian); areas under Nationalist control known as “free China” by contemporaries (Sichuan, Xi Kang, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi); and Communist regions (Yan’an became a geopolitical region during the war).\(^\text{31}\) Though scholarship on the eight years of history of the War of Resistance remains relatively thin, regional variations are well recognized.\(^\text{32}\) According to Lary,  


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 7-13.

\(^{32}\) Master narratives have focused on wartime loss and casualty, military confrontations, the growth of the Communist power in Northwest regions, Nationalist wartime finance and economy (i.e., Arthur N. Young, *China’s Wartime Finance and Inflation*, Harvard University Press, 1965).

Recently there has been a new direction in research of the same period. More attention has been focused on the social history of the war with the availability of new materials and archives in both the mainland and Taiwan. For most recent research on the war and its regional variations, see Stephen MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008; Lary, MacKinnon, and Ezra Vogel, eds., *China at War: Regions of China, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); and Lary and MacKinnon, *Scars of War*, 2002.
research on regional variations in the past two decades that had been discouraged in Mao’s era “have flourished in many parts of China, alongside the revival of regional identities, regional cuisines, and regional dialects.” Her remarks on regional history could be applied to new developments in research on the War of Resistance, as a new generation of historians emerges on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and in Japan.33

In addition to shifting sites of military action, women’s hierarchy was another hindrance for children’s relief work. Social status was the major measure for designating leaders of refugee children’s relief work. Although women from various political backgrounds participated, elite women played leading roles in organizing this work—a legacy of the New Life Movement. Leading positions were often entrusted to the wives of high officials, regardless of individual capability or willingness, which often became a major obstacle to scaling up the philanthropic work for children in need. Eva Dykes Spicer, an ardent observer of the growth in women’s patriotism and a professor of religion at Ginling College (Chengtu) could not help but notice this practice:

Position … is of considerable importance, and the wives of high officials are the natural leaders of any women’s organization. Unfortunately for this purpose some of these women have received no modern education, and therefore find the necessary—if tiresome—routine of up-to-date organization with committee meetings, parliamentary procedure, minutes, accounts, etc., hard, if not impossible, to master. They need to be guided through these intricacies by less well-known but more competent women, and much valuable time is lost … 34

33 Lary, 2007, 3.
34 Spicer, 3-4.
This bureaucratic practice unavoidably led to further variations in child refugee relief, as it relied largely, in the long run, on personal commitment and capability. Each children’s home and school had its own destiny, depending on circumstantial factors. Personal accounts exposed issues caused by poor management and unfriendly surroundings. A principal in Liuyang, for example, was pressed by local bullies to give up senior girl students who were then be forced to become concubines of the powerful from the local region.\(^\text{35}\)

Despite the existence of fraud and wrongdoing, most children found temporary safety in child relief centers. Throughout the war years, sixty-one centers were organized for refugee children, who were chiefly from war zones. There were an estimated thirty thousand children who received protection, food, and education in wartime Children’s Homes and Schools under the leadership of Song Meiling.\(^\text{36}\) They were scattered in a wide region including Jiangxi, Guangdong, Sichuan, Fujian, Guangxi, Guizhou, Anhui, Zhejiang, Hunan, Shan’xi, Shanxi provinces, and the Shang’an’ning border region. In the child relief centers, children were protected from the suffering of hunger and disease. Meanwhile, they received education and vocational training with special emphasis on agricultural knowledge and manual skill-fostering, which kept their immediate chances of survival chances in the face of an unpredictable war situation.

The achievement for child refugees made by these women, despite their political differences, was affirmed by scholars from both the mainland and Taiwan.\(^\text{37}\) Among the thirty-seven schools

\(^{35}\) See Liu Ying, My life, 56.

\(^{36}\) Lu Fangshang, Kangzhan shiqi zhongguo de fuyun gongzuo (Women’s Movement in China during the War of Resistance), in Donghai daxue lishi xuebao (Donghai University Journal), 160-161.

and homes established for refugee children in ten Nationalist provinces, Guangdong distinguished itself in offering shelter to the largest number of inhabitants in spite of the wartime difficulties brought on by disruptions in internal economic patterns.  

**Wu Jufang and Her Path: the Mother in Military Uniform**

Wu Jufang (1911-1999) was the wife of General Li Hanhun (1894-1987), the wartime governor of Guangdong province from 1938 to 1945. In the first year of the war, Wu was active in raising funds to purchase supplies for troops on the front line. She also answered the national calling for women’s service for the wounded, providing ambulances and medical supplies—purchased by donated money—to field hospitals.  

She visited her husband in the De’an front together with a team of eighteen members from Hunan and Jiangxi Women’s Relief Association (funü weilao dui), carrying gifts, milk powder, and medical supplies to the soldiers. Over the course of her seven-year tenure as the chairman of the Guangdong Women’s Advisory Committee, she served as the president of Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools and rescued over twenty thousand refugee children, continuously providing them with shelter, food, basic medical supplies, and education. She earned a bachelor’s degree in agricultural economy at

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38 For example, the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools housed 2000 children by 1942, which was double the number of children rescued by the second largest children’s home. See China Handbook, 719.

39 The number of casualties on the Chinese side was shocking during the early months of the war. For a research on troop and military loss, see Hsi-sheng Ch’i, *Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937-1945*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982); for contemporary witness accounts, see Edgar Ansel Mowrer, *Mowrer in China* (New York: Penguin Books, 1938).

40 Nanxun Tekan (A Special Collection on the Nanxun Front). The eighteen members of this women’s corps that served for the front left first-hand accounts and records of this unusual journey.
Zhongshan University in 1941 while serving as the Head for Child Relief and Women’s Affairs in Guangdong.

Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools was a multi-dimensional educational institute that included seven branches (among which four were supported by the department of Relief of the Administrative Yuan, and three were funded by Guangdong wartime provincial government); three middle schools; two elementary schools; and several factories. It had more than six hundred staff members with a thousand students in each branch school. Sheltered were refugee children and war orphans who had lost their fathers in the war against Japanese invasion; in other words, some of the children’s mothers were alive. As of year 1945, Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools offered safe havens for more than twenty thousand children, many of whom emerged from the fire of war to become engineers, school teachers, and university professors. They were subsequently scattered in the mainland, Taiwan, Hongkong, the United States of America, Canada, and Australia. Since the change of political atmosphere in the 1980s, the alumni association has resumed its activities, remembering and commemorating the past they once shared intimately.

While in her eighties, the “president Mama”—the healthy and long-lived Wu Jufang—traveled back to mainland China three times to meet with her children. Wu’s daughter, Dr. Li Zhen—a health science professor working at Johns Hopkins University and UCLA—also traveled to mainland China, Hongkong and Taiwan, and was an active messenger for former students from the Guangdong Homes and Schools. Together, they published a collective memoir for these students in 1995. Following this, Li Zhen compiled another collective memoir on this particular institute in modern China to supplement the former.
In 1947, when Chinese women were granted voting rights for the first time in history, Wu Jufang was elected as one of the first women representatives to the National Congress. This great advance in women’s lives did not last long, as the Nationalist Party was decidedly defeated by the CCP in 1949. While the Wu family had temporarily moved to New York in 1948, seeking medical treatment for General Li’s ear problems, the intended sojourn turned out to be a prolonged exile. When life took an unexpected turn for this couple and landed them in this strange new country, Wu Jufang took on the responsibility of working as the primary breadwinner for the family, as she was the one who was able to speak English. During her lifetime, Wu Jufang kept reinventing herself. In her daughter’s words, she “never failed providing for the family.”

According to her Li Zhen’s memoir, it was the desperate position of women in China that shaped Wu Jufang’s vision. The Wu family gained its fortune and prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century during the Taiping Rebellion. Women ignored by the prominent Wu patriarch inspired Wu Jufang, who heard and experienced stories similar to those told by the May Fourth generation. Wu Jufang’s mother was a second wife, who was from a tailor’s family. Deemed lower in social status by other female members of the Wu family, it was extremely difficult for the young wife, lacking support from her husband, to adjust to life in the joint family. The young wife was socially isolated from the rest of the family. While the Wu family was en route, attempting to escape from the carnage of war, the young wife was forced to give birth to Wu Jufang in a pigpen as nobody offered their home to this miserable young woman because a women’s blood was deemed unclean and corrupt. When baby Wu Jufang was only
fourteen months old, her young mother chose to commit suicide because of a false accusation of sexual impropriety from her abusive mother-in-law.\footnote{Virginia Li, \textit{From One Root Many Flowers}, 2003, 40.}

With the death of her mother, Wu Jufang sought comfort from her \textit{Naima}, the nanny. When Wu Jufang was in her early teens, her Naima tragically caught a virus from a dog bite. Despite her life-long loyalty and devotion, the Wu father refused to pay for Naima’s medicines. Wu Jufang’s plea to her father received a cold denial, and as a result her Naima died. When she wept for her Naima, her father scolded her and reminded her that tears were to be reserved for her parents only.

Wu Jufang herself frequently faced the constraints of her gender growing up. Despite the Wu family’s good economic standing, Wu Jufang did not enjoy privileges of education because her father was not in favor of women receiving the modern education that was increasingly available in early twentieth century China.\footnote{For discussion on modern education and its development in China, see Suzanne Pepper, \textit{Radicalism and Education in Modern China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Xiaoping Cong, \textit{Teachers’ School and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937} (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).} The father took official positions far away from home; like most men of his social status, he frequented brothels, smoked opium, and was frivolous in his spending habits, leaving his only daughter neglected and unattended. The father-daughter relationship was further clouded by the father’s reluctance to send Wu Jufang to school, while she clearly yearned for modern education that was becoming available to urban Chinese women. She was made to beg for money from her abusive father for school tuition, although he was spent his fortune on the best quality of opium, an amount that was said to have been able to support five to six households with rice for a month.
Growing up as a female was accompanied by a deep sense of exclusiveness and unfairness. What started for Wu Jufang as a private family experience was later to be translated into a driving force to better the lives of individuals—including youth, children, women, and men—under the new language system developed by the May Fourth Movement. The May Fourth generation—mostly men—had expressed anguish about the power of the father by publicizing women’s suffering. They blamed China’s weakness on women’s imprisonment and ignorance brought on by an oppressive patriarchal system, exemplified by the joint family system.

Wu Jufang’s individual growth and her development as a social being coincided with this period of cultural transformation and national revolution. Growing up in the lower Yangzi Delta, instead of in the major port cities on the east coast, her experience likely illustrates many the experiences of many women, whose destinies continued to be decided by their parents, even while the image of the new Chinese women was being forged in profound national discussions. Traditionally, two major themes of women’s lives—education and marriage—were arranged by the elders in the family. This generation of women frequently faced familial or patriarchal impediments on the way to gaining access to the pleasures and comforts of modern life. In other words, freedom of education and mobility were not granted to them as a matter of course after the New Culture Movement. Nonetheless, when the emergent national crisis demanded women’s mobilization, they seized the opportunity, and transformed private feelings into a collective drive for action. In Wu Jufang’s own words, decades later—but closely echoing May Fourth values—

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she was to become a voice for her mother’s generation, and “for all women who had endured so much.” She would also “become a voice for my own generation.”

Wu was not alone in her desire to take action to change Chinese women’s social and political status. Her political and patriotic involvement in the activities of war relief were part of a wide range of women’s activist groups and movements. On the political front, suffragists, carrying the recognition of women as a collective identity with their own political mandate, continued their demands for quotas in the National Assembly. Shadowed by the increasingly authoritarian nature of the Nationalist regime, women suffragists carried the mission with great difficulty. Nonetheless, they achieved success by adopting strategic measures in this unusual period, leading to the winning of voting rights in 1947 with the implementation of the constitution of the Republic of China. On the military front, women responded to the war with patriotism as enthusiastic as their male counterparts. They formed battlefield service corps, sending desperately needed food and medicine to the front; serving the army as nurses, political educators and spies; and coordinating communications between the front lines and the back by actively dispatching messages as war correspondents. On the home front, women shouldered the responsibilities of fund-raising, cloth-making, and refugee relief. Wartime activism by women

44 Li, 2003, 50.
46 Louise Edwards, “Women’s Suffrage in China: Challenging Scholarly Conventions,” Pacific Historical Review 69, no. 4, (November, 2000), 617. Edwards argues that two major factors should be held accountable for the false identification of 1949 as the year of Chinese women winning suffrage rights. First, history often fell to the victim of the mainstream political narrative. In this case, the CCP’s self-appointing role as women’s liberator was accountable for the unknown status of Chinese women’s suffragist movement. Second, Edwards criticizes western feminist scholarly practice for depending on geopolitical borders exclusively; in her own words, “the history of women’s suffrage relies on the existence of a stable nation-state with prescribed national borders and consistent government systems. These narrative conventions pose particular difficulties for scholars working on histories of the developing world and have contributed to the dearth of research on non-Western suffrage struggles.” Edwards, 618.
was diverse, and was carried on in accordance with national sympathies, as well as with their social status in a war racked country.

Unlike other high-profile women of her status such as Li Dequan, Wu Jufang did not enjoy a public role prior to the war; it was the education she received, especially from Zhongshan University, that justified her leading wartime position. Through the lens of Wu Jufang’s experience, education was crucial, bridging gaps for women to assume public roles during the war years. Education gave authority to the public roles women assumed for the benefits of war orphans and children. These developments in wartime education followed in accordance with the logic used by reformers of earlier decades, such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, who justified their demands by that saying women’s education would benefit the nation, since women were mothers of Chinese citizens after all.⁴⁷ Despite the absence of women’s own voices at the time of Kang and Liang’s proposal, women had taken essential roles, via the spring board of modern education, venturing into social arenas that were traditionally closed to them.

Wu situated herself in Guangdong, which had a long tradition of women’s activism and organization. Guangdong was the political center for women’s movements from 1924 to 1927, a period which saw cooperation between the KMT and the CCP for the first time in history. It was also the home community for the Central Department of Qomen (zhongyang funübu), a united organization of women with various political backgrounds and political agendas. Moreover, it was home to the Guangdong United Women’s Association (Guangdong ge jie funü lianhehui), the Great Union of Women’s Suffragist Movements (nüquann yundong datongmeng), the United Association for Women’s Emancipation (funü jiefang xiehui), and the United Association of Women.

⁴⁷ For a discussion on Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao’s argument proposing education for Chinese women, see Weikun Cheng, “Going Public through Education: Female Reformers and Girls School in Late Qing Beijing China,” in *Late Imperial China* 21, no. 1 (June 2000): 110-12.
Chinese Women (zhongguo funü lianhehui). It was a period with a cosmopolitan spirit of cooperation between various political movements, a time of innovation and revolution which was severely oppressed during the White Terror. Though women’s political wills continued to be marginalized on the national stage during the Nanjing decade, the self-aware and self-conscious demands for women’s rights and freedom of movement remained a concern for many educated women. Contrary to previous understandings of this era, more recent research by Louise Edwards reveals that an independent feminist movement—aiming directly for political rights for women—continued by adopting more precautionous strategies compared to their predecessors of the Guangzhou era.

The war brought a closer relationship between the regime and women in the way that the government’s ardent call for women’s patriotic support met with a ready response. However, this did not necessarily imply steps toward realization of women’s rights. Women made their voices heard and their actions highly visible through widespread organization. Women from various backgrounds came together to organize a sub-branch of the Alliance of Chinese Women for

48 For a personal account of women’s movements in Guangzhou, 1922-1927, see Chen Zhiwen’s accounts, compiled by Chen Binheng, “Reminiscence of women’s movements in Guangzhou during the Great Revolution period,” in Guangzhou wenshi, no. 30, 1-4. For personal accounts on women and early activities of the Tong Meng Hui, see Zhao Liancheng, “Reminiscence of Women’s Political Activities for the Allied Association Before and After the 1911 Revolution” (Guangfu qianhou Guangdong funücanjia tongmenghui huodong), in Selected Manuscripts of Guagzhou Literature and History (Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cungao xianbian), no. 5; Chen Shaobo, “A Personal Account on the Nationalist Red Cross Society,” in Selected Unpublished Manuscripts of Guangzhou Literature and History (Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cungao xianbian), no. 6.


50 A close relationship between women and a country’s regime often suggests otherwise. For example, Claudia Koonz reveals that the Third Reich’s continued to subordinate women while incorporating women closely into the social and political web of the regime. Scholars of modern China have found a close bond between women and mainstream politics unfavorable for independent women’s movements; for example, Nora Diamond declares that the spring of 1938 was the “final death knell to an independent women’s movement in the KMT-run area of the mainland.” Nora Diamond, Women under Kuomingtang Rule, 9; Elizabeth Croll similarly noticed an absence of independent women’s movements within the Communist region. Croll, Women and Socialism in China, 156.
Supporting Soldiers’ Self-Defense (zhongguo funü weilao ziwei kangzhan jiangshi zonghui Guangdong Fenhui), which incorporated wives of high Nationalist officials along with social activists from schools, the YWCA, and various women’s groups. (To name only a few, they were Huang Cuifeng, the representative of the Guangdong Women’s Association; Lei Liqiong, the representative from Guangdong Women’s Association For National Goods; Shi Dongji, the representative of Guangzhou Elementary Schools; Xie Huaichen, the Representative of Guangzhou Women’s Association; Zhen Shuzhen, the representative of Guangzhou Women’s Sewing group; and Chen Mingshu, the representative of the New Life Women’s Movement.) Wu Jufang was appointed director and led the first group of Guangdong women to the Nanxun front, where her husband and his colleagues from Guangdong province were stationed. She wrote about her journey on the northern front, saying, “Soldiers are determined to defeat the enemy and are prepared for heroic death; Compatriots are full of righteous emotion in supplying service to the army. We civilians in the rear should rally our mind and materials to ensure logistic supplies, in so doing, we relieve soldiers’ suffering from shortage of materials and enhance their fighting power. Representatives sent to greet the soldiers in the front brought with them news of the homeland and patriotic zeal of the rear to cheer our fighters. Meanwhile, they brought back news in the battlefield and soldiers’ stories to maintain civic moral. It was through these members serving for the self-defense soldiers that the front and the rear correspond with each other. The future of the War of Resistance relies on how effective we communicate.”

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52 Wu Jufang, “A General Overview of the Journey to the Northern Front,” in The Special Issue Dedicated to the Nanxun Front, 5.
Positioning women in the space of temporal history, Wu Jufang considered that Chinese women needed to take part in the process of transformation together with men under the circumstances of national crisis. Women were an integral part of the reconstruction and rebuilding of a new China and a new world.\textsuperscript{53} Fully aware of women’s movements globally, Wu Jufang and her like-minded colleagues, the generation of women activists, did not shy away from this critical positioning of China in a larger, global, context. Toward the conclusion of the conflagration, she wrote a brochure for the Chinese women’s movement entitled “New Path for Women’s Movement” (funü yundong de xinlu), in which she championed the principle of binding the Chinese women’s movement with the building of a new China. And she drew political motivation by imagining space for women to have both a larger social role and individual fulfillment. She stated that “the task for national construction falls on every citizen’s shoulder—men and women are equally important to this task. As such, women citizens should shoulder half of the responsibilities …The issue of child care should be mended socially and collectively. We must initiate a social plan for nursing and educating children through building a multidimensional pre-school and school system, in so doing, we co-share mother’s social responsibilities.”\textsuperscript{54}

Taking care of refugee children was, thus, not only understood as an extension of women’s motherly role, but also as women’s civil responsibility to their working sisters, Chinese society, and, thus, the nation. Refugee childcare was integral to the national project of China’s reconstruction. It was in this sense that women’s domestic, maternal responsibilities transcended the traditional moral boundaries to reach the societal sphere, an arena that was perceived as

\textsuperscript{53} Wu Jufang, Funü yundong de xinlu, 17.

\textsuperscript{54} Wu Jufang, Funü yundong de xinlu, 20-21.
possessing a positive power. Women should demonstrate their patriotism through action and take collective pride in that.

Wu Jufang dedicated herself fully to Guangdong Women’s New Life Movement Committee once she was appointed to the post. Her persistent activity on war relief illustrated her determination and dedication to benefit her home community as well as her own interests. War-time hardships and unpredictability demanded centralized and determined leadership and guidance. The Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools, similar to other educational institutes, suffered frequently from severe funding shortages, safety uncertainties, air raids, and epidemic diseases. All of these factors threatened the very survival of the institutes and thousands of children’s lives in the war years. As is evident from the various accounts, Wu Jufang not only took concrete measures, but, more importantly, took the lead in focusing on very vulnerable groups, such as women and children.

