Abstract “Repayment” (报) was a basic norm of conduct in traditional Chinese society. In the process of mobilizing peasants to join the army during the Chinese Civil War, the Chinese Communist Party emphasized the necessity of peasants “repaying” the Party after receiving benefits in earlier social and economic reforms. The peasants, for their part, focused on the potential personal losses in joining the army, and therefore emphasized the question of fairness in such repayment. A portion of local CCP cadres worried about whether the peasants who had been forced to join the army would turn on them in revenge, and devised strategies to avoid this. Such a tradition of “repayment” not only influenced the policymaking of the CCP, but also the attitude of the peasants in joining the army, as well as local cadres’ efforts in mobilization. The tradition of “repayment” can be seen in various aspects of peasant recruitment across the North China liberated region, which brings into relief the complicated relationship between traditional norms and the communist revolution in China.

Keywords repayment, military recruitment, CCP, peasants, village cadres

Translator's Introduction

Qi Xiaolin (齐小林, 1977- ) is Associate Professor, Department of Education and Research, Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Since receiving his PhD in Modern Chinese History from Nankai University in 2011, he has published prolifically on the history of the CCP during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) and Chinese Civil War (1945-1949). Qi’s research focuses primarily on the various organizational challenges the CCP faced in its military operations, covering...
topics ranging from the sourcing of gunpowder, the establishment of a wireless communications system, to the challenges of military recruitment.\(^1\) The text translated here, “The Logic of ‘Repayment’ and Its Multiple Manifestations in Army Recruitment in the Liberated Region of North China,” published in 2015, describes conflicts over military recruitment within the triangular relationship between the CCP, village cadres, and the peasantry. In this essay, Qi rewrites the story of CCP-peasant relations in the 1940s by arguing that the CCP made wide use of the cultural idiom of “repaying generosity” (报恩) to convince peasants to join the military. Surveying the Base Areas in North China that the CCP held and expanded throughout the 1940s, Qi argues that the CCP shared with the rural population a “traditional” language of reciprocity and ruler-subject relations. Qi’s work thus explores what he sees as the deep cultural structures that underlay CCP successes in mobilization. Assuming that repaying a debt of generosity was foundational to Chinese peasant psychology in the 1940s, Qi argues that the implicit logic of the CCP’s wartime policy was to create a patron-client relationship with the peasants, and a sense of indebtedness through implementing rent reduction (减租) and land redistribution (分田). The CCP in turn expected that peasants would volunteer for the army to “repay” (报) this debt.

But Qi also complicates the picture of a harmonious relationship between the CCP and peasantry by arguing that although both sides believed that “repayment of generosity” was of great importance, they had different conceptions of what this should look like in practice. The peasantry did not necessarily view what the CCP had to offer as valuable enough to justify repayment in the form of military service. Qi provides numerous examples of the diverse ways that peasants employed traditional “weapons of the weak” in protest, such as absconding and attacking cadres.\(^2\)

Qi’s quotation of James Scott is not incidental: there is an intriguing fit between Scott’s characterization of the village “moral economy” and Qi’s emphasis on Chinese peasant psychology. Like Scott, Qi portrays rural society as a largely self-contained world with its own customs and ethical norms. To Scott (and it seems, to Qi), the central tension in modernity is the encroachment of the alien state upon rural society and the ways that villagers resist this.\(^3\) One critique of this approach however, is that it ignores the class variegation and forms of domination that exist within villages.\(^4\) Another potential critique is that such a binary obscures the deep connections the Chinese state has had to rural society in the past, which Prasenjit Duara calls the “cultural nexus.”\(^5\) Of course Duara’s concept is potentially compatible with Qi’s narrative,
as Duara argues that this link between state and local society broke down under state and private predation in the Republican Period (1911-1949). But overall, it would be interesting to see Qi engage more with the questions of class conflict within villages, how the village was linked to the outside world, and the role local elites played in such a connection. On a final note, it turns out that this understanding of a self-contained “moral economy” is readily adaptable to an essentialized understanding of “traditional Chinese culture” that undergirds much of Qi’s analysis. This idea will be returned to at the end of this introduction

Qi’s work both shares the legacies of “New Revolutionary History,” and also possesses its own particularities. Here, we look at four important aspects of his work, and use them to explore his intellectual influences. These are, (1) adopting an expansive understanding of the motivations of historical actors as a starting point for interpreting revolutionary history; (2) an anti-theory orientation; (3) placing a premium upon archival evidence; and finally (4) seeking to articulate what he assumes to be a complex relationship between the CCP and “society,” which is seen as having deep continuities with the past.

