

SHAPING THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY'S IMAGE:
HISTORICAL ROOTS TO MODERN TRENDS

by

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Traditional Chinese society did much to devalue and stigmatize soldiers. During the Chinese civil war the Chinese Communist Party's military campaign had to recruit large numbers of soldiers. This began a long struggle to undo traditional stereotypes held against soldiers. Later, peacetime saw the PLA at the forefront of massive propaganda campaigns, which eventually led to a zenith in popular imagery. Modern observers of China are noting how fast, far and widespread efforts are to modernize the massive PLA. This new PLA requires a new kind of soldier, one who is comfortable with a computer. Ironically, the technology that makes modernization of the PLA possible also strengthens the civilian economy, creating a strong disincentive for highly educated youths to join the army. As a result, the modern Chinese government has once again embarked on a massive campaign to strengthen the prestige of the PLA in China.

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To my family.

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CHAPTER I

ROOTS OF THE MODERN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY

Scholastic research has, in large part, ignored the role which gathering, recruiting and retaining an army played in Chinese society. Yet, in many ways this scholastic gap simply mirrors the Confucian conception of soldiers. Traditional Confucian society did much to devalue the societal and economic prestige of this class. As a Chinese proverb explains, ‘Good iron is not used for making nails as good men are not used for making soldiers.’¹ In the classic vertical ranking of society, joining the military was considered the least of choices. “Traditionally, the Chinese divided the people into five social classes, according to social importance: scholars, farmers, artisans, merchants and soldiers.”² Society ordered itself around the scholar-officials serving government positions. Such positions provided officials with social status and a steady income that could lead to increased family standing. After winning an official administrative position through success in the imperial exam system, markers or placards were placed outside households of winners, conveying the greatness of this accomplishment to the public. The collective household (*jiating* 家庭) was then marked as special within greater Confucian society. Thus, “The most

1 David A. Graff and Robert Higham, *A Military History of China* (Westview Press, 2002), 26.

2 Graff 2002, p. 148.

prestigious career in Qing society was that of the scholar-official.^{3,4}

Yet, like many complex and long lasting societal phenomena, the career of a scholar-official was not without its complications. For all the tangible societal and economic gains two, sometimes conflicting Confucian forces served to dissuade potential scholars. While the central family was recognized in the scholastic ceremony, official positions often required capable males to leave their families for extended periods of time as different, obligatory, postings around the Empire arose. Thus, the scholar-official was sometimes placed in a position of choosing between loyalty to the greater nation (*zhong* 忠) and filial piety (*xiao* 孝). This condition, combined with a perception of the corrupting nature of greater politics, was noted in popular literature during the Ming and Qing dynasties, while contemporary examinations of Confucian society note the discomfort, fear and even potential danger of such posts. “Certainly more than one man must have wondered whether the prestige or promise of broader power and influence was worth leaving familiar surroundings and even a life of ease – or worse, risking life and limb.”⁵ These complexities between loyalty and filial piety in even the highest of social rankings help highlight the extreme undesirability of military service. Soldiering combined all the least appealing aspects of Confucian society, provided no recognition for the household (*jiating* 家庭), little money, unequalled personal danger and, by nature, the

3 This development of this scholar-official class had begun in the Song dynasty (960-1279)

4 Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1987), 123.

5 Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (SUNY Press, 2007), 84.

removal of a coveted strong young male from the household.

Indeed, the degradation of Chinese soldiers as backwards, somewhat foolish persons is long lasting as seen in this cartoon from the 1980's.⁶



This cartoon depicts the returning PLA youth engaging in village choirs, yet the young soldier is ignorant of the changes occurring in 1980's China. The depiction of him unaware of running water, illustrates a simple message. Even in the latter period of Chinese history, soldiers have been faced with social stigmas that regard them as uneducated, naive and ignorant. Thus, for various and persistent factors, the mobilization of soldiers faced overcoming Chinese societal norms as well as generalized civilian animosity. This has been true throughout both dynastic and contemporary China.

Beyond societal and Confucian norms that lowered the prestige and social acceptance given soldiers, tangible Chinese history itself worked strongly against popular support of armies. Beginning in the waning decades of the Han

⁶ C. E. Bled, *Understanding China through cartoons* (Society for a Better Understanding of China, 1985), 45.

dynasty (206 BCE-220 AD) Chinese rulers faced with economic decline, continuous invasions and an overburdened populace began enlisting criminals and foreign mercenaries into the army. “Han Emperors maintained a large army of more than one million men. The conscription system however, did not meet the extraordinary demands of frequent wars ... The later Han emperors began to include criminals and mercenaries in the army.”⁷ Not surprisingly, the new armies did not always act in the best interests of the commoners. Looting, destruction of property and various crimes became commonplace among many units of the new armies. The collapse of the Han dynasty followed soon after these military measures. Successive dynasties, throughout Chinese history, were faced with declining states and often followed this same model. As they began enlisting anyone who would join the army, destruction, loss of life and general chaos often followed. Thus, criminals and foreign mercenaries pressed into a makeshift national defense force not only directly threatened the welfare of the common people, but became a sign of failing rule and chaos between dynasties.

Indeed, the drive to create new kinds of armies continued until the very end of dynastic Chinese history. In the 1800's as the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) found itself increasingly unable to defend its ports, trade centers and cities from foreign incursion, many inside and outside the government began pushing for military modernizations. Eventually such reforms did take place. Beginning in the late 1860's, China began a vigorous campaign to incorporate Western technology and weapons

⁷ Li, Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (The University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 18.

into the dynastic armies. After modernization began these reforms received substantial attention, and real progress in strengthening the army did occur. “By the turn of the century [1900], China's New Army was a far more effective force [than old dynastic armies].”⁸

While attention, time and money poured into creating a new army equipped with Western weapons, old customs hindered the scope of potential reforms. “Unfortunately, the New Army could not save the empire because the Manchu rulers refused to carry the reforms beyond weaponry.”⁹ The Emperors were unwilling to change dynastic regulations that governed the military. Many centuries of rule had created an elaborate system that helped insulate the political center from the military, sheltered the Emperor from coups and protected political reputation from military failure. Amid such concerns the political center forbade substantive changes in the military chain of command, training or ideology. Unfortunately, modern weapons and battle tactics were incompatible with regulations that had been established when far different technologies dominated the battlefield. Compounding China's problems, corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement in the new forces further plagued modernization. These inadequacies, combined with a number of problems faced by a declining state, doomed the new forces to ultimate military failure. As China's new military lost battle after battle to foreign enemies, the new recruits' morale became substantially affected. “...The early recruits were soon disillusioned by the government's corruption, mismanagement, and worst of all, its

8 Xiaobing 2007, p. 38.

9 Xiaobing 2007, p. 38.

failure against European, American and Japanese forces...”¹⁰

Thus, with the ultimate fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 China was faced with new, militarily modernized and numerically substantial armies that had become disillusioned with the old empire. As central authority crumbled regional leaders who could command direct loyalty and control over various units began carving up pieces of China. This marked the beginning of warlordism in China. “Warlordism arose as a consequence of a militarization of politics that accompanied the fall of China's last imperial dynasty.”¹¹ As regional commanders maneuvered for position and power, life in these new micro-kingdoms became progressively crushing and oppressive for average citizens. “The conditions of warlordism had a devastating effect on the lives of the Chinese people ... The people were burdened with new taxes and loans raised by warlord rulers to support their growing armies, while funding for education and other public services was drastically reduced.”¹² Adding to these burdens, the new armies, often owing little geographic, political or cultural loyalty to their current position, became notoriously cruel to the locals. “The provincial armies were ... notoriously corrupt, and feared by the local peasantry.”¹³ In the wake of such hardship and destruction, the warlord period, lasting from 1912 until 1927, became a particularly dark chapter in Chinese history.

Eventually, the combined forces of the Goumindong and the newly

10 Xiaobing 2007, p. 27.

11 Graff 2002, p. 175.

12 Graff 2002, p. 189.

13 John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (OUP for RIIA, 1966), 50.

formed Chinese Communist Party (CCP) put an end to the warlord era in the 1926-1927 Northern Expedition. However, the problems of war and armies in China only grew worse. Beginning with the 1937 Japanese invasion, China entered yet another period of endemic warfare. For a full eight years China was caught in a power struggle between the Empire of Japan, the Guomindong and the CCP. In the course of these eight years "...Over 100 million homeless refugees (almost a quarter of the population) fled to to the interior [primarily from coastal cities] Over 20 million civilians lost their lives. Families were torn apart. Countless widows were left to fend for themselves... countless husbands and brothers were forcibly pressed into service. Many died on the battlefield, others succumbed to wounds left untreated, and yet others to starvation and diseases."¹⁴ Following the defeat of the Japanese Empire in 1945 the Guomindong and CCP continued to battle over control of China for four more years. Thus, China found itself in nearly forty years of warfare. It is hard to overestimate the sheer destruction, loss of life and trauma this left on the country and its people. "With such losses came a brutalization process that touched the entire population and left long lasting scars."¹⁵

It was during this period of chaos and destruction that the CCP came into existence. Founded in 1921, amid endemic warfare, the communists came to the decided realization that without a strong military branch of their own they would not survive the turbulent times. Thus, on August 1, 1927, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was officially born. As one more political and military party vying for support,

14 Graff 2002, p. 224.

15 Graff 2002, p. 224.

the Communists made the wise realpolitik decision to gain popular support for the PLA by becoming the likable military faction. “To achieve success in a military era ... the Communist Party ultimately had to find a way to accommodate military power within their political structure¹⁶.” In its early years the PLA contained large numbers of ex-warlord soldiers, peasant militiamen, fresh recruits, bandits and even fugitives.¹⁷ In order to resolve the apparent paradox between orderly civil, likable behavior and the amalgamation of the disparate and often uncivil available soldiering base, the PLA began implementing a series of top-down decrees designed to garner popular support – the most famous being the ‘Three Rules and Eight Injunctions’ delivered by Mao Zedong in 1928 that became the PLA’s ‘disciplinary catechism’, which survived, with a few minor changes, to the civil war’s end and official Chinese unification in 1949.¹⁸ Rules such as “Take not even a needle or thread from the people,” “Replace all doors and return all straw on which you sleep before leaving a house,” “Speak courteously to the people, “Help them whenever possible” and “Pay for everything damaged,” are often extremely specific in detailing behavior designed, and required, to increase the newly formed PLA’s reputation among the people.¹⁹

Not only did such regulations fit well with the general precepts of communism, but they legitimately served to greatly increase the PLA’s civilian-military reputation. “Adherence to these commandments would make the Red Army

16 Graff 2002, p. 190.

17 Gittings 1966, p. 103.

18 Gittings 1966, p. 103.

19 Graff 2002, p. 235.

markedly different from the existing Chinese armies, particularly the predatory warlord armies... The comparatively good behavior of the Red Army in part explains how Communist soldiers won the “hearts and minds” of the Chinese people.”²⁰ In many ways the early formation of the PLA became dependent on establishing a party that could overcome the chaos sweeping the country. The early PLA became more than a military faction, it became an amalgamation of people with the ability and doctrine to secure order and peace to the nation. Amid the warfare an army was needed, but the PLA took great pains in distinguishing itself from the other forces that ravaged the land. Thus, securing recruitment, gaining acceptance and eventual national domination was, in large part, accomplished by the PLA becoming a civilizing force in an era of extreme destruction.

Such practices worked extremely well during wartime. Yet, as successful as these policies had been in generating popular support, they were largely limited to the period of civil war. In 1950, hardly one year after unification, war broke out on the Korean peninsula. China, aiding the North Korean invasion of the south, was faced with an entirely new recruitment dynamic. While the PLA leadership relied heavily upon the experiences gained during the civil war, a multitude of new factors existed that made mobilization for this conflict of paramount importance and fundamentally different from past conflicts. For the first time in the PLA’s then 22-year-old history mobilization was required without direct threat to, or war on, Chinese soil. Yet, the strategic importance of Korea was long known and respected. “The Korean Peninsula borders on Manchuria, the homeland of the Qing Dynasty

²⁰ Graff 2002, p. 236.

and, in later years the most industrial part of China.”²¹ Such security concerns had driven the Qing dynasty to war, and subsequent embarrassing defeat, in the 1894-5 with Japan. Furthermore China, while unified, was hardly completely politically stable.

The Korean war imposed a heavy burden on the Chinese Government, already faced with the task of winning the support of a population of which more than three-quarters had only come under communist control in the past three to four years. The combination of continued internal unrest with a major external war meant that the need to secure mass support was all the more urgent, since the alternative would be doubly disastrous.²²

Beyond the importance of Korea and the conflict itself, various political and international factors contributed heavily to the complexities of the time. For one, China, politically, could not declare war on the United States, much less the newly formed United Nations, from which China was hoping to gain formal statehood recognition. “Fighting by China’s armed forces, against those of the United Nations ...at the very time when Beijing was insisting upon and hoping for agreement to that formal recognition [was not an option].”²³ To this end, the central government insisted that its soldiers were simply overcome with ‘revolutionary sympathy’ for their North Korean brethren. While this was – largely – a political fiction, a significant degree of genuine popular support was required to add some degree of plausibility. Yet, legally, no framework for drafting soldiers existed in 1950. “The

21 Sarah Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34.

22 Gittings 1966, p. 83.

23 S. M. Chiu, “The Journal of Asian Studies”, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Feb., 1968), p. 293.

Chinese Communists had begun work on a new military service law. Its final form was approved by the National People's Congress in July, 1955. Up to that time, the Communists had relied on volunteers for their source of armed personnel."²⁴ Further complicating matters, the United States, having just emerged as the dominant world power presented a highly intimidating adversary. "In the early period of China's entry into the war, there was among the rank and file a profound fear and a sense of uncertainty about engaging the American forces and their superior equipment."²⁵ Thus the Chinese entry into the Korean War was both hugely important to China while simultaneously presenting traditional cultural aversions to soldiering, a particularly feared adversary and a need to mobilize an entirely volunteer military base. This was the political reality the newly consolidated Communist party found itself in, and realizing its gravity the CCP, set about reordering the basic conception of Chinese society.

Taking both the importance and difficulties of military requirement in 1950's China to heart, the central government began a series of nationwide campaigns to generate the kind of mass popular support needed to promote sufficient voluntary enlistment. First the central government appealed to patriotic pride and nationalism to generate recruitment through loyalty to the state. While South Korea was officially defended by the United Nations, soldiers from the United States vastly outnumbered commitments from any other nation save South Korea itself. Given the persisting fear among potential recruits, and no doubt their families, of directly

24 S. M. Chiu, "Far Eastern Survey", Vol. 27, No. 11 (Nov., 1958), p. 170.

25 Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, (University Press of Kansas, 1995), 188.

engaging American soldiers in battle, a key component in the successful appeal to loyalty was the explicit blaming of America and American imperialism for the calamities, suffering and hardships of the previous era. This was accomplished by likening the United States to Imperial Japan and crediting the Guomindang's existence to United States support. Organizations such as "The Chinese People's Committee to Protect World Peace Against American Aggression" were founded to stress the importance of understanding America's involvement in past China's sufferings.²⁶ A September 1950 handbook published by the 13th Army Corps Political Department titled *Historical Fact of U.S. Imperialist Invasions of China* began a crushing narrative of Sino-American relations, highlighting events such as the unjust Tianjin Treaty of 1858 and assistance given the Guomindang. It further stressed the geopolitical importance of Korea stating, "U.S imperialists are trying to do the same as Japanese imperialist have done to China, namely, to seize Korea first and invade China second."²⁷ The booklet ended by stating "U.S. imperialists are the most dangerous enemy of the Chinese people."²⁸

However, creations of public sentiment and national loyalty were not limited to passive literary narratives. On numerous occasions Chinese People's Volunteers organizers arranged presentations held by Guomindang defectors who claimed to have received personal training from American officers during the revolution. Not only did this help place the burden of an awful and protracted civil

26 Chen Wen-hui C., *Wartime "Mass" Campaigns in Communist China* (Air Force Personnel and Training Research Center, 1955), 1.

27 Shu 1995, pp. 190-191.

28 Shu 1995, p. 191.

war on the United States, but these veterans would further explain that “American troops were spoiled playboys,” and not the hardened warriors they had been misled into fearing.²⁹ Finally, Chinese People’s Volunteers officers would arrange “self-education” activities which detailed, with great personal emotion, the atrocities committed by Guomindang and Japanese soldiers during the past decades. These exercises ended by linking their own experiences with those of contemporary North Korea. “The Chinese soldiers were led to believe that “should we allow U.S. imperialists to invade China, they would inflict the same sufferings on our people.”³⁰ The utilization of such sentiment then became widespread in direct mass mobilization campaigns and local calls for Chinese People’s Volunteers organized by the Volunteer Movement Committee. An article from a 1950 edition of *New China News Agency* described a recruitment drive held at a trade union branch in Beijing with the following statement “The secretary of the branch spoke about the danger of American attacks ... the Americans professed peaceful intentions while ‘aiming a gun at our heart and preparing to pull the trigger’.”³¹ The article further vehemently asserted “Any Chinese volunteering was a true patriot; he would act as a ‘sentry guarding our gates from invaders’.”³²

However, while generating anxiety and animosity towards the United States served a purpose, the ultimate goal was not simple fear or hatred but voluntary

29 Shu 1995, p. 190.

30 Shu 1995, p. 191.

31 Gittings 1966, p. 85.

32 Gittings 1966, p. 85.

enlistment. To that end loyalty and duty to China was linked with real action. Namely enlistment. The official cornerstone in creating and utilizing loyalty to the state was the November 1950 “Resist America, Aid Korea Campaign” (RAAK) which became the central recruitment³³ tool from its creation until war’s end on July 27, 1953.

“[RAAK] main purpose was to generate and diffuse a popular sentiment in support of the government’s action in Korea ... namely by moral exhortations and by appeals to the nation’s sense of patriotism.”³⁴ While five distinct officially sanctioned mass campaigns followed to either supplement efforts in needed areas or suppress counter opinion in others, Resist America Aid Korea Campaign’s primary task remained convincing China’s enormous and diverse population that national security and loyalty was inexorably linked to Korea and only personal action, sacrifice and enlistment could save China. A *People’s Daily* (Renminbao 人民报 报) article published on December 28, 1950 explained, “...the people of all circles are not only spreading their patriotic ardor by speech, but also answering the call of the Fatherland by concrete action.”³⁵

Such rhetoric continued throughout the course of the war, as a further *People’s Daily* article published one year later described, “They not only understand fully that their security is inextricably linked with the fate of the Korean people, but also feel themselves as part of the struggle and are doing their duty for it.”³⁶ Thus the

33. The Resist America , Aid Korea Campaign also became responsible for all manor of wartime activities, such as stimulation of production, monetary donations and voluntary rationing that will not be discussed here.

34 Gittings 1966, p. 87.

35 Gittings 1966, p. 92.

36 Gittings 1966, p. 92.

historic importance of Korea as the gateway to past invasions of China combined with the threat from America was linked to loyalty to China. Voluntary enlistment into the Chinese People's Volunteers³⁷ was highly encouraged as patriotic. Such fusion of mass public sentiment and loyalty is best illustrated by the oath Chinese People's Volunteers would take immediately before entering Korea "For the purpose of opposing U.S. imperialist brutal aggression, assisting the national liberation movement of the Korean brothers, and defending the interests of the Chinese ... we enter the Korean War on our own free will."³⁸

Yet, for however much emphasis was placed on loyalty it seems patriotism and enthusiastic nationalism were, alone, insufficient to compel adequate numbers of youths to leave their homes, families and domestic obligations. China and its citizens, for the first time in decades, found itself in a position of geopolitical stability in which farms, cities and households could be rebuilt. Given the longstanding generalized animosity towards soldiering combined with filial obligations to parents, simple appeals to loyalty, even ones so centrally located, organized on a massive scale and so vigorously promoted as the Resist America Aid Korea campaign, were not enough to convince families to send away able bodied males to, at best, war for years and at worst, injury or death on the battle field. Thus, in the persistent effort to secure sufficient voluntary enlistment the traditional Confucian social organizational system was rearranged by offering heavy material incentives for military enlistment. However, even in the very process of revising

37 In reality the Chinese People's Volunteers functioned as another branch of the existing PLA.

38 Shu 1995, p. 192.

social norms, the deep-seated importance of family relations and obligations to parents could not be escaped. Chinese central leaders reorganized real incentives for soldiering not by paying them higher salaries, giving them more political power or even providing a substantially better military service environment. Instead, tangible economic incentives were given to soldiers by promising to look after their *families* in their stead. Indeed, this promise became a primary factor in enabling potential military recruits to seriously consider joining the Chinese People's Volunteers. "It was politically and socially desirable that the army in Korea and elsewhere should be assured that their families were being looked after - in many cases they had volunteered for service on this assumption."³⁹ Despite the enormous mass-mobilization efforts of Resist America, Aid Korea, traditional Chinese values still held inescapable sway on popular action.

Given the importance of appeasing filial concerns to successful military mobilization, Beijing set about vigorously installing tangible methods to support soldiers' families. First, like many mass campaigns of the time, an official proclamation was issued stating "We, the people, must be responsible for their welfare through relief and aid to their families ...we must cultivate the fields for them, while in the city we must help their families find employment."⁴⁰ City-dwelling families received employment benefits for remaining family members, material donations and even domestic help. In some cases special factories exclusively for families of Chinese People's Volunteers families were opened. These factories

39 Gittings 1966, p. 93.

40 Chen Wen-hui C. 1955, p. 30.

promised increased salary, decreased work hours and improved working conditions. Rural families, seen to especially suffer from the absence of young males, garnered particular attention and received further supplemental legislation to substitute blood filial obligations between members of the village. To this end a further 'Four guarantees' and 'five priorities,' which promised "Thorough plowing, prompt weeding, careful cultivation and a ten percent increased crop yield," while giving priority to Chinese People's Volunteers families in "plowing, weeding, hoeing, harvesting and storing."⁴¹ Actual implementation of these measures was performed by 'substitute labor,' highly reminiscent of past *corvée* labor obligations of imperial China. Rural communities created special labor organizations whose sole purpose was the systematic ordering, scheduling and implementation of surrogate labor.