Rescuing Children: Mothers in Actions

Children’s rescue work relied on effective organization. It involved ensuring necessary funding, training personnel, mapping out action routes, establishing meeting stations, enlisting means of transportation for the children and rescuers, and receiving the children. Each stage demanded trained and experienced personnel for successful and consistent work. Thus, the Guangdong Women’s Association for Children’s Care and Education, as a branch of the Wartime Children’s Association led by Song Meiling, was a multi-layered organization involving wives of high officials, prominent leaders for women’s rights, YWCA members,
elementary school principles, and activists for war relief from the Chinese Women’s Association for Supporting the Self-Defense Soldiers.

Women took direct roles in rescuing children from war zones. As the head of the New Life Women’s Commission, Wu Jufang was responsible for organizing rescue teams and providing care for the rescued children. The Women’s Commission was instructed to form connections and networks for rescuing children with county governments, civic agencies, and guerrilla groups. The execution of the missions was charged to individual counties. The rescued refugee children were transported to a central site in Shayuan outside of Shaoguan afterwards.

Two rescue teams with fifteen members each were formed initially, one directed by Zhao Mingxin (1921-2000), and the other led by the Women’s Brigade, which was chiefly composed of soldiers’ wives and widows. They initially focused on four counties: Xinhui, Taisan, En’ping and Kaiping, which were the “semi-fallen zones” (ban lun xian qu). Rescuers were instructed to respect children’s own preference as well as the family’s opinions about staying behind or leaving for the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. As the mission of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools were unknown to the local population, they tended to be skeptical. In response to this skepticism, the rescue team created the slogan “free education, free food, and clothes” (Buyaoqian, youshudu, youfanchi, youyichuan) to entice refugee children and their families. Spoken drama was also staged in towns and villages, warning the masses of the brutalities brought by the enemy. In so doing, the rescue team fueled the audience with a deep combined sense of urgency, anxiety, and patriotism.

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55 Li, 2007, 48-49.
Rescuers took on civilians’ costumes and wore everyday clothes to remain inconspicuous. The rescuers needed to penetrate enemy lines and get into the occupied zones, where they located and gather refugee children, getting them inland by whatever means possible. Because of the unpredictability of war, rescuers had to face the fact that all of their previously arranged plans and logistics might not be able to be operate, as the situation could change at any moment. In such instances, they had to rise to the challenge quickly and make new plans for transporting the children out of fighting zones using any resources they could master.

As challenging as the situation was, the risks and stakes were fully realized. While dealing with the hardship of transportation, travel, and food shortages, rescuers also came face to face with enemy fire, all the while encumbered with frightened and sick children. In Wuhan, An’e, the leftist writer and a savior of refugee children in 1938, remarked that each journey was like a gamble with death. The first group of forty-six children was led by Chen Mingshu, out of Guangzhou when it fell in October 1938. Wu Jufang also conducted rescue actions and went into the war zone herself.

There were cases of children who came to seek food and other means of security upon hearing the news of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. After escaping from an abusive foster family, Xiang Guixin became a street urchin and witnessed the brutality of Japanese troops toward Chinese civilians. When streets became dangerous and his old neighborhood was destroyed by the Japanese invasion, news came that there was a place for refugee children. Despite the fear and distrust that was common among the general population, Xiang made the choice, in the face of Japanese soldiers’ brutal killing of Chinese civilians, to go

56 An’e, An’e wenji (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2008), 1668-69.
on his own to the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. He followed the rescue team and was immediately impressed by “a bowl of streamed rice” offered by the rescuers.\textsuperscript{57} The exact number of the children who sought help on their own remains unknown; reportedly, they only constituted a small proportion of the children in Guangdong Children’s homes and Schools.

Because of limited housing capacity, resources, and funds, rescue workers were forced to make difficult choices when setting selection criteria, despite their initial ambitions, and only certain children, no older than fifteen years, were eligible to be housed for primary education opportunities. First on the list were children of nationalist martyrs in the War of Resistance; second were children of soldiers fighting in the front; in third position were children of civil personnel who died for resistance causes; fourth were children of staff members who were committed to national salvation; fifth on the list were orphans from war wracked zones.\textsuperscript{58}

Getting children out of war zones was only the beginning of the long journey of survival. Teachers and caregivers at the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools were left alone to provide care-giving and education. Once a group of children arrived, the most immediate concerns were primarily the psychological issues surrounding trauma. Many children showed symptoms of anxiety, fatigue, depression, and trauma when they arrived. Wu Jufang told her daughter about the children’s arrival:

\begin{quote}
On arrival, the children all looked bewildered, their clothes soiled and torn, their heads full of lice and scabs. They had skin infections and many were skeletally thin. Many were sick with fever and diarrhea-inducing diseases. The children had been through the merciless
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} Li, 2007, 46-51.

\textsuperscript{58} Zhongguo funü weilao ziwei kangzhan jiangshi Guangdong fenhui gongzuo gaikuang (A General Report of the Guangdong Chinese Women’s Association for Comforting the Anti-Japanese Soldiers), 9.
experience of seeing their homes burned and destroyed and their parents and kin mutilated and killed before their very own eyes. These children lost their ability to smile and laugh. They made hardly a sound, even when crying. 59

Children’s victimization was also documented by Ruth V. Hemenway, who was put in charge of obstetric, gynecological, and pediatric services by the Syracuse-in-China Hospital in Chongqing in 1937. The small pediatric service witnessed a major expansion, not so much as a result of medical improvement, but rather as a result of the war. Orphans gathered from areas devastated by conflict were sent to the pediatric wards. Hemenway observed that these children “ranged in age from three to ten; they were in severe shock as a result of the slaughter of their families, the burning of their homes, terrific bombings, complete desolation, starvation, thirst, and long travel under the worst conditions. Day after day these orphans would simply lay quietly in bed, not moving, not speaking, not feeding themselves.”60 Community acceptance and support was crucial for the traumatized children to regain their spirit. Instead of treating the children in shock with medicine, Hemenway’s pediatric wards cured them with special care. Doctors and nurses fed the children, sat by their beds, brought them toys, talked to them, and took them to the playground. This special treatment proved effective as “little by little the stunned look would begin to leave their small faces and their eyes would brighten a little bit. Finally a child would sit up in bed and then feed himself. Soon after that he would begin talking.”61

The Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools offered these children a sense of community acceptance, which they may not have been able to find elsewhere in the war zones. Teachers

60 Hemenway, 187-8.
61 Ibid., 188.
fostered an intimate bond with these children, and children themselves became life-long friends. Those who were already there were encouraged to take the initiative to embrace the new-comers and offer them friendship.

As a wartime social welfare organization, the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools practiced the national policy of State Medicine, a medical plan initiated by the Nanjing Government in 1929 aiming to extend medical and public health services to people in urban centers as well as rural areas.\(^{62}\) It was continued in the Southwest regions after the open hostilities in 1937 with the goal of promoting wartime public health and, in particular, combating epidemic diseases brought on by the unprecedented movement of refugee populations and military men. School hygienic programs were also introduced. However, because of the lack of trained health personnel, teachers were frequently trained to observe children’s physical and mental fitness.\(^{63}\) When a child arrived at the camp, usually he or she would receive a thorough medical examination and even vaccination, depending on the child’s condition.\(^{64}\) Students in healthy conditions were sent to an ordinary camp to join the others immediately. A set of new clothing and a school kit—which included a book bag, a notebook, a brush and ink, a facial towel, toothpaste, and a foot bandage—were offered to prepare children for camp life. The sick

\(^{62}\) For an official interpretation of the policy, see *China Handbook*, 1937-1943, 671-84.

\(^{63}\) *China Handbook*, 1937-1943. The Chinese Nationalist government paid attention to health and medial care of orphans. For example, medical supplies distributed to orphanages under the Relief Commission’s management were valued at $13,000. 725.

\(^{64}\) Physical examination was a common procedure that war orphans went through upon their arrival. For example, children rescued from central China were collected in Yichan for repatriation and redistribution in 1937 and 1938. Cao Mengjun, one of the founders of Wartime Children’s Association, served as the head of Yichan Temporary Care Center. For a personal account, see An’er, “Children are Heading for Sichuan,” in *An’er wenji*, 1670-3. The original essay was published in *Kangzhan wenyi* (Wartime Literature), vol. 1.
and weak were sent to medical treatment centers or special classes, small in size, where they usually received special attention and care.\footnote{Li, 2007, 76.}

An important part of the school health program was the control of communicable diseases through early recognition of symptoms and by means of immunization. In the medical examination performed upon children’s arrival, nurses paid particular attention to signs of tuberculosis, respiratory disease, and malaria. Children showing symptoms were separated from the rest and were sent to a special care room on campus.

The selection and construction of school sites also reflected a deep concern about providing for personal and public hygiene. Usually, school sites were purposefully located on the banks of flowing rivers.\footnote{Ibid, 75.} Special attention was focused on water supply, housing capacity and sanitation, food supply, sewage, and disposal of night soil. The goal was to prevent the occurrence among children of communicable diseases such as respiratory illness, smallpox, cholera, malaria, and diarrhea—illnesses that accounted for the majority of deaths among civilians and refugees in wartime China.\footnote{“China – Health, Department of – Training of Personnel, Annual Report of the Public Health Personnel Training Inst. July, 1937 – June, 1938”, Folder 62, Box 6, Series 601, RG 1, RAC.}

Lack of well-trained and well-educated personnel was a major challenge in moving the welfare program forward. In order to meet the emergent need of caring for thousands of children, the Homes recruited young women with several years of work experience as teachers. During the war years, five hundred teachers were trained in relatively, short three-week periods. Each teacher was usually responsible for twelve children. These teachers were “young, energetic,
patriotic, willing to give, and had a sense of mission for the country and for the children.”\textsuperscript{68} And they played multiple roles in children’s living experiences. They shared meals, lived in the same dormitory, attended the classes, worked in the fields, and engaged in recreation with the children: “In the classroom, they were teachers. After recess, they became parents. They acted as group leaders when laboring in the fields, and as older brothers and sisters in the playground.”\textsuperscript{69}

**Surviving the War: Persistence and Strategies**

Guangdong lost its costal regions and major cities such as Guangzhou and Shantou, and thus a major source of income from trade. Additionally, the loss of these coastal regions and cities also meant loss of remittance from overseas Chinese as they fell into Japanese hands. The provincial government and its administrative units and staff were forced to retreat into the northern areas of the Nanling Mountains. Lian County was chosen as the wartime capital, which was later moved to Shaoguan upon the request of General Li. The war’s consequence were disastrous, as the provincial government lacked the means to provide adequate food, especially during the year of drought from 1943-1944. During wartime, Guangdong’s populace also suffered from endemic diseases such as malaria, kala-azar, and plague.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} Li, 2003, 142.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 142.

Not surprisingly, the most challenging task was to maintain the livelihood of the thousands of refugee children and soldier’s widows throughout the war years. As the war remained prolonged—and funding from the Executive Yuan (xing zhen yuan) remained ever insufficient to meet the needs—strategies for self-reliance had to be developed. Successful survival depended on contributions from all, including the directors, teachers, staff members, and children. Each was expected to contribute his or her part to the survival of this special refugee institution, which ensured food, safety, education, and emotional support.

The first item on the self-reliance agenda was to determine the location of schools. As such, locations were carefully considered and eventually it was decided that schools needed be built against mountains while facing a river, since mountains offered protection from air raids and rivers provided sources of water, sanitation, and convenient means of transportation. Rivers also offered convenient conditions for agricultural production. The practical usages of mountains and water were carefully calculated, but they were not the only factors. The aesthetic effects of mountains and rivers in education were also considered important in the selection of school locations because they were generally believed to be beneficial in cultivating harmonious feelings and moral virtues among students.\(^71\)

In the daily activities reported in the schools, children’s labor remained crucial as limited supplemental funding restricted the capability to hire help from outside world. For example, teenage boys worked as construction workers, building dorms and classrooms. They followed local customs for construction and incorporated local products into their building of classrooms.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 56.
and dorms. Pine tree bark was used to construct roofs, and pine wood was used for the walls. The dwellings were simply constructed and designed for the practical purpose of basic shelter.

As for the issue of food shortage, the Nationalist Government adopted a strict food control policy and provincial food bureaus were asked to store up “an adequate amount of food” and to buy up surplus food in the province.”\footnote{China Handbook, 1937-1943, 648-54.} This policy was effective in the way that it ensured at least the minimum amount of food to meet the Homes and Schools’ daily necessities, since the realm of child refugee housing and education were designated as “National General Mobilization Affairs” by the Nationalist Government.\footnote{Ibid., 127. Students, civic officials, and teachers enjoyed a higher degree of food supply security during the war years, while the general population was sometimes left on their own to deal with disastrous consequences. Guangdong peasants, for example, received no help from the provincial relief bureau, and faced the same threat as was brought on by drought, i.e., there was not adequate food to meet demand. Many officials such as Li Hanhun, according to her daughter’s memoir, were frustrated and exhausted by the severe shortage of primary supplies during the war.. See Li, 2003, 140.} In other words, school children enjoyed a privileged supply of food during the war years. Though Guangdong’s provincial government struggled with the military for the power of food control during wartime, the Homes and Schools were privileged and guaranteed support because children and soldiers were considered a high priority.

As funding was crucial to the continuing operation of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools, Wu Jufang took this matter into her own hands. Once a year, she traveled to Chongqing to appeal for funds for refugee children, chiefly from the National Relief Commission of the Executive Yuan, which supplemented children’s relief work. Travel from the wartime capital of Guangdong to Chongqing was fraught with dangers, including frequent bombings from Japanese
air force, the foggy environment surrounding Chongqing, and the mountainous route. Wu Jufang described the journey in simple sentences to her daughter:

I went to Chungking two or three times a year. In those days, transportation was difficult; I had first to go to Guilin by overnight train and then wait there for a flight to Chungking. The flights were seldom on schedule and often canceled. The planes were small with two rows of seats facing each other and accommodated about twenty people. The metal seats were so cold that I felt frozen in the air.

Each journey to raise funds might last from one to two months. The prolonged journey meant a significant absence from the family. One such journey came with the uttermost sacrifice of the death of her younger son Li Shao. Wu Jufang compensated for her grief and loss by continuing her commitment to the children under her supervision. She said that the children’s condolence comforted her spirit and helped to move her forward. She shared a close bond with the war orphans, which led to reciprocal affection between her and many children under her supervision. While in Chongqing for fund-raising, she often took time to fly to Chengdu to visit junior air cadets selected from Guangdong Children’s Homes and School. One child wrote to her of the joy of seeing her again: “Mama, you so surprised us when you came to see us from Chungking.” After her departure, these children frequently wrote to her, sharing their achievements, seeking advice, and informing the “Mama” about difficulties and hardships in their lives. Letters from these children showed that Wu Jufang continued to serve as a life mentor, readily available to answers their pleas for aid after they graduated from Guangdong.


Li, 2003, 140.

Li, 2003, 319.
Decades later, Wu’s daughter found a letter from a child expressing his gratitude for the money Wu had sent her, and informing her that he “is well now.”

This bond, however, could not help to relieve the deteriorating morale as military efforts stagnated and reached a stalemate, putting growing pressure on Guangdong’s limited resources. Working staff and general civilians were increasingly caught in the traps of inflation and shortages of materials, and as a result, discontent and disappointment were widely reported in Nationalist China, taking a high toll on civilian morale. As a consequence of the growing gap between inflation and the purchasing power of salaries, able personnel continued leaving the Homes and Schools for alternative positions that might provide them more resources to get by on. The leaving of salaried staffs and civil officers worsened conditions and left more unsolved problems. Guangdong was not exceptional regarding the consequences of declining morale.

Maintaining confidence in the face of increasing discontent was a nation-wide issue that plagued almost every governmental office and voluntary organization. The situation was documented in personnel accounts, governmental reports, and observations by American and European journalists. College professors and students complained about inflation and its disastrous effect on educational institutions.

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77 Ibid., 319.


80 “A Tentative Proposal for a New Basis on Which Salaries May be Provided for the Faculty Member of the P.U.M.C. and Possibly of other Faculties.” October 2, 1943, p.1-3, Folder 1039, box143, RG IV2B9, CMB, Inc., RAC.
If rescue actions relied on patriotism and voluntary contributions from the people, the maintenance of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools was a much more complicated matter, relying on planned, long-term strategies. Wu Jufang was the sole figure behind this movement during the eight years of war, and members of the New Life Women’s Advisory Committee worked closely with her to realize these plans. The organization and its way of working helped to effectively combine ideas and boost the morale necessary for continuing work.

**Educating China’s Future Citizens: Motherhood, War Orphans, and Nation**

The challenge was how to conduct and structure children’s lives, when family—the fundamental nurturing unit—was no longer in place for them. War orphans had lost the structures that supported and knitted together their lives before the war—family, kin, schools, friends, community. Vital elements in people’s lives were no longer in place. Educators had to consider how they would work to promote understanding about key human relations that usually took place in the community prior to the war.

Late Qing reformers and the May Fourth generation, in formulating their political agendas, looked to children as critical to national salvation. Liang Qichao, for example, viewed children as the symbolic representation of a new China, and saw education as “the key to the
survival of China.” According to Limin Bai, the Chinese notion of the child involves “a phase of lifespan, a social status, and a state in human nature.” This notion mirrored a connotation applied by Chinese to children. That is, other than the biological stage (a phase of lifespan), children also represent incompleteness (a social status), and a type of youthful “innocence, resilience and freshness,” which symbolizes hope and the future. Borrowing Giuseppe Mazzini’s notion of “Young Italy,” which entailed the building of a free and independent republic by way of liberating the separate Italian states from foreign rule, Liang Qichao argued that China had the same historical opportunity to emerge out of its dynastic ashes, only if its populace—especially the Chinese youth—started to imbue themselves with the civic virtues of modern nation-state citizens. Liang Qichao and his generation of reformers focused political attention on the youth for national salvation. Generations to come continued this tradition of writing about children for purposeful ends.

Lu Xun’s written attack on the traditional Confucian education system in China as one of “eating people” invoked introspection about cultural intervention on education. His younger brother Zhou Zuoren was one member of the May Fourth generation who introduced a social Darwinian pedagogical program for youth education in his writings on children’s literature and folksongs. Thus, the concept of children in modern China was, in Andrew Jones words, an “epistemological, ideological, institutional and even commercial category.” Modern writing

81 Limin Bai, “Children as the Youthful Hope of an Old Empire: Race, Nationalism, and Elementary Education in China, 1895-1915,” in Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth 1, no. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 210-11.

82 Ibid., 211.

83 Ibid., 211-2.

and reading about children performs an “intense absorption with the act of looking at the child … in which the object of that gaze becomes the repository for a displaced desire, in this case, for national transcendence of China’s semicolonial status.” Based on this sentiment, Chinese urged an awareness of children as a political matter that should involve “regularized institutional intervention.” Thus, education for children in modern China was, using Jones’ term, “a double movement between rescuing children and being redeemed by them.”

This modern (and anxious) desire for national development gained momentum when open hostility erupted and the Nationalist Government disastrously lost east China in the following six months. Madame Jiang’s appeal warned of the dangerous consequence of ignoring the issue of refugee children. She stated that “there are many tens of thousands of children, bereft of parents and homes. There are even more children wandering with parents who are too poor to feed and clothe them. This situation must be taken care of immediately because they are to be men and women of this country. They must be housed, fed, clothed, and educated. They cannot be allowed to drift, to become beggars, or potential criminals.’’ Thus, the appeal from Madame Jiang to her audience was to “help them to become worthy citizens able and eager to take their full share in the further defense and rehabilitation of our country.” Children were the pathway to China’s future, viewed from a Darwinian evolutionary version of history; thus, the prerequisite was to affirm opportunities for children’s survival, and to develop their welfare institutionally in the name of the nation.

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86 Jones, 715.