The individual scholar most important for Qi’s training is his dissertation advisor at Nankai, Li Jinzheng (李金铮). A central figure in “New Revolutionary History,” Li’s work has pushed back against the former historiographical consensus that dominated the history of the Chinese revolution: the allure to peasants of nationalism and class consciousness, which the CCP could then use for military mobilization.6 Li also rejects both top-down and bottom-up explanations. He challenges for instance what he calls the top-down “policy-effect” (政策—效果) model, which depicts the peasantry as responding enthusiastically to the Party’s calls for mobilization.7 But he also pushes back against a prominent strain of bottom-up thinking that came to the fore in the early 1990s: that which privileges individual material “self-interest” (利益) as the main motivator of peasants for supporting the revolution, and which therefore saw land reform as the Party’s key policy.8 Instead, Li argues for a “dual impact” (双重互动) model between the motivations of the peasantry and policies of the CCP, i.e. between state and society.9 This process was highly complex, Li argues, and he rejects any simplistic characterization, writing: “In reality, the reasons why the peasantry supported and joined the revolution were incredibly complicated, and it is very difficult to find one or even a few theories that can adequately cover them.”10

This focus on the complex motivations of historical actors has led to what might be
seen as something of an anti-theory orientation on the part of Li and his student Qi. For instance, in his monograph, Qi Xiaolin criticizes previous scholars of CCP military recruitment for “lacking an adequate evidentiary basis” (实证性不足), and differentiates his work from those who are “stuck in the mud of some theory” (拘泥于某一理论). As an example, Qi argues against the scholar Li Lifeng (李里峰) and Li’s use of the concept of a “rational actor” (理性人员) to explain peasant mobilization, which Qi says “ignores the complexity of historical facts.”

Qi has even expressed certain reservations about the possibility of historians explaining large historiographical questions, such as how and why the CCP won the war against the KMT, stating that “I have no interest in touching such grand historical topics.” Instead, he sees the job of historians as essentially complicating narratives and providing thick descriptions of the interaction between local actors, the societies in which they lived, and the political bodies which sought to obtain their services.

It is likely for this reason that Qi emphasizes to such a great extent the importance of archival research to his work. The essay translated here uses materials sourced from archives across Hebei, which allows Qi to show how military service became contested at the local level. However, because of this anti-theory orientation, combined with the desire to provide a thick description of state-society interaction, Qi and those who share his outlook are still forced to find some theory or understanding of local society and the state, which can give them purchase from which to analyze the archival documents they find. Qi’s reliance on the concept of “repayment”—or bao—is a result of this need to have some interpretive framework. Its usage is one of the most intriguing aspects of the essay, as well as perhaps the part most open to critique. Though Qi clearly establishes the CCP’s use of narratives of bao, this is less so the case with the peasantry.

Qi’s usage of bao is heavily based upon the work of Lien-sheng Yang, the American-trained historian and Harvard University professor active in the post-WWII period. In 1957, Yang published the article “The Concept of Pao as a Basis for Social Relations in China,” in which he provides an exegesis of the importance of bao to the major Chinese textual traditions. Based on Yang’s work, Qi extrapolates the importance of bao to “traditional” Chinese rural society writ large. A number of the quotations that Qi cites as folk sayings come directly from Yang’s essay: for instance, the couplet “Repay each cup of wine with wine, and each cup of tea with tea” (酒换酒来茶换茶). Interestingly, Yang cites this couplet as coming from the missionary Arthur Smith’s
1902 work *Proverbs and Sayings From the Chinese*, where it is in turn unattributed. Considering Arthur Smith’s cultural/racial essentialism (Smith also wrote the infamous *Chinese Characteristics*), using these quotations to prove the importance of *bao* to Chinese peasant life is a curious case of reverse cultural essentialism percolating to the surface over the course of a century.¹⁴