Yet, despite the political primacy given these campaigns the actual implementation of preferential treatment to families of military dependents was not without resistance. The central government, realizing the importance of keeping the soldier feeling secure in the completion of filial obligations, launched an additional campaign to punish those not supporting the military dependents, stressing such support was not a 'favor' but a 'duty' "...warning against the tendency to regard assistance for dependents as a 'personal favor;' on the contrary, it should be regarded as a routine."⁴² Initial recruitment figures were substantially bolstered as families became convinced they would, in fact, be well looked after in their son(s) absence. In 1952 the Chinese People's Daily ran an article extolling the excellent conditions of

41 Shu 1995, p. 200.

42 Gittings 1966, p. 93.

rural families who had sent their sons away. Not only was China worth fighting for, but their specific military engagement against the United States was helping ‘save the farm’ and the family back home.

Many dependents have written to their children at the front about their happy life in their native places and have asked their children to deal determined blows against the American invaders in order to protect the happy life of their families, to safeguard their farmland ...⁴³

Thus appeasing fears of unfilial behavior was complete; joining the military was not only an acceptable filia action in that it did not deprive the family of work, it actually *helped* one’s parents and family by safeguarding the secure home they, thanks to their status as a military dependent family, now enjoyed.

Indeed, in many cases these campaigns were so successful that joining the military became a more effective way for filial sons to support their family than staying home and tending the fields ever could. Without becoming a narrative regarding landholding laws in early communist China, it is sufficient to say special ‘landlord exemptions’ were given to dependent families allowing those already holding land to retain, or in some cases gain, additional land beyond that of what regular households could hold. Large landholding, once common among official families, became the domain of military families. “The land reform law of June 1950 included ... special privileges for soldiers and their families. They would be exempted from the category of ‘landlord’ and their landholding would remain untouched unless it was markedly excessive.”⁴⁴ In northern China where recruitment was the most successful and has precise statistics, since the area was both closer to the conflict

⁴³ Gittings 1966, p. 95.

⁴⁴ Gittings 1966, p. 86.

itself, and the central authority of Beijing, "...over ten per cent of China's farm land was owned or farmed by army dependents."⁴⁵ While the mass mobilization drives produced impressive numbers of Chinese People's Volunteers, their numbers were nowhere close to ten percent of the region's population. When these landholding figures are combined with the assumption that village members would help cultivate, harvest and store crops for the family back home, the material incentive offered to families of soldiers was truly impressive.

Having thus strongly appealed to national loyalty and subsequently altering the classic Confucian conception of soldiering in relation to filial obligation from a wholly unfilial act to monetarily guaranteeing the welfare of one's family, the central government went one step further and actually *inverted* social prestige. Symbols of status and recognition once reserved for scholar-officials became tools employed to generate additional respect for the PLA, and incentive to for young men to enlist.

The new Communist government actively set about making soldiers, and particularly new recruits, the new Chinese elite. First, Chinese People's Volunteers organizers directly instilled this value in prospective new soldiers. "...a deliberate attempt was made to encourage the recruits to regard themselves as a new elite."⁴⁶ Such local values were reinforced by mass communication from the central government. In newly unified China, undergoing large-scale managerial, political and economic changes, the inversion of past social status from scholar to soldier, was just

45 Gittings 1966, p. 93.

46 Gittings 1966, p. 80.

one of many sweeping dynamic changes. However, neither the importance of recruitment nor the overt central drive to complete this social shift was overlooked by the central government at the time. Articles from large, well-circulated papers from Shanghai to Beijing carried stories denouncing the past imperial degradation of China's emerging elite. One Shanghai paper bluntly asserted "To counteract past influence, they denounce the neglect of military men as a serious deviation [from the past] in the new Communist culture pattern."⁴⁷ Indeed, in the new social dynamic envisioned, one which secured the enlistment of needed servicemen, the PLA became central to continued Chinese security and stability. To this end central government officials began issuing proclamations asserting the PLA's⁴⁸ close ties with Mao Zedong himself. "[The PLA] 'made up of the best sons and daughters of the Chinese people ... personally organized by the great leader of the Chinese people, Chairman Mao.'⁴⁹ Just as past scholar-officials had once directly served the emperor, the PLA now directly served Chairman Mao.

However, the drive to reverse an enormous collective history of social animosity, neglect, and disdain for soldiering was not completed with pure central rhetoric. Actual practices were implemented at the city, village and family level that ensured the 'new social elite' would not be overlooked. First, simply joining the Chinese People's Volunteers entitled fresh recruits and their families to special honor and recognition throughout their respective communities. "Social approval was

47 Chen Wen-hui C. 1955, p. 32.

48 And its corollary, the newly formed Chinese People's Volunteers.

49 Gittings 1966, p. 94.

formally accorded to such families by 'congratulation teams' organized among their neighbors, who would visit them with gifts and ceremonial banners."⁵⁰ The first illustration, from a 1951 *People's Daily* article reads 'It is glorious to take part, to oppose America, support Korea, protect the home and the nation.'" (Illustration 1).⁵¹ The image depicts several young soldiers, supported by their family and congratulated by the entire village. This sense found itself duplicated in many publications of the time. The next illustration is part of a series that details a young soldier's life and achievements. Again, his journey began by being congratulated by his family, and the village. (Illustration 2).⁵² The caption reads "Hero Wang Jiguang born in the small town Shima in the ninth district of Jiang county Sichuan came from a peasant family. In the 'Campaign to Resist American Aggression in Korea' he enlisted in the army and received this ceremonious send-off. At the ceremony his mother pinned a red rose on his breast and instructed him to 'kill many enemies and defend the fruits of the revolution.' Such village gatherings, once enjoyed by successful exam candidates, were now employed in completing the reversal between dynastic officials and PLA soldiers. This honor, the ceremonial capstone that accompanied strong centrally-driven appeals to traditional sentiments of both loyalty and filial piety, became accessible merely upon enlistment. Given the importance of this recognition, a second, more prestigious recognition of PLA servicemen rewarded

50 Chen Wen-hui C. 1955, p. 45.

51 Stefan R. Landsberger, "Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages," (International Institute of Social History, 1994), <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/index.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

52 Beijing: People's Daily, 1951.

heroes who displayed outstanding valor or bravery or exemplified desirable characteristics in battle. For these men, and perhaps most importantly for their families, overt displays of past imperial honor were employed, leaving no doubt in local communities that PLA heroes were indeed the new elite. One *Shanghai Daily* article, published on August 5, 1951, described ‘Old man Yao,’ whose son had achieved special honor in battle as “having had the happiest day of his life ... merit banners and other gifts from the local government ... people came by groups from neighboring villages to congratulate the Yao family.”⁵³ Such practices tied directly to old imperial traditions. “It was a common practice for the local government to hang a sign in front of the house of a hero or martyr. The sign reads "Glorious Family." In old China, this form of honor was bestowed on the families of distinguished scholars.”⁵⁴ The similarity between this convention and that of high-placed official examination winners is striking. “Later Ming ... degree-holders regularly erected memorial flagpoles or plaques in front of their homes or ancestral hall to mark their achievements.”⁵⁵ This convergence would not have been missed by Korean War contemporaries.

Thus for recruitment during the Korean war Chinese society was fundamentally reordered in broadly reaching ways to provide sufficient incentives to convince enough young men (and their families) to become soldiers in the Chinese army. For the newly formed communist government this was no small task. Not only

53 Chen Wen-hui C. 1955, p. 34.

54 Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (University of California Press, 2000), 191.

55 Elman 2000, p. 191.

was Korea's geopolitical value fully appreciated, but the wholesale failure of mass-mobilization campaigns to the newly established and predominantly untested ruling communist party created serious potential for domestic disaster. Taking these concerns to heart, and facing centuries of ingrained social disdain for soldiers, central government officials began reordering social norms based upon long-standing models. In doing so, central government officials did not so much create a new system, but rather modified the old system to fit new needs. Traditional debates between loyalty and filial piety among the once scholarly-elite were aggressively addressed, employing powerful appeal to national loyalty while simultaneously addressing concerns of piety and duty to one's parents, all the while providing both nation-wide and local social incentives to recruits and their families. The PLA became central to both administration and patriotism in China, much like the scholar-officials had once been. The People's Daily, on June 24, 1951 claimed, "The army for the people, the people for the army, and they are inseparable and in full cooperation."⁵⁶ Ironically, the long-standing and deep-seated prejudices and perceptions against soldiers required the inversion of another social group's status with that of its own. While People's Daily message would have liked its readers to take such assessments at face value, the reality required utilizing much deeper and longer lasting ingrained perceptions to meet the goal of the moment.

56 Samuel B. Griffith II, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (McGraw-Hill book Company, 1967), 188.

CHAPTER II

AGENTS OF REFORM: PLA IN PEACETIME

The mass mobilization movement seen in Resist America, Aid Korea campaign thus helped generate the enormous number of PLA wartime volunteers, and while suffering appalling losses, they successfully fought to a standstill the armies of the United Nations and the United States. PLA social prestige remained extremely high, yet many in the army thought the time had come for modernization in training and technology to take precedent over mass campaigns primarily aimed at creating a heroic image of an invincible army within society at large. Soon after, and guided by soviet influence, the PLA began to undergo rather fundamental changes in structure, recruitment and training. “In 1955, as the new People's Republic recovered from the Korean War and passed its first Military Service Law, it sought to institutionalize the recruitment of soldiers.”⁵⁷ This recruitment system was highly stratified and based, in large part, on a Soviet model. “The adoption of the Regulations and the serve of officers in February 1955 formally introduced into the PLA, as part of its movement towards regularization and professionalize, a highly stratified system of ranks with differential pay and privileges, modeled after the Soviet System.”⁵⁸ Such movements, while considered essential by many high ranking

⁵⁷Sijin Chen, “The Challenge of Conscription in an Era of Social Change,” in *Civil-military Relations in Today's China*, ed. David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness (M. E. Sharp, 2006), 236.

⁵⁸ Ying-mao Kau, *The People's Liberation Army and China's Nation-Building* (International Arts and

officials of the time, effectively created an increasingly inegalitarian model of soldiering. Primacy would now center upon creating a professional core of career soldiers who could move up through the ranks and enjoy benefits and salaries above the more junior members. Such a movement within the army, if allowed, would have moved the PLA substantively away from the mass amalgamation of disparate social, political and monetary groups previously seen.

These reforms, however, did not last. A resurgence in Maoist politics⁵⁹ combined with the worsening Sino-Soviet split doomed such professionalizing measures and created a centrally directed political backlash against many in the army, now seen by as conspiring against the official party line. Reforms followed quickly. Several high-ranking PLA officials identified with the modernization were purged, Soviet army building models were criticized⁶⁰ and, most importantly, 1958 saw a monumental resurgence of propaganda within the army ranks which continued until 1966, at which time propaganda within the PLA synchronized with that of greater society. The language of the time, while fascinating, is no doubt highly familiar to students of post-reform China, slogans such as “It [PLA] is a completely new type of people's army, radically different from feudal-warlord and bourgeois armies.” And “Any class enemy, at home or abroad, who is vainly hoping for our country to change

Science Press, 1973), xxxix.

59 Specifically a Communist sense of egalitarianism. PLA modernization through professionalism threatened such measures by potentially creating a highly respected sub-class within society that would function in increasingly inegalitarian ways.

60 Not only did the Soviet Army model provide the theoretical framework for the new professionalized PLA, but with the complete severance of Sino-Soviet ties in 1961 overt links to Russia became highly criticized.

its color must first try to make our army change its color.”⁶¹ Yet, what is perhaps more telling is the massive volume of time devoted to such propaganda. One military analyst of the time estimated that “Every young soldier receives a thorough indoctrination into the principles, goals, and values of the Republic. In the early 1960's, fully 30-40 percent of training time was devoted to political educational work.”⁶² Virtually limitless slogans, movements and memorandas then followed. Today one can find literally thousands of pages created by the simple CCP to military office paper trail created in just a few years. The sheer volume attests to the prominence given these campaigns. Many were short lived, many died off and still others became replicated again and again. However, three political education campaigns launched between 1958 and 1962 deserve special attention as they clearly served as models for replication during the radical Cultural Revolution years.

First, starting nearly a decade before the first formations of a generalized Cultural Revolution, the Politburo began a campaign to send high-ranking officials down to the ranks with normal soldiers to do menial tasks, perform labor and learn from the masses. “In the military, the nationwide rectification campaigns of 1957-58 against bureaucratism, dogmatism, subjectivism, and conservatism were conducted in conjunction with a stepped-up movement to send officers, including generals, to the ranks as privates to practice productive labor.”⁶³ A General still received a general's pay to scrub potatoes for months, but he received orders from temporary superiors,

61 Kau 1973, pp. 73-78

62 Harvey W. Nelsen, *The Chinese Military System* (Thornton Cox Publishers, 1977), 52.

63 Kau 1973, pp. xlii.

duties below his stature and associated with the lowest ranks of the army.

This movement was mirrored in a mass scale initiation of party members into the armed services. These party members came from various backgrounds and not all received favorable positions within the military ranks. "By April 1961, party branches were in place in every company and party cells in every platoon. In April, an estimated 230,000 new party members joined the PLA."⁶⁴ This system persisted, and during the initial radical phase of the Cultural Revolution became deliberately propagated to revolutionary radicals. "As early as 1968, a deputy chief of the general staff announced to a Red Guard meeting that military cadres would soon be sent to do labor in rural and frontier areas, but nothing came of that remark until the Shensi Military District announcement of 1974."⁶⁵ This speech, given ten years after the initial Maoist PLA reforms in 1958, went substantially further than previous experiences in the army. Instead of sending soldiers down within their own military ranks, the PLA would literally be forced directly into broader civilian society. Members of the central government making such comments to Red Guards helped perpetuate the concept of forcing soldiers out of the PLA. While it is true that the 'up to the mountains and down to the villages'⁶⁶ had some impact on urban youth prior to

64 Qiu Jin, *The Culture of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 75.

65 Nelsen 1977, p. 157.

66 "From December 1968 onward, millions of educated urban youth (*zhishi qingnian*, 知识青年), consisting of secondary school graduates and students, were mobilized and sent "up to the mountains and down to the villages" (上山下乡), *shangshan xiexiang*), i.e. to rural villages and to frontier settlements. In areas, they had to build up and take root, in order to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. This relocation program was practiced first on a limited scale before the Great Leap Forward Movement, resumed in the early 1960s, and accelerated sharply by the late 1960s. While some 1.2 million urban youths were sent to the countryside between 1956 and 1966, no less than 12 million were relocated in the period 1968-1975; this amounts to an estimated 10% of the 1970 urban population. In principle, the program called for lifelong

formal Cultural Revolution politics, the vast majority of displaced urban youths came from a generation growing up as these movements were being conducted within PLA ranks. “While some 1.2 million urban youths were sent to the countryside between 1956 and 1966, no less than 12 million were relocated in the period 1968-1975; this amounts to an estimated 10% of the 1970 urban population.”⁶⁷ In the later Cultural Revolution period intellectual and urban youth relocation was often accomplished by PLA assistance. Artwork of the time directly replicated this theme, tying relocation to glorious PLA traditions. The headline, very militantly reads “Advance courageously along the great glorious road of Chairman Mao's May 7th Directive.” Lacking the PLA and military context, such wording would seem an odd choice for urban intellectual youth heading for rural labor. However, in this case we see the PLA harnessed as a strong propaganda tool in the later, wide-scale, movement that mobilized youth to follow in the footsteps of the PLA. (Illustration 3).⁶⁸ Similarly, *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, one of the most iconic texts of the entire Cultural Revolution era, was written only after a prior trial within the PLA. While the book was broadly disseminated to the general Chinese public in 1966, it was Lin Biao, a highly decorated revolutionary hero, high ranking PLA officer and close associate to Chairman Mao, who first compiled the work explicitly for distribution to the PLA.

resettlement in the rural areas, but toward the end of, and in particular after the Cultural Revolution, many were finally able to find jobs or to be transferred back to the cities. A great number of them, however, had resigned themselves to their fate and decided to remain (Landsberger, 2008).”

67 Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/xf.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

68 Stefan R. Landsberger, "Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages," (International Institute of Social History, 1994), <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/ff-nk.html> (accessed November 8, 2008)

“In 1960, Lin wrote the introduction to the first edition of the four-volume *Mao Zedong zhuzuo xuandu* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong). In it he celebrated the victory of the Chinese Revolution as the victory of Mao Zedong Thought.”⁶⁹ Lin initially produced relatively few copies that he distributed to various political officers, cadres and officers for guidelines and easily accessible Mao quotations. However, the work soon became very popular, and by 1964 everyone in the army owned a copy. “In November 1961 the General Political Department of the PLA provided copies ... to every company, and over the next three years the number of copies distributed exceeded 150 million.”⁷⁰ Following the 1964 campaign to “Learn from the PLA” the *Quotations* reached a staggering level of dissemination when the central government published at least one copy for every man, woman, and child in China. “In May 1964 the General Political Department published the first edition ... known as the 'Little Red Book' during the Cultural Revolution, and printed nearly a billion copies over the next several years.”⁷¹ The second edition of 1966, included on the second page Lin Biao's autograph saying “Study Chairman Mao’s writings, follow his teachings and act according to his instructions.” What began as a simple propaganda tool, written by a military commander for aiding the political development among recruits, became the most widely read book in modern Chinese history. Indeed a vast majority of Cultural Revolution era art and photographs include some reference or depiction of *Quotations From Chairman Mao*.

69 Jin 1999, p. 76.

70 Jin 1999, p. 76.

71 Jin 1999, p. 76.

Beginning in 1961, five years before the formation of radical Red Guard groups, the PLA began its own series of political investigations and struggle meetings. These meetings aimed at investigating the class background, political loyalties and revolutionary determination of every PLA soldier. In a secret document, dispatched to the regimental level only, the Central Committee Deputy Director painstakingly detailed the mass campaign within PLA ranks. “The purpose of this stage of the movement was to use the three investigations to make the army units stand firm in their class standpoint, whole-heartedly support the Party Line and policy ...”⁷² Such investigations would involve several soldiers examining their colleagues, helping them establish what wrong thinking might be present, and encouraging self criticisms. The same document further described the particulars of how such meetings would best be conducted. “Personal investigations must have a central point, and each person must be investigated according to what his major problem may be.”⁷³ The central government intended to use soldiers to help detect any unfavorable behavior among other soldiers. These meetings did not center on skills, training or military ability, rather personal politics, philosophy and loyalty to Mao. Contemporary authors, reflecting back upon these events identify the movement as one that aimed to homogenize beliefs (or at least their display) of all members of the PLA. “The three investigations involve investigating standpoints ... work and behavior record ..attitude toward the Party’s line, politics and whether his

72 Chester J. Cheng, (ed), *The Politics of the Chinese Red Army* (Hoover Institution Publications, 1966), 112.

73 Cheng 1966, p. 112.

political vigilance is high ... In a word, it is to investigate class awareness.”⁷⁴

These investigation meetings were not without consequences. While specific punishments for soldiers found harboring wrong beliefs are difficult to find, the initial documentation points to strong punishments. “If any counterrevolutionary, bad and seriously unlawful elements are discovered, they must be scrupulously investigated ...and the guilty parties must be removed from the company units to be dealt with in a special category.”⁷⁵ What this entailed is not entirely clear. However, the instructions highlight the importance of removing such offenders in such a way to not dampen the general movement. Being 'dealt with in a 'special category,' resulted in individual punishments. The second, perhaps initially unforeseen, consequence of the investigations became a broader societal replication in the years immediately preceding the cultural revolution. One former Red Guard detailing his experiences in 1965 recalls creating a game with his fellow classmates who would form criticism meetings to determine who had the best political views. “Once we held a red pairs movement, which was a great success. We got the idea from the PLA, which had the same custom. Each of the students in a class would be paired and would constantly criticize and check each other ...”⁷⁶

This explicit reproduction of politics and policies instigated within in the PLA to that of larger society was not by chance. Like many policies of this era, the interaction of PLA values and civilian society began with a massive, centrally

74 Jin 1999, pp. 125-6.

75 Cheng 1966, p. 116.

76 Bennett, Gordan A. and Montaperto N. Ronald, *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-Ai* (Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1972), 24.

conducted movement. To this end in 1964 the 'Learn From the PLA' campaign began. Apparently the political, military and ideological reformation undergone within PLA ranks was complete and could now be wholesale exported to other social elements. Such macro level political and social modeling was rather explicit as the PLA increasingly became a source of emulation among cadres, state owned enterprises and even schools. "In 1964 and 1965, political work structures modeled on those of the PLA were systematically introduced into civilian Party organizations... school systems and economic enterprises."⁷⁷ Such programs generated substantial political longevity. In 1970 the *New China News Agency* stated "In the new era the PLA has shown new growth. This is the result of instructions from the Party Central Committee and the Command of Mao-Tse-tung...Study on large scale the PLA."⁷⁸ Learning the proper revolutionary model by studying the PLA became a popular and long lasting slogan and encouragement. Indeed, throughout the 1960's and most of the 1970's a high degree of engagement between PLA soldiers and civilians became encouraged, linking the PLA directly to the people. In 1965 the *Liberation Daily* ran an article stating "Our army and people are bonded by flesh and blood and are as closely related as fish and water." (Kau, 103) Such policies helped give abstract principals and propaganda a human face. PLA soldiers themselves were identified as firmly committed comrades, exemplars to emulate and even as individual teachers. Another *Liberation Daily* article asserted, "They [PLA] regard the spreading of Mao Tse-tung's ideas as their binding duty and the most fundamental task in carrying out

⁷⁷ Kau 1973, p. xxxi.

⁷⁸ Kau 1973, pp. 206-219.

work among the masses of the people.”⁷⁹ (Illustration 4).⁸⁰

Perhaps the most famous example of this personal engagement between PLA ideals and broader society is the 'Study Lei Feng' campaign. In 1963 one of China's most enduring figures made his first public, posthumous, appearance. Having died in a construction accident, Lei Feng's diary was discovered, published and held up as a shining example of selflessness, correct political consciousness and loyalty. His thinking was thus used as a model for all to follow. “Beginning in 1963 the entire nation was encouraged to espouse the political loyalty, ideological commitment, and behavioral norms of PLA heroes like Lei Feng.”⁸¹ Later annotated versions of this diary appeared, adding insight to various meaningful moments of his life. One edition, published in 1968 titled *Lei Feng, Chairman Mao's Good Fighter* carried instructions written by Lin Biao himself, stating 'Follow the example set by Comrade Lei Feng and be Chairman Mao's good fighters.’ In this edition two specific moments are identified as the happiest in Lei Feng's life -the PLA liberating his village during the war years, and his later joining the PLA himself.