Street children, refugee kids, and orphans worried many, and children’s education called for much attention as intense military fighting occurred in the early days of the war. Members attending the opening ceremony of Guangdong Women’s Anti-Japanese Association asked the Song sisters to lend their social prestige to the welfare of children deprived by the war.\(^{88}\)

Women pursued and propagated school education for children, in order to attain the promise of achieving new positions in a positively-conceived society, and in order to become members of a larger group in contrast to their small and very often shattered family circles. Socially speaking, it was a social entrepreneurship of collective action inspired by women’s own experimental conceptions, which linked education, children, and nation. For example, An’er, the author of the official song of the Wartime Association for Children, wrote,

We left the father, we left the mother;
We lost the land, we lost the hometown;
The enemy is the Japanese Imperialism and its hired ruffians
We are to defeat it,
…

We do not rely on the father,
Neither do we rely on the mother,
We search for new learning
And we build new homes.
Our good friends escaped from the Japanese fire.
We are to help him, help him
To defeat the enemy and return home;
We are to aid him
To go back to visit the mother and the father;

To help him,
Together, we build a new China!\(^{89}\)

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\(^{88}\) Guangdong Funüyundong fazhan shiliao, originally in Jiuwang Ribao (Salvation Daily, February 4, 1938), 24.

\(^{89}\) An’e, 60-61.
Wu Jufang’s own writing echoed this vision, which linked children’s education with the destiny of a shared future. In her message to Guangdong province on Children’s Day in 1941, she wrote:

Little friends you were born in an age of great difficulty and are growing up in the vicissitudes of history. You have left youthful weakness behind and marched forward bravely with the tide of our time … You children escaped from the fire of war impress us with your enthusiasm and creativity in creating a micro-society, where you are organizing your life with education and hard work to meet the needs of our country for the purpose of resisting the enemy… We should start to unify Guangdong children and henceforth to unify all children in China. What a great power will that be!  

Through her writing for the special issue dedicated to Children’s Day of 1941, Wu did not hide her recognition of children as individuals with authoritative power to decide the immediate future of China’s War of Resistance. She viewed children as a social group with the capacity for independent thinking and action, which would contribute to the causes of the resistance. Thus, children were an integral part of Chinese society, and their chosen directions in life needed be closely watched.

Wartime educators relentlessly elaborated on the importance of educational institutions. Each day children lived their home lives, their school lives, and their social lives in virtually the same space. How should the children’s homes and schools influence their well-being? What were the responsibilities of this joint organization? War mothers deemed that schools and homes had special responsibilities with regards to maintaining and improving the health of all students. In order to meet this conceptualization of the Children’s Homes and Schools, the educators and

\[\text{\cite{wu1941}}\]
caregivers took many factors into consideration; the environmental settings and facilities of the school and curriculum design, for example, received extra attention.

The homes and schools were usually built with playgrounds for physical education, games, and sports. The simple construction and the carefully selected physical locations of the campuses emphasized safety and educational purposes, and an equal emphasis was put on curriculum design and wartime education of children.

To survive the war’s adverse conditions demanded determination, discipline, and structure. For the purpose of achieving educational goals by stretching the limited resources, Wu Jufang invited faculty members from Zhongsan University to join the teaching team as frequent consultants. As a member of the alumni and as the Director of Guangdong Women’s New Life Movement Committee, she possessed a resourceful network necessary for mobilizing personnel and material resources to meet the ends.

Cui Zaiyang, the dean of the teacher’s college at Zhongsan University, was invited as the chief consultant for the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. He developed a set of principles for children’s education, especially for elementary school age children because they occupied the biggest proportion of child population. Cui Zaiyang had a Ph.D from Lyon University in France, and he was a proponent of national education. Meanwhile, he was respected for his candid concern for the benefits of children’s individual growth, and encouraged

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91 Li, Ibid., 61.
creativity for self-development.\textsuperscript{92} His theory followed the guidelines set by the Nationalist wartime education principles, which emphasized fostering patriotism and discipline.

In order to cultivate a spirit of service to humanity among the students, the curriculum design committee placed special attention on discipline training. To prepare students for the benefit of the nation was the motto adopted by the Institute. Students were made to follow a system of group-life with special attention on orderliness, cleanliness, precision, mutual respect, and cooperation. Students were instructed to observe the following four principles: never put off until tomorrow what you can do today; unite for collective goals; be determined to achieve original goals; and be prepared for the future.\textsuperscript{93}

At the same time, they were called upon to participate in certain social activities, such as fund-raising for wounded soldiers, refugee relief work, winter clothing drives, and so on. In order to cultivate national and social interest, weekly student conferences were regularly held to discuss important political and social problems.

The Homes and Schools were first and foremost a home for children who were separated from their parents; additionally, they were schools for education, farms for production and self-sufficiency, and camps for discipline and military training.\textsuperscript{94} The guiding principles of the school were “disciplining, educating, fostering, and defense of mother land” (Guan, jiao, yang, wei). Children were encouraged to become independent learners as well as willing partners in mutual

\textsuperscript{92} Han Feng, Guangzhou you liangge zongren laoshi (Two educators in Guangzhou), in the Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cungao xuanbian (the Unpublished Manuscripts of Guangzhou Literature and History), no. 7, edited by the Guangzhouwen shi weiyuanhui (Guangzhou Political Party Committee for the Learning of Literature and History), (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe).

\textsuperscript{93} Li, 2007, 68.

\textsuperscript{94} Li, Jiangshu lishi, 55.
academic support. To discipline was to foster the virtues of confidence and persistence, thus to instill a deep sense of responsibility into the minds of future citizens of China; to educate was to teach children with literacy, music, arts, and mathematics; to foster was to prepare children with knowledge of economy and production and other vocational training, thus affording them the opportunity for self-reliance and independence when they approach adulthood; to defend the mother country was to train children with military skills and form healthy bodies for protecting and defending the motherland.  

Children were seen as the future citizens of China, and so not only love and support but, more importantly, discipline was weighted heavily in teaching duties.

The aims of this education were to offer not only literacy and vocational training, but also to instill children with a resistance consciousness, Emphasis was given to the study of Chinese history and geography, and resistance was reinforced by the school song: “(I am) a small piece of iron, cast into knives and guns to kill the enemy; a small piece of iron, cast into a strong physique Little friends, we are the great citizens of Chinese nation. In good spirit, we are the backup force for the national resistance and salvation. We are little heroes, we are little soldiers, ha ha ha ha… Look, when we extend our tiny figures, the enemy begs. Ha ha ha ha… Listen, when we roar, the enemy was shattered into pieces of dust.”

Collective living promoted intimate relationships among residents, including refugee children, teachers, and staff. (Jia, chang, xiao, ying) These continuities between home, school, and camp drew children into the realm of the collective, which was in harmony with the patriotic spirit of unity for the resistance efforts. Teaching faculty and staff members were the de facto parents, life mentors, full-time teachers, and military coaches for the children they rescued from various channels.

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95 Li, Ibid., 61.
Interpreting Wu’s Role

Wu Jufang’s persistent attendance to relief for refugee children during the War of Resistance cannot be interpreted simply as a high-ranking Nationalist wife’s convenient answer to the calling of the New Life Movement. Her closeness to the authoritative regime does not imply full obedience toward the political will of male-centered gender ideology; in fact, her distance from that ideology was articulated by her active bid for women’s suffragist rights during her last years in the mainland. Wu Jufang possessed a privileged social status in this critical moment, but it was not the sole factor supporting her contribution to this vital national effort.

Five decades later, living a dramatically different life in the United States, free from direct political connections, Wu Jufang described her wartime ordeal to her children with a tranquil mindset,

I was not quite thirty years old. What pushed me forward was the tragedy of the time, and a commitment to do my part for Guangdong and for the country, and my youthful energy and naiveté. I lost my five year old son to illness within months of assuming the responsibilities for the war orphans. I thought to myself, my son had the best of care at that time, but we were not able to save him. These refugee children have no parents. That thought gave me resolve and courage so I worked and smiled, but often I was crying inside. I understood the anguish of parents who lost their precious children, and of children who had no parents, because I had lost my own mother before age two. I pulled myself together to do what had to be done and did my best for them. The Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools Incorporation was formally established in a ceremony at the Sun Yatsen Park one week after my son Shao’s burial.\footnote{Li, 2003, 139.}
Disaster did indeed instil a deep sense of mutual reliance among members of the shattered community. Her sentences were full of a woman’s feeling (as a daughter and a mother) at an extreme moment in her country. She made reference to her own experience of loss in explaining her wartime persistence in child care. This act may be interpreted as personal, but it only explains partially her motivation.

Her devotion should be viewed within the framework of a community searching for shared national spirit. This yearning for collectivity was best illustrated in a lament on the loss of Manchuria to Japan written by Tan Sheying, a well-known editor for Funü gongming in Shanghai. In an essay published in October 1937, she wrote:

Since the mandate of heaven fell, China had suffered from series of national humiliations from imperialist impingement and invasions. Japan once again seized the opportunity to invade northern China in the vacuum created by China’s inner turmoil. It created excuses to annex the land of northeast provinces from China by ignoring international law completely, wounding, and murdering numerous Chinese people. This should be considered by all Chinese (tong bao) as the most painful national humiliation. When we mourn the national suffering, have we ever thought about the origin of the loss? Our ancestral saying warned us that ‘worms only survive in rotten materials, outsiders humiliated those who but with low self-esteem, and invaders intend to challenge the state that is torn first by inner conflicts…Even though the tragic disaster of losing our country is approaching, it is useless to regret the wrongs of the past. Only if all China unites and shoulder the responsibility to revenge the national humiliation, should we have the chance to turn the weak into the strong.97

Chen Duxiu went further in his writing, arguing that compatriots should not panic about the Japanese invasion, but instead view it as an occasion of history endowing China a rare

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97 FNGM, vol. 56 and 57, October 15, 1937, 1.
opportunity for national unity by fighting against a common enemy.\textsuperscript{98} This recognition that crisis could be linked to hope was shared by many at the beginning years of the war. Those who held this opinion were not simply being optimistic, but were moved by the unprecedented patriotism and collective action from all social groups, including soldiers, students, workers, peasants, intellectuals, men, and women with or without political alliance. It was a movement of a population, and its patriotic passion became a sensation. Taking the press as an example, the circulation of newspapers soared during the war.\textsuperscript{99} Numerous local newspapers were dedicated to the War of Resistance, because news was in great demand by the public, and newspapers were recognized, in Hung’s words, “as a weapon that could stir up national consciousness and wage political war against the invaders.”\textsuperscript{100} A large number of educated people joined the ranks of professional journalists and started writing for the causes of resistance.

Relief work mattered nationally and personally to Wu Jufang. Her husband kept a habit of writing her letters from the front describing the unbearable loss of soldiers from lack of medicine and other supplies.\textsuperscript{101} Wu herself was not only a keen observer of the suffering and misery brought by war, but also an integral participant in a patriotic movement to support the soldiers. She believed that the opportunity for revival could only be generated from a new morality, one that concentrated on the functions and obligations of men and women in the name of the nation and of the family. This shared national sentiment led to women’s semi-voluntary social relief


\textsuperscript{99} Hung, 151-3.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 151.

\textsuperscript{101} Li, 2003, 98-101.
work, which was partially supplemented by the National Relief Commission in Nationalist China.

Wu witnessed the fervor of Guangdong women’s patriotism with the outbreak of the war and joined it immediately. She wasted no time in organizing women’s relief work for the War of Resistance together with other activists (wives of high officials, social activists, and professional women), and started to publish for the cause of relief work. She and her colleagues issued the special collection on the Nanxun front in 1937. Each member of the comfort team wrote an essay for this special journal, covering topics such as the organization of a women’s service team, determined Chinese generals, patriotic soldiers, travel to the front by railway, the military medical situation, the misery and suffering of refugees, and pleas for general public’s support—topics which were frequently found in wartime newspapers and journals. Wu’s attempt to awaken national consciousness for relief work through writing continued when she was appointed President of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. She published her speeches and written essays in *Jiu wang ri bao* (National Salvation Daily), *Jiu wang hu sheng* (Voices for Salvation), *Yue hua bao* (Yue hua newspaper), *Zhongsan ri bao* (zhong san daily), and *Guangdong funü* (Guangdong women), covering topics ranging from children’s education, the women’s movement (especially for war relief), women’s brigade, and women’s work and rights.

Newspapers became the chief platform of communication for women activists. They published annual reviews on women’s work at the provincial and xian levels, analyzing successes and failures in their work and introducing methods of mobilizing urban and rural women’s support for relief efforts. Heroic deeds and exemplary role models were favored in this writing. Meanwhile, newspapers continued the discussion of women’s profession and domestic
duties, agreeing that women needed to take public roles and pursue independent professional jobs.\textsuperscript{102}

One may argue that the crisis opened up a new array of opportunities for women who were willing and desirous of doing something good for their country or their community. The need for women’s service indeed facilitated a friendly environment for women to enter the public realm. Wu Jufang was in a social position favored by mainstream Nationalist opinions, and thus in a good position to assume a leading public role during the war. She herself also found joining various social activities—a right that the May Fourth generation aspired to—fulfilling, and satisfying.

Wu Jufang’s active involvement in public affairs raised eyebrows in the Guangdong provincial administrative circle. Though the involvement of high officials’ wives in immediate war relief was approved and applauded by most at the beginning of the war, their continuing activism encountered more challenges from inside. Her travels to Chongqing drew criticism from her husband’s political rivalry as “wives’ politics” (furen zhengzhi), a highly sensitive issue that could have damaged her husband’s political future. Even decades later, she recalled this incident bitterly when asked by her daughter:

\begin{quote}
My work with the orphans and the women bothered many people out of envy. Most of it came from men who were unable to accept a woman as a partner in matters that counted. The defense minister Chen Cheng told your father that he thought I should “slow down.” I felt so hurt. I had to make a decision either to go head-on with the work I was doing or to retreat into background. I decided to continue meeting the rescue tasks head-on. To avoid further insinuations that I dominated the provincial government politics and to make your father’s position easier, I relegated the women’s production
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{102} For an overview of women’s writing and their major topics, see GDFNYDLSZL, vol. 1-3.
brigade to Chen Mingshu, resigned from most of the committee memberships, and concentrated all my energy on directing the Children’s Homes and Schools.\textsuperscript{103}

Perhaps this criticism reflected the precarious position of the wartime Guangdong provincial administration, which was clouded by complicated politics caused by officials’ personal connections and favoritism. On the other hand, it also represented a deep-seated anxiety toward female social activism in the Nationalist administration. This anxiety was partially a reaction toward the rejuvenation of Communist women’s work in the War of Resistance, and partially a paternalistic response from males in the administration. Women’s relief work usually included contribution from leftist activists, which often gave their opponents adequate excuses to attack.\textsuperscript{104}

The anxiety was best illustrated in the case of the national postal office and its issuance of the policy to reduce the number of female clerks in 1939. This incident resulted in nationwide discussion on women’s proper place in society. While the government remained silent on the issue of women taking a career outside of the realm of the household, women activists voiced their discontent publically. Surrounding this issue, several essays were published in a rather short time period and drew wide attention. They triggered a nationwide discussion on women and national reconstruction during the war. Most women activists linked women’s responsibility to the nation by making the argument that taking a public role was the best means of serving the

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{104} GDFNYDLSZL, 102.
interests of China, and that any intentions or efforts to stop them would have derailed the war effort.\textsuperscript{105}

Serving as the chairperson for the Guangdong New Life Women’s Advisory Committee during the war, Wu was drawn to national affairs, or Kangzhan Jianguo, a positively-conceived sphere where men and women interacted in a manner of equality. Her wartime participation confirmed her belief that an individual citizen’s righteous morality would lead to collective patriotic action, and that this was key to China’s salvation and, eventually, the building of a modern nation. Official and public discourse viewed coping with wartime national hardship as a critical component of civic virtue, and that each individual citizen should adapt to this hardship and take action in order to make a new departure for the nation. When this positive perception of her individualism was challenged by traditional inhibition, she felt hurt. Nonetheless, her strategy was to keep going, though she had to compromise sometimes.

Her strategy can be illustrated by her purposeful selection of wartime attire. The way she dressed herself represented her belief in the relationship between a woman’s self-discipline and national hope. Pictures of Wu Jufang show a contrast in her daily attire before, during, and after the war. Before and after the war, she wore make-up and fashionable dresses, either Qipao or other fashionable attire. However, during the war, she wore a military uniform: a white shirt, a military jacket, and pants.

Women’s fashion was rarely a neutral issue in modern China. Various political movements have employed women’s attire for purposeful ends. In the early years of the republic, how women should dress was not only a national problem but also the subject of government-

\textsuperscript{105} Lu, 1977, 87-90.
sponsored reform. As of the 1930s, women’s fashion was understood as an integral part of commercial consumption in semi-colonial modern society. Thus, women’s fashion was a strong indicator of evolving social change and its resulting ideology. The history of fashion in Modern China features active and persistent state intervention. The Nationalist Government, in furtherance of controlling and saving materials for the war, proposed frugality and denounced any means of luxury. Women answered the calling. For example, in her speech on what women should do in the moment of China’s great suffering, Wu stated that “women should gain self-consciousness and independence for the purpose of fostering a pure human being … in the past we Chinese women conducted a life of consumption, which does not fit the time of war. We should change the life attitude, restore a self-disciplined and frugal life … We should follow the regulations of national mobilization, contributing our saving and income to our country to strengthen the power for resistance.” Thus, women’s determination towards the building of a modern nation state of China could be measured by the way they dressed.

Dressing herself in a military uniform without badges, Wu Jufang conveyed a deep sense of wartime work ethic—firm commitment, determination, frugality, persistence, and self-sacrifice. This image of women serving for China during wartime had been propagated by Madame Jiang in one of her most widely-published photographs during the war. Meanwhile, adopting a simple style of clothing was also realistic in for working environments that demanded frequent travel.

In 1939, when the expansion of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools increasingly demanded more time and energy, Wu Jufang, a mother of three children, relied on nannies and

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106 Hershatter, 67-88; Finnane, 196.

107 Wu Jufang, “What Shall We Do to Commemorate the Woman’s Day,” in GDFNYDLSZL, 429-32.
servants to permit her time to pursue social activism. Writing for women’s magazines, studying for a bachelor’s degree in agricultural economy at Zhongshan University, and taking charge of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools required her to engage in scholarly research that took her to libraries, seminars, school campuses, children’s dormitories, and government offices. In addition, field work sent her to war zones, to various campuses of Children’s Homes, and to schools. Personal accounts of her affectionate bond with her children reflected her commitment to them as top priority, but she never considered that they kept her from social activism.

In her writing, she denounced Hitler’s Third Reich’s association of women with “Kinder, Kuche, Kirche” (Children, Kitchen, Church), for the derogative connotation of designating antiquated female role models. She could not agree to restrict women to domesticity by sacrificing their social activism. Based on this opinion, she suggested that child rearing could be and should be a social affair. Maternity care was integral to public affairs. Healthy, organized, and socially-oriented child care centers should be supported by the government and the public, thus freeing women from time-bound care work, and offering women who wished to work for the public opportunities to do so. This idea found corresponding voices in many women activists’ writing, regardless of their political alliance.  

By joining a community of patriotic women, she achieved a new degree of personal autonomy. Through her writing, she sought to justify women’s meaningful roles in public and fought against the social custom that distinguished women from men as contributors. By making herself into a public figure in favor of women’s rights for work and economic independence, she gained wide recognition. This led to her election as the women’s representative to the National

108 For example, Communist women were ardent supporters of public care for children. Some of them wrote publically on the establishment of public child care facilities sponsored by the government.
Congress in 1947, when Chinese women were granted suffragist rights for the first time. Nonetheless, even with all of her wartime work and achievement, Wu Jufang was not allowed to make a choice of her own after her husband’s departure from the position of provincial president. Except for the Lixing Middle School that Li Hanhun and Wu Jufang supported as a private school, three of the Children’s Homes and Schools were passed on to one of Wu’s wartime aids, and one other that was supported by the wartime provincial government was handed on to the new governor’s wife.

Conclusion

Wu Jufang was granted the position as the head of the New Life Women’s Commission simply because she was the wife of the governor of Guangdong Province. Nonetheless, this position did not render her a decorative vase standing next to her husband. The need for women’s participation created an opportunity for her to reach beyond domestic boundaries, and drew her to a national-scale campaign for the relief of refugee children. She was able to transform personal ability and aspiration into a national enterprise intertwined with women’s movements. The Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools helped Wu Jufang weave together a new personal and political identity that confirmed her vision and capacity to handle the material details of social organizing. Consequently, Wu developed an independent leadership that was recognized by women’s political circles, and as such was elected as a member of the first group of woman representatives to the National Congress in 1947.