Thus, in his attempt at avoiding a reliance on overly simplistic theories of peasant motivation, Qi instead becomes dependent on what could be considered an essentialist conception of rural Chinese society and peasant psychology. PRC scholars such as Yang Kuisong have pointed out the questionable nature of this idea of a “universal psychology” of the Chinese peasantry (普遍心理), and suggested that Qi’s interpretation may be a result of his reliance on CCP-drafted documents and narratives (as opposed to those from the perspective of the peasantry).¹⁵ Li Jinzheng has also previously taken “traditional peasant mind-states” (农民的传统心态) as an important factor in his narratives.¹⁶ These particularities place Li and Qi in an interesting camp of “New Revolutionary History.”

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**When Eating Rice, Do Not Forget The Person Who Planted It: “Repayment” And Military Recruitment In The Eyes Of The CCP**

The principle of reciprocity in exchange is accepted in nearly every society. In China, the concept of “repayment” (报) has a long history. In ancient times, Chinese people not only had a heightened consciousness of “repayment,” but also utilized it extensively within their social systems. As a political party intent on transforming Chinese society, throughout its existence the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) paid attention to the reaction of peasants to its policies, and viewed ensuring that peasants gained tangible benefits as an important basis for obtaining their support. During the period of the Sino-Japanese War, the CCP cast off the extreme policy of confiscating the farmland of landlords to distribute to peasants, but continued to implement the land policy of “rent and interest reduction” (减租减息) in order to obtain the support of the peasantry, and pushed the peasants to “pay a debt of gratitude” (报恩) to the Party.¹⁷ Every time the CCP faced a dire situation, providing tangible benefits to the peasantry became an important guiding line for drawing up policy. From late 1940 through early 1942, the strategic situation in the CCP’s North China Base Area deteriorated; natural disasters
and famine continuously occurred, the base area was shrinking, peasant livelihoods were gradually falling, and the CCP’s replenishment of its military personnel had met with serious complications. In order to pass through this most arduous phase of the guerilla war behind enemy lines, the CCP implemented a strategic retreat from its radical policies within the base areas, and repeatedly emphasized the implementation of “rent and interest reduction.” The Party Center believed that:

Wherever the Party carries out “rent and interest reduction” in a relatively universal, earnest, and thorough manner—and at the same time still ensures payment of rent and interest to landlords—the enthusiasm of the local masses for taking part in anti-Japanese struggle and democratic construction will be relatively high...but within many base areas, this policy still has not been broadly, earnestly, and thoroughly carried out...In these areas, the enthusiasm of the masses cannot be developed and utilized, and furthermore, the masses cannot be truly organized to establish the basis for ardent anti-Japanese resistance...As the War of Resistance enters an even more arduous phase, the Party Center requests that each base area further mobilizes the enthusiasm of the broad masses for resistance against Japan and for economic production; to further unify all economic strata (阶层) participating in resistance against Japan, so as to persist in long-term struggle behind enemy lines. After fine-grained research of the experience of each locale, the Party Center made a decision to summarize the Party’s land policy...the Party Center sincerely hopes that the comrades in each locale will further research this policy and earnestly carry it out.

From this, one can see that the CCP hoped that implementing “rent and interest reduction” would form the basis for peasant recruitment into the military. The various policies implemented in each base area after the end of the Sino-Japanese War—including rent reduction, settling accounts, retaliation against malefactors (查减, 清算, 复仇), to the “land reform” movement of the early war of liberation—all followed this logic: “If the land problem is solved in this base area of over one hundred million people, then the people of the liberated area can be made to support revolutionary struggle for the long-term without becoming weary.”