Riding on the success of Lei Feng, other revolutionary PLA martyrs were soon escalated to national fame. In 1965 the New China News Agency and *Liberation Army Daily* ran a story praising Wang Jie, whose life experience shared a remarkable similarity to that of Feng. He suffered before communism, felt saved by Mao and the party, joined the PLA, and eventually died in a construction accident.

⁷⁹ Kau 1973, p. 109.

⁸⁰ Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/xf.html> (accessed November 8, 2008)

⁸¹ Kau 1973, p. xxx.

His selflessness was particularly praised. The article explained how “On his way to a bookshop one Sunday morning with [another soldier] Wang Jie saw a long line of carts full of stones being hauled by workers across a bridge. He [and the other soldier] immediately began to help the workers ...”⁸² The initial article made these similarities explicit, stating “He set Lei Feng up as his model, measuring everything he did by his actions.”⁸³ During the Cultural Revolution's radical period, civilian industries took learning from the PLA and Lei Feng to heart. One draft, written by a subordinate transportation department in Beijing, titled its work model as 'Learn from the Liberation Army in Political Work.'⁸⁴ This booklet, published in 1967, naturally gave primacy to Mao Zedong's thinking, but learning from the PLA, and Lei Feng, became a vehicle for greater understanding of such highly praised revolutionary ideals.

However, this interpersonal and human aspect of of the PLA's role in communicating centrally approved values was not limited to dead martyrs, newspapers or even propaganda posters. During this era the PLA had real human faces. First, statewide news began extolling the long-time willingness, desire and virtue of individuals to learn from the glorious PLA. Another *People's Daily* article dating from 1966 asserted “The masses of people in our country have always seen the Liberation Army as an example from which to learn...This has played a tremendous

82 Kau 1973, p. 226.

83 Kau 1973, p. 224.

84 Joseph W. Esherick, Paul Pickowicz and Andrew Walder, eds., *Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 65.

role in advancing our country's socialist revolution.”⁸⁵ The PLA soldiers themselves were subsequently identified as fierce and unwavering in their desire to help spread the words of Mao and the Communist Party. On August 1st 1966 *New China News Agency* carried an extremely interesting and lengthy story regarding a PLA unit that marched across the countryside administering medical care to sick villagers, while most importantly, helping spread true revolutionary ideals they had perfected during service in the army.

“They [PLA] regard the spreading of Mao Tse-tung's ideas as their binding duty and the most fundamental task in carrying out work among the masses of the people...In the course of a long-distance march, a company under the Peking Military Command passed through 32 country towns and more than 300 villages and hamlets. During the march, the commanders and fighters of the company *gave priority to spreading Mao Tse-tung's ideas among the people*. In any village where they stopped, they told the peasants about their own experiences in studying and applying Mao-Tse-tung's writings⁸⁶

Emphasis added

The experiences of this troop was laced with Maoist Communist ideals, and drew strength from the revolutionary years and the formation of the PLA when it was creating its image as a likable military faction. This was accomplished by telling heroic tales of the Long March and the selflessness of PLA soldiers. The value of learning from their thinking, of course, was then linked to the prominence of learning Mao Zedong thought. During this era PLA soldiers routinely interacted with all levels of society. Those familiar with the life of Lei Feng will remember substantial pages detailing his experience tutoring young school children. Not only could Lei Feng

85 Kau 1973, p. 220.

86 Kau 1973, pp. 109-110.

teach his 'little comrades' how to read, write or do arithmetic, he also taught them simple, wholesome, communist life lessons. The 1972 recorded memories of a former Red Guard details how in 1965 this middle school-aged male "...spent a lot of time with the PLA. Between militia lessons, exchange visits, joint athletic meets, and joint recreation parties, we got to know many of the soldiers very well...We would mingle with the troops, ask them questions and try to emulate them."⁸⁷ While various personal or incriminating aspects of political memories are no doubt highly suspect, the overall narrative fits extremely well with the mass campaigns of the time. Later, this same youth very explicitly stated that his desire to become a Red Guard stemmed directly from heroic PLA images, his time spent with, and admiration of, PLA soldiers. "Films depicting the heroism of the PLA and the constant drive to "learn from the army" had given all of us a very good impression of soldiers ... The Red Guards were presented as a reserve force of the army...We could be soldiers too. Who would not have joined?"⁸⁸ Again, given the omnipresence of posters, photos and news sources extolling the virtue, courage and socialist charisma found in the PLA such reflection seems highly credible.

Normative ideals formed within the PLA and subsequently transmitted to civilian society found one additional avenue of dissemination. Without detailing force numbers, levels of recruitment or draft regulations, suffice to say the PLA had an enormous number of soldiers before, during and after the Cultural Revolution. These soldiers did not forever remain in the PLA. One military analyst writing in

⁸⁷ Bennett et al 1972, p. 23.

⁸⁸ Bennett et al 1972, p. 67.

1974 claimed “Since 1949, about 15 million men have been released from the PLA.”⁸⁹ Considering the average age of revolutionary era soldiers was rather young, one may reasonably assume these individuals remained active participants withing broader society before and during the Cultural Revolution years. However, while 15 million is a large number, other subsidiary branches of the PLA formed in even larger numbers. The People's Militia, while not primarily a fighting force, nevertheless received military training, combat techniques and most importantly many hours of political teachings. “During the middle and late 1960's the armed and basic militia forces numbered some 23 to 29 million members. While not normally allowed to bear arms, these militiamen [and women] received basic military training, in both weapons and politics.”⁹⁰ This image, dating from 1969, plainly states “Organize contingents of the People's Militia on a big scale.” (Illustration 5).⁹¹ While perhaps lacking in literary luster, the image draws upon all the powerful propaganda tools of the time. Documentation of this era inextricably refers to 'workers, peasants and soldiers' as the three good classes within society. In this one image we see a peasant (presumably identified by his straw hat), a worker in overalls, and a man wearing military fatigues. They wear Mao badges, they hold high *Quotations from Chairman Mao* and they march under a red banner. This enormous pool of secondary soldiers received not only centrally approved and propagated ideological training, but their formation was further legitimized by their dissemination of revolutionary ideals to

89 Nelsen 1977, p. 20.

90 Nelsen 1977, pp. 23-24.

91 Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/index.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

greater society. In many ways this was a simple recruitment tool, but it further served to enhance their normative political power. The numbers of militiamen and women, added to the already gigantic pool of demobilized regular soldiers formed during this era, carried important political power. Modern historical examinations of famous Cultural Revolution-era incidents, communes and power seizures note the prominence this particular style of military political indoctrination among demobilized soldiers gave movements. In their work detailing the Shanghai commune, Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun recount the memory of one former red guard saying:

Their many years of military life had imbued these demobilized sailors [a branch of the PLA] with a particular work style and mind set. During successive political campaigns, the demobilized sailors were more leftist than the local cadres and more apt to subject people to criticism. This was principally due to the fact that political work received particular emphasis in the military, especially from the 1960's on, when the PLA stressed "class struggle" more than society at large.⁹²

Thus, the sheer numbers of regular PLA and militia, the importance of politics in their training and the value placed upon learning from the PLA created an enormously forceful and compelling ideological tool. Such values found outlets in propaganda, personal interactions and even post-official PLA membership. Values formed, or forcefully developed in the armed forces, during the preceding years through successive military campaigns, were now finding a normative role in larger society.

Finally, civil-military interactions of this era also operated on a purely administrative basis. However, in detailing these norms one must understand the

⁹² Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Westview, 1997), 132.

complexities of the time. The PLA's direct involvement in macro level Cultural Revolution events can be broadly defined as either organizational or participatory. Perhaps the clearest example of instrumental PLA organizational involvement in this era were the 1966 Red Guard Tiananmen Square rallies. During this time the PLA often found itself the only organization truly capable of creating or maintaining any real order, and even amid the chaos, this order was sometimes needed. This was especially true in the youthfully Red Guard organizations. While the Red Guard movement initially formed from organic and spontaneous youth movements, within several months the central government instructed local PLA commanders to assist in the training, idolization and even organization of local Red Guard groups. "...on December 31, 1966 when the PLA was ordered to give 'short term military and political training' to Red Guards in schools throughout China. Such training was categorized as militia work, and hence the responsibility of the regional PLA."⁹³ Indeed, many of the Cultural Revolution's most vivid and engrossing images would not have been possible without direct logistic support provided by the army. "Between August 18 and November 26 [1966] Lin Biao's army organized and provided the logistics to mount eight Red Guard rallies in Beijing's Tiananmen Square."⁹⁴ Reading former Red Guard memoirs, the PLA structural involvement is quite clear. "...PLA soldiers had been assigned to our ranks, not only to keep order but also to lead us in political activity."⁹⁵ Such organizational involvement created

93 Nelsen 1977, p. 27.

94 Yarong Jiang and David Ashley, *Mao's Children in the New China* (Routledge, 2000), 5.

95 Bennett et al 1972, p. 111.

little trouble or controversy within the PLA structure. Indeed, public organization of these youth helped strengthen the revolutionary image of the PLA, without compromising its own interests. This was not true of all Cultural Revolution era events.

While general normative ideals and ideas can be traced through PLA motifs, propaganda and personal interaction the true impact of *direct participatory* PLA involvement within the radical era of the Cultural Revolution is far more complex. However, these complexities, once unraveled, create perhaps the most vivid evidence of how socially, politically and organizationally important the PLA was to the Cultural Revolution era. During the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution, the PLA found itself caught between its carefully crafted image, the desires of Mao and radical revolutionaries on one hand and the realities of mandating order on the other. Often this meant disobeying the directives issued by Mao and other central power holders. Initially painstaking efforts were made to keep the PLA distant from the chaos. Not only are soldiers and demonstrators a poor mix, but Mao risked destabilizing the army and the last line of party power. However, this decision was soon overruled and on January 1, 1967, the *Liberation Army Daily* called on the PLA to “actively participate in and defend the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.”⁹⁶ Yet, in the wake of the disasters of the Great Leap Forward the army was *simultaneously* ordered to safeguard agricultural and industrial production. “...The PLA [was] expected to play contradictory roles: it was expected to support the left in

96 Nelsen 1977, p. 77.

the power seizure, while ensuring production.”⁹⁷ Further compounding matters, the PLA became charged with imposing a 'great alliance' of radical Red Guard groups in attempts to curb factionalism. Such orders, issued by the political center, led to differences of interpretation at the local level. Thus regional commanders faced with decisions on the ground often sided with less radical organizations in their attempts to preserve order. “...The army usually supported the less radical rebel organizations in the interest of stability. Charged with the often conflicting tasks of assisting the revolutionary efforts of the masses and maintaining social and economic order, army commanders usually preferred order.”⁹⁸

This is, however, only half the reason why the PLA, the championed upholder of Maoist ideals, often sided against the most radical Cultural Revolution organizations. In reading the PLA involvement in events between 1966 and 1969 one must constantly remember how *big* the PLA was in numbers and how large China's territory is. Politics applied in one unit is not necessarily representative of another's experiences. First, PLA units at that time tended to come from and were stationed in their geographic location of origin.⁹⁹ Furthermore, local PLA commanders had long sought good standing with party committees. “The PLA in general had maintained a good relationship with the power holders, especially with the provincial Party

97 Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (University of California, Berkeley, 1978), 189.

98 Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, third edition (Free Press, 1999), 334.

99 Most modern armies do not leave soldiers stationed in native places for fear of conflicting loyalties and extra-administrative ties.

Committees.”¹⁰⁰ These relations, established before the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution, were hard to break, and contemporary reflection on micro level Cultural Revolution politics highlights these local bonds. “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution revealed a great deal of localisms because units had not been moved about.”¹⁰¹ In addition, local PLA commanders and soldiers often had their own set of beliefs and values. These sometimes conflicted with the goals of the Cultural Revolution. A particularly vivid example was PLA soldiers rallying to protect the birthplace of Confucius from a radical Red Guard organization. “The demolitionists only retreated when the officer ordered a platoon of soldiers to link arms and blockade the main hall. “Nobody wanted to clash with the People's Liberation Army.”¹⁰² During the chaos of the Cultural Revolution soldiers often found themselves in opposition to the central government's official goals.

These events did not go unnoticed by Mao and the center. By late mid-1967 Mao reportedly asserted that “75 percent of the regional military organizations were supporting the rightists.”¹⁰³ Under central pressure, the *Liberation Army Daily* even began running stories covering the paradox between the PLA ideal and local realities. “They [capitalist roaders in army] use militia to arrest, assault and even detain ...the proletarian revolutionaries.”¹⁰⁴ Following these complicities, radical youth organizations began to form within PLA schools themselves. “Despite the

¹⁰⁰ Lee 1978, p. 189.

¹⁰¹ Nelsen 1977, p. 217.

¹⁰² Esherick et al 2006, p. 83.

¹⁰³ Jin 1999, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Nelsen 1977, p. 185.

strenuous effort to prevent a full Cultural Revolution within the PLA, the PLA students in the military academies and schools had split into radicals and conservatives...”¹⁰⁵ The chaos began to effect even the PLA and many officers where attacked and PLA warehouses were raided. Some radicals attacked a military convoy bound for Northern Vietnam. “To obtain the [arms], the mass organizations even raided Air Force units in Sinkiang and trains in Kwangsi carrying military aid to North Vietnam.”¹⁰⁶ Reportedly, the attacks against PLA soldiers became so common that guards patrolling the Russian border stopped carrying guns for fear of having them confiscated by radical youths, and some units buried their arms while others simply stopped normal operations.¹⁰⁷

Ironically, this brief but turbulent disorder within the PLA ranks that threatened its ability to function is perhaps the most telling example of how instrumental the PLA had become to late Maoist China. Despite the chaos, the PLA had become the one organization capable of restoring any real order. While 'three-in-one' committees made up of PLA officers, cadres and representatives of the masses theoretically administrated the provinces, in reality the PLA truly ran operations in the provinces. Despite the chaos in its ranks, the PLA still managed to weather the storm better than any other mass organization in China.

In March 1967, *Red Flag* announced that so-called “three-in-one” organs made up of the People's Liberation Army officers, revolutionary cadres, and representatives of the “masses” would replace Party and government organs of the past...With the party

¹⁰⁵ Lee 1978, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ Lee 1978, p. 282.

¹⁰⁷ While such stories are wide-spread specific and named accounts are less readily available due to a mix of shame and fear of punishment at failure to obey orders.

organization in tatters and the “masses” divided and circumscribed in their political freedoms, the Revolutionary committees became dominated by the PLA...¹⁰⁸

As the Cultural Revolution reached its less radical phase, Mao's first directive became restoring the political legitimacy and primacy of the PLA. This was accomplished by distancing the attacks against capitalists in the party from those in the army. To this end, on September 5, 1967 Mao stated “The handful of persons within the party taking the capitalist road should not be lumped together with the group of people taking the capitalist road in the military. We should mention only the handful in the Party and strive to make the military a success. There must be no chaos in the army.”¹⁰⁹ Further steps were taken to restore the somewhat battered prestige of the PLA. Shortly following his first statement Mao bluntly asserted “The army's prestige must be resolutely safeguarded. There can be no doubt whatever about that...The chief danger at the moment is that some people want to beat down the PLA.”¹¹⁰ Restoration of order was not immediate, but soon the PLA was ordered to forcibly end the first, radical, phase of the Cultural Revolution. Thus, restoration of order began with restoration of the PLA.

108 Esherick et al 2006, p. 31.

109 Nelsen 1977, p. 37.

110 Nelsen 1977, p. 83.

CHAPTER III

END OF THE MAO PERIOD – THE PLA IN DECLINE

The re-empowered PLA began restoring order throughout the cities and provinces. This was not always an easy task, and often PLA commanders opted for replacing civilian leaders with military. “Where the PLA could not form an alliance with remaining revolutionary cadres and the revolutionary masses, Military Control Committees were established to maintain order.”¹¹¹ However, peaceful replacement of power was not always possible. The violence, and often endemic chaos, that had first driven the central party to bring about a military restoration of order did not instantly cease. Accounts vary as to the exact extent of PLA violence in the following months. Some claim the PLA acted with amazing restraint, while others assert widespread massacres. “...The greatest atrocities and a heavy share of the killings appear to have been the work of the PLA, especially in the general repression of radical Red Guards and workers' organizations in the summer of 1968.”¹¹² Wherever the truth may lie, in the process of restoring order across China, the PLA found itself in a position of enormous tangible power. “By 1971, military officers occupied approximately fifty percent of civilian central leadership positions and sixty to seventy percent of most provincial leadership jobs.”¹¹³

111 Graff 2002, p. 256.

112 Meisner 1999, p. 354.

113 Graff 2002, p. 256.

This military takeover though sanctioned by the central committee did not last. Starting in 1971, Mao began rhetoric designed to reign in the social prestige, cultural dominance and emulation of the PLA in popular society. During Mao's 1971 provincial tour the first signs of the Party's (or at least Mao's) desire to control more tightly the daily minutiae of the military was seen. Mao began telling various regional commanders, "It would be putting the cart before the horse if matters already decided by regional Party committees were later turned over to the army Party committees for discussion."¹¹⁴ Following on the heels of Mao's tour, official propaganda began laying the foundations for what would later become central directives. While earlier political campaigns had stressed the importance of wide scale learning from the PLA in order to better understand Mao, the Party and Communism, late period Cultural Revolution politics placed heavy emphasis on the PLA following the party and even learning from the people. "A decade earlier Maoists had established the PLA as the model of universal emulation, but now slogans of the day enjoined the PLA to 'learn the fine work style of the Party' and to "learn from the people of the whole country".¹¹⁵ Even the persistently popular Lei Feng became subject to revision. While the roots of his original popularity lay in selfless devotion to those around him, and especially the PLA, later works stressed his devotion to the Party. "...unlike the early 1960s (when Lei Feng was presented as a military hero before the public), his Party membership was placed first and he was admired for the 'splendid example' he put before the Chinese people by "...his [Lei

114 Meisner 1999, p. 386.

115 Meisner 1999, p. 386.

Feng] utter devotion to the Party and to the socialist cause.”¹¹⁶ In the following year many centrally published articles began reiterating the same message. One particularly famous editorial was published on August 1st 1972, and was carried by *People's Daily*, *Liberation Army Daily* and *Red Flag*, the three largest papers in China at that time, “unequivocally reaffirming the absolute leadership of the Party over the army and, indeed, over all institutions of society...it laid stress on the maintenance of a stern discipline, a spirit of complete obedience to the Party and a consciousness of revolutionary traditions.”¹¹⁷

While the foundations existed in early 1971 to begin limiting the political role of the PLA, it was the Lin Biao affair that ultimately resulted in, or perhaps fully enabled, Mao and the top CCP leadership to curtail the army's political representation and power. To this day no universally accepted explanation exists for why on the night of September 13, 1971 Lin Biao and his family fled Beijing aboard a military aircraft, or why later that night the airplane mysteriously crashed over Mongolia. The official explanation was, and remains, that Biao attempted a military coup, failed, and fled. The crash itself remains unexplained, though Chinese officials deny involvement. What, however, is no mystery is how Mao and others within the party reacted to the affair. Burying Lin was no easy task – for years he had been acclaimed Mao's 'right hand man', while magazines and newspapers of the time featured him almost as prominently as Mao. It took nearly a year for news of Lin's death to reach the general public, and dealing with the death was a central concern at the 1973 Tenth

116 J. P. Jain, *After Mao, What?* (Westview Press, 1975), 81.

117 Jain 1975, p. 80.

Congress of the CCP (August 24-28) that marked a turning point in the PLA's political power, monetary endowment and organizational prominence.

The first, and foremost, order of business became asserting the absolute power of the Party over all sectors of society and government. Zhou Enlai stressed “Of the seven sectors – industry, agriculture, commerce, culture and education, army, the government and the Party – it is the Party that exercises overall leadership.”¹¹⁸ Immediately following Zhou's rhetoric came tangible measures designed to limit individual commanders' agency. One longstanding concern among those who felt the PLA had too much power was that the strong bonds and loyalties commanders could form between their soldiers. The soldiers often came from the same provinces and cities as the commanders. Additionally the political commissars commanders worked with would often be assigned to the same unit for many years in a row. Thus ties between soldiers and commanders and the CCP's political arm within the ranks could often outweigh obedience to central directives. For those who wished greater control over the PLA limiting the associations between commanders and their troops became a central concern. “...A vigorous attempt was made to strengthen Party leadership over the army, to curb the political role of the military leaders, and to discourage the practice of the concurrent holding of civilian and military power.”¹¹⁹ To this end “they [commanders] were removed from the command of their troops and from their local power bases where they had established themselves for many years (in one case nearly twenty). Moreover the transfer had been arranged in such a manner that no

118 Meisner 1999, p. 390.

119 Jain 1975, p. 90.

commander was permitted to take with him the political commissars he had worked with.”¹²⁰ While the true cause of the Lin Biao affair remains unsatisfactorily explained, and we may perhaps never know exactly what happened, one result was a massive and widespread campaign to limit the power of the PLA. “Whatever explanation emerges when the CCP archives are finally opened, Mao's use of the Lin Biao affair to begin a drive to eradicate PLA dominance of the CCP is not in doubt.”¹²¹

However, curbing the power and prestige the PLA had amassed did not end with moving commanders away from loyal troops and friendly commissars. Soon, its representation in the Politburo was under attack. Beginning in 1973 Politburo members with military experience, especially those linked to Lin Biao, were either purged, or more often than not, new non-military members were added to reduce the percent of PLA representation. “...army representation was reduced from about 45% in the Ninth Central Committee to a little more than 30% in the Tenth. Of the 45 regular members of the Ninth Central committee who were dropped from the Tenth committee (including 10 members who had died), were military leaders belonging to the Lin Biao faction ...”¹²² Thus by the 1975 military affairs commission (MAC) Deng Xiaoping was in a position to openly criticize the PLA on five points. “In a speech on July 14, Deng Xiaoping summed up the shortcomings of the PLA in

120 Jain 1975, p. 91.

121 Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 336.