Women’s refugee children’s relief work, despite its nature as an independent job demanding tremendous administrative skills and physical endurance, remained second to national military
campaigns, the ultimate field of manhood. Women’s work for war orphans thus became replaceable at the end of the war. Some important figures were removed from their positions. In Wu’s case, the removal of her husband’s official appointment meant the end of her career as the president of the Guangdong Children’s Homes and Schools. Nonetheless, Wu and her female colleagues did not yield to marginalization. She placed a high value on female individuals and idealized the future for its capacity to improve the lives of average women and children.

Children’s education was understood as an integral part of nation building by women who identified it with ultimate national survival. It was the concept of linking children with national prospects that led to the nationalization of relief work aimed at war orphans. By dedicating women’s labor to this national enterprise, women developed a strong ideological commitment to children’s education and welfare.

Children refugee relief served as a lever not only for women’s activism but for a more general social transformation; it became a vehicle for addressing social issues surrounding the relationship between the nation and systematic social welfare. By linking “the traditional duties of women to give aid to the orphaned”\(^{109}\) with national reconstruction, women expanded the social meaning of care-giving. Child welfare became a public arena where women could pursue a career outside of the realm of the home, and social institutions were built to meet the new trend. As Schneider argues, child relief activities organized during the war “became a newly recognized professional choice after the war.”\(^{110}\) Social work and social welfare were incorporated into college curriculums after the war ended. Women continued to pursue public and political roles in this realm, and this was continued after 1949 in the People’s Republic of

\(^{109}\) *China Handbook*, 702

\(^{110}\) Schneider, 19.
China. Pursuing children’s welfare became a platform for fighting, not only for children’s rights but for women’s rights and social welfare as well.

Women’s active roles in refugee children relief work should not be simply viewed as a convenient extension of motherhood. Typically, the boundary between the front and the rear was vague and ambiguous during such a pervasive war. Wartime mothers and refugee children lived through these extremes by relying on mutual support, wherein women exhibited unusual courage and leadership crucial to the survival of many children. Motherhood was recognized by its traditional characteristics of caring, offering, giving, and sacrificing; however, women made these “traditional characteristics” much more aggressive, and creative, in striving for war orphans’ and their own survival. “Motherly characters” might be recognized by social custom and propaganda work, and women’s work for refugee relief was viewed by many as a convenient extension of their work at home, but they took unusual measures to reach the goal of providing for those in need. Women focused on the national duties of citizens in taking on this social project.

The case of Wu Jufang also presents an opportunity for rethinking Chinese nationalism as a version of nationalism that was specifically visualized by women, who explained, in their own ways, the meaning of sacrifice to meet the perceived needs of the nation. The previously unwritten stories of women working for war relief urged scholars to examine the dynamic energy that women contributed to the shaping of modern China.

Women’s child refugee relief efforts should not be understood merely as nationalism’s triumph over feminism, because if we do so, we tend to deny women’s self conscious choices to engage in activism for survival. These women imprint agency and subjectivity in the choices
they demonstrated in their actions and writings. Women proved that they were indispensable in this movement of national resistance, and they derived meaning from their lives of sacrifice in a time of need, despite the fact that their choices might have conflicted with their immediate individual interests. In this process, Chinese women constructed a platform of their own for their voices, and took realistic actions to achieve goals. They were an integral element in forming voluntary social action for what they believed was the good of the nation. “Good women” also make history.
Chapter Four. Mobilizing Rural Women for the War of Resistance: CCP Women Cadres and the Introduction of a Revolutionary Vocabulary

The Chinese Women’s Movement and the Sino-Japanese War

This chapter explores the political tools and technologies women cadres employed to aid in the establishment and expansion of the CCP resistance state during the War of Resistance. Communist women’s work was a significant part of the Chinese Communist Party’s war efforts. Rural women were encouraged to meet together in occasions beyond the realm of domesticity and shared experiences. By doing so, women cadres facilitated the making of a common language known as “speaking bitterness” among rural women, which enabled the latter to take on political roles to emerge as an independent social category.

Because the mobilization took place in the comparatively conservative northern regions of Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, and Hebei provinces1, the CCP women’s work campaign demanded different strategies than those used in the Jiangxi Soviet state.2 These strategies included dressing in peasant clothing, talking to rural women individually, launching literacy education programs, incorporating women into the Great Production Movement, and identifying sources of suffering.3 Through these strategies, the CCP campaign gradually gathered understanding and

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2 Jiangxi Soviet is a Communist state established by Mao Zedong and Zhu De in the border regions of Jiangxi and Fujian provinces in November, 1931.

3 Elisabeth Croll discusses how the CCP women cadres dealt with the socially more conservative environment in northern Shanxi. She notices that the educated women cadres connected with rural women by discarding their uniforms and sharing their own sufferings. The women cadres found it more challenging to build a meaningful
support from local women, who then became indispensable to Communist survival in these areas. The Party was successful in winning support from China’s peasants, which eventually led to the CCP’s rapid expansion in the north China plain in the latter half of the War of Resistance.

The CCP agenda interpreted women’s issues within the framework of anti-imperialism and China’s national salvation. Women’s work itself became the primary activity through which China defined a modern patriotic war effort. The potency of this national agenda was powerful in framing the direction and nature of women’s work, as it offered women a vision of a national revolution that demanded women’s perceived attributes of self-sacrifice, courage, and the virtues of motherhood. Nonetheless, Communist women interpreted women’s issues under this designated framework from their own angles as women, and thus profoundly transformed many concrete components of women’s lives, along with local expectations of women. Their efforts created social realities for developing new knowledge on women and gender relations, if not going so far as to profoundly transform the conventional conception of gender relations.

The CCP initiated the rural women’s mobilization against the backdrop of increasing Japanese encroachment over the years. This background shall be discussed briefly in order to situate the women’s movement within the framework of national revolution. Japanese aggression destroyed the Nationalists’ attempt to unify China, and the Japanese military advancement re-mapped China’s territories into fragments that presented irreconcilable political desire and ambitions. Both the CCP and the GMD created guerrilla zones to harass Japanese military campaigns. The CCP successfully staked out territory through the establishment of base areas and guerrilla zones from 1937 to 1945.

relationship with rural women in northern Shanxi due to rumors that portrayed CCP women as a pack of wild ones. See Croll, 199-200.
The CCP strategy put women in a critically important position in the development of guerrilla zones, due to women’s resources in providing protection and food for moving forces in small areas.⁴ Rural women who mobilized to sustain guerrilla zones formed the mass base for the CCP expansion. Historians agree that the eight war years of “Sino-Japanese conflicts” created a breathing space for the Red Army and eventually led to a powerful expansion by the end of the war that the Nationalists could not afford to ignore.⁵ The Communist military forces swelled from 92,000 to 910,000 in 1945. The forces expanded to ten times their 1937 size.⁶ The CCP controlled base areas stretching from Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, and Hebei to Liaoning, and together they covered an area of 250,000 square miles. Such a vast expansion of force entailed meaningful participation from rural women.

Women constituted an integral part of CCP discourse and played highly visible roles in the political and military expansion of the CCP. How do we understand the enormous success of Communist influence in local settings from a gender perspective? How did the CCP gain popular support and governmental authority in the North China plain by the end of the War of Resistance? I attempt to answer these questions in the light of women’s experiences by looking

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⁴ The purpose of creating guerrilla zones was to ensure that would be no peace in the rear for the Japanese, and to prevent them from tapping economic resources. The strategy of the guerrillas was not to seek face-to-face confrontation with the more advanced, technologically-supported Japanese armies, but to withdraw when Japanese garrison troops advanced in force against them, and to harass the Japanese when they attempted to settle down. The guerrillas would attack the Japanese and cut their supply lines when they showed signs of weakness; they would give chase and annihilate them when they retreated.

⁵ Different terms are used in academic and popular history to refer the war between China and Japan from 1937 to 1945. It is known as Sino-Japanese Conflict, the Anti-Japanese War, the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the War of Resistance, among others. These terms and their connotations tell much about the angle used to examine the nature of the war.

at women’s mobilization for the war efforts, which initiated collective action among peasant women for a shared vision in a vast geographical terrain.

Peasant women’s female identity complicated their participation in the war effort.⁷ Together, their experiences show that the mobilization of these women had enormous consequences for the redefinition of being a woman in peasant families and villages.

**Context: the CCP Gender Regime and Women’s Mobilization**

The war years forced the GMD as well as the CCP to marshal all potential resources for survival and resistance. Jiang Jieshi, the official leader of the United Front for the War of Resistance, and Mao Zedong, the legendary communist leader, both emerged from the legendary Long March with messages for Chinese women. In their public speeches and published works for war mobilization, both leaders called on women to sacrifice and contribute to this war effort.⁸ Alongside their belief in mass mobilization, both recognized women’s significance in the War of Resistance: women were to be mothers and wives backing the military soldiers, educating the children, shouldering the responsibility of taking care of the elders at home, resuming the roles of teachers and educators, and acting as alternative workers in factories and farmers on the field while able-bodied young men were fighting in the front; in other words,

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⁷ Recently Gail Hershatter asks for a more careful and cautious reconsideration of Chinese rural women’s participation in the Communist revolution. Her oral history materials reveal that women’s narratives do not necessarily coincide with the official chronology. See Hershatter 2011, 1-6.

⁸ Mao Zedong, Mao Zedong zai zhongguo nüzi daxue kaixue dianlishang de jianghua (Mao’s Speech at the Opening School Ceremony of the Chinese Women’s University), in Jinchaji beiyue qu funü kangri douzheng shiliao, Jinchaji beiyue qu funü kangri douzheng shiliao bianjizu (Beijing: Zhongguo laonian lishi yanjiuhui,1985), 3-15.

Jiang Jieshi, Funü Tongzhi de Gemin Zeren (Revolutionary Responsibilities of Women Comrades), in Kangzhan yilai Funü Wenti Yanlun Ji (The Collected Speeches on Women’s Issues From the War of Resistance), 1-2.
women were to be the driving force for social stability in the rear and the supporting force for the military campaigns at the front. Thus, although women did not fight, they were certainly indispensable to Chinese survival and ultimate victory.

The political call for women’s contributions to the war effort was part of the scheme to restore national authority in remote southwest China, which had previously been in the hands of local warlords. After retreating from his social, financial, and political base in the Southeast to the remote region of southwest China, Jiang Jieshi and his Nationalist government, in desperate need for national material and moral support, launched a series of campaigns for mass mobilization. Both civilian leaders and military commanders were instructed with the importance of mass mobilization and propaganda. Jiang educated his generals with the idea that “propaganda among the people is more important than bullets, political educators are as important to the national resistance as army commanders.” Women in Nationalist regions were mobilized for a variety of work ranging from housekeeping, rural mass education and mobilization, nursing, fund-raising, and propaganda for military campaigns.

Jiang, however, was criticized for his developing suspicion and increasing neglect of mass mobilization, especially for his ignorance and unwillingness to include Chinese peasants. Jiang’s China was regarded as marked by stark inequalities between the rich and the poor, with Chinese peasants on the bottom of social hierarchy. The distance between Jiang’s government and the largest population of the country generated distrust and criticism from both domestic and international observers. Chinese patriotic war correspondents Fan Changjiang and Qiujiang attacked the Chongqing government’s mistrust of its own people, which they called a narrow-

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9 Yunnan province was controlled by the warlord Long Yun (1884-1962). Most of Sichuan province was under the control of Liu Xiang (1890-1938).

10 Farmer, 190.
minded “obscurantist policy” (yumin zhengce). These most influential intellectuals of wartime China became disillusioned with this government for “keeping its own people in the dark,” coupled with the increasingly restricted censorship on publishing and writing, and some of them started to turn to the left. Fang Changjiang was one of the many. According to Hung Chang-tai, Fang’s political decision “was prompted not so much by his embrace of socialist ideas, but largely by his patriotism and his deep dissatisfaction with the GMD government.”¹¹ Pearl S. Buck—the 1938 Nobel Prize laureate for her writing on Chinese peasantry, and an influential figure in U.S. foreign policy towards China during wartime—criticized Fang’s increasingly political orientation as evidence of the distance between the Nationalist government’s elites and the people.¹² Indeed, the escalating price of food in the Nationalist areas and the widespread corruption of Nationalist officials—both military and civil—ultimately weakened popular trust in the Nationalist government under Jiang’s leadership in the later years of the War of Resistance. Jiang’s failure to mobilize the masses can be explained by his fear of Communist infiltration, which led to his conservatism and ignorant neglect of national mobilization and gradually drove many neutral or sympathetic intellectuals and students to the left after 1940.¹³ (The relationship between intellectuals and the Nationalist resistance policy will be discussed in chapter on women’s press and the rise of women’s resistance political culture.)

If Jiang’s mass mobilization policy remained distant from the peasantry, Mao Zedong’s depended on them. Women were incorporated into Mao’s macro-plan of mass mobilization, in which peasant women were to be encouraged to be part of the productive force. Communist

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¹¹ Hung, 173.


¹³ For a discussion on journalists and war correspondents’ reactions to Jiang’s conservatism and inaction on mass mobilization, see Hung, 170-1.
Soviets had only survived by putting down roots in villages and relying on peasants in the border areas of Fujian and Jiangxi in the early 1930s, one of the most critical moments in the CCP’s history immediately following the White Terror in 1927. After the terror, with the collapse of the First United Front, the political struggle over an urban-centered or rural revolution within the central circle of the CCP proved a matter of survival for the Red Army in the following decade. Mao and his supporters eventually proved that his rural-based peasant revolution was a viable alternative to an urban-based revolution for the survival of the Red Army. At the historical juncture of Japanese aggression and Chinese Nationalism, the CCP, under Mao’s leadership, seized the opportunity to form the Second United Front with the Nationalists, taking advantage of the opportune moment to adjust to the new local settings and rejuvenate party leadership and revolutionary principles. What resulted was a military and political rivalry that would alter the fate of the Nationalists and the Communists, and eventually China.

Mao Zedong maintained his belief in mass mobilization after the formation of the Second United Front. This time, however, he targeted all Chinese people who were patriotic, regardless of social class, and his political demands for collective action resonated with those moved by patriotism and nationalism provoked by the imminent crisis. Patriotic intellectuals and left sympathizers answered this nationalist calling enthusiastically. However, Mao’s nationalism was not to succumb to Jiang Jieshi’s authority. Rather, it would fuel his vision of a socialist

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14 The relationship between the CCP Red Army and local peasants was much more complicated than the official description of CCP history, which usually presented a peaceful and mutually-beneficial portrait. In addition to sympathy and support from the peasantry, the early encounter was clouded by a mixture of distrust and violence, generating from either abusive communist policy or deep distrust from the local folks. For a witness-account of the early history of distrust, see Zeng Zhi, *Yige geming de xincun zhe*, (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1998), 52-62.

15 For a discussion of intellectual nationalism during the war, see Hung, 152-80.
China based on the support of the vast majority of China’s peasantry. Mao was not afraid of stirring the emotions of the people and spreading his vision of China to the masses, most of whom were the belittled and distrusted illiterate peasants and other groups socially disadvantaged under Nationalist rule. But in 1937, his policy aimed to meet the yearning of China, and to gain support from various groups of people across class boundaries. He delivered talks and published widely on theories and methods for mass mobilization.\textsuperscript{16} He was led by his vehement nationalism to champion undivided loyalism to China, and, at least for the time being, to call for a united front against Japanese aggression.\textsuperscript{17}

Mao was determined to make it clear that China would be able to draw on the resources and energy of every Chinese citizen, including women. In a talk delivered at the school-opening ceremony of the Chinese Women’s University in Yan’an (Yan’an nüzi daxue) in 1939, he stated that the foundation of the university was politically significant for its potential in training women cadres armed with “theories” as well as “experience from practical work.” The future graduates of the Woman’s University were “to be ready for the work in the front, [and ready to] go to the villages and factories to organize the 225 million Chinese women for the War of Resistance. If there were no awakening of Chinese women, who occupy half of the total population, the resistance effort of China would not be able to win the ultimate victory.” He continued to state that women’s roles in the war were to “educate the sons and daughters, encourage the husbands, and educate the masses. Only with the mobilization of Chinese women, will we achieve the goal of mobilizing all Chinese people … I demand all women comrades to focus on the task, and be determined and dedicated for a long-term revolutionary enterprise and

\textsuperscript{16} Jinchaji beiyue qu funü kangri douzheng shiliao, 3-9.

\textsuperscript{17} The CCP propagated its principle of united action against the Japanese aggression on August 1, 1935, when it was still on the long journey that came to be known as the famous Long March. It was not until two years later that the GMD and CCP reached an agreement to form the United Front officially.
substantial works in the future. Our party needs people exclusively for the project of educating (the masses).”

Though both the Nationalist and Communist leaders confirmed the national demands for mass education as well as women’s mobilization, their methods of mobilizing women differed. In contrast to Jiang’s increasing distance from the peasants, Mao focused his work on rural lives and country folks. He called for the educated urban intellectuals to embrace country living, which meant abandoning urbanities and making country life the foremost concern in their writing and other forms of artistic expression. The policy sought to disintegrate and weaken the traditional patrilineal and patriarchal powers vested in the hands of village elders and clans, and to replace them with the power and ideology of the Communist party. The will for destruction of traditions and customs was also the will for a reintegration and assertion of a new power system, that of patriarchal party power.

The conceptualization of a firmly resistant China was highly gendered in Mao’s speeches, as women were considered ideal candidates to be prepared for the survival of a frustrated China. Though women were indispensable to this effort, they found that they were still socially vulnerable within a male-centered gender system. Women cadres and women intellectuals alike found themselves sharing a destiny of being yoked by stereotyped gender norms in the Yan’an years. Women cadres expressed this gender-specific frustration in memoirs published in the

18 Ibid., 3.

19 Researchers have discussed the relationship between feminism, nationalism, and party-centered politics. Some historians argued that feminism has been subsumed by nationalism in China’s War of Resistance. See, for example, Yihong Pan, “Nationalism and Feminism in China’s War of Resistance Against Japan,” in The International History Review 19, no. 1 (February, 1997).

20 For a discussion of party-assigned marriage arrangements, see Chang Jinzhu, Zhandi nü jie—pchang zhong de hong jun nùzhanshi (Glorious women heroes—Long March women soldiers), (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe,2005), 251-60.
1980s and 1990s. For example, if affairs of war and nation loomed large in Zeng Zhi’s memoir, so too did remarks on the inequalities and indignities that bedeviled women’s place in the social arrangement.\textsuperscript{21}

The gender role that the CCP designated for Communist women was to be good mothers and wise wives who had the responsibility of nurturing children and educating their sons and husbands with patriotism. Women’s value was to be realized through their nurturing of the young and their supplementary capacity to men. In brief, the CCP demanded that women be associated with men in the forming of Chinese national resistance, but not as equal, independent partners. Challenging male dominance and seeking women’s rights could be dangerous or suspicious, thus it was not allowed. Ding Ling’s writings challenging party patriarchy and gender inequality in the early Yan’an years were answered by the CCP with ruthless criticism and political campaigning.\textsuperscript{22} In the meetings with women cadres in 1942, Liu Shaoqi warned the attendees of Ding Ling’s “useless style of working” and urged women cadres to focus on “practical work” instead. In other words, the CCP intended to erase the elements of individual feminism and instill women’s work with the Party’s will.

This was not a brand-new phenomenon. In the previous decade, women’s roles in the revolution were secondary to the men’s, though women had been an active part of it since the Great Revolution in the 1920s. Women were recruited into the CCP revolution to meet particular purposes from the very beginning. When the Red Army was forced to retreat into the mountains of the Jiangxi and Fujian provinces, women were recruited for washing and cooking as well as agricultural production. In addition to these works, women also formed propaganda

\textsuperscript{21} Zeng, 1999.

\textsuperscript{22} Barlow and Bjorge, 38-39.
teams for mass mobilization. Regardless of women’s contributions to the Red Army’s survival, their duties were considered disposable when it was deemed dangerous for the moving army to take women and children with them to retreat. Records show that women were often left behind by armies. Zeng Zi recounts such a story when she herself was a member of the central circle of the Fourth Front Army led by Mao Zedong and Zhu De when the Red Army was chased intensively by the Nationalist encirclement campaigns.