Traditional Chinese ethics promotes emphatically the ideal of “giving favors and rejecting reward” (施恩拒报). Within Confucian ethics (忠恕之道), this is the duty of every individual capable of bestowing favor, and Chinese ethics also emphasizes the duty of the recipient of generosity; the recipient cannot but repay the favor bestowed on them. This is the most foundational of morals. Folk sayings such as “A drop of generosity should be repaid by a bubbling spring of gratitude,” “When consuming water do not forget the person who drilled the well,” “When eating rice do not forget the
person who planted it,” all teach people to not forget debts of gratitude. In the mind of the bestower of favors, repayment may not be hoped for during the act of giving; but in society, objectively, such an action is likely to produce the reaction of repayment. Therefore, within interpersonal relations, people can bestow favors without worry, knowing that after they do so, the recipient will have to repay it. As such, the CCP’s optimism that after land reform peasants would undoubtedly join the army to a large extent stemmed from its understanding of the logic of “repayment” within Chinese tradition.

During the process of land reform, pouring out one’s grievances in “speaking bitterness” (suku 诉苦), and “remembering bitterness, thinking of sweetness” (yiku sitian 忆苦思甜) were important methods of calling upon the passion of the peasants for repaying generosity. Although it has been made clear in the recent research of Wu Yi that as political instruction, suku only produced effects for a short period of time, diminishing with repeated use and ultimately becoming totally ineffective, we can see how, from the perspective of the CCP, techniques such as suku and yiku sitian were supposed to guide the peasantry towards thinking in terms of repaying debts of gratitude. Li Lifeng has pointed out that the basic logic from which suku was derived was the following: “The reason poor people’s lives are bitter is because rich people are evil; Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT are the representatives of the rich, so you should hate, be angry with, and struggle against them. The CCP is the representative of the poor, and helps the poor to fanshen; thus you should love, feel gratitude towards, and support the CCP.” The CCP hoped the peasants’ feelings of gratitude would turn into corresponding acts of gratitude, and it emphasized the necessity and absolute nature of the peasant’s repayment of the Party’s generosity.

“Conscience” (liangxin 良心) is one of the most important moral norms in traditional Chinese society: lacking a conscience was a very serious accusation. Being able to understand debts of gratitude and their repayment was a manifestation of having a conscience; conversely, to forget a debt of gratitude had the reverse connotation. Within the process of mobilization for military recruitment in the Northern China liberated areas, when the CCP led peasants into the widespread practice of examining one’s conscience (良心检讨), it attempted to use the idea of “conscience” to bring into play the notion of repaying a debt of gratitude, causing peasants to respond to the kindness of the CCP. In December 1944, in a directive on supporting the army, the Shandong Provincial Wartime Administrative Committee emphasized the need to
educate cadres and the masses, to organize the masses to examine their conscience, and to lead the cadres and masses to adequately recognize what kind of military force the Eighth Route Army was, whose it was, and to have them personally understand that without the force of the Eighth Route Army, there would be no base area, and consequently no anti-Japanese democratic government, no food to eat, no clothing to wear, and no free People (人民). On the basis of repeatedly holding meetings for the examination of one’s conscience, the Party drew up a tacit agreement for supporting the army, and created the foundation for mobilizing peasants for military recruitment.23 In November 1944, the Huaibei Jiangsu-Anhui Border Region Winter Study Committee, in their “winter study movement directive,” requested the following with regard to military recruitment education:

From now on in comparisons made of people’s livelihood in our base areas versus the areas under KMT rule (or in comparison with people’s livelihood in neighboring areas under collaborator control [顽区]), and from the comparison between people’s current livelihood in our base areas versus people’s livelihood in the past, you should concretely explain that these benefits are primarily provided by the Communist Party, New Fourth Army, Eighth Route Army, and local CCP-backed governments; consequently, when the peasants drink water they should think of its source, and not say “the scar is healed and I’ve forgotten the pain”; rather they should constantly thank the Communist Party, New Fourth Army, Eighth Route Army, and Democratic Government, examining one’s conscience…the peasants should understand that if they want to do right by the New Fourth Army and Eighth Route Army, and want to protect the material benefits they have already obtained, the first thing they must do is materially support the army and give preferential treatment to military families…the second and more important thing is that they must enthusiastically join the army, so as to strengthen the People’s own armed forces.24