122 Jain 1975, p. 83.

five words, “bloating, laxity, conceit, extravagance, and inertia.”¹²³ Conceit and extravagance became the chief concerns leveled against the PLA. Deng charged army commanders of “seek[ing] ease and comfort, higher salaries, more housing space, and indeed top conditions in every respect.”¹²⁴ Like earlier speeches, the 1975 MAC carried real consequences, and “...the MAC for the first time ... stipulated exactly how many cars, domestic staff, and secretaries a high ranking PLA officer had a right to.”¹²⁵ The PLA soon found itself affected by many similar measures. This trend continued until 1978 at the Eleventh Central Committee when, in groundbreaking redirection of society, Deng Xiaoping officially launched his Four Modernizations. “The Third Plenum of the Communist Party's Eleventh Central committee in December 1978 was the watershed event that redirected China's national focus to economic modernization. The Four Modernizations were adopted as national policy, and as this was done the ranking of defense modernization was slipped to last.”¹²⁶

123 MacFarquhar et al 2006, p. 389.

124 MacFarquhar et al 2006, p. 390.

125 MacFarquhar et al 2006, p. 390.

126 Graff 2002, p. 259.

CHAPTER IV

DENG XIAOPING'S NEW CHINA – PLA MODERNIZATION

Following these reforms the PLA found itself removed from a position of direct influence on society, and it became, for possibly the first time in its creation, a purely military organization. “The PLA had completed the process of “returning to the barracks” (i.e removing itself from involvement in all aspects of civil society), and has subordinated its modernization to the larger task of national economic development.”¹²⁷ Thus began a period of low priority given to the PLA in both Chinese society and scholarship. Three primary factors worked against the PLA during this time.

First, China had, as a whole, become tired of mass political campaigns. “[The]...population [had] grown cynical and politically apathetic [and] could no longer be easily inspired by old revolutionary slogans and ideological exhortations.”¹²⁸ During the PLA's early years, mobilization, success in battles and recruitment had all depended upon its ability to generate large levels of popular support. This had always been accomplished through mass political campaigns. Indeed scholarship of the early PLA has trouble differentiating the two. Subsequently, during the Mao years the army had been held up as a shining example

127 Graff 2002, p. 260.

128 Meisner 1999, p. 525.

of proper behavior, morals and communist spirit.

However, following the Cultural Revolution's end the PLA had been openly and publicly criticized. Moreover, with Deng's new China politics were withdrawing from Chinese societal primacy. The PLA followed, and began directing training exclusively towards military matters. "Political and ideological training stressed the military rather than the social, ideological, or economic role of the PLA."¹²⁹ For the first time since its formation the PLA found itself out of the political arena. Even the social peacekeeping role the PLA had played was redirected to a new quasi-military branch, the People's Armed Police (PAP), to further the divide between PLA and society. "In the early 1980s, the Chinese leadership decided to re-establish a dedicated force for internal security duties."¹³⁰

Secondly, in the early Deng years economic modernization did not include the PLA. Special economic zones, factories and power plants all became hallmarks of this era, but the army was left out of these developments. PLA generals were told (and for the most part willingly complied) to wait for advancements in other sectors of the Chinese economy until focus would eventually return to them. During these years, the PLA withdrew from the social spotlight. "The PLA was tasked to modernize and professionalize, but it would be low on the list for government resources. Thus, military modernization became a long-term goal, dependent upon first strengthening the overall Chinese economy."¹³¹ Save for a brief

129 John Pike, "PLA History" (Global Security, 2008) <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/pla-history.htm> (accessed November 8, 2008).

130 SinoDefence, (SinoDefence.com, 2008) <http://www.sinodefence.com/> (accessed Oct 31, 2007).

131 Graff 2002, p. 259.

period in defense priority during the China-Vietnam war in 1979, the PLA simply ceased to occupy the significant role in society it had once held. Finally, in 1985 Deng went one step further in removing the PLA from direct societal interaction. He formally declared the threat of major war for China remote. “In a major strategic reassessment, Deng declared in 1985 that the threat of major wars was remote. Instead, Deng forecast the more likely scenario would be a limited 'Local War' fought on China's periphery. A reduction of another million personnel was also announced.”¹³²

Thirdly, the PLA faced major budget deficits. “The process of creating a leaner professional force began with a decisive Central Military Commission (CMC) meeting in June 1985 when the PLA was set on a new course...and succeeded in freeing up close to ten percent of the national budget.”¹³³ During the period of Deng's leadership, the main PLA force was reduced by nearly two million. Yet, even with these cuts the army itself began entering into civilian society and began running civilian enterprises simply to raise enough money to buy equipment, pay salaries and modernize. Budget deficits became so bad that for a number of years the PLA grew much of its own food. “The PLA was required to grow much of its own food, and produce in its factories many of the light industrial goods necessary for basic survival and mission accomplishment.”¹³⁴

132 Graff 2002, p. 260.

133 Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

134 Graff 2002, p. 260.

CHAPTER V

TIANANMEN SQUARE, POLITICAL FALLOUT

Between 1979 until 1989 military spending continued to decline by a considerable margin every year. “Officials [of the Chinese military] claim between 1979 and 1989 military spending declined by an average of 5.8% a year.”¹³⁵ By 1989 the situation faced by soldiers, their families and social institutions had deteriorated significantly from the former glorious days of the Korean War and early Cultural Revolution politics. “First, the military budget ... had shrunk... Military families saw their living standards falling behind those of civilians...The government lacked an effective policy for helping military personnel transfer to civilian jobs...and civilians had little understanding of the military, and the once fervent popular concern for the welfare of soldiers was a thing of the past.”¹³⁶ Indeed, during the military involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen protest and subsequent massacre, PLA organization, quartering and general ability had deteriorated to such a degree that many soldiers went long periods without food provided by the army, some had no ammunition and others lacked basic utilities. “...The soldiers in the Square [Tiananmen 1989] had almost nothing to eat from Sunday to Tuesday...The Martial Law forces ran out of other things besides food. On Tuesday, some units were

135 editor, *Q&A: China's Military Budget* (BBC, 2008) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/asia-pacific/7277382.stm> (accessed November 8, 2008).

136 Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (ed), *The Tiananmen papers* (PublicAffairs, 2001), 9.

sending soldiers out to scour local shops for batteries.”¹³⁷ Ironically, the degree the PLA had been allowed to deteriorate became a key component in a major reversal in the CPC's attitude towards PLA funding, prestige and modernization.

In the lead-up to the June military crackdown on students, intellectuals and workers in and around Beijing and Tiananmen Square, the Chinese central leadership was faced with three issues regarding the effectiveness of promising military force, the deployment of soldiers and ultimately the use of grave physical violence. First, many of the Tiananmen protesters felt that the CCP either would not or could not use the military against them. Many different reasons existed for this belief. Shen Tong from Peking University, one of the student leaders, felt that they had a right to peaceful organization and protest. Peking University had, after all, been the site of many student led movements that had changed the course of Chinese history. “The students were aware that the Army could pose a threat to the Movement, 'but we felt that if we did not go too far, the Army would not present a real danger'.”¹³⁸ Others felt the loyalty of the PLA soldiers stationed in and around Beijing belonged with the city they lived in, rather than the central government – specifically, the 38th group army, one unit that had received some funding and modernization remained stationed around Beijing and had become an example of what the Chinese military might achieve on a army-wide scale in the near future. Many citizens of Beijing felt this elite unit 'belonged' to Beijing and thus would not move against them. “Whether rightly or not, the 38th [Group Army] is [was]

137 Brook 1992, p. 209.

138 Brook 1992, p. 28.

generally regarded by Beijing people as 'their' army."¹³⁹ Further, as developments arose, many protesters began to feel the army itself would side with the people. The following story is of dubious factual validity, yet thanks to leaflets printed out and distributed by the protectors has become widely believed. The story states that "General Xu Jiangxian [the commander of the 38th group army]... refused to lead the 38th into position as part of the martial law force."¹⁴⁰ As the story went, the General asserted "I've already thought this through early on and have prepared myself," he is reported to have said "The people's army has a history of never having suppressed the people. I cannot sully that history."¹⁴¹ While the General went to prison for disobeying his orders, such stories circulated widely, and eventually it was felt that "The officers urged that the PLA [should] not be used to suppress the students ... The students now dared to think that the government could not mobilize the armed forces against them."¹⁴²

Indeed, the students were not entirely wrong in presuming the military leaders, the 38th group army and certainly individual soldiers had no wish to enter into a wide scale suppression and possibly even Cultural Revolution style aggression with students and Beijing residents. The CCP felt it could not rely on the 38th group army and its nearly 200,000 soldiers stationed in Beijing, and thus brought in soldiers from neighboring provinces unburdened with conflicting loyalties. "...There

139 Brook 1992, p. 29.

140 Brook 1992, p. 72.

141 Brook 1992, p. 72.

142 Brook 1992, p. 40.

are [were] more than 200,000 troops stationed in the Beijing Military Region, adequate to suppress a military coup. Instead of relying on the local army, Deng's headquarters had to bring in army units from other parts of the country.”¹⁴³ These new soldiers were picked from rural provinces with few ties to Beijing. One firsthand account notes how out of place these soldiers looked. “One eyewitness noted that ‘the soldiers looked disoriented. They stared around as though they have never seen skyscrapers before, as though they had never been to Beijing.’”¹⁴⁴ Beyond simply moving in soldiers foreign to Beijing, the CMC began a Cultural Revolution style political campaign to bring 'correct thinking' back into the minds of the soldiers who they were asking to exert force against civilians. The propaganda focused on asserting the need for social stability which was threatened and destabilized by unreasonable demands by the students.

An urgent notice from the PLA General Political Commanders Department disseminated to all commanders in the Beijing area read “They [soldiers] should lead the troops to a correct understanding of how important stability is for the country and to the realization that what people really want is stability...Second, they should help the troops and officers analyze which of the students slogans were reasonable ... etc.”¹⁴⁵ Further, the CCP greatly feared association between the soldiers and the protesters. Bonds between soldiers and those who they might be asked to use force against, who were often of very similar age groups, were feared to weaken their

143 Chu-yuan Cheng, *Behind the Tiananmen Massacre* (Westview Press, 1990), 118.

144 Brook 1992, p. 33.

145 Nathan et al 2001, p. 220.

resolve in following such commands. An April 26 editorial, carried in *Red Flag*, required all officers and soldiers to study the editorial read “Any person sent out of business or a mission must be educated well and strictly instructed not to become a looker-on, not to join any debates, and not to participate in any trouble. No officers or soldiers are permitted to go among the students to network...never allow students to come among them.”¹⁴⁶ Even with such political measures, Deng Xiaoping himself had to address the Martial Law Troops on 9 June 1989 saying “...although some comrades may not understand this for a while, they will eventually understand this and support the CC's decision...”¹⁴⁷

Despite obvious trepidation and some misgiving about the PLA re-entering civilian politics, the PLA ultimately obeyed the CCP's orders to clear out Tiananmen square and forcibly restore order to Beijing. However, it appears participation in the military intervention became something of a taboo subject. Either out of personal shame, or fear of negative public opinion, few soldiers admit to having participated in the forceful dispersion of the protectors. One reporter who interviewed several units of soldiers in 1992 reports that “Participation in martial law is now [1992] regarded as a matter of shame. If asked, every PLA officer and soldier will insist that *his* unit was not involved in the massacre.”¹⁴⁸ Another widespread story involves watches given to the soldiers involved to honor their compliance.

Shortly after the bloodshed in Beijing, many soldiers involved in the military action were awarded silver

146 Nathan et al 2001, p. 80.

147 Tony Saich, *Governance and Politics of China* (Palgrave, 2001), 66.

148 Brook 1992, p. 204.

wristwatches for their participation. At the top of the watches' yellow face was a red outline of the Tiananmen rostrum; on the bottom, a profile of a PLA soldier wearing a green helmet. Under the soldier were the figures "89.6" (for the date June 1989) and the characters "In Commemoration of Quelling the Rebellion." Inscribed on the back were the characters "presented by the Beijing committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Government of Beijing." In the following years, these watches were often found in flea markets in Beijing, broken, their hands no longer working, discarded by the soldiers to whom they had been presented.¹⁴⁹

All such accounts give special prominence to the number of these watches in poor condition found in the following years.

Ultimately, while the PLA followed orders and violently moved against the protesters, this command was not accomplished without much difficulty, on the spot ideological campaigns and extreme repositioning of troops. As a result, in the subsequent months it seems the CCP and CMC began to take the importance of having a firm control over the military extremely seriously once again. While the Deng era military reforms had successfully weakened the PLA's political power to a point where it could no longer challenge the central leadership, it now became clear that the ruling party still had to resolutely command PLA loyalty. The 1989 Tiananmen military intervention marked a turning point in attention given to the PLA. Effectively the incident reversing the trend that had begun in 1979. Several factors coalesced at roughly the same time to bring about the well funded, rapidly modernizing and important PLA now visible in China. First, as discussed, the importance of PLA loyalty as the final line of party defense was violently

149 Saich 2001, p. 193.

demonstrated. Thus, immediately following the events a large and prominent propaganda campaign began to stress the army's absolute loyalty to the party.

“...Reassertion of political criteria emphasizing the PLA's 'absolute loyalty' to the CCP followed the Tiananmen crisis of 1989. The need for this effort stemmed from evident vacillation and resistance on the part of some PLA units to the orders to intervene in the martial law period, and especially the order to clear the Square by force.”¹⁵⁰ These reforms to PLA political training and policy then became long-term official mandates. “...A conference on PLA political work, convened in December 1989, was addressed by General Political Department director Yang Baibing who endorsed a new program of political indoctrination stressing the PLA's 'absolute loyalty' to the party.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, the assertion and stress of presenting the PLA's absolute loyalty to the central party, both within and outside the army, became one longstanding reform resulting from the 1989 Tiananmen incident. “Throughout the 1990's and on into this decade, even while the observance of political criteria has seemed more and more perfunctory alongside an increasingly powerful stress on substantive technological expertise, commentary in the *PLA Daily* and leadership statements and speeches on Army Day and other military occasions have continued to dwell on this and related themes.”¹⁵² This message is seen prominently today, and indeed may be one of the first images a casual observer of the PLA might notice.

Indeed, the ideological campaign stressing PLA party loyalty that developed after the

150 David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunnes (ed), *Civil-military Relations in Today's China*, (M. E. Sharp, 2006), 135.

151 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 136.

152 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 136.

1989 events in Beijing became a permanent aspect of the PLA mandate.

Second, beginning in 1989 and continuing to this day, the PLA's military budget was raised steadily. Further, the new General Secretary to the Communist Party of China, Jiang Zemin, had no personal military service background. Previously, all others General Secretaries had served in the military and had personal connections with many of the top generals. Jiang had none. This, coupled with the dramatic demonstration of the army's importance, helped convince him to value an increased military budget, modernization efforts and prestige. "...Jiang Zemin's taking over the helm of the military in 1989 also accounts for some of this increase in PLA budgets. Where Deng could command the PLA, Jiang could not. Having never spent a day in the military, Jiang embarked on assiduous efforts to cultivate PLA loyalty, and an increased budget was part of this effort."¹⁵³ Third, the United States' first Gulf War presented another incentive for Chinese military modernization. The antiquated PLA's military model operated much like that of the Iraqi army. Theoretical debates had been raging in PLA circles and military academies regarding a contemporary 'people's war' and it's ability to resist the full force of a modern military. The United States' dramatic victory shocked many. "The falling [budget] trend was probably reversed after the 1990-91 Gulf War. The high-tech weapons used in the war served as a wake-up call to the Chinese military leadership, reminding them how far China was behind in its armaments."¹⁵⁴

153 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 203.

154 Shaoguang Wang, *The Military Expenditure of China, 1989-1998* (Department of Political Science, Yale University, 1999) http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/gpa/wang_files/Milex.pdf (accessed November 8, 2008).

CHAPTER VI

MISSION OF THE MODERN PLA

“Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive one; it is man and not materials that counts.” Mao Zedong

Mao, writing in the grips of war against both Japanese and Kuomintang forces, sought to highlight the power of a populace mobilized against a common enemy who was relying upon determination and numbers to defeat better equipped opponents. Since unification, China has struggled to define the evolving role between man and material. Theoretical debates have raged. Should the PLA remain ‘red,’ focused first on proper political thinking and second on material, or ‘expert,’ shifting primary focus to military professionalism? In 1991, after viewing the decisive U.S. victory over Iraq’s military, a military that in many ways mirrored the contemporary PLA, China began to concentrate on military modernization with increased efforts. To achieve rapid modernization a dual ‘red’ *and* ‘expert’ strategy was adopted.¹⁵⁵ The proceeding PLA changes, while underway, are not easy for those outside the inner circles of the Politburo or Central Military Committee (CMC) to determine as China, like any other nation, does not foster transparency in its military process, planning or goals. The last official report, dating from 1993, titled *Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period* (Xin shiqi junshi zhanlüe fangzhen) stated a variety of objectives that, while undoubtedly modified by year to year adjustments, represent

¹⁵⁵ Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today* (Routledge, 2006), 14.

the last official guidelines by which the CMC and People's Liberation Army (PLA) operate. This report highlighted the need for forces capable of conducting amphibious and airborne operations against Taiwan.

Indeed, during the 1990s and early 2000s Taiwan became a central issue driving PLA modernization. After U.S. intervention during the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, it became increasingly clear to the CMC and PLA leadership that militarily intimidating Taiwan, and its U.S. ally, would require a highly developed and technologically advanced army, a force capable of operating across spacial distances and neutralizing both Taiwanese and U.S military deterrents. As a result, increased effort, resources and money were invested into developing the PLA navy and air force (PLAN and PLAAF). Since then, overt tension over Taiwan has temporarily faded as economic ties have strengthened; the pro-independence movement in Taiwan has lost popularity in Taiwan and the Chinese central government's perceived need to prevent immediate political separation has eased considerably.¹⁵⁶

The lessening of immediate tensions should not suggest that the Chinese central government dismissed the issue of national reunification. Today, military modernization and PLA strengthening campaigns continue with showing resolution towards Taiwan. In a 2007 article carried in major Chinese online newspapers (Xinhua and the U.S. ChinaDaily) Zhang Qinsheng, the officer in charge of PLA foreign affairs, said "The modernization of the Chinese armed forces aims to achieve the ability to defend national sovereignty, security and reunification of the country." Since the leadership in Beijing still officially regards Taiwan as part of the nation and

¹⁵⁶ Political talks between neighbors and joint actions during SARS. (Is this right?)

asserts matters of diplomacy between the PRC and Taiwan as wholly domestic in nature, this statement is obviously directed at cross-straits military wrangling.

However, in just the past few years the government directive towards PLA modernization has become increasingly complicated. While Taiwan remains of important, new issues, policy goals and tasks assigned to the PLA have grown. Territorial integrity, a growing reliance on foreign oil and an increasing desire to secure shipping lanes for supplies are all being identified as potential missions for the PLA. Additionally, increasing central focus for developing a military force capable of mirroring developments in China's civilian sector is visible. This concern was identified in 1993 as "...Developing...units and personnel capable of supporting global exchange programs, UN peace-keeping operations, and foreign military training programs."¹⁵⁷ While such a trend in PLA modernization is obviously not new, many attribute the full-fledged rise of this phenomenon to the past several years alone. "By 2005 a new phrase began to appear in Chinese pronouncements, proclaiming that China must strive to build 'a military force that is commensurate with China's... international status'."¹⁵⁸ A year later, a April 2006 commentary in the official *Liberation Army Daily* explicitly reiterated this desire, "As China's comprehensive strength is incrementally mounting and her status keeps on going up in international affairs, it is a matter of great importance to strive to construct a military force that is commensurate with China's status and up to the job of defending the interests of China's development, so as to entrench China's

157 Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell (ed), *Right Sizing the PLA* (US Government, 2007), 213.

158 Kamphausen et al 2007, p. 215.

international status.”¹⁵⁹

In realizing these goals the PLA is undergoing fundamental changes to reorder its fighting force from winning “protracted wars of attrition on its territory to one capable of fighting and winning short-duration, high intensity conflicts against high-tech adversaries – which China refers to as “local wars under conditions of informatization.”¹⁶⁰. In real terms the outcome of this evolving strategy is twofold. First, winning wars “under conditions of informatization” means China is actively pursuing advanced technology from direct foreign sales, dual-use technologies and its own civilian sector. Nearly every avenue for procurement of advanced, integrated and technologically reliant weapons is currently being utilized by the government. A 2007 *Xinhua* article quoting Hu Jintao explains the goal as, “To continue to implement the strategy of strengthening the military through science and technology...the application of information technologies as the driving force and ensure that our armed forces are capable of winning warfare in the information age.” Second, massive personnel downsizing has occurred for over the past two decades. A 1994 *China Daily* article explains. “Since the mid-1980s, China has twice downsized its military by a total of 1.5 million. In September 2003, the Chinese government decided to further reduce 200,000 troops by the end of 2005 to maintain the size of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at 2.3 million.” This force restructuring includes an increased non-commissioned officer corps to soldier ratio, more airmen and more

159 Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2007* (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007)
<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/070523-China-Military-Power-final.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2008).

160 Department of Defense 2007, p. I.

highly skilled technology staff. Currently, the macro PLA strategy is dominated by these two concurrent trends.

While procuring and developing advanced weapons, weapons systems and integrated technology required in their operation continues to present China with domestic, monetary and foreign policy problems, the PLA is steadily modernizing its equipment and strategic involvement into intelligence and high-end technology. Ironically, while massive personnel downsizing is underway, the PLA is once more faced with questions of recruitment, popular perception and securing the right kind of soldier. As always, the conditions of the time dictate the specifics of the desired PLA soldier. In the 1990s, CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin said, "we must train qualified personnel first, for we would rather let our qualified personnel wait for equipment than the other way round."¹⁶¹ Thus it would seem Mao's old military doctrine holds true. China, while actively pursuing advanced military materiel, is finding its army is only as good as its soldiers. The rapidly unfolding story of PLA modernization is, in large part, a story of finding highly educated, skilled and technology savvy youth to become officers capable of operating and developing a growing supply of high-end technology now found in the PLA. However this task is proving a challenge for China's central leadership. The following pages will explore the dynamic between evolving Chinese civil-military relations, contemporary civilian PLA perceptions and what the Chinese central leadership is doing to change, manipulate and guide them.