Mao Weiyuan was in charge of a meeting for more than 100 activists of officers and soldiers one night after the army moved to a small town in Jiangxi province. After Mao analyzed the current situation and illustrated corresponding strategies, he invited discussions and opinions. Right at this moment a male comrade stood up saying that the shape of the army was too shabby because of pregnant or physically weak women comrades. Not only did they weaken the army’s mobility but also scattered energy of the directors. Since there are underground organizations right here, then we should leave these women to them. His opinion was agreed by the rest of the male comrades who shouted, ‘leave all the women comrades!’

Such distrust and hostility towards women created tragedies as the military situation continued deteriorating in the following year. On the eve of the Long March, the central committee of the First Front Army only brought thirty three women with them while leaving the others, most of whom were purged and annihilated by the Nationalist army or local bandits in the following military campaigns. Likewise, the Fourth Front Army led by Zhang Guotao (1897-1979) decided to leave the Women’s Independent Brigade to themselves while the army lost

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23 Zeng zhi, 72 and 82.

24 Lily Xiao Hong Lee and Sue Wiles, *Women of the Long March* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999). Drawing on published memoirs and accounts of three Long March women—He Zizhen, Kang Keqing, and Wang Quanyuan—Lee and Wiles look into this heroic military action through the angle of women participants. They reveal stories of heroism as well as stark accounts of baby abandonment, extreme physical challenges, food shortage, and the perils of being left behind and captured by the warlord armies. They also discuss women’s mutual support for surviving the march; Helen Praeger Young, *Choosing Revolution: Chinese Women Soldiers on the Long March* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
unfavorably to the attack by local warlord Ma Bufang’s (1903-1975) army in Hexi Corridor in Gansu. The military defeat proved disastrous for women soldiers: most died in the battlefield, and the rest were captured and forced to become prostitutes or concubines for the warlord army soldiers. Only a handful among the 1,300 women soldiers escaped and survived. Additionally, the survivors were purposefully forgotten in the dust of history after 1949 when the CCP took power in mainland China. Wang Quanyuan, for instance, lived the life of a poor peasant in the northwest, forgotten and unknown, which contrasted sharply with her former comrades’ high-profile political lives in Beijing. The newly founded Communist regime was not willing to endanger the “glorious” revolutionary legacies by restoring these women’s proper positions in history.

Viewing itself as the legitimate inheritor of the May Fourth Movement and as a loyal disciple to Marxism and Leninism, the CCP adopted both the progressive and regressive gender assumptions from these influences. Inheriting the iconoclasm of the May Fourth generation, the CCP promoted itself as the problem-solver of “women’s issues.” They identified the Chinese

25 For a history of the women’s squad of the Fourth Front Army, see Young, 2007. Wang Quanyuan, the leader of the women’s independent squad, perhaps best illustrates women’s sacrifices and marginality in China’s revolution in the twentieth century. During her imprisonment, she suffered various forms of torture and humiliation. Though a few women leaders were rescued when the Second United Front was formed officially in 1937, Wang was not so lucky. She was forced to be the concubine of Ma Jingchang, an official of the warlord army. In 1942, she managed to escape from Ma’s control and escaped to the Eighth Route army office in Xi’an, hoping to return to the CCP. However, the Party refused to take her, so she begged her way back home to Jiangxi province, the former base area of the Red Army revolution. Her family was too poor, so she had to marry a peasant for survival. Her early military service remained unknown and unacknowledged, while most of her colleagues who made it successfully to Yan’an in the Long March became the most celebrated political figures in CCP history in the following decades. It was not until the late 1980s that the CCP acknowledged her active service to the early history of the Red Army by compensating her with benefits and salary equal to a “supplementary regional district cadre.” She never received benefits equal to those that her colleagues of the Long March enjoyed. For a discussion on Wang Quanyuan and her history, see NBLZ, 33-50.
“patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal” family system as the source of Chinese women’s oppression, and proposed that this system should be overthrown.\(^{26}\)

However, the urgent need for “emancipating” Chinese women from the yoke of patriarchal family, as Susan Glosser has argued, could be attributed to Chinese men’s own ardent aspiration for freedom from the father’s power and authority.\(^{27}\) Chinese men experiences and expressed their own patriarchal oppression, and the oppression that they themselves attacked by depicting women’s plight might have simply oversimplified women’s experiences while ignoring women’s agency completely.\(^{28}\) In other words, women’s issues were an interpretative tool adopted by Chinese men for their own gains at a particular historical juncture.

In spite of such odds against women under these extreme conditions, the women’s importance to the survival of the CCP continued to grow. However, they faced powerful challenges from local customs that had regulated ordinary women’s lives over decades and even centuries. By the time the CCP settled in northwest China—a barren plain isolated from the rest of the country—even the most experienced women cadres were shocked to find such conservative customary practices regarding women’s roles and their mobility.\(^{29}\) This customary conservatism was in immediate conflict with the Communist need for women’s work supplying

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\(^{27}\) Glosser, 10-11.

\(^{28}\) Ba Jin (1904-2005) is one of the most widely-read and important writers of twentieth century China. He wrote on Chinese men’s burden under the patriarchal family system. See Ba Jin, \textit{Jia} (Family) (Xianggang: Nanguo chubanshe, 1957). In this novel, the Gao brothers represented the generation that was caught between their expected duties to the extended family and their awakening yearnings for individual freedom. The eldest brother represents the filial son who sacrifices his personal aspirations for the benefits of the extended family, while the younger brothers represent a new generation of Chinese youth who aspired to conduct a modern life centered on conjugal family, in which they could take control of financial resources and other familial matters.

\(^{29}\) Li Xiaojiang, \textit{LNRZJSH}, 112; Beiyuequ, 90.
food, washing and mending, building local networks, and providing other military supplies. Customary practices prevented women within family domains from joining in the CCP activities, and yielded no convenient resources for the survival and rooting of the Communist powers, thus, freeing women from such restraints was a necessary step.\textsuperscript{30}

Organizations and Cadres: Technology and Personnel in Mass Mobilization

The Women’s Anti-Japanese and National Salvation Association and the United Association of Women were the two major CCP organizations for women’s mobilization. Both associations successfully established regional branches staffed by cadres, who were the driving forces behind the mass mobilization necessary for the CCP’s survival and development in northwest China.

Women were introduced into the bureaucratic system to become CCP cadres responsible for mobilizing and organizing peasant women. There were three major sources for the recruitment and training of women cadres. The most significant supply of women came from the Long March veterans. The second largest source for women’s cadres were refugee students who attended the Women’s University in Yan’an because of patriotism and revolutionary idealism, inspired by published works by Edgar Snow and Fan Changjiang on China’s Communists and their promising revolutionary agenda. Lastly, the Chinese peasants who contributed personnel to the CCP woman’s work were also typically driven by pragmatic concerns in their daily lives.

\textsuperscript{30} Research on women’s social and agricultural activities showed that women in the rice cultivation regions in China usually shared more labor work, and therefore the parameters of their mobility went beyond compound of their family yards. However, women tended to attend less field labor in the sorghum or wheat cultivating northwest regions, so more frequently women stayed inside of the house according to customary practice. See Kenneth Pomeranz, “Women’s Work and the Economics of Respectability,” in Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005).
The Long March veterans were experienced women soldiers who had endured the saga of worker’s movements\textsuperscript{31}, peasant riots, encirclement campaigns, and the Long March before the CCP’s settlement in Yan’an in 1936.\textsuperscript{32} Cai Chang, Deng Yingchao, Kang Keqing, Wei Gongzhi, Liu Ying, Qian Xijun, Liu Yueqin were among the women soldiers who made the legendary Long March to northern Shanxi.\textsuperscript{33} They had formed the core force for Communist women’s war mobilization ever since. The second personnel reservoir consisted of leftist intellectuals, students, and refugees who were drawn to Yan’an during the War of Resistance, and the third source of personnel was local peasant women.

Cai Chang, Deng Yingchao, and Kang Keqing’s stories illustrated the first generation of CCP women’s path to power. Cai and Deng embarked on their revolutionary journey during the May Fourth Movement, and they belonged to the first group CCP members. Kang Keqing began her life as a poor peasant girl from Jiangxi Soviet. Her pugnacious and plucky personality facilitated her transformation into a courageous soldier and woman activist for Communist rural


\textsuperscript{32} Women veterans of the Long March also had a variety of backgrounds: some had become politically radical during the 1927 Northern Expedition and even earlier; others were peasants recruited from border areas of Fujian and Jiangxi provinces. Some were well-educated with university or vocational college degrees, others only had some years of elementary school education or were simply illiterate. Among these women, Cai Chang, Deng Yingchao, and Qian Ying were long-time Communist party members with higher education; Kang Keqing and He Zizhen were drawn to the Red Army when the Communists were forced to turn to rural areas in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For further reading on women during the Long March and women’s military activism, see Nicola Spakowski, “Women’s Military Participation in the Communist Movement of the 1930s and the 1940s: Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion,” in Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski, eds., *Women in China: the Republican Period in Historical Perspective* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2005), 129-71; and Helen Praeger Young, “Threads from Long March Stories: The Political, Economic and Social Experiences of Women Soldiers,” in Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski, eds., *Women in China: the Republican Period in Historical Perspective* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007).

\textsuperscript{33} Historians remain uncertain about the accurate number of women soldiers of the Long March, as a result of the lack of reliable statistical sources, especially on the Fourth Front Army, which was less-restricted about women soldiers’ involvement in military expeditions. Young collected memoirs and stories of thirty five Long March veterans. Many more women joined the Long March with the Fourth Front Army as it did not adopt a women-exclusive policy as the First Front and Second Front armies had. For a discussion on the exclusion and inclusion of women in military activities, see Spakowski, 129-71.
work. These women had their own individual histories of revolution, independent from their high-positioned husbands, which helps to explain their well-established positions in women’s work in Yan’an.

Student refugees were drawn to Yan’an by the CCP’s bold policy of resistance. A cluster of complex forces drove the youth to Yan’an. The writing of radical journalists such as Edgar Snow and Fan Changjiang made Mao’s passionate speeches and calling for a united resistance against Japanese aggression known to the outside world. In contrast to Jiang’s hesitation and non-action, Mao’s call for a unified resistance seemed a promising alternative. It resonated with young students who wanted to do well for the nation in the face of increasing Japanese advancement. After the official formation of the Second United Front in 1936, young students’ choice to attend Yan’an was even made public and was no longer banned by the GMD openly.

The CCP’s underground activities in colleges and universities helped to create a network that facilitated the journey to Yan’an. Student movements in the 1930s calling for a united national resistance against Japanese aggression fostered a group of radicals who were critical of Jiang Jieshi and Kuomintang’s non-action policy towards the escalating Japanese aggression in north China. Though the CCP was prohibited in the Nationalist area before the Second United Front, their underground force continued to function secretly in schools and universities.

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34 Evidence proved that some women were drawn to Yan’an for more immediate personal issues such as seeking shelter from chaotic war zones, securing a career, or earning an opportunity for education without necessarily having a determined dedication to national salvation or communist ideology. See Chen Jing, Zhandi sheying jizhe, in Nübin Liezhuan, 588-9; and Luo Jiurong, You Jianming, and Zai Haiyuan, eds., Fenghuo suiyuexia de zhongguo funüfangwen jilu (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2004), 125-8.

35 The publication on Chinese communism also fueled this interest. Edgar Snow’s Red Star Over China and its 1938 Chinese version introduced a reform-minded and resistance-dedicated Yan’an to young students who were disappointed and frustrated by Jiang’s early reluctance to form an all-out resistance against Japanese aggression. Therefore, they looked to Yan’an as an alternative to the Nationalist Government. In the three-volume biography of Chinese women soldiers, some attributed their wartime decision to join the Communist Party to reading Snow’s passionate description of Red China. See Nübin liezhuan, 56.
Underground Communist workers, dissenters from Jiang’s Nationalist regime, and Communist sympathizers spread radical ideologies of communism and nationalism among young students. The intensified political and national crisis fueled students’ patriotism. As Japanese encroachment of north China accelerated in the early 1930s, Chinese students demanded that Jiang’s Nanjing government end the civil war and form a solid political unity for resistance. In order to resist the Japanese seizure of Manchuria and north China, Chinese students put up strings of protests which culminated in December 1935, when over six thousand students took to the street in Beiping. Female students from middle schools and colleges were a highly visible part of this movement, which demanded an immediate solution to the imminent crisis facing Chinese citizens.

In such a charged, patriotic atmosphere, the CCP did not hesitate to take the opportunity to spread their influence among students. They formed the underground organization the Pioneer League for Chinese National Emancipation (zhonhua minzu jiefang xianfengdui) to attract radical students. The Nationalist oppression of the famous 1935 “December 9” student movement, which called for a national resistance against Japanese aggression, confirmed their determination against Japanese encroachment—and confirmed their suspicions of Jiang’s willingness.

After the eruption of the war in 1937, Japanese cruelty towards Chinese intellectuals left many with no choice but to head for either the Nationalist or the Communist regions. Medical missionary Ruth Hemenway recorded stories of refugee students in Hankou in 1938. The students she met told her that “we students have to dress as coolies, amahs, farmers, or servants in order to pass through the Japanese lines.” According to another, “The Japanese felt our hands as we passed them. If our hands were calloused, we were allowed to pass by. If the hands were
soft, the person was snatched out of the line and we saw him no more.” These students also bore witness to the execution of Chinese intellectuals: “one professor had a few books in his small piece of luggage; the guard said ‘pass on,’ but as he walked by the guard, the Japanese stabbed him in the back and killed him.” The cruel suppression of Chinese patriotism, as embraced by young students and intellectuals at the initial stage of the war, prompted the educated to leave and forced them to make a choice between the regions either controlled by the KMT or the CCP.

Frustration and disappointment with the Nationalist government’s non-action towards Japanese advancement in north China certainly influenced young students’ decisions to join the left and the CCP, but recent memoirs also reveal another factor contributing to the migration to Yan’an of educated youth: the attraction of free education. When asked why her brother joined the CCP, Yu wenxiu, a woman who was interviewed by Li Xiaojiang, remembered that her siblings’ choices to attend Yan’an were partially out of financial concerns, alongside the desire to join the resistance effort. The plan gained their father’s approval because of the father’s fear that his children would be “slaves” of Japanese imperialism (wangguonu) by staying in the occupied zones. Newspaper advertisements for free education in Yan’an indeed offered an appealing alternative for students who sought a future for the country as well as for themselves in the immediate chaos after the defeat of the Nationalist Government.

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36 Hemenway, 181. A volunteer medical doctor in a pediatric ward in wartime Chongqing, Hemenway witnessed human suffering from air-bombing, fire, rape, refugee exodus, hunger, orphans, and murder during the war, which continued to haunt her when she returned to the United States. She attempted to address the memories of war that troubled her through painting. Today, some of her paintings can be located at Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

37 Luo, You, and Zai, 2004, 123-34. Yu wenxiu’s siblings went to Yan’an as well as the Nationalist-held areas during the war, and worked for different parties, which led to the family history of separation over the two banks of the Taiwan Strait after 1949. Many personal accounts or memoirs have revealed the commonality of such family stories among siblings who were driven by patriotism to join different resistance groups. See for example, Long Yingtai, Dajiang Dahai 1949 (tiandi tushu gongsi, 2008).
Yet Yan’an was not readily prepared for the massive migration of urban youth. The abstract notions of nationalism and patriotism had to be channeled into daily life and transformed into functional components. In order to relieve the pressure of population growth in the communist areas, Yan’an inaugurated a double system of education and production for the purposes of survival and power consolidation. The continuing education system was to receive urban youth and eventually refashion them with Communist ideologies for rural revolutions. Both the Long March women veterans and educated youth were encouraged to enroll in schools and colleges such as Yan’an nüzi daxue (Yan’an women’s university), Shanbei gongxue (Northern Shanxi Public School), Kangri junzheng daxue (The Military and Political Academy of Anti-Japanese War), Luxun wenxue yishu xueyuan (Lu Xun Academy of Arts), and Lu xun shi fang (Lu Xun normal college).

Colleges and vocational schools were also set up in other Communist base areas outside of Yan’an, as an increasing number of students were flocking to the region by 1939. Many schools are named after Lun Xun, the recently deceased leftist writer who inspired a generation of students seeking a radical change for China. The incorporation of Lu Xun into Yan’an’s education system indicated a conscious attempt to accommodate the radical urban youth.

Among all the schools prepared for further education, there were obvious differences regarding the purposes of training and organization of curriculum. Women were not expected to join the military confrontation at the front, though evidence proved that women faced high risks of encountering Japanese and collaborator armies in guerrilla zones, even if they were not sent to the front. Most women were enrolled in programs of “cultural and political studies.”

38 Hung, 239-40.
39 Li, LNRZJSH, 154.
purpose of this curriculum was to improve the reading ability of the formerly uneducated women soldiers, and more importantly, to instill the newcomers with Communist political ideology. Popular courses covered Marxist theory and the history of the CCP, as well as political economy and an introduction to social science.\footnote{Nübin liezhuan, 237.}

Besides taking regular courses, women cadres were also instructed in the doctrines of the Rectification Movement, which aimed to tighten the CCP’s control over propaganda in 1942. The educated youth from urban centers were considered unprepared for working side by side with the peasantry, therefore education and training were necessary for them to gain first-hand experience in the countryside. Thus, they were encouraged by the CCP to go to villages to work with peasants, in order to establish connections with Chinese peasants and introduce them to revolutionary ideas.

The CCP’s work generated another pool of candidates for women’s work from the peasants. If Long March veterans and educated youth had better chances of holding higher positions, peasant women were the main force for the CCP’s operation at the local level. Peasant women’s involvement in the CCP women’s work was often more contingent in nature. These women often found themselves in the Communist zones as the Eighth Route Army maneuvered across the terrains of north China plain.

Because of the rather conservative local attitudes towards the women’s movement, the CCP encouraged cadres to establish a personal relationship with peasant women. They encouraged
cadres to knock on doors and invite local women to attend their meetings.\textsuperscript{41} It was usually those socially disadvantaged and thus least protected women who were drawn to the women’s meetings first, in spite of pressure from the local customary environment. The personnel of Communist women cadres could range from escapees of arranged marriages and those suffering from oppressive mothers-in-law, to simply the most outgoing women in local villages and towns as the mass mobilization movement started to expand.\textsuperscript{42}

Despite the initial difficulties of breaking the conventional customs, peasant women localized Communist women’s mass mobilizations and gained a strong foothold for Communist development in the north China plain in the years that followed.\textsuperscript{43} These women used their own networks to build connections for the resistance movement, and they adopted their own ways of expanding efforts for the resistance movement and spreading the message of national crisis. Taking women in central Hebei as an example, they translated the idea of resistance into local lyrics and sang the songs in local languages so that women could grasp the meaning.\textsuperscript{44} For the auxiliary campaign, they sang: “Remove your make-up, sisters, let’s save our nation together. Chase the Japanese devils out of our land, we search for our emancipation. You come and make

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Similar patterns of women joining the Red Army were also witnessed in the earlier years of the CCP women’s mobilization during the Jiangxi Soviet. See Helen Praeger Young, “Why We Joined the Revolution: Voices of Chinese Women Soldiers,” in Dombrowski, 93-96.
\item \textsuperscript{43} We know little about peasant women and their dynamic interaction with the CCP army at the local level. According to David Goodman, the CCP took different approaches to women’s mobilization and gained varying degrees of support in each county, depending on factors such as land tenure patterns, preexisting local women’s organizations, and so on. David Goodman, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Li, LNRZJSH, 260.
\end{itemize}
shoes for our soldiers, and I come to send the rice to the front.”⁴⁵ The song was inviting, and it drew a vision of shared work and collective action to meet the same patriotic purpose.

With the presence of Long March veterans, urban intellectuals, and local peasantry, the staff of CCP organizations was made up of a wide range of individuals. There were students, peasants, teachers, soldiers, and journalists, among many others. Some were able to read and write to various degrees, others were illiterate. The degree of fusion and the mixture of various social classes was indeed a brand new phenomenon that had never been seen previously in Chinese history.