161 Dennis J. Blasko, "Chinese Military Logistics: The GAD System Part II", *China Brief*, October 14, 2004, http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=395&issue_id=3108&article_id=2368693 (accessed November 8, 2008).

CHAPTER VII

THE MODERN PLA'S TROUBLE FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Today, the image of the PLA is hampered in a number of ways. First, since the PLA's founding in 1927 it has found the need to engage in production, agriculture and businesses with the civilian economy. During the pre-unification armed conflict these practices simply served to repay civilians or provide soldiers with food and equipment. Later, Maoist and communist campaigns required the PLA to serve as a shining example of hard work and diligence. "...The involvement of the military in economic affairs is nothing new. It began in the early days of the Red Army, expanded during the revolutionary period, and continued, with widely varying intensity, after the establishment of the Communist regime."¹⁶² However, in the post-Mao era and Deng's reforms the PLA's internal production and economic participation took on an entirely new dimension. During the 1980's the PLA was freed to engage in pure market capitalism. "The Deng leadership cast off Maoist restraints on economic development, the PLA began to move into commercial activities that would have been strictly off-limits."¹⁶³ Using its resources, manpower and official position, the PLA began doing extremely well for itself. Indeed, many members of the armed forces faced with falling paychecks, decreased military budget

162 Thomas J. Bickford. "The Chinese Military and Its Business Operations: The PLA as Entrepreneur," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, May 1994, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645058> (accessed November 17, 2008).

163 Bickford 1994, p. 11.

and memories of the eventual humiliation ending the Cultural Revolution began using these advantages illegally. "...The assets readily available to PLA units to take on economic undertakings; and the desire of officers and men to make up for past deprivations ... The result has been a wide range of activities that are downright illegal."¹⁶⁴ Stories of PLA corruption, bribery, prostitution, arms smuggling and the use of government property for private business ventures all became extremely common during this period.

Indeed, such PLA practices occurred throughout the entire 1980's. At one point it was estimated that a full ten percent of the PLA's then five million strong standing force was directly engaged in the civilian economy. PLA business interactions even became a course taught at some military academies.¹⁶⁵ These activities, and commonplace excesses, eventually came under direct criticism from the central communist party. In 1989, following Tiananmen Square and the massive reforms designed to repair the PLA's image, a number of regulations were issued by the central leadership to curtail illegal business practices. The list was soon referred to as the "ten nos." While some 'nos' were fairly straightforward, the regulations themselves clearly illustrate the depths of illegality the PLA had come to. Some, but not all, of the regulations include "[No] buying up goods illegally, engaging in profiteering, smuggling, hiring out or selling military vehicles and exploiting the

164 Bickford 1994, p. 23.

165 Mel Gurtov. "Swords into Market Shares: China's Conversion of Military Industry to Civilian Production," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 134, June 1993, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/654300> (accessed November 17, 2008).

positions of military men for business purposes.”¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately for the PLA's image such reforms did not immediately work.

As a result of negative civilian attention and the central leadership's regulations the early 1990's saw the PLA itself began taking steps to lessen the negative attention it was starting to receive.

The problem of corruption and the prospect of the PLA engaging in something as blatantly capitalistic as currency futures or living high off the profits of their corporations is not something the military leadership welcomes; concerns have been raised about the PLA's image, especially when military units use their own names in doing business. General Liu Huaqing, vice chairman of the Central Military commission, has been very strong in his warnings about the negative impact of corruption in the PLA, particularly during the anti-corruption drive in 1993.¹⁶⁷

These reforms did not immediately work to fix the PLA's tarnished image.

Many Western observers in the early 1990's claimed the PLA, which had once stood for high ideals and purity, had become a shining example of Chinese capitalism gone wrong. “If the PLA was once a symbol of revolutionary purity, it is now more a symbol of marketization and materialism.”¹⁶⁸ The problems of corruption continued until 1998 when the Chinese central leadership decided it could no longer stand for the PLA directly engaging in the civilian economy. “...This foray into business for profit spawned deep levels of corruption in the system, leading the civilian leadership

166 Bickford 1994, p. 24.

167 Bickford 1994, p. 460.

168 Bickford 1994, p. 461.

to order the PLA to divest its commercial operations in 1998.”¹⁶⁹ The announcement not only called for a radical deviation from standard PLA practices, but in a political move unseen in the waning days of the Cultural Revolution the central leadership openly and scathingly attacked the military for its practices. “This announcement, which was unprecedented in its public airing and the severity of the language used, was seconded in subsequent days by key members of the military and civilian leadership, including the de facto head of the PLA, General Zhang Wannian.”¹⁷⁰ This move was meant to end the PLA market economy interaction forever, warn against future enterprises and show the general population that such corruption would not be tolerated.

Yet, it seems the long standing institutions formed over a decade in the 1980s, based on practices established from before the PRC won formal sovereignty, are hard to fully eradicate. While complete separation of the army from the economy has so far proved impossible, the widespread and endemic profiteering has largely ceased. “The widespread conclusion that the PLA was “banned” from business is far too simplistic. The military continues to operate a wide variety of small-scale enterprises and agriculture units... No longer, however, will profit and international trade be critical features in the system.”¹⁷¹ While past practices that served to severely damage the PLA's image among civilians have largely stopped, the central leadership still finds it necessary to occasionally remind the PLA, and civilians, that the

169 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 214.

170 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 224.

171 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 230.

continuation of past predatory market practices will no longer be tolerated. “The years following the divestiture have been marked by repeated “mop-up” campaigns on the part of the central leadership and significant resistance and foot-dragging on the part of local government and military officials, repeating the pattern of earlier rectifications.”¹⁷² In recent years the PLA has been ordered to begin divesting itself from providing non-military services to its own members, and instead rely on the civilian economy. One 2007 *Xinhua* article titled “PLA to cut non-military projects and services.” explains “The People's Liberation Army (PLA) plans to withdraw its involvement in transport, electric power and telecommunication projects and stop providing non-essential services to its members, according to a circular issued recently by the Central Military Commission.” Overcoming the negative attention and imagery the PLA received during its years of overt market interaction has not been easy, and internal debates still rage over exactly how much the PLA still owns.

As a career choice for young educated Chinese the PLA also faces a number of problems. In the middle of 2000, the *PLA Daily* (Chinese) published an article describing a youth from Ningbo, a rather affluent port city, who fabricated a criminal record, including drug addiction and murder. When discovered, the youth said 'I would rather spend four years in prison than three in the army.' This story became rather infamous, and while conditions for PLA recruitment have no doubt improved in the better part of a decade, the situation is still, in many ways, extremely grim. In a 2006 PLA 'self assessment', among five key issues facing the PLA “The gap between the current level (of soldiers and officers) and the requirements that

172 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 230.

must be met in order to win wars” was identified as a key problem.”¹⁷³ One PLA Admiral, Shi Yunsheng, is quoted in a 2007 brief before the Chinese Central Congress as describing the situation as, “Those that we need will not come or will not stay. Those we do not need will not go away.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, while the Ningbo youth is no doubt an extreme example, the basic conditions that would lead someone to prefer prison to PLA service are still present. Contemporary observers of China know the entire nation is undergoing profound changes at nearly every level of society. The PLA does not act within a vacuum separated from society. This is especially true when they must recruit new members from today's youth. Understanding why the contemporary PLA faces such a negative stigma is intimately linked to a rapidly modernizing civilian economy and culture. Currently, three primary factors create difficulties in finding the right personnel for the PLA. First, China's one-child policy and a rapidly aging population has large and wide-scale ramifications on youth demographics that tend toward lowering the desirability of a career in the PLA. These changes are being met with new recruitment laws, which often solve one problem while creating another. Second, institutionalized problems in the education system are compounded by massive disparities between urban and rural schooling that create great difficulties in finding enough qualified youths. Third, the rapidly expanding civilian economy, while critical in providing weapons technology and funds, is increasingly drawing the best youths away from the PLA, as those with

173 Karl Eikenberry, *U.S.-China Military Relations: Engaging the PLA* (Roundtable Meeting, US-China Roundtable, 1999), 82.

174 Timothy Lo, “PLA Reform,” *Coping with the Dragon*, 2007, <http://www.ndu.edu/CTNSP/pubs/CopingwithDragon.pdf> (accessed November 8, 2008).

advanced degrees can find much better paying opportunities in the civilian economy.

China's 1979 one-child policy has had enormous and far-reaching effects on population demographics, ratios and interactions. This has created societal repercussions at nearly every level and aspect of Chinese family interactions, politics and government. For the purpose of the PLA, which despite widespread numerical force reductions is still in the business of recruitment, vast numbers of young (primarily men) people every year creates special problems. First, and most simply, one child per family (generally) means that fewer youth exist in Chinese society, and thus fewer are available for recruitment. Western military observers have already noted this trend. "The broad shifts taking place in China's population...are working against the PLA."¹⁷⁵ The numerical shortcoming is no secret within the PLA either. A 2001 *PLA Daily* article reported that the number of recruitable males in one eastern province had shrunk from 2 million in 1991 to less than 1 million in 2001.¹⁷⁶

Decreased birth rates are thus resulting in a population that is disproportionately old. Indeed, many population experts expect that China will be the first nation to ever become 'old before it gets rich.' Again, this is no secret in China. "Chen Zhi, chief of the department of population and social science in Sichuan Province which has the highest proportion of seniors in China said 'We are like a man getting old before he gets rich,' Chen recently told the local press."¹⁷⁷ The shortage of

175 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 242.

176 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 242.

177 Jehangir S. Pocha, "The Greying of China," *The Boston Globe*, January 2, 2007 http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2007/01/02/the_graying_of_china/ (accessed November 8, 2008).

youth combined with an aging population is thus beginning to affect the traditional family structure that relied on the children to take care of elderly parents. Just as in years past, having the only son leave the family is a large social obstacle. As a result, the PLA has recently lowered its term of service from four to two years considering “...the hardship placed on some families who had only one son (as a result of the one-child policy), the decision was made to reduce the time of conscription service in order to allow the youth to return to their families quicker.”¹⁷⁸ Yet, while many felt the need to reduce the term of service to help alleviate social-family pressures, the new recruitment laws in many ways only serve to compound the existing problem. In a system that has trouble finding enough male recruits, reducing terms of service by half simply means twice as many new recruits must be found and trained. “The paradox is evident: to make the service more palatable to a small group of candidates, the term of service had to be shorted ... created a requirement for a greater number of conscripts to be drawn each year from an ever- shrinking pool.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, while the problem of losing sole-family supports is reduced, the underlying need to find more youth from a smaller pool is doubled.

Finally, social stigmas and male child desirability has led to an increasing gender imbalance. “In China, which has strict population controls, boy children are thought to be more desirable to parents than girl children. The ratio of boys to girls in China...has been widening in the past decade due to techniques that allow parents to

178 Blasko 2006, p. 49.

179 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 242.

predict the sex of their offspring.”¹⁸⁰ In 2001 this had created a sex ratio of 1:17, or, in gross numerical terms, “The number of men is thought to outnumber women in China by more than 60 million.”¹⁸¹ At first glance this might seem like good news for the PLA which is, primarily, recruiting young males. However, like most broad-reaching social trends, the growing youth gender imbalance has created a phenomenon among young men in China known as 'unmarriageable males.' China's “unmarriageable males” are “the rising numbers of young men in China who, due to the country’s growing youth gender imbalance, have no realistic prospect of securing a bride.”¹⁸² The fear among these young male soldiers, many who do not have girlfriends when they join the ranks, is that they simply will not find a bride once they leave the service. This fear has been noted within the PLA as well. “Lt. General Qin Chaoying said that many conscripts did not have a girlfriend back home during their service and, afraid of becoming “unmarriageable males,” many of them want to leave the service.”¹⁸³ Thus, the effects of the one-child policy are profound in finding and recruiting youth for the PLA. In many ways they do present any special differentiation between educated and uneducated youth in terms of the desirability of a career in the PLA, but they do strongly compound the problems facing current recruitment.

180 Bashir Mamdani and Meenal Mamdani, *The Impact of China's one-child Policy* (Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, 2006), <http://www.issuesinmedicalethics.org/143ss106.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

181 editor, *China Steps up to 'one child' policy* (BBC, 2000) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/941511.stm> (accessed November 8, 2008).

182 Charles Wolf, Jr., K. C. Yeh, Benjamin Zycher, Nicholas Eberstadt, Sungho Lee, *Fault Lines in China's Economic Terrain* (Rand, 2003), 56-57.

183 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 31.

While demographic shifts driven by the one-child policy may not have specific implications for educated youth joining the PLA, the current educational structure that exists in rural, urban and military academies is currently working almost perfectly against the needs of the modern PLA. Every year the CMC publishes a list regarding the number of candidates they need from each militarily autonomous region in China. This forced conscription, supplemented by volunteers from around the country, makes up the regular recruits entering PLA force. These conscription numbers are assigned quotas and reflect the population ratio of rural and urban China. Currently these figures are set at 66.8 percent and 33.2 percent respectively. Recruitment is based on a strict percentage based on populations ratios for a number of reasons. Politically, burdening the respective populations evenly makes a great deal of sense and helps foster a sense of fairness in the system. Ideologically, the basic concept of a two-to-one rural/urban split is supported by the PLA's historic reliance on the strong rural youth.

However, in modern times, when education is of paramount importance, this dynamic is creating increased problems in securing qualified recruits. Current nation-wide compulsory education laws require access to nine years of education for all Chinese youths. However, the 1978 market reforms have consistently favored urban development, fueled by a large-scale influx of unequally educated workers from the countryside. Rural education is not heavily (sometimes at all) subsidized by the central government. Thus, the poorest Chinese are often left to supply their education bill entirely on their own. Not surprisingly, rural education is sparsely subsidized, especially when compared to standards in the largest cities. “Although

twelve years of schooling was virtually universalized in Beijing and Shanghai by the beginning of the twenty-first century, 20 percent of the country's populated rural areas had not attained the legally guaranteed nine years of education."¹⁸⁴ By 2005 this figure had dropped to ten percent receiving nine years of education or less. For the PLA who still draws, by law, a full two-thirds of its recruits from rural areas, finding youths capable of becoming the new generation of qualified soldiers needed by the work force is extremely difficult.

Another consequence of rural educational inequities is a steady flow of rural youth without professional training pouring into cities looking for any kind of employment combined with the household registration act which prevents rural families from participating in state-owned enterprises and party institutions. However, current registration laws require PLA recruitment be conducted on location of one's official registration of residence. A youth who travels to the city is often unavailable for the following winter conscription. Given the burden of low-standard local infrastructure for many rural communities, tracking the exact whereabouts of every member is not a high priority."¹⁸⁵ Thus, when winter recruitment and registration arrives, officers in charge are often forced to lower educational standards as the quota system overestimates both the number of youths in the community and their educational level. A 2006 *Xinhua* article sheds some light on this issue, stating 'For those from rural areas, elementary education is a must.'¹⁸⁶ Close observers will

184 Gerard A. Postiglione, *Education and Social Change in China: Inequality in a Market Economy* (M. E. Sharp, 2006), 3.

185 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 238.

186 Yao Runping (ed), "People's Liberation Army starts national recruitment," *Xinhua English*,

note elementary education is six years – a full three years short of the 'national compulsory level'.

Urban education is in many ways the polar opposite of the dilemma faced by rural recruitment. The same policies that have disproportionately burdened rural communities have helped fuel a remarkable surge in the level, quality and universality of urban education. The same *Xinhua* article quoted above describes this phenomenon stating, “Urban male recruits have at least high school education and university students are favored.” Clearly, the laws surrounding PLA recruitment and conscription from urban areas reflect a much brighter intellectual prospect. However, even at the constrained one-third yearly urban recruitment levels, the PLA is still facing a difficult task in finding enough urban youths for the PLA. The current conscription laws begin at age 18 and cap at age 22, while compulsory enlistment is deferrable to those currently studying at university level institutions. Thus, in practical terms, for the vast majority of university level students – predominately urban youth – mandatory conscription is not something they will ever face.¹⁸⁷ This condition is good for the students, but bad for the PLA. Additionally, higher education enrollment has received much attention from the central government. Educational reforms have been underway since the end of the Cultural Revolution's end and, for the most part, they have been tremendously effective. Since 1978 “the number of new students in the higher education system has increased over ten-fold,

November 1, 2006 http://news3.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-11/01/content_5275743.htm
(accessed November 8, 2008).

187 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 238.

from about 400,000 in 1978 to nearly 4.5 million in 2004.”¹⁸⁸ This surge in enrollment has not only affected the pool of urban youths, but also the most highly educated and intellectually-minded rural youths have increasingly found opportunity for higher education. While this is an extremely positive development for both the economic prospect of China and Chinese youth wishing to pursue higher education, the modernizing PLA remains unable to rely upon traditional sources of youth willing to serve.

Finally, the very strength of the civilian economy that is making technological leaps possible for the PLA is fighting against recruiting those needed to use the new equipment. While the PLA does not fully publicize their pay scales, some educated guesses may be made regarding the disparity between contemporary civilian-military pay.¹⁸⁹ In the 1970s, the military paid some twenty percent to thirty percent more than civilian counterpart jobs. However, these pay scales have not been matched to civilian progress. In a rare case, a professor at the National Defense University (he was a senior colonel with thirty years of service) revealed his 1999 salary as 1,600 yuan a month.¹⁹⁰ To put this in perspective, a 2003 graduate of an ordinary electrical engineering department can now expect to make anywhere from 5,000-10,00 yuan a month working in a large city.¹⁹¹ Such a disparity has created

188 Yitzhak Shichor, “China's Revolution in Higher Education”, *China Brief*, March 2, 2006, http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=415&issue_id=3637&article_id=2370828 (accessed November 8, 2008).

189 Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007* (Office of Naval Intelligence, 2007) <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf> p. 103 (accessed November 8, 2008).

190 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 238.

191 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 180.

enormous problems for the PLA. A rank few will obtain, senior colonel, in his mid-fifties would make only a tiny fraction of what a fresh graduate from a top-ranking technology school could find. This disparity did not function to draw technologically savvy recruits into the PLA. Thus, in 2006 the PLA begun to address these issues by nearly doubling pay for officers and NCO's. "PLA officers and NCOs received pay increases ranging between 80 and 100 percent. For example, prior to the 2006 salary increase, a PLA colonel earned 2,000 RMB (USD 256) per month. Following the salary increase, a PLA colonel now earns 4,200 RMB (USD 539) per month."¹⁹² These reforms were also matched by increased care to barracks, food and basic living standards.

However, despite these reforms, the pay disparity is still quite evident. Even with the raises, the civilian economy still offers more money and fast promotions at a younger age to recruits with the degrees now being sought after. Even after the pay reforms the income inequality between soldiers and those engaged in the civilian economy is still being noted, both in domestic Chinese sources and by foreign observers. A *Xinhua* article published November 30, 2007 detailed the monetary and employment benefits of graduating from a top university, in this case Peking University. The article noted that 97% of their graduates find employment within a year, with most working for famous multinational companies, major organizations or prominent research institutes. However, the article went on to say that "Ten percent chose to work in the impoverished areas in northwest China, the

192 Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, Travis Tanner (ed), *The "People" in the PLA* (US Government, 2008), 212.

People's Liberation Army (PLA), or the rural areas around Beijing.”¹⁹³

This ten percent subcategory was defined as “rewarding, but does not pay well.”

Chinese officials and PLA generals still complain that wages, as they stand, still can not compete against the civilian economy to attract the best and the brightest Chinese youth. “Senior Chinese officers have complained in interviews in the local and foreign media that PLA pay rates were still too low to entice the best recruits despite the continued increases in defense outlays. The market economy is also attracting a lot of talented graduates to join the private sector.”¹⁹⁴ Today's most contemporary US research regarding the PLA reaches the same conclusions as Chinese sources. The September, 2008 “*The “People” In The PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*” claims “However, the PLA has been facing increased competition for top university graduates from China’s private sector, and this is likely to become more of a challenge as the economy continues to grow and the highly educated graduates the PLA seeks to recruit look to more lucrative options.”¹⁹⁵ The problem is quite simple. The PLA, despite recent pay increases still can not compete monetarily with the booming civilian economy for candidates with technology degrees from its best universities.

Thus, today the PLA is faced with a paradox. Blazing economic modernizations have provided capital, technology and incentive to modernize the

193 editor, “Survey: Graduates from famous universities get a head start in jobs game,” *Xinhua English*, November 30, 2007 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-11/30/content_7175059.htm (accessed November 8, 2008).

194 David Lague, “China investing heavily to train a more tech-savvy army,” *New York Times Herald Tribune*, May 29, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/29/asia/china.php> (accessed November 8, 2008).

195 Kamphausen et al 2008, p. 196.

PLA. However, this very system that has made such progress possible works against the PLA's ability to find the kind of people who can actually use these new technologies. These modernizations, and the resultant problem of finding the right kind of recruit, are being taken seriously by the CMC, and Chinese central leadership. Today the PLA is at the forefront of a Chinese movement to address these issues, and a foreign movement to study the handling of these issues. One contemporary way these challenges to recruitment are being aggressively met is with propaganda. To date, little foreign research has explicitly dealt with modern PLA recruitment and contemporary propaganda. Yet, similar to the mobilization for the Korean war, a wide campaign currently aims to make the right kind of youths desire enlistment and generalized Chinese society to view the PLA as positively as possible. Though the target audience is different, media and social institutions are different, the basic tool to alter perception remains constant.