After 1940, the north China plain witnessed a rapid growth of women’s national associations. According to some accounts, by 1945 these associations the Communist border regions had 7.1 million members in all.⁴⁶ The development of women’s organizations was parallel to the expansion of Communist power north China. In the early years of the war, when the CCP’s power base was limited in size, women’s work was sporadic and lacked a centralized system to galvanize sources and spread influence. On this stage, the few women cadres and educated youth played major roles. The educated youth usually limited their activities to the county level, and few went further to organize women’s associations for salvation, which were usually incapable of reaching the rural areas. The team for women’s work tended to organize peasant women sporadically, in only a limited number of villages. And they adopted various

⁴⁵ Li, LNRZJSH, 265
⁴⁶ Devin, 43.
names ranging from women’s sewing groups to associations of sisters, associations of women, and women’s association for national salvation.\(^\text{47}\)

Following the rapid power expansion of the CCP in the north China plain and the subsequent establishment of a CCP government, women’s work was increasingly institutionalized and became a highly visible part of the border region’s bureaucratic system. The purpose of women’s work in this context was to follow the party guidance and to popularize the CCP ideologies. Regular meetings and conferences were held by various Communist women’s offices to review the work that had been done in the past and to make plans for further action in the years to come. The meetings and conferences usually served to mediate between the CCP and local cadres: participants collected data and experiences from local cadres, and meanwhile reflected and communicated opinions from the central department of the CCP, eventually ensuring the practical realization of the party’s policies on women.

**Politicizing Women’s Mass Mobilization**

Women’s salvation movements predated the coming of the CCP’s influence in many areas of northwest China. Nonetheless, CCP women’s work was the most persistent presence in rural China based on its vision of women as an integral part of social and economic support for the war effort. This conceptualization of women as taking an active revolutionary role demanded that the CCP refashion female gender norms. Women cadres were political employees of the party— if not necessarily fully equal to male counterparts in opportunities—and were incorporated into the political ladder of the bureaucracy. Women’s work was above all

\(^{47}\) Jinchaji beiyue qu funü kangri douzheng shiliao, 69.
a branch of party organization, and was meant to serve the needs of the party. Women, on the other hand, found conflicting elements in serving the political party. On the one hand, CCP women’s work claimed new arenas for women’s social and political activities, while on the other, it confirmed conventional conceptions of women’s virtue in collective action and self-sacrifices.

There were two phases for the political development of women’s work in Communist arenas. The first phase of the movement witnessed the initiation of women’s political mobilization under the banner of the United Front; the second phase was more about building women’s bureaucracy exclusively under the auspices of the CCP, a status attributable to the fragmented nature of the Second United Front between Nationalists and Communists. The first phase of development aimed to attract women across class boundaries; the second period was characterized by a stronger political orientation prescribed solely by the CCP, with an emphasis on continuing mobilization of peasant women based on the CCP revolutionary vision.

The CCP emphasized the essential importance of propaganda and a mobile leadership. First and foremost, they sent politically trained women cadres to organize women’s national salvation associations. These female cadres were bureaucrats functioning as translators and representatives of the party. They spread messages of national crisis, concepts of gender equality, class theory, and in some cases, they said no to violence against women. Women cadres were instructed to adopt flexible methods to meet the challenges from local societies. Developing responsive strategies to solve specific problems was personally emphasized by Mao Zedong. Based on his own experience of rural investigation in Xinguo county in 1924, Mao

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48 JCJBYQFNKRDZSL, 14-17; 68-69.

49 Ibid., 4-9.
demanded that cadres interact with local populations, which meant knocking on their doors and
listening to their voices carefully. By this, Mao aimed to learn about the “suffering and
hardships” of the peasantry, and thus to discover the entry point for the CCP’s rural
mobilization. Mao believed that land was what poor peasants needed; women, however, suffered
much more than men, who were simply deprived by an unequal social system. The women were
oppressed by the authority of the clan, the authority of the state, and the authority of the
husband. In order to be able to make connections with peasant women, according to the CCP
guidelines, cadres needed to address the specific problems suffered by women.

In addition to institutionalizing women’s national salvation organizations, the CCP
intensified its control over the direction of the women’s war mobilization. Women’s
contributions to war mobilization were recognized politically and publicly. The CCP
propaganda created a politically rewarding system to exemplify those women who worked
extremely hard, and made them well-known role models for the rest of the community. CCP
newspapers, village broadcasts, mass meetings, spoken dramas, and novels were adopted to
circulate “glorious deeds” of female role models who were considered to have made special
contributions to the resistance effort.

The political recognition and rewards were also material, and could be as trivial as a facial
towel, a cup for drinking water, or some food, or quite significant in monetary value, such as a
buffalo for tilling fields—a considerable property for peasants in northwest China, where land
was hard to till by human labor. Such rewards could be fiercely envied by other peasants and
thus stirred a strong excitement in rural villages.
Women’s political meaning to the CCP war effort was exemplified by the insertion of new holidays in the Yan’an calendar. March 8, the International Woman’s Day, was celebrated by the CCP with extreme political rituals. The activities were prescribed and sponsored by the CCP’s central government in Yanan, and the regulations generated there were transmitted to all levels of the party’s political branches. Meetings about women’s work were held at various locations, ranging from Yan’an to unknown villages. In all major party newspapers, annual reports on women’s work were published on the first page; prominent Communist leaders published speeches and essays about women’s; women cadres summarized major “experiences and lessons” from a year’s work; and new directions and goals for the coming year’s work were identified.

If most of the celebrations and commemorations were confined to party members, the mass meetings, filled with public speeches and performances that rewarded women role models, reached the largest population of Chinese peasantry. Female role models were invited to offer talks in which specific topics were emphasized, such as their involvement in agricultural production, household management, solving neighborhood quarrels, and providing support to the CCP army. Female role models were invited as honored guests to various meetings and their stories were published in major newspapers in the following days to be made known widely in the Communist areas.

One article in Jinchaji Daily on April 25, 1944 stated the following:

Only the working people (China peasants) are true heroes. Who are Han fengling and Rong Guanxiu? Who are these role models? They are not someone famous, but ordinary women from Jinchaji area. Like us, they were ordinary Chinese peasants, nonetheless,

50 JCJBYQFNKRHZSL, 19.
they were the ones who made great achievement that shakes the sky and moved the earth. The new democratic society under the leadership of the CCP disarmed the heavy feudal chain [that] yoked them for thousands of years, and has greatly improved their social and economic status. Chinese women’s creative talent that was confined by traditional customs now gained the stage for its social performance. They went to the field to become capable farmers like Han Fengling; they became efficient household manager[s] like Wang shixin, who makes a harmonious family and leads the family with plans to avoids hunger; some elder women like Du yuanlin—the sixty two year old madam—continued to assume work in the field and at home in order to free their sons and daughters-in-laws from these duties to contribute to the party’s work in their village.\textsuperscript{51}

Through newspaper publications and stirring speeches made for the mass meetings, the CCP created a new language to confirm women’s agricultural production. Ordinary peasant women’s production activities gained political meaning when these women were staged as individuals working for the common good of the Chinese nation. Individuals and their behaviors were politicized and disciplined through the propaganda system that exemplified the good and condemned the bad in Communist regimes.

The CCP’s prescriptions for women’s bodies promulgated another agenda for politicizing women’s war activity. The female body was the site where Chinese nationality and Chineseness were contested and defended. In various media forms, the Communist propaganda praised women who fought against Japanese sexual violence. In the 1944 annual report of Shanxi and Hebei provinces, along with female role models for agricultural production and army auxiliary service, two groups of young women were also awarded for their defense of chastity against Japanese soldiers’ sexual assault:

\footnote{JCJBYQFNKRZDSL, 201.}
Women in some areas were active in the campaigns of anti-looting and anti-exploitation (against Japanese invaders and its collaborators). Young women were particularly courageous in fighting against sexual violence. Enemies often harassed women in Yushou and Xujiagou villages, however, these young women developed a strategy for resistance by secretly staying in a mountain cave. There were another ten women from a village of Qiding area all committed suicide when the enemies chased after them. They would rather die than surrender to the sexual threat of the enemy, which exemplifies Chinese women’s national and ethnic integrity.52

This description implies the tendency to view women’s body as the site of man’s contest in Yanan ideology, a way of thinking that echoes the customary practice that demanded women’s chastity by saying, “it is a matter of importance to lose one’s chastity, while it is a matter of insignificance to starve to death” (er si shi xiao, shi jie shi da). Women’s bodies were the last frontlines of the war, in which Chinese women took responsibility to protect themselves from armed enemies, while the invaders claimed the ultimate occupation by violating women’s bodies through rape, which in Susan Brownmiller’s words “is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.”53 The female body became a national site, symbolically defining and upholding the boundaries of national difference. CCP propaganda underlined the stereotyped gender hierarchy and gender norms of the “traditional society” that the CCP claimed to destruct.

The dilemma raised a fundamental question: what should women do when forced to confront sexual violence? Could an individual woman live out conventional perceptions or

52 JCJBYQFNKRDZSL, 446.

53 Susan Brownwell talks about sexual violence in a general sense, and she does not apply this issue specifically to rape against the backdrop of war or military conflict. But her interpretation of the male psychological connotation of sexual violence is in accordance with researchers’ opinions on sexual violence and war. For a discussion on rape and war, see Goldstein, War and Gender, 356-379; for a specific discussion on military sexual violence committed to Chinese women, see Iris Chang, 19-105.
social customs if her body was tinged with enemy pollution? The answer perhaps was no. Shame and deprivation followed if female chastity was violated. Women were doomed to pay the price for crimes that they befell, not crimes that they committed. Ding Ling’s pre-rectification-movement writing conveyed ways in which women were mistreated as a result of having experienced sexual assault during war violence, despite the utterly impossibility of avoiding such violence in many circumstances. Her heroine’s experience of being marginalized and deserted after rape was perhaps also the destiny of those “polluted” women under the CCP gender regime.  

Communist deployment of cultural forms and symbols to mobilize women for the war efforts is evident in the CCP’s imperative to create a collective vision of a socialist China. Instead of defining patriotism as the ultimate goal of this campaign, the CCP painstakingly fought for political legitimacy in rural China, over and above the nationalist government and the authority of the clan. According to Hung, the CCP leadership sought to legitimate the new alternative by using public culture as “a political vehicle to promote socialism and to politicize the people’s life.” Under such representation, women served as a cultural element in representing a collective image of a socialist China, where women’s roles were fashioned through the party’s control of tools for propaganda.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates the uneasy relationship between women and the Chinese Communist revolution in the war years of resistance. The CCP used the power of patriotism to harness the Chinese women’s movement, taking control of its direction and

55 Patriotism was the central theme of the Nationalist government’s wartime propaganda. However, its weakness, corruption, and inefficiency overshadowed the calling for a collective national sympathy.
56 Hung, 269.
ideology. The marriage between nationalism, feminism, and Marxism was possible due to the colonial nature of the Japanese invasion. The common goals of resistance helped to shape the complex bonding of the three.

The communist cadres used the language of the women’s movement from earlier years as well as patriotic messages to mobilize peasant women. These female cadres played a critical role in bridging the rural population with CCP ideology, thereby helping to establish the political existence of the CCP at the rural level. During China’s War of Resistance, the CCP’s revolutionary vocabulary was popularized and gained currency—a trend that was to be continued into the years of the Civil War and the People’s Republic era.

The CCP’s campaigns of mobilization instilled women with a new sense of self through the introduction of political organization and political language that closely linked them to national salvation. A new sense of collective purpose was attached to every action associated with the military maneuver. Instead of understanding power relations through the patrilineal and patrilocal perception, peasant women were introduced to the language of the modern nation state through CCP ideology and guidelines.

Simultaneously, the mass mobilization for the War of Resistance served as a platform for the CCP to popularize its alternative version of China, in which the power structure of Chinese rural society needed to be reshaped. Peasant women’s participation in party initiatives varied across regions, as differing factors informed highly sophisticated and locally-targeted methods of gaining resources from women.
Chapter Five. Drafting Women’s Labor: Transforming Domestic Women from the Patrilineal Kinship System to Subjects of the Communist Nation State

In the previous chapter, I examined the influence of the CCP ideology on women’s wartime mobilization and women cadres’ political strategies for reaching peasant women. The women cadres’ work in the CCP’s regions was instrumental in distributing political messages and creating a presence for the CCP regime in rural women’s daily lives. This chapter discusses how peasant women responded to this political force, which attempted to reshape their social and cultural existence. By examining rural women’s wartime work and struggles, this chapter offers a closer look at the nature of the CCP women’s mobilization. This chapter also examines rural women’s voices by reading and analyzing oral history materials gathered in the 1990s, when it became possible for the researchers in mainland China to conduct interviews with peasant women.

The CCP women’s movement has received a great deal of scholarly attention from researchers of modern China. The early generation of scholars of China were interested in exploring the relations between Communism and feminism, an intellectual curiosity driven by a larger academic environment where the first generation of women’s studies scholars took the initiative to “restore women back to history” and established “women” as a legitimate subject of research in a male-dominated academic world. Elisabeth Croll traces the uneasy relationship

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between nationalism, feminism, and socialism. She demonstrates that feminism has its own history in China that predated Marxism. Kay Ann Johnson focuses on women’s access to and control of resources as well as their roles in family and work and in reproductive and productive labor. In exploring the ambiguous relationship between feminism and socialism, the early generation of women scholars invested their resources in answering the “women were there” question. These scholars were disappointed that socialism failed to deliver fully the promises in professional development, economic stability, and political participation.

Subsequently, instead of focusing on the failure or success of socialism’s promises in delivering gender equality, later scholars have shifted their inquiries to the historically specific configurations of the subject of women and gender in modern China. Scholars have given more attention to urban women due to the availability of primary sources. In her recent work, Gail Hershatter examines rural women and the Chinese revolution by drawing on oral history materials from women who experienced the years immediately before and after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The reorganization of rural society was in many ways fundamental during the Civil War (1947-1949) and the years immediately after the establishment of the Communist regime. Hershatter discusses the relations between the CCP’s policies and women’s work, marriages, childbirth, and parenting. In doing so, Hershatter reveals a history of gendered revolution which does not necessarily coincide with the official narrative.

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This chapter argues that a similar transformation happened earlier in the War of Resistance, and it adds to previous scholarship by discussing the complexities of womanhood in rural China. It goes beyond locating women’s positions in revolution, and pays attention to the complexities of the actors and the gender dynamics that shaped the landscape of the CCP’s gender regime during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Mobilizing Peasant Women: Introducing a Revolutionary Vocabulary to the Rural Population

Women cadres were sent to villages and towns to live and work with local folks. The ideal was to understand “women’s pain,” generated not only from the war but also from domestic violence, mismatched marriages, oppressive parents-in-laws, and harassment from bandits.\(^{61}\) The work for women cadres was to discover the dissatisfactions of the peasant women and also their yearnings, in order to develop methods for reaching them and activating their participation in a rather conservative social environment. These steps for mobilizing rural revolution were developed by Mao Zedong in 1924, based on his investigation of peasant life in Jiangxi province. Mao’s emphasis on peasants’ work underscored his belief that China’s grassroots revolution would and should be achieved in rural China via the introduction of ideas about class struggle and land reform.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{61}\) Nübin liezhuan, 23-34.

The Communist mass mobilization cadres found that they were dealing with a variety of responses from the local population upon their arrival and with their continuing presence. Certain villages and towns were readier to receive them, while others were suspicious of these mixed groups of men and women. The Communist mass mobilization team and women cadres also found that the patriotism and nationalism that had stirred young students were not necessarily adequate for mobilizing peasant women out of their culturally defined spheres of domesticity. Village elders, husbands, and parents-in-laws usually were suspicious of unknown strangers accessing their daughters, wives, or daughters-in-laws. Neither did they like the idea of their daughters or wives joining Communist activities to talk with men or to stay in stranger’s places, where they would have to “appear alone and expose faces” (paotou loumian). Liang Guoying, a woman cadre at Huailai county in Hebei province, recollects the hardships her team encountered at the initial stage of mass mobilization.

Women then would not step out of the front door, not even to mention gathering them together for a meeting. Whichever village we reached, we found out local women observing us through the door slits. Rumor had that women soldiers of the 8th Route Army would take them away (from their parents). They were too afraid to open the door. Village elders were even more ‘feudal’. They kept young women (in the house), and deemed that mingling with us with the presence of males was morally degraded. Women should behave themselves and stay in their proper places.63

The scenario was familiar, and the CCP women’s cadres were experienced in handling the conventional customs and laws that bound women in domestic arenas. The strategy the Communist mass mobilization team developed, by way of their decade-long experience of rural revolution in previous base areas in Fujian and Jiangxi, was to work village by village and town

63 Li Xiaojiang, LNRZJSH, 248.
by town building links with the most socially disadvantaged and least-protected: suffering child-
brides, oppressed daughters-in-law, widows, and poor elders with no descendents.

The communists were to continue the practice based on the merits of their successful experience in the Jiangxi Soviet. Meanwhile, they were also willing to compromise and adopt a milder strategy when they found themselves facing village elders who were much more conservative than those they met in southern China. In North China, whenever they were viewed as unraveling power by village elders—whose recognition and support of the CCP’s power was both critical for their footing in local environments and politically significant for the newly formed cooperation with the Nationalists—they adjusted their strategies. First, female cadres were designated specifically for mobilizing peasant women, in order to dissolve village elders’ suspicions and gain permission to access village women. Second, the conservative parents or parents-in-laws were not viewed as “backward elements,” as they likely would have been regarded in previous radical movements; instead, they were now viewed as a social group that should be incorporated into the United Front. In the case of persistent resistance from villagers, the mass mobilization teams were instructed to do “education and persuasion” work. Creating conflicts with village elders and inflicting unwanted political diatribes were deemed politically incorrect under the guidelines of the United Front.

Women cadres strongly identified with the confinements and constraints of rural women and their shared inability to be physically mobile. Many women cadres had their own stories of resistance against family confinement and their attempts to gain the right to education, physical mobility, or marriage freedom, and they considered the life-changing transition from being an

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64 Croll, 199.
oppressed woman to a communist cadre a helpful bridge that shortened the distance between them and local women. In other words, women cadres emerged from their own early life experiences with a sense of the constrictions generated by prescribed female gender norms. In their work as cadres, these women found a common language between themselves local women based on the shared experiences of either an unhappy childhood from poverty or a miserable life under abusive parents-in-law. For those women who were not happy, or were even miserable, in real life, access to the CCP women’s work presented the possibility for an alternative life.

Women cadres were instructed to probe for the details of everyday life and search for the origins of rural women’s “suffering.” In order to do so, they were required to access rural women and talk to them in person. By talking with local women, cadres were expected to determine women’s living conditions in their families, as well their social statuses in their village community. The purpose was to discover the family’s income, the labor distribution based on gender, landownership, women’s handicrafts and their relationships with local markets, and, finally, to ascertain the relationships among family members—especially between husbands and wives and between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Following the example established by Mao, women cadres intended to find economic and social factors that prevented a semblance of equality between the sexes.

The CCP mobilization movement offered a new language and an unprecedented mechanism for peasant women to analyze their lives. Nonetheless, peasant women did not passively wait for solutions. Some women proved alarmed and pugnacious enough to seek life-changing opportunities or alternative ways of living. Some said no to arranged marriages by joining the Communist-led armies, and some simply ran away from abusive family members.

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65 Young, 1999, 93-96.
Some were drawn by the ideal of resistance, and others sought education opportunities in Communist areas. Xu Ming (born Wang Hexian) was the daughter of a well-to-do family at Gaoyang county in Hebei province. Xu was introduced to youth culture in the Communist army by her cousins, who joined the CCP youth movement in 1937. Xu aspired to gain freedom of movement, shared the ardent passion of resistance, and yearned for the opportunity to work for the women’s salvation associations and the resistance force. She was determined to leave her “home prison” to pursue freedom. Xu’s initial endeavor was frustrated by her father, who despised the mingling between men and women that was introduced by the arrival of the Communist cadres. She was forced to leave the Communist army after her first attempt to enlist. When she returned home, Xu’s parents tried to put her under house-arrest but she managed to escape to the local headquarters of the Eighth Route Army again. The Communist army compromised with her father and designated a teaching post for her in an elementary school. In the meantime, Xu was expected to honor a previously arranged marriage. Xu found it utterly impossible to accept this arrangement and she decided to run away from her family permanently, to join another military unit in an adjacent county, in secret. In order to avoid being recognized and located again, Xu took a further step, changing her name from Wang Hexian to Xu Ming permanently.⁶⁶

For most women, however, war mobilization was a matter of survival. As troops maneuvered and fought, women inevitably found themselves in war zones. This was particularly true for women in the North China Plain, where strings of guerrilla war campaigns were launched by the Eighth Route Army. In order to deter the support of ordinary Chinese away

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⁶⁶ Li Xiaojiang, RNRZJSH, 242-246. For a brief introduction of Xu Ming’s activities during the War of Resistance, see Li, 242-246.
from the CCP resistance effort, Japanese armies launched the notorious “three all” campaigns that lasted from 1941 to 1944. “Three all” was shorthand term for the slogan “kill all, burn all, destroy all” that aimed to annihilate villages aiding the Chinese resistance effort. Besides the notorious “three-all” campaigns, the so-called “mopping-up” campaign launched by the Japanese army between August and October 1941 “left 4,500 villagers dead and 150,000 homes burnt.” The violence and destruction generated by these institutionalized war crimes was horrific, and created a fearful setting for many women who lived in the Japanese occupied and controlled areas. Many villages and individual families had their own tragic stories to tell because of the cruelty inflicted on them by the Japanese army. Life was crushed by constant disaster, which included losing loved ones, food shortages, forced labor, sexual violence, and a sense of humiliation.

The Communist mass mobilization movements channeled the complexity of emotions into effective weapons for resistance. Since the enemy was much more advanced in terms of equipment, guerilla strategies proved to be the most efficient channels for expressing hatred towards Japanese invaders and eagerness to resist. Anger and rage stemmed from loss, suffering, and fear. The imposed violence by the Japanese perhaps deterred some people, but in many other cases, this violence encouraged a widespread and bitter resentment against the Japanese invaders. This emotion could be easily transformed into action, and it obviously facilitated the Communist campaigns for mass mobilization.

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67 Spence, 444.

68 Patriotic emotions, nationalism, and sentiments of resistance were not equally spread among Chinese. Rhodes Farmer, the war correspondent for the Melbourne Herald, noticed the emotional differences and variety of attitudes toward the invasive Japanese army in his three-year travel in northwest and central China. Rhodes Farmer, Shanghai Harvest: A Diary of Three Years in the China War (London: Museum Press Limited, 1945), 56-70.
Village women shared these feelings, and many demonstrated that they were willing to partake in the resistance activities. Women’s networks proved especially significant for organizing resources for guerrilla resistance efforts. Instead of conducting tasks alone and unprotected, women tended to introduce their female family members and relatives into guerrilla activities, and thus formed cooperative and more effective networks.

 Mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters, sisters-in-law, daughters, and female friends were all convenient resources for forming a working team to look out for each other’s backs. 69 Active women could also introduce women cadres to their friends or relatives in other villages. Luo Yun, Director of the Propaganda Department of the Women’s National Association in the central Hebei province, was introduced by Guo Ruiyun, a local married woman, to the latter’s natal village and established a women’s national salvation association after gaining trust from local peasant women. Guo’s mother was an active member and was later appointed the director of the women’s association. 70

The communists developed strategic methods to channel emotions into action. Women cadres adopted two major strategies to access peasant women, starting with literacy classes during the initial stage of the war years, from 1939 to 1941. The idea was to spread the message of national crisis and national salvation along with basic literacy education. 71 Second, the rural agricultural production movement was initiated by the party to cope with severe material shortages and scarcity after the open break-out of hostility between the Nationalists and the

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69 RNRZJSJH, 249 and 282-5.

70 Ibid., 256.

71 RNRZJSJH, 255-6.
Communists in southern Anhui province in 1941. In a few villages, they also initiated rural hygienic campaigns in order to endorse the party doctrine of mass campaigns.

Literacy classes (shi zi ban) were regarded as effective means to transmit the sense of national emergency and crisis to the masses; 72 these classes demonstrated that China was a politically vulnerable country in need of collective action by both men and women. By the late 1930s, a sense of failure and crisis based on colonial experience had emerged as a primary vehicle of national self-understanding as well as philosophical reflection. The adoption of failure as a tool to reorganize the nation meant promoting a collective national consciousness of resisting-colonialism and imperialism along with a deeply grounded sense of national salvation. 73 As Tsu Jing’s groundbreaking research has recently argued, failure in modern China history has played an integral part in the making of modern Chinese identity. A mode of national inquiry has been deeply grounded in the sense of national humiliation and the demand to emerge out of it. By allowing the mind to associate with continuous events and ideas, national sympathy—a patriotic national feeling—thus facilitated the ongoing process of shaping Chinese nationalism. 74 Interestingly, the forming of a national sympathy had become, by the middle of the 1930s, not only a social yearning on the part of Chinese elite intellectuals, but also a political desire held by the Nationalists and the Communists. Young students, who passionately wanted

72 Launching literacy classes as a means for mobilizing women predated the all-out Japanese aggression in 1937. This tactic was adopted by CCP mass movement cadres from its use in the Guangdong era during the so-called Great Revolution period (1924-1927). The main purpose was to educate the masses with revolutionary language by organizing night schools.


74 Recent research has shed light in a highly sophisticated way on the relationship between globalization, colonialism, cosmopolitan consumerism, and China’s search for national strength. For example, Rebecca Karl discusses the discursive construction of anti-colonialism from a global perspective. Karl, Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
to do well for the nation, were drawn to the mass campaigns to educate ordinary Chinese about the political and military challenges facing the nation. After the breakup of Sino-Japanese War on July 7, 1937, refugee students formed their own troupes of spoken drama/street opera for national salvation and resistance against Japanese aggression.\textsuperscript{75} The literacy classes were created not only to attract women to the public activities, but also to convey a sense of gender inequality and national crisis through teaching. By analyzing women’s lives, the CCP hoped to challenge certain perceived gender roles and awaken women’s consciousness for change.

These classes admitted that an education about the war was necessary, given that over ninety percent of the population was illiterate. The literacy classes emphasized political education, which introduced the nature of the protracted war with Japan, the formation of the Second United Front, the CCP women’s work for war mobilization, and rural policies. The CCP also made the classroom a site for spreading military knowledge and self-defense skills. The components of the instruction varied depending on geographical location, instructors, and the vision of local communist leaders.

Rural agricultural production was another arena that called for women’s active participation as more and more young, able-bodied men were conscripted into the army. The open-outbreak of the hostility between the CCP and the KMT in 1941 with the accident in Southern Anhui intensified the blockade of the CCP regions. Both official communication and commercial activities were reduced, which meant a decreasing number of supplies came from outside world. Additionally, Japan strengthened its military campaigns, encircling CCP regions after the CCP’s abrupt One Hundred Regiments Campaigns, which counterattacked the Japanese on the North China Plain in 1940. The encirclement campaigns worsened the problem of shortages. In order

\textsuperscript{75} Hung, 56-77.
to overcome the difficulty, Mao Zedong launched the Great Production Campaign (da sheng chang yun dong) in the hopes of becoming self-sufficient. By the time of 1942, the CCP was already well-known for its centralized propaganda and intensive campaigns on agricultural production for achieving self-sufficiency (zi ji zi zu). When the military campaigns with the Japanese reached a stalemate in 1942-1943, the CCP strengthened its emphasis on agricultural production. A cadre’s ability to improve agricultural production was a measure for promotion, according to the 1943 report on the mass movement in the Beiyue area. The emphasis on agriculture was also reflected in CCP evaluations of women’s work, which measured how well women had done in production.

Nonetheless, the mobilization movement did not make women the major force for agricultural production in the North China Plain during the War of Resistance, but their potential attracted increasing attention as the material supply from outside continued to decrease. As the consequence of eight consecutive years of war and ongoing military recruitment, the issue of labor shortages started to stand out by 1944 and 1945. Mobilizing women for production became an increasingly important political campaign. Women’s participation in production was interpreted as a means for improving women’s socio-economic positions, since this kind of work garnered income and contributed to family economic stability and represented a change from the prior social structure in which men were the only productive laborers who brought food to the

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76 Jinchaji border region was renamed as Beiyue region in 1941. Jinchaji border region included parts of Shanxi, Hebei, Chahaer, Rehe, and Liaoning provinces. It covered a region of roughly 800,000 square kilometers, with a population of 25,000,000 scattered in 108 administrative xian (counties), in JCJBYQFNKRDZSL, 130.

77 Devin, 39.

78 Ibid., 153.

79 JCJBYQFNKRDZSL, 635.
family table. The CCP claimed only through economic independence could women start to establish foundations for emancipation and gender equality. Women were encouraged to engage in field work as well, as well as the so-called supplemental productions such as weaving, fruit-tree planting, poultry-raising, and shoe-making to supplement family income.\textsuperscript{80}

Women were especially encouraged to partake in weaving and spinning,\textsuperscript{81} because the supply of cloth was hampered by isolation from major textile centers due to the Japanese occupation and the KMT blockade. The initial CCP attempt to set up textile production was that of joint state-private factories. But factory-style enterprises turned out to be difficult to organize in the primitive countryside, and it was equally infeasible to locate the amount of capital and the numbers of full-time workers required, as the factors of sporadic local population and limited means of transportation did not support the development.\textsuperscript{82} Nonetheless, production did manage to increase from 1939 to 1941, but it was unable to meet needs. So in addition to factory production, Mao Zedong began encouraging the development of cottage and co-operative handicrafts.\textsuperscript{83}

The CCP encouraged local women to organize mutual-aid teams to pool and redistribute limited resources. For example, widow Liu with bound feet in Youganhe village exchanged her skills in cloth-making with her neighbors in exchange for clearing the land. Both Liu and her neighbors benefited from the mutually agreed upon exchange: Liu’s land was prepared by the neighbor for crop planting, and the latter received home-made cloth in return. With the land

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{80} Ibid., 135.
\bibitem{81} Devin, 40-41.
\bibitem{82} Luo Qiong, \textit{The Cottage Textile Industry in the Shan-Gan-Ning Border Region}, 5-6.
\bibitem{83} Ibid., 6.
\end{thebibliography}
ready for planting wheat and vegetables, Liu’s family avoided the risk of going hungry in the coming year. According to reports on *Jinchaji Daily* (*Jinchaji ribao*), some women did successfully support their families’ livelihoods by taking advantage of opportunities and combining income sources, or by diversifying their production. Zhen Xiuhua from Yanchi village, once a beggar in famine season, recollected life by enrolling herself into the Great Production campaigns. With the seed money she received from the local CCP organization, she was able to establish a small business using her shoe-making skills. The business helped feed Zhen’s family, who were then able to open land to grow food.  

Previous scholarship has failed to locate the CCP’s Great Production campaigns against the backdrop of a general trend of rural economic bankruptcy in China. However, rural China’s steady progression towards poverty and deprivation received attention from both Chinese and foreign observers. Luo Qiong, a feminist journalist in Shanghai, warned of the disastrous consequences of the disappearance of rural women’s handcraft businesses. According to her analysis, traditional Chinese family-run cottage industries were on the edge of total bankruptcy because of the encroachment of imperialist industries. Pearl S. Buck noticed the increasing poverty of Chinese peasantry in her novel *The Good Earth*, in which Chinese villages were ravaged by strings of war, flood, and famine in the first half of twentieth century. It was under such general trends of rural deprivation and devastation that the Great Production movement was

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84 JCJBYQFNKRZSL, 634.
85 Ibid., 634.
86 See, for example, Devin, 1976.
87 Luo Qiong, *Shanganning bianqu minjian fangzhiye (The Cottage Textile Industry in the Shan-Gan-Ning Border Region)* (Jinan zhongguo funu she, 1946)
initiated on the North China Plain in Communist areas. In light of this, it was not surprising for rural people to locate a sense of belonging in the Collective Production movement, which the CCP in fact facilitated in order to gain support from the peasantry.89

The war mobilization created a simultaneous sense of belonging and dispossessions. This mobilization brought new issues to rural women’s lives: with women’s labor conscripted toward war efforts, who would take care of children and do the family chores—including fetching water, washing, and cooking—all of which were perceived as women’s (and especially daughters-in-laws’) jobs, according to local custom? The alternative candidates for these jobs were the privileged mothers-in-law, who had advanced to rather superior positions in the household after spending their lives in obligation to others’ needs. Suddenly, they found that family chores fell on their shoulders again. They found it hard to cope with the new social roles and relationships. The mothers-in-law’s interests were hurt by the new trend of development, so some of them were unhappy with the transformations introduced by the CCP. Nonetheless, there were also numerous examples of women elders who involved themselves actively into the resistance efforts by helping out their children and the daughters-in-law.90

Women’s Labor: Revolution and Its Limits

Recent scholarship has focused more on urban women than rural women due to the availability of sources.91 Rural women were less likely to leave written records about their

90 RNRZISH, 271-2.
91 For a discussion on female laborers in cotton mills in Shanghai, see Emily Honig, Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); for a discussion on
productive activities. According to the existing studies on women’s labor in rural China, scholars generally agree that rural women’s participation in field work varied tremendously in different macro and even micro regions of the country. John Lossing Buck’s study *Land Utilization in China* estimates that women performed about 13% of farm labor and about 16% of subsidiary work in North China. Fei Xiaotong’s 1938 survey in Lu Village, Yunnan Province, revealed that women performed more day labor than men in farming, suggesting that Buck’s research findings could not be generalized. Utilizing Japanese surveys from the 1940s, Phillip Huang argues that women in northern China contributed little to sorghum and millet farming, but helped with harvesting winter wheat and barley. Interview materials suggest that poorer women were more likely to engage in field work than those from well-off families. What historians have discovered about rural women and labor engagement suggests that the CCP’s painstaking effort to mobilize rural women to become an active part of the field work after 1942 coincided with an increase in the number of males who were mobilized to engage in military expansion in northern China.

During the War of Resistance, the responsibilities and work categories of rural women covered a wide spectrum of activity. In addition to ordinary domestic chores, women were

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92 Davin, 1975b; Croll, 1985c.


required to contribute in various ways to the war effort. As with statistics on women’s contribution to the war effort, there are no extensive or consistent records of the duties women performed. Information must be extrapolated from numerous sources, including memoirs, biographies/autobiographies, newspaper pieces, published annual reports by the CCP, and annual reports on women’s movements compiled by the women’s federation after 1949. Yet, similar to their contributions to domestic life, women’s paid and unpaid labor was crucial to the political economy of border regions and Communist military operations; i.e., women supplied the necessary services that kept the army fed, clothed, healthy, and sheltered.

The labor of rural women was often not acknowledged or compensated monetarily. Communist women cadres’ work in rural China received monetary or material compensations from the CCP governmental system, but peasant women were usually made to volunteer for the war effort regardless of their economic situations. They were wives and mothers who cared for the wounded, cooked for the cadres and soldiers, and kept the army clothed. They were guards who watched out for various secret meetings held by Communist guerrillas. They were message carriers who usually delivered information by crossing dangerous zones and railway lines. They were producers of goods working as farmers, weavers, and clothing and shoe makers. They were also warriors serving for the village and county self-defense squads in the rear while the borders of the fighting zones underwent rapid flux during intensive military operations. Rural women were especially called upon in this capacity in guerrilla zones where self-defense squads were organized to protect children, crops, and properties.

96 LNRZJSH, 257.

97 The annual reports were mostly written by Communist cadres who were in charge of women’s work during the years of war. Usually these reports were published in major communist newspapers in the base areas, and served to circulate work experience and lessons learned by cadres. The reports served as a tool for propaganda work as well, in their promotion of political ideologies.
Women were considered ideal job candidates for certain tasks because of their so-called “special functions” (teshu zuoyong) under the conditions of war. Because of conventional gender conceptions, women were considered less capable or less likely to be involved with military operations. Therefore, many believed it would be safer for women to be spies.\(^98\) The adoption of women as spies sometimes led to controversial issues of sexuality and chastity. Perhaps historians will never know who and how many women became involved with secret intelligence work. Ding Ling’s short story *When I was in Xia Village* raised questions about gender inequality and feminine virtue by casting light on a peasant woman’s experience after returning to her home village from the Japanese zones. Zhenzhen, the heroine of the story, was raped and infected by the Japanese soldiers with a venereal disease. Instead of committing suicide, as expected by local custom, the heroine was forced by the CCP to stay behind the lines to gather intelligence for the resistance.\(^99\) After coming back from the occupied zones, Zhenzhen however, met with only discrimination from the locals. While some Communist cadres did view her as a “war hero” who had sacrificed her female self, Zhenzhen’s family attempted to arrange a marriage for Zhenzhen with her former “sweetheart” in order to reclaim discipline over their daughter. Zhenzhen, however, refused this traditional arrangement and instead embraced an alternative solution. She declared that “a person’s life is not for one’s father or mother, or even for one’s self.” She made herself ready to set out for the supposedly more “liberal” Communist capital of Yan’an.\(^100\) Zhenzhen’s fate remains uncertain as the story ends. Ding Ling made her

\(^{98}\) Johnson, 189.
\(^{99}\) Barlow, 38.
\(^{100}\) Though Ding Ling’s story includes a plan for her heroine to leave the village for Yan’an, Zhenzhen’s destiny remained vague. Ding Ling’s essay “Thoughts on the Women’s Day on the Eighth of March” illustrates this ambiguity well. According to Ding Ling, female gender in Yan’an continued to serve as a site for the making of a power hierarchy in which the female gender usually serves as a complimentary, secondary, and referential position to the essential, indispensable position of men. Ding Ling questioned this phenomenon by focusing on women as her
silent doubts about the uneasy Communist gender regime in Yan’an obvious by not being able to offer a workable solution for Zhenzhen, who receives double prejudice and is a victim of the social stigma her society imposes on her. Zhenzhen’s case revealed a deep-seated patriarchy that continued to oppress women, and also shed light on the Communist regime’s inability to openly discuss or combat patriarchy at the village level.

Nonetheless, peasant women offered significant protection to the soldiers of the Eighth Route Army. As an increasing number of eligible males were mobilized to the front, women became more strategically significant to the war effort. Due to a shortage of formally-trained medical workers, women’s traditional roles as caregivers were considered important alternatives in correcting this deficit. Because it was not viable for the quick-moving guerrillas to carry the wounded by way of railway lines, given the Japanese blockhouses stationed nearby, the wounded and sick were often sent to farmers who were deemed loyal to the resistance causes. In many cases, women were left without any medical supplies—not to mention necessary food rations—to cure the wounded or sick. Usually, peasant women were left alone to tend to and feed the sick or wounded. The oral histories compiled by scholars recount stories of women saving eggs to offer the necessary nutrition to severely wounded and possibly malnourished soldiers. Given that many soldiers and refugees died from a lack of vitamins, women who offered food and nutrition to the wounded were indeed life-savers. These peasant women often found that the soldiers under their care formed life-time friendships with them.

In guerrilla zones, women offered indispensable protection to the moving armies and passing cadres. Many of the “loyal households” (bao lei hu) offered reliable and long-term protection for subjects, and she was criticized for her exposure of gender issues. If Zhenzhen were to seek the female self, she might be mostly disappointed in Yan’an. For a discussion on Ding Ling’s essay, see Barlow, 316-21.

101 LNRZJSH, 275-6.
the CCP soldiers. Women managed many of the “loyal households”; since they were considered to be “alert and detail-oriented,” they were more capable and fit for taking jobs related to the security of resistance soldiers or cadres.\textsuperscript{102}

Although the CCP demanded that rural women engage in challenging work, the Party did not provide a support network that freed women from their domestic duties\textsuperscript{103} The issue of women’s welfare was put on the agenda—at least on paper. Women leaders demanded maternal leave and were rewarded with certain policies that gave women benefits. Deng Yingchao, who did not have children of her own, urged the CCP community to heed to the “special needs” of women. Cai Chang, the chief of the CCP Women’s Department and a mother of two, also demanded the establishment of childcare centers. The primitive facilities that were available to the CCP women cadres were not, however, accessible to peasant women, who were left behind in the development of the Communist social welfare system. This bias had a lasting impact on the Communist regime, even after it took over the mainland in 1949. The peasant population was treated unfavorably for quite a long time in terms of social welfare.

Commensurate with this bias, the resources made available to relieve peasant women from domestic duties were by no means adequate. Childcare services, for example, were threatened by the lack of transportation, food shortages, constant Japanese aerial bombardments, and epidemics. Losing children or forced separated from newborns was quite common during the war.\textsuperscript{104} It was not rare for high-ranking official’s wives to give up their children. Such cases

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 273.

\textsuperscript{103} In order to free women from family duties, childcare centers and some canteen services were developed for CCP women workers in Yan’an, if not in all the CCP areas.