CHAPTER VIII

MODERN PRO-PLA PROPAGANDA

Given the seriousness of the recruitment issues, and the modern focus on Chinese military improvements, current efforts to bolster the PLA's image are widespread, diverse and well-propagated within Chinese society. They stem not only from the central Government, but in addition, modern, positive-PLA motifs are finding home in popular media created and viewed by private citizens. However, despite the widespread nature and diverse sources, modern media, images and propaganda glorifying the PLA can be grouped into three distinct categories. The first category presents the need for a strong, modern PLA, and the great achievements currently being made towards that end. Following this, much effort is being made to highlight PLA heroes and popularize individuals. This is also finding roots in modern China's popular entertainments and its portrayal of PLA soldiers. Finally, in keeping with the PLA's founding as a peoples army that helped harvest crops and safeguard the commoners, the PLA is increasingly stepping up its disaster relief efforts. This effort is twofold. First, increased resources and training are being dedicated to domestic humanitarian missions, increasingly advertising the PLA's role in these missions. This is then followed by a highly effective and widespread campaign to portray and publicize these efforts.

Currently much scholarly attention, both Western and Chinese, is being

given to modern China's development and nationalism. Not surprisingly contemporary nationalism has strong implications for the PLA as it represents a very real physical manifestation of the nation's power. In recent years the PLA itself has begun to channel the widespread Chinese nationalism internally, an effort that is being noted. "...nationalism is a growing force within Chinese society as a whole and the PLA in particular."¹⁹⁶ As for the purpose of increasing the PLA's image in contemporary society, nationalism has the strong potential to draw recruits by non-material means. Again, the incredible potential modern Chinese nationalism has for creating a strong recruitment tool is being taken seriously. "...the strong sense of nationalism that exists in China can also be a powerful recruiting tool."¹⁹⁷

New recruits however, are not the only target used to promote nationalism and pro-PLA sentiments are being used. Another manifestation of the PLA, CMC and Chinese central government's manipulation of the armies image is contemporary nationalism being harnessed to explain why a strong PLA is needed for China and how the PLA is rising to that challenge. Currently, this message is being delivered in a multitude of ways. First, and not surprisingly, newspapers such as Xinhua carry stories that exemplify the need for the PLA. These stories often quote top CCP leadership, Hu Jintao included. One of many examples, carried the headline *Hu highlights importance of military training in peacetime*. The article goes on to describe the importance of a strong army, the need for the Chinese people to support modernization efforts and for the PLA servicemen to remember their historic and

196 Blasko 2006, p. 172.

197 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 181.

important role. “All service people should be made aware of the Army's historic mission, ideology, fighting spirits, and socialist ethics, while upholding the Marxist view of war, patriotism and revolutionary heroism, the leader said.”¹⁹⁸

However, displays and opportunities to detail the need for a strong PLA are not limited to simple newspaper stories. August 1, 2007 marked the official '80th Anniversary of the PLA,' an event that was widely covered on Chinese television. This ceremony even took the central government's approach to stories deemed important, and blocked out nearly all other channels to cover the anniversary for several hours. Amid the the speeches, parades and displays, one PLA general came on and made a long speech regarding the territorial integrity of China – meaning Taiwan – and other separation movements. Amid such talk he urged the PLA and Chinese in general to take seriously the problems of military modernization and the potential for real combat. “...all PLA soldiers and officers should further "heighten their sense of responsibility and sense of urgency", and to make all-out efforts to "get well-prepared for military struggle.”¹⁹⁹ Transcripts of this speech can still be found on line at the PLA's 80th Anniversary web page.

While such widespread and broadly decimated stories, images and messages are no doubt powerful tools in creating and fostering pro-PLA sentiments, and perhaps even nationalism, modern Chinese leadership is taking steps on diverse

198 Chen Fen (ed), “Hu Highlights Importance of military training in peacetime,” *Xinhua English*, June 27, 2006 http://news3.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-06/27/content_4757830.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

199 Mu Xuequan (ed), “General stresses PLA's mission to safeguard national sovereignty,” *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Australia*, March 6, 2007 <http://au.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t301488.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

levels to ensure the PLA is well received. Today, the Chinese education system is also being actively used in efforts to explain why China needs an active and powerful military, and how the PLA is that force. To this end a strong, compulsory, military education that focuses on proper military thinking is currently conducted at virtually all levels of the Chinese education system. This has been written into the Chinese constitution. In 2001, sponsored by Jiang Zemin, China passed the *Law of the People's Republic of China on National Defense Education (Order of the President No.52)*. The law is extremely clear in its use of schools to foster a sense of nationalism, pride in China and faith in the PLA. Article one, Section one states “This Law is enacted in accordance with the National Defense Law and the Education Law for the purpose of popularizing and strengthening education in national defense, carrying forward the spirit of patriotism, promoting the building of national defense and furthering socialist cultural and ethical progress.” The law goes on to stipulate that “The State, through conducting education in national defense, helps citizens...develop patriotic enthusiasm and conscientiously perform their obligations to defend the country.” Such regulations are not going unfulfilled. One example of modern political and pro-PLA education can be seen in an October 27, 2007 *Xinhua* article titled *Jet fighter presented to SW China middle school*, that details how a retired PLA jet has been moved to a middle-school as playground object to teach the children how advanced the PLA has become. The article also details how excited the children were the night before the aircraft arrived, and how overjoyed they became once it did arrive. “Many students didn't sleep well during night before the aircraft arrived as they were so excited. When they were informed the plane had

been sent to school the next day, students rushed to the playground, and touched it. Some of them even climbed onto it after teachers approved it.”²⁰⁰

Modern pro-PLA propaganda is also finding root in institutions of higher education. The first steps to having PLA education and representation in Chinese colleges was accomplished in 1998 with the founding of agreements between the PLA and Peking University and Qinghua University in Beijing allowing PLA soldiers to directly enroll in the schools and receive education. “The first agreement between the PLA and a civilian academic institution was signed in July 1998 between the General Political Department and Peking and Qinghua universities.”²⁰¹ These agreement has subsequently been expanded to include a total of twenty-one civilian universities. This initial PLA-Civilian higher education interaction has been reinforced by efforts to reach the broader student body. Today, officers exist in all twenty-one universities to further pro-PLA education. “These officers responsibilities also include overseeing military propaganda work at the host civilian institution...”²⁰² Today, these offices are clearly visible on Chinese campuses. Illustration six and seven are of summer 2008 signs outside the PLA office inside the Peking University walls. (Illustration 6). (Illustration 7). This, again, is in accordance with the 2001 Chinese constitutional amendment which further stipulates in Article 16 “Institutions of education shall incorporate national defense education into their plans for work

200 Song Shutao (ed), “Jet fighter presented to SW China middle school,” *Xinhua English*, September 27, 2007 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-09/27/content_6799399.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

201 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 190.

202 Kamphausen et al 2008, p. 229.

and teaching and take effective measures to guarantee the quality and results of national defense education.” The PLA office, complete with billboards, in the center of China's most prestigious university, is a logical extension of such a law.

However, modern propaganda drives are not limited to such subtle and inconspicuous examples of youthful pro-PLA education. One, somewhat more obscure, yet fascinating example of this drive to showcase the need for a strong armed force in hands on youth education is an amusement park roughly two hours outside of Shanghai, curiously named *Oriental Green Boat* (*dongfang lu zhou* 东方绿舟). *Oriental Green Boat* consists of two parts, one being a typical amusement park while the other is a man-made lake with a life-size model US aircraft carrier on one side and a fortified Taiwan beachhead on the other. Various pieces of retired military hardware litter the area. Missiles on concrete platforms, a retired squadron of bombers and even the rusting exoskeleton of an old diesel submarine rest tucked away behind the model aircraft carrier. The symbolism behind a US aircraft carrier posed to invade Taiwan is not subtle. Beyond President Clinton sending in the USS Independence in 1996 to stop PLA missile tests in the Taiwan Straits²⁰³ the PRC is currently lacking in a 'blue water navy' – or the ability to project its forces much into sea or beyond its borders. (Illustration 8). (Illustration 9). A US aircraft carrier in such a position creates a idealized fantasy of modern PLA power, but also clearly reinforces an extremely tangible example of what and why exactly China needs the PLA strong, both physically and technologically.

203 editor, “Lessons from the March Missile crisis,” *Taiwan Communique* No. 71, June 1996, <http://www.taiwandc.org/twcom/71-no3.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

However, highlighting the need for a strong PLA is not left to pure chance and juxtaposition of images. The aircraft carrier comes complete with retired PLA soldiers who lead, mostly children, through a tour of three decks decorated with modern PLA propaganda. (Illustration 10). This is a picture of the first floor, where soldiers explain to the red-caped children the reasons why China has suffered in the past for lacking a strong military and who stress the importance of contemporary efforts to become (and remain) militarily powerful. Such messages are repeated in written plaques across the walls. (Illustration 11).

The message is clear. In the past China did not have the resources or might or perhaps the will to defend itself and it paid the price at the hands of the other more developed nations. Now that China is rising in the world the same mistakes must not be repeated. This sign even urges the touring youths to ask themselves what they can do to aid in their nation's security. The second floor lists in chronological order all the atrocities, injustices and humiliations committed against China in the past 200 years, while on the third and final floor, PLA soldiers explain to the children how important it is to have a strong air force and missile program.

One retired PLA supply truck driver, who was willing to speak with me, claimed that on some weekends extra volunteers would be brought to the site and a mock invasion would actually be held by shuttling children over from the boat onto the beachhead. The exact details of the claim are, sadly, unverifiable, but I was able to ride a retired amphibious landing craft towards 'Taiwan.' (Illustration 12). The ride came complete with sound effects and commentary from the driver.

In speaking with Chinese citizens from Peking, Fudan University

students, Olympic spectators, and a number of security guards, the need for a strong PLA seems to have become broadly agreed upon in civilian society. The most prominent and widely accepted (or at least widely told to me) belief is that China does not, in any way, want war. As such, having a strong army is the only way to prevent one nation from unfairly engaging in violent military actions against another. I have personally heard the example of the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan in proving this assertion many times on many occasions. The claim goes, Iraq and Afghanistan were militarily weak, so they were invaded without too much concern from either the US or its allies. If it had been modern China, the argument goes, nobody would have dared.

Given all the attention and effort given to portray why a strong PLA is so important, the next logical step on the part of the PLA is to prove just how far they have come. "...The military seeks to impress the public with its competence and the security it offers...If the PLA can indeed regain the sustained respect of the people, it will probably have a much easier time recruiting and retaining troops."²⁰⁴ This is exactly what is currently being done. Obvious examples include newspaper articles highlighting modern weapons, missile programs, space programs and the new modern training PLA soldiers obtain. Such images are widespread and, in many respects, dominate the available media representations of the modern PLA. Most stories carry vivid, high quality pictures exemplifying the skill, training and modernization of the PLA. (Illustration 13).²⁰⁵

204 Finkelstein et al 2006, p. 246.

205 Fan Aifeng (ed), "Officers and men in test confrontation exercise," *PLA Daily*, October 15, 2008, http://english.pladaily.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2008-10/15/content_1510539.htm (accessed

Here we see again see allusions to amphibious landings, presumably in reference to Taiwan. The article explains, “During the exercise, the principles of high speed, coordination, synchronization and high efficiency were embodied by the officers and men of the unit, and the troops had been tempered in an all-round way.” However, high tech weapons make up the bulk of these stories often complete with grandiose claims regarding the ability of PLA soldiers to use these new advanced technologies. This article discusses long range mobile missile development systems. (Illustration 14). The article explains, “Recently, the officers and men of an armored regiment used their new armaments to carry out live-ammunition fire examination under scorching sun in northern Fujian Province, and the percentage of hits reached 97%.”²⁰⁶

Yet, for all the focus on modern training and high tech weaponry, the PLA and central government leadership is careful to reinforce the personal ability and drive of contemporary PLA soldiers. One interesting story discussed how some soldiers, lacking current active duty responsibilities, took it upon themselves to develop a new personal physical combat training program “...In light of actual combat, a group of the Nanjing Military Area Command put its troops through rigorous training of dangerous and difficult subjects in order to constantly enhance the combat skills.” Again, highly detailed visuals follow. (Illustration 15).²⁰⁷

November 9, 2008).

206 Fan Aifeng (ed), “Officers and men in test confrontation exercise,” *PLA Daily*, October 15, 2008, http://english.pladaily.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2008-10/15/content_1510540.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

207 Mo Ruilin, “Building up crack troops through hard training,” *PLA Daily*, October 16, 2008, http://english.pladaily.com.cn/site2/news-channels/2008-10/16/content_1512123.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

Such examples of modern PLA competence are not limited to army publications, but can be found all over Chinese media and publishing. One news story, run on multiple channels that can now be found all across the Internet on both Chinese and English websites, is a short video of US marines competing in an obstacle course against their Chinese counterparts. The reporting is not overly dismissive of American prowess, but instead stresses the intense training the PLA soldiers undergo and, of course, the background competition during the dialog shows a US Marine soundly defeated. (Illustration 16).²⁰⁸ Contemporary bookstores also now carry large sections dedicated to military technology and advancements. This picture highlights one of several shelves dedicated to modern military and PLA equipment in a bookstore near Peking University. (Illustration 17). Such topics are also widely covered in newspaper and magazine stands throughout major cities. Thus the CMC, PLA and central government is aggressively attempting to channel and cultivate a growing sense that a strong PLA is needed to keep China safe, and remain peaceful. This is accomplished through media, education and psychical placement of pro strong PLA images and iconography, while subsequent movements stress how strong and capable the PLA has become. Civilian culture has, in places, begun mirroring this image.

The second element in this widespread movement to popularize the PLA is a drive to increase the reputation and prestige of heroic individuals. This, in many ways, ties back to long standing traditions seen in the PLA, be it stories exemplifying

208 editor, "US Marines VS Chinese Marines," *YouTube*, August 20, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFoWCbQjwXw> (accessed November 9, 2008).

courage in the Korean war or the diary of Lei Feng. Today, such stories are still given much attention by the central government. Scholarship and PLA studies have noted this general trend, yet have not greatly examined the nuances. “The General Political Department wastes no chance to publicize these and many other ancillary areas in which the Chinese armed forces provide support to the general population or create pride in the Chinese people. Typical reports range from helping peasants with the harvest, to saving pandas, to congratulating PLA Olympic medal winners.”²⁰⁹ Today's version of PLA hero recognition finds dissemination into greater Chinese society through many of the same outlets as those of past decades. Currently, modern PLA heroes and role models are recognized primarily in public places, television programs and newspapers.

The China People's Revolution Military Museum in Beijing offers perhaps the clearest example of holding military individuals up to public acclaim. (Illustration 18). (Illustration 19). This plaque reads 'Model of the Time' (*shidai kaimo* 时代楷模). While such a message in a military museum is perhaps not entirely surprising, it is noteworthy the sheer prominence the PLA receives in this and many other similar displays around the museum. Looking at this image, the observer is left with the distinct impression that the PLA constitutes a great deal of the most capable, praiseworthy and honorable individuals in China.

This message is not left only to those who tour a military museum. Recently the central government has begun airing short television shows about outstanding officers, aimed at a civilian audience. “The PLA propaganda apparatus

209 Blasko 2006, p. 175.

also has been producing a daily half-hour military news program, aired by China Central Television (CCTV). This program serves primarily the civilian audience, not the PLA.”²¹⁰ Through the months of June, July and August 2008, every weekday night at 8:00 PM a half hour segment would be shown on CCTV channel seven, interviewing, detailing and describing a member of the PLA who had contributed to the nation in some exemplary way. During the months following the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, such reports became dominated by those who had taken part in the rescue operations. (Illustration 20). (Illustration 21). These are two images from June 18, 2008 and August 11, 2008 from the brief biography portion of this show. These stories come on regularly, and again leave the distinct impression that many of the best in China are found in the PLA.

Print media is also following the same modern trend in creating heroic PLA figures. In many ways these stories are most reminiscent of the old style cultural revolution, and even earlier works. This story, *PLA Officer Driving Force Behind Snow Relief Effort*, from a February 2008 *China Daily* article describes in great length the sheer heroic determination, selflessness and pride in safeguarding China one officer took during the 2008 winter snow storm. In this example a 53 year old commissar singlehandedly displayed many of the most common and time-honored traits of an outstanding PLA role model. A truck driver (Lei Feng died driving a truck) worked tirelessly for 10 straight days in a snowstorm to keep the road clear – risking not only sheer exhaustion but real physical danger, because, in his words,

²¹⁰ Stephen J. Flanagan and Michael E. Marti (ed), *The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition* (National Defense University Press, 2003), 82.

“...the looks of helpless passengers and drivers motivated me. I could not give up as the Spring Festival was approaching.” Indeed, even when some drivers would lose their tempers with Wei for not working fast enough, he would only grit his teeth, think of China and the importance of this national celebration, smile and work harder. Such heroics have apparently earned him high praise from most who know him. But this humble servant has his own role models ‘...many people admire him but Wei, he has his own idols.’ Wei’s personal heroes are his own soldiers, who despite personal sacrifice and the needs of their own families, worked without complaint to safeguard the people, and so won a tear from Wei. “Sometimes I can’t help crying when thinking about my comrades-in-arms. While they worked with me, their own families were suffering from power shortages and cold, with some of their family members in hospitals. But they never said no to the tasks assigned.”²¹¹ No doubt such heroics do exist, and Wei probably is, by any measure, a hero. Yet, the reporting of his actions is laced with meaning, which when taken with the other stories beginning to appear all throughout centrally propagated media, go far beyond simply honoring heroes. They serve as positive models to follow, embrace and in many cases emulate.

The very real possibility for emulation is not being left to chance.

Contemporary recruitment efforts tie directly into popular PLA figures who have become recognized in greater Chinese society. One example of this is a new generation of ads that have now begun being aired around China. (Illustration 22).

This particular ad was discussed at great length in *Beijing Youth Daily* (Beiqingwang,

211 Wu Jiao, “PLA officer driving force behind snow relief effort,” *China Daily*, February 19, 2008, http://chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-02/19/content_6464342.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

北青网).²¹² The Chinese headline reads 'An infusion of quality talent to build an information-equipped army,' while the ad itself contains three PLA figures who gained national recognition. The first is Liwei, China's first astronaut, whose wife is also a PLA officer. He stands above Fang Yonggang, a naval university professor who became highly associated with educational campaign in 2007, while the third individual is Gao Ming, a PKU student who took two years off from his studies to join the PLA and in doing so, became a youth icon. These three individuals are meant to exemplify not only popular fame, but the new kind of soldier that a modern PLA needs. Astronauts, professors and students from China's most famous and prestigious university are clearly recognizable symbols of education and intellectual capability. Moreover, they target an urban audience. This message is clear in China as well. The article from *Beijing Youth Daily* reads 'Conscription in the city for the first time through the work of public service announcements published in the mainstream media.'

Yet is it not only the central government that is beginning to popularize individual heroes among the PLA. Indeed, this is beginning to resonate in popular non-government sponsored society. The story of Gao Ming, while later portrayed for recruitment purposes, was entirely organic and created the 'Gao Ming phenomenon.' Gao, an honor student at PKU studying in business management, joined the PLA in December 2005 during the yearly winter recruitment drive. He was the first PKU undergraduate student to do so. "In 2005, responding to an on-campus army

212 Yang Liwei 杨利伟, "daiyan zhengbing guanggao 代言征兵广告" [Conscription advocacy ads], *bei qing wang* 北青网 [*Beijing Youth Daily*] November 2, 2007, <http://bjyouth.ynet.com/article.jsp?oid=25047042> (accessed November 9, 2008).

recruitment drive, Gao became the first PKU student to enlist and was honored with a huge send-off ceremony.”²¹³ Gao performed exceptionally well in the PLA, ranking top in both fitness and intellectual drills. The stories covering him, both civilian and government alike, also stressed how well-liked he was. Later, his decision and actions caused a stir among his fellow PKU students. The PKU newspaper covered Gao extensively, and endorsed him for a number of prestigious honors, while other Chinese news sources endorsed him for other reasons. *Sohu.news* ran one October, 03 2007 story honoring Gao in its own way. (Illustration 23)²¹⁴. This picture came with a Chinese caption that reads 'You are the most handsome guy at Beijing University.' (*ni shi beida zui shiqi de nan sheng* 你是北大最帅气的男生). The story of this smart, physically capable young army man was covered at length in multiple sources. The story of the PKU honor student who joined the PLA became so well-known and discussed in China that some American publications began covering the story. In the same month as the *Sohu.news* story was published, *The Weekly Standard* ran a similar story titled *China's New Soldier*.²¹⁵ This article came to many of the same conclusions as Chinese sources. Gao has become extremely popular and well-known. The combination of physical and mental prowess, juxtaposed against the apparent shocking nature of a PKU student joining the PLA, had created quite a story.

Gao is not the only PLA-related subject finding its way into a subject for

213 Michael Goldfarb, “China's New Soldier,” *The Weekly Standard*, September 10, 2007 http://www.weeklystandard.com/weblogs/TWSFP/2007/09/chinas_new_soldier.asp (accessed November 9, 2008).

214 Li Xuezhong 李雪红, “ni shi beida zui shiqi de nansheng! 你是北大最帅气的男生 [You are the most handsome guy at Beida] *sohu* 搜狐 <http://news.sohu.com/20070903/n251917680.shtml> (accessed November 9, 2008).

215 Goldfarb 2007, p. 1.

the civilian news and entertainment field. PLA related stories are becoming extremely popular in movies and television shows. (Illustration 24). This picture, taken June 2008, shows a small portion of the military and war section of a bookstore near the PKU campus. I visited this bookstore on a weekly basis for nearly two months, and this section always had many people looking at the titles. One movie, *Assembly*, has become especially popular in China. I have yet to meet an urban Chinese peer close to my age who is not familiar with the film. Indeed, I talked to several new Chinese students at the University of Oregon who went to college in China, and while none wished to be named, all had seen the film and claimed it has been shown in many campus movie halls around China. In the film a PLA soldier, Captain Gu Zidi, is given an extremely dangerous mission in a 1948 battle against Guomindang forces and must wait to hear the assembly call to retreat. He never hears the call, and sacrifices his entire unit fighting to the death against impossible odds to fulfill his mission. In the process he transforms a cowardly scholar into a model of selflessness and heroism. Sadly, all the soldiers except Gu die. Gu goes on to conduct the same level of heroism in the Korean War, but later finds it nearly impossible to prove he was the war hero his reputation had built him up to be. The film's second half details his struggle to find formal recognition for his lost battalion, while taking care of the scholar's wife who refers to him as 'big brother.' (Illustration 25).²¹⁶ What makes the film remarkable, other than its extreme popularity, is the gritty 'real' nature the film portrays. Gu is presented as a real person, complete with flaws. War is

216 editor, "jijiehao 集結號 [The Assembly]," *Love HK Film*, 2007, <http://www.lovehkfilm.com/panasia/assembly.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

terrible and people, even PLA soldiers, die in awful ways. This is portrayed in graphic detail. Yet, all the while, classic themes are duplicated throughout the film. Gu, and all the soldiers, fight with single-minded dedication for the good of China. Heroic sacrifices are obviously highlighted, but also the unit's ability. Later, Gu takes care of, but never engages in any romantic action with his old soldier's wife. Eventually Gu vindicates the entire battalion's reputation by finally winning them formal recognition. Television shows have also begun portraying more violent and realistic versions of PLA life, winning large audiences. One recent show, *Soldier Sortie*, is rumored to have exceeded the former top-ranking television show in China, *Prison Break*. According to a October 26, 2007 *Time* article, "Soldier Sortie is the most successful series (even more so than Prison Break, according to an Internet poll) on Chinese TV at the moment." This show depicts much of the same heroism seen in the civil and Korean war era dramas, only with contemporary PLA special forces officers.

Today the PLA, CMC and Chinese Central Government are taking the task of creating modern PLA heroes extremely seriously. Indeed, while Chinese Communist Party has a long tradition of recognizing outstanding individuals in the PLA, recent years have seen an explosion in the amount of time, attention and prominence the central government has dedicated to propagating the deeds of heroic individuals to greater Chinese society. Nearly all forms of media are currently employed in this effort. Moreover the campaign is beginning to resonate strongly with civilian popular culture. Contemporary China's television and the movie entertainment industry is not only following suit in creating extremely popular PLA

stories, but these stories all support the central party message. The message is clear. The PLA is full of heroes. This is true of both the revolution and Korean war era, but also of the modern PLA.

The third, and final element of contemporary, centrally-propagated positive images regarding the modern PLA is disaster relief. While the PLA has not fought a major armed conflict since the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese war, in recent years it has been actively and aggressively engaged in domestic aid after natural and man-made disasters. This is a centrally driven directive, widespread and often concerned with large scale efforts. According to the English language *Gov.cn Chinese Government's Official Web Portal* "The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has undertaken a range of humanitarian relief missions in disaster-stricken areas overseas in the past five years... nearly 225,000 military personnel have taken part in rescue and relief work this year."²¹⁷ Foreign observers are also beginning to take notice of these trends. "Every year all elements of the Chinese armed forces...are involved in numerous relief operations in response to natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and forest fires."²¹⁸ Indeed, while the PLA has always been concerned with internal domestic safety, modern trends have seen a noticeable increase in the time, military resources and manpower dedicated to such tasks (I have yet to see a female in any PLA disaster relief photo). Beginning in 2002 PLA commanders and units began thinking of disaster relief as part of an official mandate, and thus began preparing accordingly. "In 2002, rescue and disaster relief training was incorporated

²¹⁷ Mu XueQuan, "PLA to intensify disaster relief efforts," *Gov.cn*, August 14, 2006, http://english.gov.cn/2006-08/14/content_361421.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

²¹⁸ Blasko 2006, p. 175.

for the first time into the army's military training plan. Units from all over the country now routinely prepare to participate in these operations and have a guideline for training and evaluation."²¹⁹

Today's PLA not only dedicates large numbers of human resources towards relief efforts, but has also become a conduit through which state-sponsored relief aid flows. The Chinese central government is proud of this, and aggressively advertises the PLA's role in such domestic humanitarian efforts. One, of many, examples is a Xinhua article from the 2008 snow storm titled *PLA Sends 600,000 plus Quilts, Cotton-padded Coats to Disaster-hit Areas*. This article discussed in some detail the sheer volume of relief items the PLA distributed to needy Chinese citizens. Such articles also commonly stress the competency of today's PLA in not only its primacy in carrying out aid, but also the speed at which humanitarian material is distributed. "[A] senior Colonel in the PLA emergency response leading group said: "We got a request for help from the State Disaster Relief Commission on Tuesday, and we got the materials to them overnight."²²⁰ These articles often come with long sets of pictures, illustrating the articles pro-PLA assertions. A photo in the article depicts a member of the PLA infantry handing out steamed bread rolls to a young woman and child.

However, the contemporary relief efforts of the PLA are not based entirely on pure physical and tangible actions. Stories and images, such as handing

219 Blasko 2006, p. 174.

220 Yao Sinay (ed), "PLA sends 600,000 plus quilts, cotton-padded coats to disaster-hit areas," *Xinhua English*, January 30, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-01/30/content_7526655.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

out blankets and bread during the snow storm, and countless other examples detailing the good deeds of the PLA, are currently extremely widespread. “Photographs and reports on PLA medical personnel treating local civilians or soldiers donating blood are common in Chinese military newspapers. The 2004 Defense White Paper states 'more than 100 military hospitals' have provided support to civilian hospitals in 'remote and less developed area'.”²²¹ Today, even the PLA's official mandate as a primary domestic relief agency is wildly advertised. “The Headquarters of the General Staff and the General Political Department of the PLA recently issued a circular requiring soldiers to help citizens in typhoon-hit areas cope with difficulties. “Soldiers and armed police should help local officials evacuate and resettle citizens in typhoon-hit areas, and offer food, potable water, quilt and medicines to victims.”²²² This story originally ran in *Xinhua* news, Monday, August 14, 2006. It is one of virtually countless examples of centrally disseminated news sources publishing the disaster relief work carried out by the PLA.

While the PLA has always been a source of internal disaster relief, and even with the stepped-up campaign of 2002, the 2008 snow storm and earthquake have provided the most vivid and widely disseminated examples to date of this new campaign to bolster the PLA's image. Today an enormous volume of Internet, print and broadcast media exists. Contemporary images of soldiers aiding earthquake victims during the 2008 summer months could be seen virtually everywhere in Beijing. Some examples include, but are not limited to, ads on bus stops, entire

221 Blasko 2006, p. 173.

222 XueQuan 2008, p. 1.

sections of bookstores filled with glossy, full color picture books detailing the army's positive role, television ads, newspapers and even inserts in restaurant booklets.

(Illustration 26). (Illustration 27). (Illustration 28). (Illustration 29).

However, it is not only the enormous dissemination of these images that makes modern trends in publicizing disaster relief noteworthy. Modern images portray a highly heroic and positive image of the PLA in acting to help average Chinese citizens in times of extreme need. Indeed, virtually every image of the PLA and disaster victims is designed to resonate with strong positive feelings towards a domestic audience. First, images and stories repeatedly stress the selfless dedication to the Chinese people displayed by the PLA. Images of personal sacrifice, pain and hardship are particularly common. In many cases the soldiers hands, as a primary and extremely tangible means of giving physical support, are highlighted. One Sichuan television station reported that soldiers, upon seeing the devastation, and injury and death, dashed among the ruins and began digging out with their bare hands anyone with the slightest chance of surviving. "Among the collapsed buildings, soldiers used their hands to dig out anyone with the slightest chance of being alive."²²³ During the previous winter's snow storm, images and descriptions of frostbitten hands were also extremely common. (Illustration 30).²²⁴ This Xinhua picture accompanied a story with a similar description of personal heroics during the snow storm.

Second, accompanying images of injuries sustained aiding the people, the

223 Liu Yunyun, "The PLA Shoulders the Load," *Beijing Review*, May 22, 2008, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2008-05/23/content_118154.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

224 photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

physical determination of young soldiers is often stressed, especially in visual media, as in being able to move large objects, clear obstacles or transport huge quantities of desperately needed goods by the heroic determination shown by the modern PLA.. (Illustration 31).²²⁵ (Illustration 32).²²⁶ Finally, these descriptions stress the long hours, the exhausting work, the lack of sleep and food soldiers overcome when rushing to aid their fellow citizens. The same Sichuan television station reported, “Due to the high pressure involved in the rescue work, many soldiers had not eaten a meal through the entire day”, adding that civilians, upon seeing the soldiers' hard work, determination and exhaustion “...even tried giving their food to the soldiers, telling them they could save more lives if they kept their strength.” Of course, the soldiers are reported as graciously refusing such offers. Accompanying stories detailing modern soldiers' hard work and hunger in these times of hardship are images of soldiers collapsed, exhausted and catching a few hours sleep at whatever working location they are presently deployed. (Illustration 33).²²⁷ (Illustration 34).²²⁸

In many ways this drive to stress the great care, attention and devotion of the PLA to the Chinese people simply reflects directly upon its early revolutionary era founding principles. Images and stories of soldiers hauling injured civilians out of buildings, handing out blankets and refusing to take food from the people tie

225 Bian Xiezu 编写组, *Wenchuan! Wenchuan! Jiangzhen Yiju Zhongguo* 汶川!汶川!强震疑聚中国 [Wenchuan! Wenchuan! Strong Earthquake Casts Doubt on China] (Foreign Language Press, 2008), 62.

226 photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

227 Xiezu 写组 2008, p. 34.

228 photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

remarkably well into old army rules such as 'Take not even a needle or thread from the people' "Speak courteously to the people" and "Help them whenever possible."²²⁹ It was, after all, one of the PLA's most basic founding mandates that winning the revolution required massive popular support from the Chinese people. Today, as a direct arm of the central Party, it seems only logical that such policies would remain. Yet, what makes the contemporary images of domestic PLA civilian aid particularly noteworthy is how closely they tie into traditions many decades old. Today many examples of a stylistic reconstruction of, perhaps, the utmost pinnacle of Chinese propaganda exist in PLA images that fit remarkable well well with those from the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution eras.

Often the similarities between today's images and those of the 1950s and 1960s exist primarily to reduplicate common, and inspiring themes. These images correspond with stylistic similarities seen between the two time periods. Artwork and propaganda from the PRC's early years often highlighted large groups of hardworking citizens working towards a common goal under a large, waving red flag. (Illustration 35).²³⁰ (Illustration 36).²³¹ The first image is from the cultural revolution, it depicts members of the PLA and People's Armed Militia engaging in both military affairs (right half) and domestic industrialization (left half). Both conditions carry a long line of soldiers beneath the large red flag. The second image is from a long series of photos from the 2008 winter storm storm. These soldiers are lined up across

229 Graff 2002, p. 235.

230 Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/index.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

231 photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

a bridge, shoveling snow towards the center divider in an attempt to clear a driving space across the impassible corridor. Again, the individuals are obviously hardworking, but stylistically the images are remarkably similar. Other times, the style itself bears less resemblance, but the message remains the same, asserting that the contemporary PLA cares about the people in many of the same ways seen in decades past. These images both stem from disastrous earthquakes. (Illustration 37).²³² (Illustration 38).²³³ The first is from 1976, when six large earthquakes decimated many parts of China; the second is, again, from the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. While it is unclear if the doctors, or white-capped nurses, have any formal affiliation with the PLA, both images stress PLA members front and center in aiding the injured.

Finally, food and agricultural production are finding duplication as well. (Illustration 39).²³⁴ (illustration 40).²³⁵ In illustration thirty-nine, a PLA soldier helps in the Great Leap Forward era land reclamation projects, while the contemporary image (illustration 40) displays “...officers and men of a reserve anti-aircraft artillery division stationed in Sichuan Province seized the opportunity to send some officers and men to the countryside to help local people to reap wheat.”

However, stylistic and single-point similarities are not the only place where the content of contemporary PLA disaster propaganda is tapping into long-

²³² Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/index.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

²³³ Xiezu 写组 2008, p. 39.

²³⁴ Landsberger 1994, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/index.html> (accessed November 8, 2008).

²³⁵ Qiu Chaozhong, “Troops help people in quake-hit areas to harvest wheat,” *PLA Daily*, May 29, 2008, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/special-reports/2008-05/29/content_1287493.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

founded traditions within the armed forces and its interaction with the Chinese civilian sector. In the recruitment campaign for China's entry into the Korean War, appeals to national loyalty and filial piety were aggressively made through laws, social programs and interactions with traditional Chinese society. Today, through its coverage of disaster relief, the PLA is strongly portrayed as loyal to all of China by its extreme filial piety to the old of the nation. Young children are also brought under the protection of strong male caregivers. This is accomplished by portraying the modern PLA as the strong, loyal and pious son. As already seen in descriptions of PLA heroes' selfless efforts, modern soldiers are reported as putting the nation above their family life when extreme circumstances call for such sacrifice. Indeed, in the story of the benevolent commissar, who also rarely saw his wife and child, was moved to tears thinking of his own men putting the well-being of strangers above that of their family in an effort to clear the road so that travelers could reach their destinations in time for the lantern festival.

Such personal heroic sacrifice has been long established in PLA propaganda, especially in noteworthy individuals selected for special praise. Yet, what recent PLA visual portrayals from the snowstorm and earthquake add is a saturation of images that take traditional themes of caring for the elderly and children to a visual forefront. Pictures depicting young, strong, healthy men showing dedicated care for children and the elderly dominate depictions from both the 2008 snowstorm and earthquake. (Illustration 41).²³⁶ (Illustration 42).²³⁷ These images

236 Sun Haibo, "Witness on Site: Journalists Journey Beyond Role as Recorders," *China Pictorial* (2008) p. 28.

237 Xiezu 写组 2008, p. 36.

speak for themselves. Indeed, that is undoubtedly their purpose. These young soldiers show steadfast devotion to physically caring for elders with whom they presumably have no family ties. Yet, in these images they act as if every old man or woman were a close relative. The looks of pious, resolute determination are not coincidental. The observer of these images is meant to see the PLA as a young, healthy male caretaker of individuals traditionally looked after by the family. (Illustration 43).²³⁸

Children are treated in a similar fashion of heroic responsibility. Great and tender care is displayed – time and time again. (Illustration 44).²³⁹ The rare depictions of female soldiers presents an opportunity to take the care of children one step further than is possible with young males. This is one of several images showing perhaps the most intimate of all care: breastfeeding a young, hungry child. The article explains how the young woman asked her parents to take care of her own child for the next six months while she looks after this new child. Such a request radically inverts a traditional conception of family among the PLA. While the daughter should be tending to her own family, and raising the grandchildren, she instead has taken it upon herself to become loyal to the children of the nation at large, asking her own parents to help shoulder internal family obligations to facilitate this.

What, however, these images lack is depictions of young healthy PLA soldiers helping young, or even middle aged, Chinese. While they do exist, images of soldiers aiding young men are extremely rare. It seems unlikely that young men,

238 photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

239 Xiezu 写组 2008, p. 46.

woman or physically capable individuals were not also injured or in need of help in any of these disasters. Thus, a logical conclusion is that these images are picked explicitly as appeals to traditional perceptions and roles of the strong family son piously aiding the family elders to the family elders, looking after the children and displaying loyalty to the state. (Illustration 45).²⁴⁰

Like other areas of PLA propaganda, drawing the correlation between the PLA as the strong, loyal and pious son to the Chinese people is not left entirely to chance and personal assertion. Contemporary stories describing post-disaster relief typically stress the great emotional bonds formed between the recipients of PLA aid and the soldiers themselves. The soldiers are seen as becoming acting members of what are often newly formed post-disaster communities. Indeed, in the case of the Sichuan earthquake and its high death toll, many families did become restructured in various ways. Direct and explicit descriptions of the family-like ties formed by the PLA are vividly illustrated in a June 5, 2008 article published in the *PLA Daily* titled *New Family, New Life*. This article comes from a special spread to honor PLA soldiers as part of a larger story dedicated to detailing the PLA front line participation in relief campaigns that ultimately created a temporary shelter for hundreds left homeless by the earthquake. Again, written assertions are vividly reinforced by images of the entire community coming together and crying when the soldiers must finally depart. (Illustration 46).²⁴¹ (Illustration 47).²⁴²

²⁴⁰ photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

²⁴¹ photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm> (accessed November 9, 2008).

²⁴² photography editor, *PLA Daily Photo Gallery*, various dates, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/site2/>

Finally, centrally disseminated descriptions of PLA disaster relief stress how grateful the entire nation is for their dedication, sacrifice and ability. One May 23, 2008 story, published in the Beijing Review, describes how villagers and townspeople who had been displaced from their homes and cut off from the surrounding region began to cry with joy and relief when they first saw the soldiers arrive. "...many became emotional when they saw the soldiers arrive in town, shedding tears and saying they were more confident now..."²⁴³ The soldiers are described as not only extremely welcome, but extremely capable and appreciated as such. Further, following the long tradition of using highly evocative visual media to reinforce the written message, images of this civilian support is being widely propagated. (Illustration 48).²⁴⁴ During the months of June, July, and August 2008 this image could be seen all across Beijing in newspapers, magazines, and the central government's television commercials. The picture of a young boy in Sichuan rescued by the PLA is not, on its own, partially remarkable. What made the picture so well known was the child's action. Despite his obvious injuries and near-death experience this child times the time and psychological effort and determination to raise one arm to honor the PLA by saluting the soldiers.

Direct praise for the PLA is not only drawn from stories and images of local support, but also from the government itself. The PLA, having admirably followed its central directive, is then often commended by the central government. In

news-channels/photo-reports/2008-11/09/photo-reports.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

²⁴³ Liu Yunyun 2008, p. 1.

²⁴⁴ Xiezu 写组 2008, p. 51.

the case of large scale emergencies, and thus large scale PLA operations, direct praise for the PLA's actions often comes from the highest branches of government, is highly publicized and carries images of soldiers directly congratulated. This October 9, 2008 story from Xinhua titled *President Hu Praises Army's Role in Quake Relief* contains many congratulations to brave individuals, but also the PLA in general, noting that it was the first in to aid victims. (Illustration 49).²⁴⁵

Following these trends modern observers of the PLA are beginning to take notice of how powerful a tool the representations of aiding Chinese citizens in need can be, and how cost-effective the prominence of modern images aggrandizing PLA disaster relief is in generating PLA support. "In this case [disaster relief] a relatively small amount of spending can result in a much larger amount of good will on the part of the people assisted by the PLA disaster relief operations."²⁴⁶ Following the widespread publicity and praise of PLA actions, some Western observers feel opinions are improving regarding the overall worthiness and generalized good feelings with which average Chinese regard the PLA. "Military participation in these activities [examples of disaster relief] is considerably improving the PLA's image in the eyes of average Chinese citizen[s]."²⁴⁷ While current, popular, grassroots perceptions of the PLA are difficult to accurately gather or predict, some independent verification of Western observers is possible. During my June 2008 research in

245 Wang Yan (ed), "President Hu praises army's role in quake relief," *PLA Daily*, October 9, 2008 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/09/content_10172134.htm (accessed November 9, 2008).

246 Blasko 2006, p. 176.

247 Blasko 2006, p. 175.

Beijing it immediately became apparent how prominent positive images of PLA disaster relief had become in the nation's capital. In interviews with Chinese college students, security guards and other people around Beijing willing to speak with me about the PLA, the one universal answer to my questions was a strong degree of respect and appreciation towards the PLA's efforts to save lives in Sichuan and the winter 2008 snow storm. No deviations existed on this question. Everyone I spoke with responded by describing how wonderful it was to see the army do so well and help so many in need. Another, more radical, example of this widespread perception of the PLA's domestic prominence in aiding civilians is a curious video that has become widely circulated among *Youtube* users. In 2007 the video contained no English, but a year later comes with the title *China Army vs USA Army in Real War*. The video itself is a slide show that portrays image after image of PLA soldiers working to save the children and the elderly during the 2007 flood. (Illustration 50).²⁴⁸ (Illustration 51).²⁴⁹ What makes this particularly interesting is the juxtaposition these images received, being portrayed against that of the American military participation in post-hurricane Katrina relief. The Chinese in the left image commends the PLA for "Chinese child carried above the flood," while the American image on the right simply reads "no food, no food, no food." Such a video is by no means concrete proof regarding the creation of positive images regarding the PLA, but it does suggest that the central state's message is beginning to find some

248 editor, "China Army vs USA Army in real war," YouTube, August 26, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD4CWrx9wMY> (accessed November 9, 2008).

249 editor, "China Army vs USA Army in real war," YouTube, August 26, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD4CWrx9wMY> (accessed November 9, 2008).

resonance in the general population. In either case, the Chinese government is putting great efforts into portraying the modern PLA as capable, loyal and pious caretakers of China.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In many ways the history and evolution of the CCP has been inescapably linked to that of the PLA. This is, when viewed through the lens of traditional Confucian Chinese society, quite remarkable. Throughout vast portions of Chinese history the army, and those who would become soldiers, were denigrated and disrespected. Yet, during the Chinese civil war the Chinese Communist Party concluded it must, as one other warring faction, raise a military of its own. Thus, on August 1, 1927 the PLA was officially born.

However, the PLA ultimately became something far different than any other armed force China had – or has – seen. The PLA's commanders, the founding members of the CCP, who would ultimately come to power, decided their power would come from becoming the likable faction; this was accomplished by interacting with civilians in ways that could enhance the army's prestige and respectability. In the PLA's early years great care was taken to ensure the soldiers did not harm those around them, but instead won the hearts and minds of commoners. This began a long struggle to undo traditional stereotypes held against soldiers. After victory, soldiers were soon needed to engage the United Nations in Korea, and thus mass recruitment campaigns began anew. This became the PLA's first test of recruitment when China itself faced no direct aggression. New tactics were needed, and traditional

conceptions of loyalty and piety became inverted and tied with prestige. Later, peacetime saw the PLA at the forefront of massive propaganda campaigns.

Ultimately, the populace grew tired of mass political movement. A new leadership eager to set a new course for China, combined with an overactive PLA, culminated in a zenith in popular imagery and power. Yet, in 1989 when the central leadership called upon the PLA to clear Tiananmen Square of protesters, the PLA, eventually, did exactly as directed. Once again the central leadership valued the direct power of the PLA. Displays around the world of how weak the PLA had become relative to other nations' armies soon helped reverse trends in downplaying the importance of the PLA and began a shift toward modernization. A new kind of PLA began to evolve based on high-tech weapons. It has since been backed by a booming civilian economy that can provide weapons and funding. Yet, this new PLA requires a new kind of soldier, one who is comfortable with higher education and a computer as well as a rifle. Ironically, the technology that makes modernization of the PLA possible also strengthens the civilian economy, creating a strong dis-incentive for highly educated youths to join the army. As a result, the modern Chinese government has once again embarked on a massive campaign to strengthen the prestige of the PLA in China.