\textsuperscript{104} For a personal account of the separation of mothers and their children, see Zeng Zhi, 1993.
were seen with Mao Zedong’s wife, He Zizhen, during the Long March. Similar stories happened to women who worked in precarious situations during the Second Sino-Japanese War as well.

When danger approached, women were often forced to make nearly impossible choices. Both cadres and peasant women told stories of how mothers were forced to give up their children, usually when the army was chased by the enemy. In some cases, women were forced to kill their babies because their cries could easily attract attention.¹⁰⁵

Local cadres organized rural women into small teams in order to fulfill specific tasks. Cadres selected one or two women activists to be team leaders to ensure the fulfillment of work in shoe or cloth making. Those who were interviewed in the 1990s tell the details of the organization scheme and how they conducted work under frequent Japanese surveillance.

Researchers: Where did the cloth for making shoes and clothes come from? Are they yours?

Liu Shengcai (Liu as follows): The cloth for making shoes and socks are from the peasant women, however those for uniforms are sent from above. The cadres instructed us to start making shoes when the intelligence information informed us that the Japanese was not coming for search of communist activities, to hide (cloth, uniforms, shoes, socks, and any signs of cloth-making) from the visible places when message came that the Japanese were likely to launch campaigns to look for the communists. That was how we conducted with big project by doing work together. We assigned small projects to be finished by women in their own homes. I was a team leader, so I always took the tasks that could not be distributed to other members easily. My mother was responsible for the washing team then. Once our military units arrived, we started washing, mending and cooking. This often was what we were doing all day long.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Women soldiers of the Long March also reported being forced to abandon or kill their babies during unusual military situations. Not only soldiers of lower ranks but also those of higher positions were forced to give up their newborns. For example, during the Long March, He Zizhen, Mao’s wife, was forced to give up two of her newborns. For a description of the painful experience, see Chang, 76-182.

¹⁰⁶ Li, LNRZJSY, 264.
What Liu recounts reveals three main points about rural women’s work. First, women sometimes used their own resources (in this case, cloth) to keep the communist army clothed, for which they were unlikely to have received monetary compensation. Second, peasant women worked for the communist causes under precarious conditions. They risked being subjected to Japanese brutality if their work was discovered. Third, a variety of work was distributed to women based on their age. Young women were more likely to be designated to make shoes or uniforms for the army, while older women were often engaged in washing and cooking tasks. Keeping the army fed and clothed was a challenging task.

In a time when the very issue of survival was at stake, why did peasant women work for the Communist army when it seemed the return was so minimal? Western scholars have tried to answer the question by recourse to women’s mobilization and movements, while Chinese Marxist scholars have offered a grand narrative of patriotism and determined devotion to resistance cause. They argue that the CCP mass mobilization was quite successful in liberating women from patrilineal kinship system and remolding women into politically conscious beings. Oral history materials did provide ample evidence of women’s voluntary contribution to the CCP resistance effort and military expansion at local levels. The voluntary

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107 The return often included political recognition in public meetings; see Chapter Four.


109 Xiao Yang, Nüxing xueke yanjiu zongsu-zhongguo funü yundong shi yanjiu zongshu, 316.

110 For example, Han Huiru explained her work for the CCP as a voluntary act driven by her patriotism. See Han Huiru, Zhengzhen de gongchandangren (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2007).
nature of women’s contribution could also be easily read as patriotic acts, sometimes driven by the brutality of the Japanese occupation regime.\footnote{For a discussion on the nature of the regime, resistance, and collaboration, see Konrad M. Lawson, \textit{Wartime Atrocities and the Politics of Treason in the Ruins of Japanese Empire}, Ph.D dissertation, 2012, Harvard University.} In addition to political mobilization, patriotism, and the sense of collective purpose developed in the making and imagining of a socialist China (see Chapter 4), were there other factors that explained peasant women’s altruistic behaviors towards the CCP soldiers during wartime? Did Confucian values of benevolence and the traditional interpretation of virtue play a role in it? While it would be hard to provide evidence to support the argument, a woman named Zhang Jingzhi’s testimony deserves attention, for it provides a story that hasn’t been told by official history yet: the mandatory nature of the CCP work required by peasant women. Zhang talked to the interviewer about the early stages of the war:

Cadres from the women’s national associations were very demanding. Nobody dared to resist making shoes or clothes for the Red Army once raw materials were distributed. It was mandatory, nobody can escape from that. Each household had an assigned quantity to be made. There was no mending machines, all were made by hand. Some said that they were not able to finish all the projects within the given time. Then they usually were given a couple of days more to get the projects done. You did not have the choice to not to make it. It wasn’t until much later new policy was made in accordance with the productivity of each household. Usually it was determined by the size of the land a household tilted.\footnote{Ibid., 262.}

Only made available in the 1990s, the oral history materials reveal a hidden history that was not seen in the official narrative of the war and revolution in modern China. The CCP regime did use power to impose production on rural women and taxed their productivity without properly

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112 Ibid., 262.
recognizing the economy of rural households, a phenomenon seen in the beginning years of the Second Sino-Japanese War, according to Zhang’s testimony.

Wives and daughters of rich peasants or landlords were usually in the most controversial positions concerning mandatory tasks. They were categorized as a potential threat to China’s revolution by the class theory introduced by the CCP. The political environment was critical of them, and resistance from them was answered by oppression. Even in the 1990s, a representative Communist woman continued to use critical language to condemn women from privileged backgrounds, as in this account recorded by David Goodman:

Rich peasants and landlords (funong he dizhu) were afraid of losing their property. Rich women were ideologically backward. They used simply paper or oiled-paper for making the soles of the shoes. Those shoes were of bad quality and could not last long. Once such shoes were discovered, the shoemaker would be criticized in our mass meetings and be punished to make ten more pair of shoes for each pair of bad quality.

Perhaps dissatisfaction among rich women was not surprising, due to the existence of coercive practices; Goodman shares stories of women who were an active part of the Licheng Rebellion against local CCP authorities.

**Making Communist Subjects**

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113 For a discussion on women from well-off families and their response towards the CCP mass mobilization, see David Goodman, 2000.

114 Ibid., 262.
Regardless of the danger, political pressure, or material shortage, peasant women revealed an inclination to identify with CCP resistance causes. Talking about the danger in working for the communist guerrilla forces, Liu Shengcai was asked whether she took the tasks willingly. Liu replied:

Of course, I was very happy to be able to do something (for them). All people worked together for the same purpose. We did not work for money or fame … We were working for the national salvation. The idea of resisting Japanese and saving our nation was made widely known then. We even sewed slogans into the underwear we made for the soldiers to show our support. I remember some of the slogans were “annihilate the enemies completely” (che di sha di), “fight to the last moment” (zhan zheng dao di), and “resist Japanese and save our nation” (kang ri jiu guo).115

Another woman named Zhang Xiaoxia also remembered how women in her village saved their food for resistance forces in difficult times:

Our village is located in the most barren area, and the living there was very difficult. We relied heavily on wild plants for food in time of deprivation, however, we always saved the best for our soldiers. There was one occasion when it was the first day of the New Year, we got some white flour for making dumplings. White flour was very valuable back then, and it was reserved for the New Year. When the dumplings were ready, our army happened to arrive, and we offered the dumplings, the best food we ever had, to the soldiers. Anyway, we did what we could for the good of our soldiers.116

Women’s identification with Communist resistance led them to recognize and accept the Communist vision of China’s future. This inclination occurred not only in women but also in

115 Li, 264.
116 Ibid., 259.
men. Recent research by Henrietta Harrison on Liu Dapeng (1857-1942)—the impoverished and marginalized provincial-degree-holder who did not fall to any of the convenient categorization of scholar-peasant-merchant-artisan—reveals that male peasants in Japanese occupied areas most likely were happy to see the Red Army’s resistance campaigns. Liu Dapeng, an aging man who had previously remained distant from politics, kept records of the Red Army’s movements in his diary diligently.\(^{117}\) Resistance and patriotism were elements that helped the CCP gain support from the Chinese peasantry and that created a space for CCP language and ideas to gain currency in local milieus. In the oral history projects, peasant women from the war years used a revolutionary vocabulary that was not seen in later generations. Gail Hershatter notices a similar phenomenon in her interviews with women in two rural communities in Shannxi. She suggests that rural women might have accumulated the revolutionary vocabulary during the years of resistance.\(^{118}\)

This identification with the resistance effort led peasants to go further and agree upon a future revolution that might bring a new societal order. Talking about her unusual deed of selling

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Liu Dapeng’s survival strategy under Japanese occupation once again illustrates the complex meaning of survival for ordinary Chinese during the occupation. Compromises and resistance took unusual forms for struggles over maintaining life. According to Harrison, the aging man’s strategy should be understood from both the long history of impoverishment in rural China and the immediate crisis and pressures brought by Japanese aggression. Liu conducted a well-off lifestyle during the late Qing and early Republican periods, when his occupation as school instructor and, later, his investment in local coal mines brought a decent income for the extended family, including Liu and Liu’s sons’ families. However, the Liu family’s economic condition deteriorated steadily parallel to the general trend of China’s rural bankruptcy during the Republican period. The family was forced to rely on their land, which did not promise much. When the Japanese came, a grandson of the Liu family served as a military doctor for the Japanese army and eventually became an official in the hygiene department of the puppet government (since the grandson was apprenticed to a maternal uncle who had been a Japanese-trained doctor earlier). Liu Dapeng himself agreed to draft a declaration of surrender to the Japanese upon the request of local prison warden, the only remaining official. However, Liu kept his resistance in a private method. He wrote his thoughts, concerns with China, and hostility towards the Japanese invasion in his diary, an activity he had carried on during his entire life, and which became Harrison’s primary source for her research on the particular history of China surrounding Liu’s experiences.

\(^{118}\) Gail Hershatter, 2008.
twenty mu of her land to support the CCP.\textsuperscript{119} Niu Wenying said, “Our party was truly poor then. My brothers and I learned that there were many organizations like our party elsewhere in the world. They helped to turn the dark world into the one full of hope. The final victory belonged to us, and by then we would achieve world harmony. But the current issue was that our party was too poor to operate properly, so we decided to sell the land to financially support it.”\textsuperscript{120} This vision was not only inspired by the CCP’s activities in the local communities, it was also driven by a shared idealism and common goals for humankind.

\textbf{Women’s Own Voices}

Chinese Communist discourse and official history have created a heroic story of the women’s mobilization during the eight years of “extreme difficulty” (\textit{jianku zuojue}) during the War of Resistance. This version of history frames women’s mobilization as an integral part of the great Chinese Women’s Movement, and conveys a narrative of Chinese women’s “liberation” under the leadership of the party.\textsuperscript{121} The practice of writing women’s history has warned about the dangers of taking official history or experience for granted.

Only recently, with the publication of Li Xiaojiang’s research on women’s oral history and some post-Mao autobiographies, did we start to hear the private voices of women, though not

\textsuperscript{119} 1 mu is equal to 0.164 acre.

\textsuperscript{120} RNRZJSH, 268.

\textsuperscript{121} Communist discourse and the official history have their own history of shaping and development. Researchers are required to examine the contextual and discursive environment from which these discourses have been developed.
entirely free from the ideological framework of the Maoist era. Nonetheless, we are able to comprehend the world of private individuals from the history that has long gone.

Women’s own memoirs, appearing in the 1990s, offer women’s perspectives with which to examine the CCP resistance. Their personal narratives shed light on all spheres of existence under the extreme conditions of war and trauma. Long March veteran women mourned the loss of youth and beauty in the most tedious years of fighting and marching before landing at Yan’an. Being forced to abandon one’s baby could became the most painful memory of a lifetime, although in some places, killing or giving up babies was customary practice when times became extremely difficult. Women were particularly vulnerable when they acted in supportive roles by sending loved ones to the front, which often resulting in being deserted for years afterwards. Some women sustained incredible deprivation during the war without receiving compensation from the Communist regime, although their husbands had enlisted in the Eighth Route Army. In women’s own stories, heroic deeds did not necessarily generate pride—a national emotion that the state successfully endorsed both during the eight years of extreme conflict and in the following decades. Women’s first-person accounts were a far cry from the picture painted by the CCP official history.

In guerrilla war zones as well as in moving military units, coping with pregnancy, childbirth, and child care made women particularly vulnerable to mental anguish and extreme acts of physical endurance—whether through abortion by choice, forced abortion, bearing children, killing a baby because its cries jeopardized others.122

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122 The same dominant force was experienced by women soldiers of the Long March. See Chang Jinzhu, Zhandi nüjie—changzhengzhong de hongjun nü zhansi (Women in the battlefield—a record of Long March women soldiers) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006).
It was not necessarily the party’s network but the commonplace interconnections arising from women’s friendships that gave women significant help for surviving betrayal, hunger, and other forms of danger in a time filled with war devastations. Luo Yun, a young woman cadre who found herself pregnant, constantly received aid from local women whom she befriended. These women offered her gifts such as hand-made shoes, a coat, a jacket, eggs, white flour, and even free childcare. She believes that it was the friendly community of rural women who made her survival possible. During one difficult experience, when she was sought after by the Japanese soldiers, Luo and other communist cadres decided to take refuge in an underground tunnel. Underground tunnels prepared by the resistance soldiers were usually small and dark. Babies cried in these dark tunnels, and their cries could attract the attention of the enemy. Under these extreme conditions, personal accounts include cases of mothers who were forced to suffocate their babies. Knowing the danger Communist woman faced by bringing her baby on an escape route, Madam Wang, a rural woman and Luo’s local connection, decided to take the baby with her. The baby was fed with four rural women’s milk and survived the military campaign.¹²³ Xu Ming, a woman cadre who also initiated her rural work by relying on support from Madam Wang, tells another story of receiving domestic comfort from this same woman. Madam Wang not only offered a safe place of refuge for those Communist cadres (both male and female) in the guerrilla zones but also a home for the Communist cadres who were separated from their own families. Decades later, Madam Wang’s dishes of fried napa seasoning with red peppers, steamed rice, and green onion pancakes were still vivid in Xu Ming’s memory.¹²⁴ Madam Wang made her house into a warm haven for Communist women cadres.

¹²³ RNRZJSH, 291-2.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 292.
These rural women’s altruistic behaviors toward Communist women often went beyond politics. It reflected a socialization of motherhood and friendship. This connection was most meaningful, for it illustrates the entanglement of survival and resistance—sometimes resistance meant to survive with dignity. We do not know how prevalent the behavior was, but its existence was certainly meaningful for these women involved. The good deeds of peasant women were deeply appreciated by those who received the benefits.

**Conclusion**

Gender figured prominently in the making of the Communist resistance regime. Peasant women were mobilized to serve the developing needs of the base areas and to support the war effort. Rural women were expected to extract these women’s domestic skills, such as cloth making, nurturing, and caring for others in order to help the Communist army. Rural women played a major role in sustaining the CCP Army and its expansion on the North China Plain. Their contribution to the war effort was interpreted within the framework of nationalism and patriotism in the CCP official history, which has long denied them a language of their own to address issues associated with gender-specific inequalities.

The Chinese Communist State privileged national survival over gender equality in its political campaigns. Rural women were encouraged to establish roles in political and productive arenas under the theory of national salvation. Though it persuaded rural women to be part of the revolutionary force, it did not, however, allow women to create techniques to address immediate issues in gender hierarchy. Even within women’s own groups, there were inequalities among
female cadres and rural women in accessing political resources and power, which might have contributed to the profound boundaries between rural and urban regions afterwards.

Despite its flaws, the CCP revolutionary vocabulary instilled a deep political sensibility in peasant women. Research shows that many rural women spoke about establishing a new relationship between themselves and the larger world beyond their families through the tools introduced to them by the women cadres. By being part of the resistance effort, many rural women experienced their daily lives differently. The political activities helped to create a sense of inclusiveness. Rural women appeared in history as part of a new social category that possessed resources for revolutionary change for their own and other's lives.
Epilogue

The War of Resistance inevitably tested the boundaries of gender norms. Chinese women found themselves in challenging and unsettling circumstances, and often took broadly-defined roles in the public in order to mobilize social and political resources for national causes. When human and material resources were stretched to the utmost in this total war, Chinese women self-mobilized or were mobilized to work in full capacities in nursing, orphan relief, propaganda, munitions, and frontline services. The resistance efforts brought women to unprecedented responsibilities and enhancements of power, if only temporary.

Their wartime positions often asked them to embrace elements of both feminine and masculine qualities: they were often in care-taking businesses and in enterprises supportive of China’s war effort, although often in roles where they expressed qualities associated with independence, assertiveness, and rationality. What was more, their wartime work demanded them to challenge traditional norms of staying within the realm of domesticity. What they did during the war for public and soldier relief acquired political meaning for women. They established themselves as modern professionals such as political workers and educators amidst the vicissitudes of war and violence.

Embracing aspects of both genders does not mean that women became more masculine and less feminine. Women’s wartime actions demonstrated their initiative to negotiate with their social surroundings and the nation to mark out a new subject-position for women, who were politically active and socially resourceful on a national scale. Both the Nationalist and the Communist women were part of the history-making during the War of Resistance. They did not
fight for ideology in the eight years: they fought to be part of the resistance force and to be part of the dialogue about nation-building against the backdrop of Japanese invasion.

Women portrayed themselves as national citizens who shared half of the responsibility for national reconstruction, and took civil pride from their patriotic deeds. During the war, Chinese women gained greater mobility and visibility in public arenas, and cultivated a profound sense of politicization in their relief works in nursing, war orphan relief, frontline service, and propaganda work. Their public activities brought them into leadership positions, which often demanded independent and strategic performances in order to survive the deprivation of the war. In the meantime, women’s activities became the embodiment of their commitment to the collective goals of the nation, which represented a drastic change from their May-Fourth sisters’ championing of individual subjectivities and romantic love.

Women’s resistance activities were rich in varieties and broad in scope. Their work touched a wide region within China and also showed a cosmopolitan spirit in their efforts to reach beyond the scope of national borders, reflecting the nature of their local and national conflict as a global total war. The Nationalist women, for example, extended their voices to the U.S., England, and Australia. Not only did they want to reach their counterparts in other nations, but also they expressed the desire to communicate China’s struggle against colonial power to a larger political world beyond China.

Differences in women’s work between the Communist state and the Nationalist regime did exist during the war. The resistance was dominated by two powerful political figures, Jiang Jieshi and Mao Zedong. Both the Nationalist and Communist regimes attempted to mobilize women for resistance purposes while containing women’s activism under the control of
patriarchal nationalism. They shared the common goal of conscripting female sacrifice on the male territory of combat. This dissertation reveals that the disorganized Nationalist regime was neither able nor willing to maintain and nurture the growth of women’s wartime activism, while the Communist regime actively institutionalized the development of women’s work in rural regions. The resulting differences were remarkable: politically conscious women during the war distanced themselves from politics in Nanjing, while rural women increasingly developed a profound identification with the Communist regime in Yanan. This trend in women’s activism continued into the Civil War era, which needs historically conscious research in order to explain the connection between women’s political mobilization and activism and the CCP’s taking over of the mainland in 1949.

The difference in ideological orientation between the GMD and the CCP did not exert visible influence on women’s wartime work. It was the resistance cause but not the ideology that drew women into wartime resistance activism. However, distinctions did exist. Women in Nationalist China were able to exert a remarkable degree of freedom and creativity of their own in creating social welfare programs for war orphans, gaining resources and offering relief for Chinese soldiers, and establishing highly professional nursing for the Nationalist army. The Communist women cadres, however, followed strict party guidelines to mobilize peasant women. The latter were not allowed to criticize the patriarchy that governed their lives in order to ensure full support from the male peasants.

This dissertation on Chinese women and war contributes to current scholarship on a revision of women’s history in modern China by challenging official accounts, which have subjugated women’s resistance as part of the CCP women’s movements in an effort to centralize and control the discourse on women’s appropriate relationship to the CCP Party state. According to the
CCP’s official interpretation in mainland China, there was only one, singular type of resistance, and it was led by CCP women cadres. This purposeful interpretation has carelessly erased the efforts made by Nationalist women and many more non-party affiliated women, whose public activities were indispensable components of the civil society during the war. My research reveals that patriotic women worked with the Nationalist regime in a non-confrontational, mutually-beneficial mode, which challenges recent work on civil society that claims the public sphere must operate in opposition to the state.
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