Thus, the resulting story is, in many ways, truly a 'people's army'. The PLA has never in its history been able to act independently of society, or the changing role the central leadership sets for it. This, undoubtedly, is true for any large organization working within a society, yet for the PLA the relationship is especially close. Throughout its history the PLA's image has always been key. In the wars for

independence the PLA represented the face of the emerging CCP. In the Korean war the PLA's image became painstakingly crafted to draw in enough recruits. During the Cultural Revolution the PLA became a mass disseminator of propaganda. Later years saw a society moving away from mass political campaigns and the PLA, largely retreated from society. From its founding, until Deng Xiaoping, the PLA played a role of dominance within society because those leading the nation deemed the PLA most capable, or most needed, in helping set that direction. Later post-Mao China saw the goals of the nation radically change, and the PLA changed with it.

China has, however, evolved a great deal from Deng's initial endeavorer into capitalism. Modern China now sees a booming economy, high technology and a central leadership that once again values the PLA. Thus, the PLA is once again returning – in force – to the forefront of Chinese politics and imagery. Yet, as always, this interaction is directed and controlled by the political, social and economy realities of the time. Gone are the days when a sturdy peasant with a rifle and millet could win the day. But, the civilian economy is pulling the new kinds of recruits needed away from the PLA. This problem is being taken seriously, and strong measures are being implemented that fit modern China. One such measure is a strong modern propaganda campaign designed to educate all Chinese on the need for a strong PLA, how the PLA is becoming strong and why the young and educated should enlist.

Modern movements to elevate the PLA's image, like those of decades past, are designed to resonate with the society of the day. Today's China is evolving with remarkable speed in almost every way imaginable. One such evolution is Hu

Jintao's October 2006 introduction of a socialist 'harmonious society.' This movement is still in its infancy, but moves to correct many of the emerging problems caused by the blistering pace of Chinese reforms, growth and market expansion. Corruption, inequality, pollution and basic social problems are all being questioned. "This policy, identified with the Hu Jintao leadership, acknowledges the new problems that have emerged as China continues its amazing economic growth. The economy is booming but so are tensions from rising inequality, environmental damage, health problems, diverse ethnicities, and attempts to break the "iron rice bowl."²⁵⁰ A 'people first' mentality is being advocated as the path to correcting these growing problems. The PLA is, as always, a product of its time. And while its wages can't compete with those of the civilian sector and while a host of problems exist that might drive away the young and educated, the central government is enacting a massive contemporary campaign to portray the PLA as exactly the kind, loyal and pious 'people first' caretaker of this new China. The disasters of 2007 and 2008 have given the PLA great opportunities to display exactly how they can look after the entire nation when it needs them the most. Real action, which no doubt saves untold lives, is being supported by a propaganda campaign that is equally potent. Images, stories and tales of sacrifice, caring and responsibility by the young men and woman of the PLA can now be found all over China, from TV to books to popular domestic movies. These events are unfolding as this narrative unfolded. We know what the new PLA needs. Modern observers should look for this new army to find itself

250 Matthew Boswell, "Harmonious Society," *China Elections and Governance*, July 23, 2007, <http://en.chinaelections.org/newsinfo.asp?newsid=9752> (accessed November 9, 2008).

through the China of the time, just as it has always done. As further domestic, political and economy events unfold, the PLA will follow. While the soldiers of today, dressed in new uniforms and supported by tanks and cutting-edge missiles look nothing like those who won the civil war, the PLA's basic interaction and quest for prestige within Chinese society has remained constant.

APPENDIX
ILLUSTRATIONS



Illustration 1 Bidding a Young Soldier Farewell



Illustration 2 A Young Soldier Leaving Home



沿着毛主席《五七指示》的光辉大道奋勇前进!

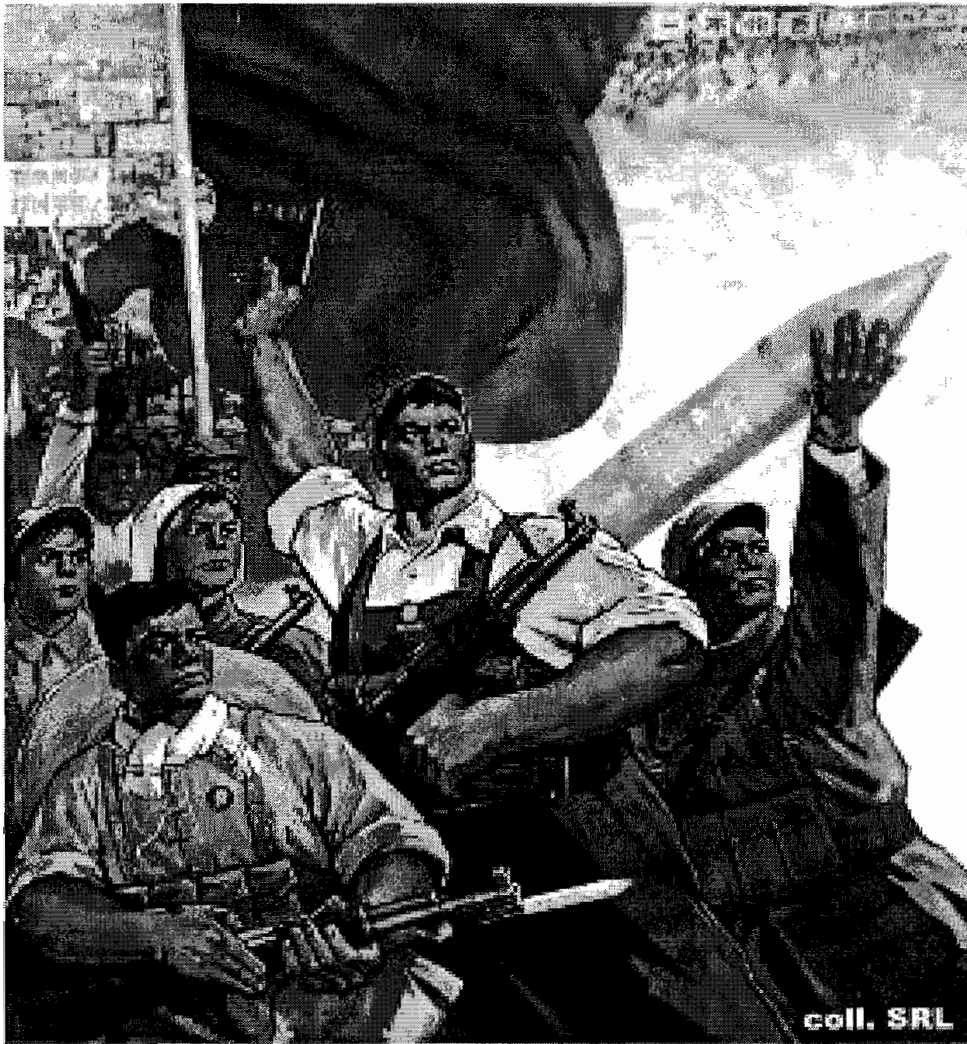
coll: SRL

Illustration 3 Advance Courageously along the Great Glorious Road of Chairman Mao's May 7th Directive, 1971



中国人民解放军是毛泽东思想大学校

Illustration 4: The Chinese Liberation Army is the Great School of Mao Thought (1969)



大办民兵师

Illustration 5 Organize Contingents of the People's Militia, on a Big Scale



Illustration 6 Peking University PLA Recruitment Office
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 7 Peking University PLA Recruitment Office Poster
Photo by Jason Ross

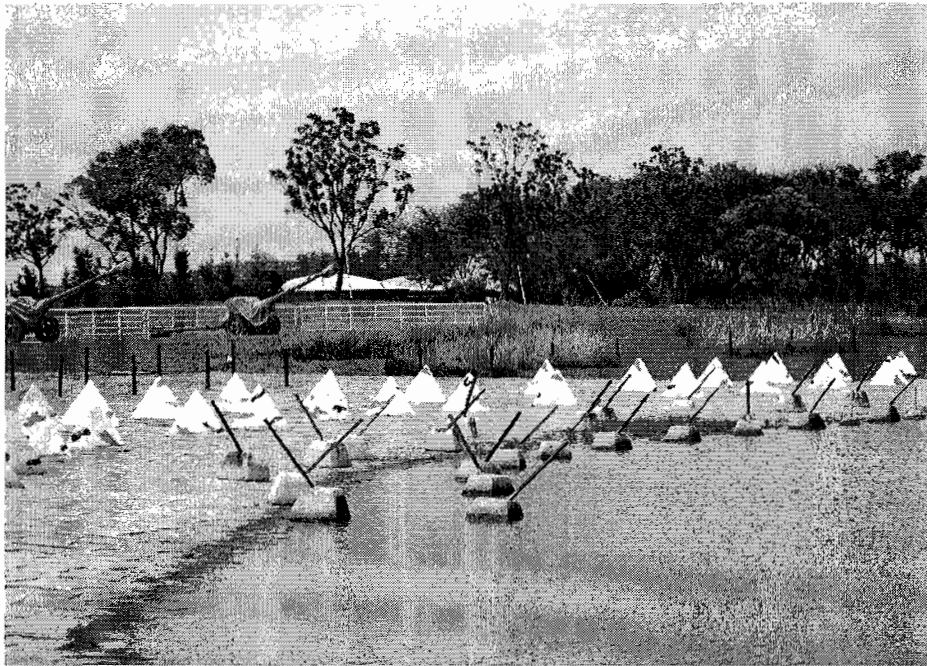


Illustration 8 Pretend Taiwanese Beachhead
Photo by Jason Ross

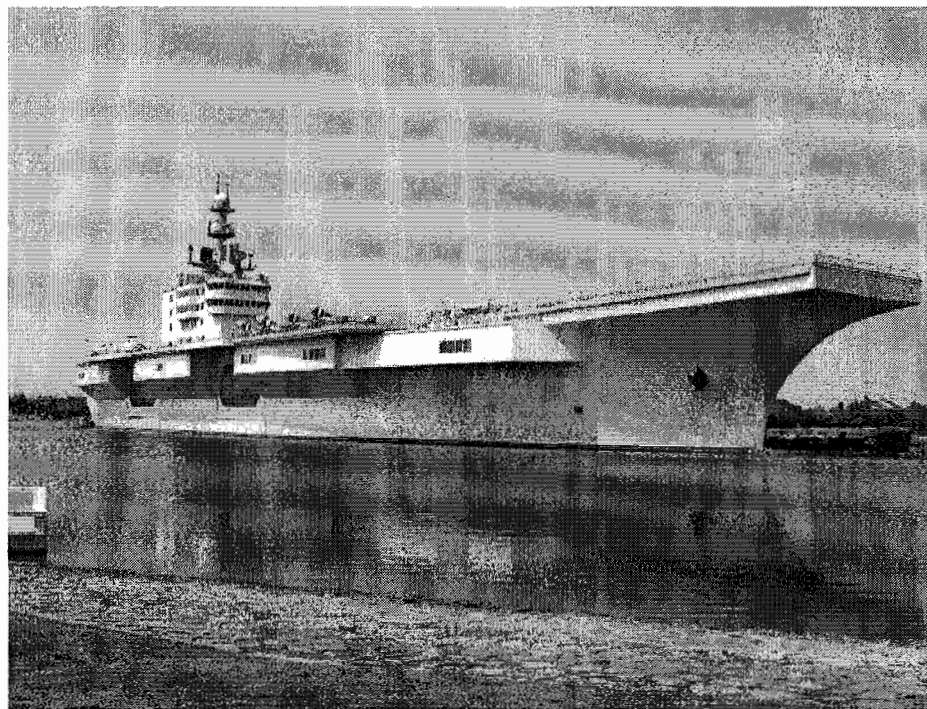


Illustration 9 Model Aircraft Carrier
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 10 Children Inside Model Aircraft Carrier
Photo by Jason Ross

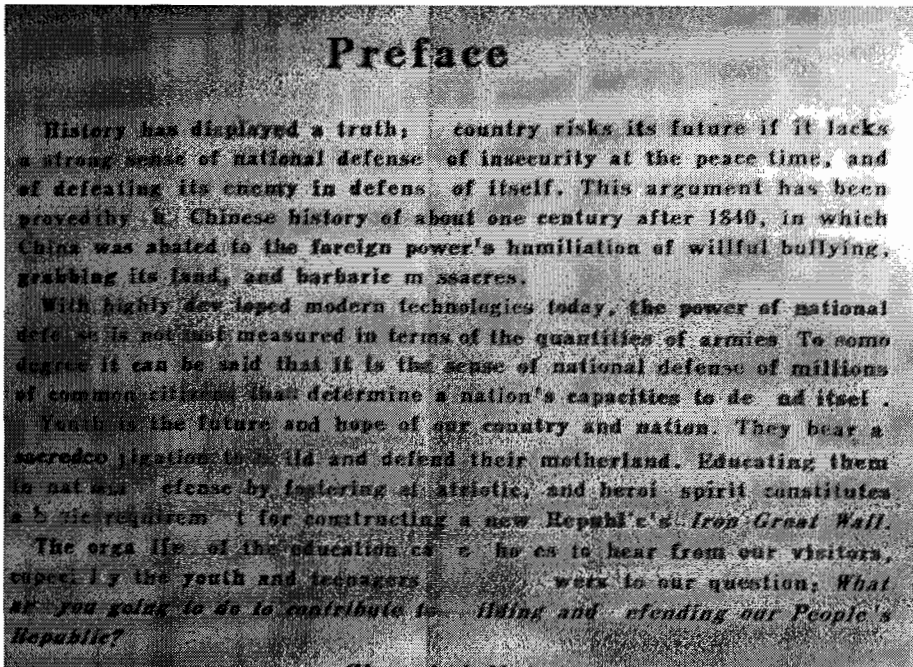


Illustration 11 Propaganda Posted Inside Model Aircraft Carrier
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 12 Inside Amphibious Landing Vehicle During Mock Invasion of
Photo by Jason Ross Pretend Taiwanese Beachhead



Illustration 13 PLA Soldiers Practicing Amphibious Landing



Illustration 14 Scoring a Direct Hit



Illustration 15 Physical Training

US Marines VS Chinese Marines

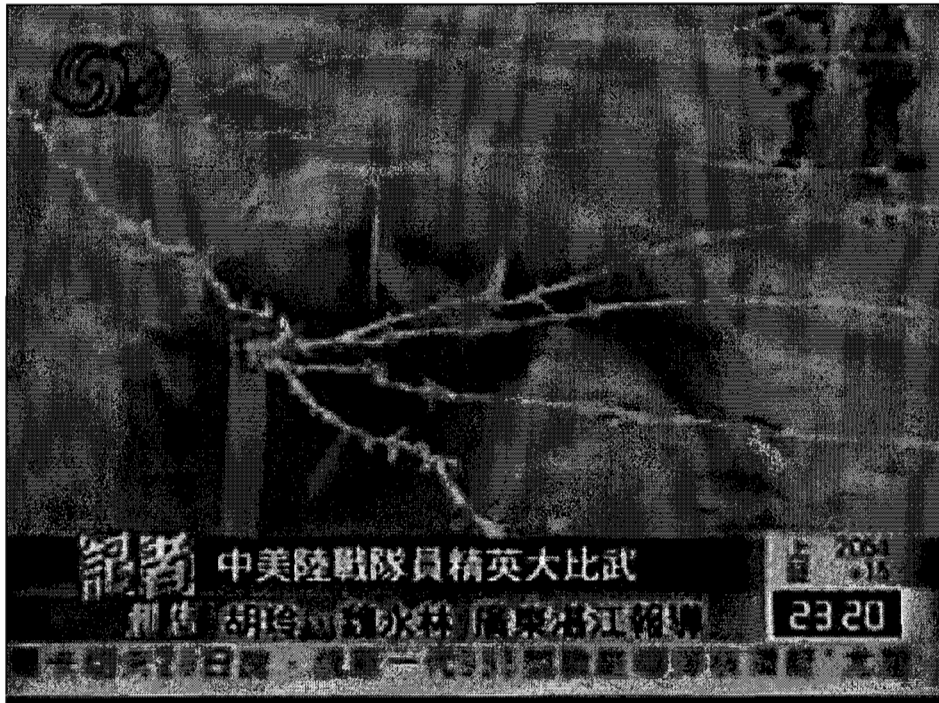


Illustration 16 United States Marine in Chinese Obstacle Course



Illustration 17 Bookstore near Peking University
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 18 Model of our Time
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 19 Model of our Time
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 20: CCTV Broadcast of a PLA Soldier's Biography
Photo by Jason Ross

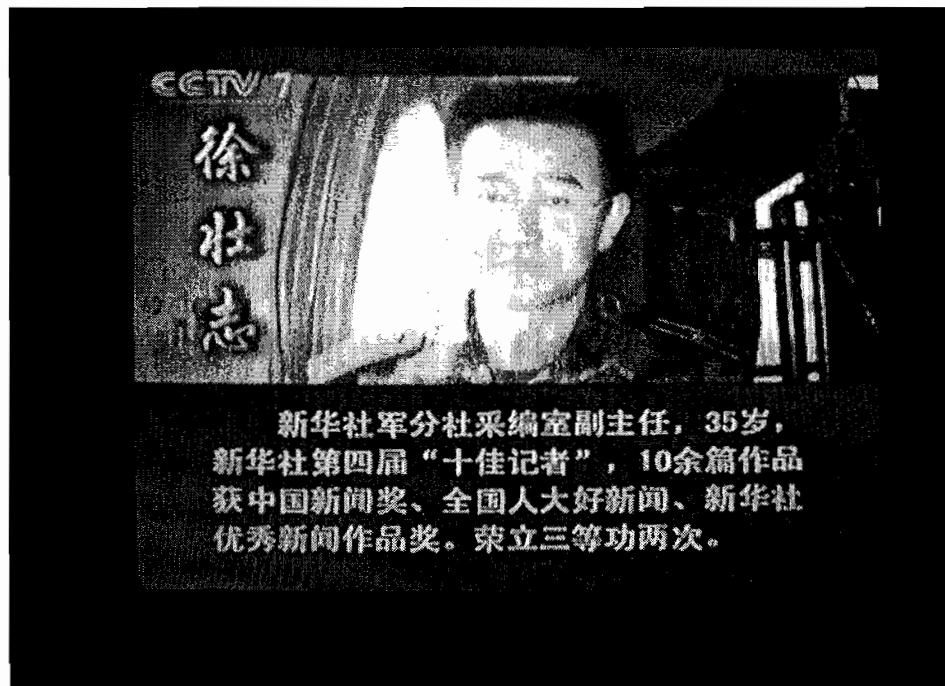


Illustration 21: CCTV Broadcast of a PLA Soldier's Biography
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 22 Peking University's PLA Hero in Recruitment Poster



Illustration 23 Peking University's PLA Hero in School Paper



Illustration 24 Movie Store near Peking University
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 25 Captain Gu (center) (the red-scarfed Scholar
behind him (right))



Illustration 26
Bookstore near Peking University,
August, 2008
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 27:
Subway Stop, Third Ring Road
Beijing, July, 2008
Photo by Jason Ross

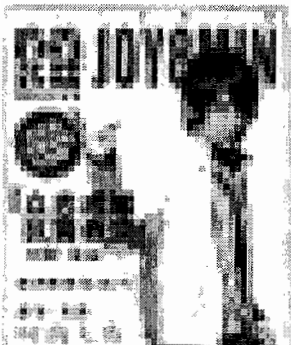


Illustration 28: CCTV 7, June, 2008
Photo by Jason Ross

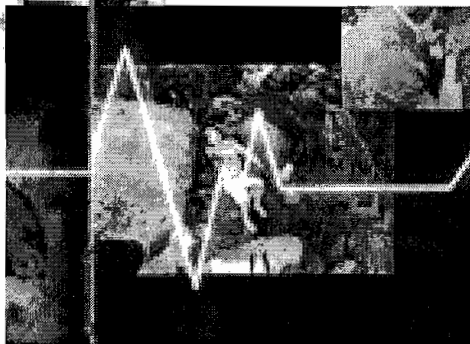


Illustration 29 Photograph of Advertisement in a
Cab, Beijing, June, 2008
Photo by Jason Ross



Illustration 30 Frost-bitten Hands



Illustration 31 Transporting Food



Illustration 32 Heavy Labor



Illustration 33 Sleeping Soldiers, Sichuan Earthquake



Illustration 34 Sleeping Soldiers, Winter 2008 Snowstorm



Illustration 35 Soldiers Pictured in the Mao Era



Illustration 36 Soldiers Pictured in the 2008 Snowstorm



加强党的领导发挥共产党员共青团员模范带头作用

Illustration 37

1976 Earthquake Poster



Illustration 38

2008 Sichuan Earthquake



高举毛泽东思想伟大红旗 把我军真正办成毛泽东思想的大学校

Illustration 39 Early PLA Soldier Helping Peasants Harvest Grain



Illustration 40 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, PLA Solders Helping Harvest Grain



Illustration 41 Pious PLA Soldiers



Illustration 42 Carrying a Chinese Elder to Safety



Illustration 43

Caring for Chinese Young



Illustration 45

Winter 2008 Snowstorm Rescue Operations



北川震后重建家园。(北京青年报王晓溪摄)

四川江油县公安局女民警蒋小婧在地震灾区应救护为一名地震灾区孤儿喂奶，却“狠心”把自己才6个月大、同样需要母乳喂养的孩子交给父母照料。(新华社记者李晓明摄)



Illustration 44 Adoptive Mother



Illustration 48: Between the months of July and September 2008, this image was seen all over Beijing, CCTV and Domestic Olympic Advertisements.



Illustration 46 Departing Soldiers



Illustration 47 Farewells



Illustration 49 Hu Congratulating Heroic Soldiers

China Army vs USA Army in real war



Illustration 50 Chinese Child Carried above the Flood

China Army vs USA Army in real war



没有食物，没有食物，没有食物

Illustration 51 No Food, No Food, No Food

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