The logic of “bestowing favours and repaying debts of gratitude” (施恩—报恩) contained in this passage is eminently clear. In comparison to the wording of CCP policy, the expressions of grassroots cadres were even more earthy and direct. In 1947, during mobilization for military recruitment in the Shandong liberated area, some grassroots cadres “took up the matter of land and moveable property having been distributed to the masses in order to threaten the masses, saying: ‘Guys, you were full of energy when it was about getting things, but have become cowards when it’s time to join the army. How was it that you were able to fanshen? Have you forgotten where it came from? Do you have a conscience (忘本没良心)? Have you done right by the CCP if you don’t
join the army? Have you done right by anyone? Chairman Mao and Chiang Kai-shek are on the mountaintop wrestling right now, and we’re going to climb that mountain and grab Chiang Kai-shek’s leg!"

Whether it was the CCP’s high-level proclamations, thick with ideological flourish, or the straight talk of grassroots cadres in the base areas, the core of all such statements revolved and unfolded around the repayment of a debt of gratitude, that logic so fundamental to Chinese social relations. The Party and its cadres repeatedly stressed that the material benefits given to the peasants by the CCP needed to be repaid, and that joining the army was the optimal means of doing so. In traditional versions of Party history, the effects of conscience examination are obvious and substantial. Examples of this in official Party history abound. For instance, in Henan’s Jiaozuo City (Lifeng District), there was the case of the heroic fanshen woman of Dongwangfeng Village, Zhang Lanying, who used various forms of conscience examination and probing (摸心思) to complete her duties of military recruitment. The village cadres attempted to get the peasant Fu Lai to join the army, but met with his refusal; upon this, Zhang Lanying led Fu Lai into an examination of his conscience:

Zhang Lanying: Fu Lai! Does your house have food in it right now? Have you been able to fanshen?
Fu Lai: I’ve achieved fanshen; I have eleven mu of land, and have food to eat.
Zhang Lanying: Who enabled you to fanshen?
Fu Lai: The Eighth Route Army and Chairman Mao helped me fanshen.
Zhang Lanying: That’s right! The Eighth Route Army brought you fanshen; you should join the Eighth Route Army and save those people who haven’t been yet been able to fanshen. Wasn’t your older brother killed by traitors? Now you should go get revenge.

Through Zhang Lanying’s persuasion, Fu Lai happily joined the army.

From this we can see that in its mobilization for military recruitment, the dialogue between the CCP and peasants unfolded around the logic of “repayment” found in traditional Chinese society. Whether it was the drafters of policy in the CCP or grassroots cadres carrying out concrete work, they engaged, be it consciously or unconsciously, with the concept of “repayment.” A portion of the leadership of the base areas believed that examining one’s conscience, and relying on conscience to guide the peasants, was a method of education the masses could accept. As Liu Ruilong pointed out while
leading work in Huaibei in 1945:

There are a number of advantages to this method: it does not involve dogmatic preaching, it is not like feeding a duck, but rather involves the masses educating themselves. It involves mobilizing the masses to remember their own previous personal experiences, looking at the process by which they obtained the wealth they have today, feeling the greatness of their future, and based on that, deciding what course of action to take. Here, the words are said by the masses themselves, the events are those the masses have personally experienced, the language is that which the masses, women and children, all understand, with no trace of Party formalism (党八股). It is not a method of someone cursing someone else, someone instructing someone else, but rather everyone relying on their own conscience.  

In a society which held “one drop of charity should be repaid with a bubbling spring of repayment” as an important behavioral norm, it is very difficult to imagine that peasants would not eagerly join the army because of land reform. The idea that the peasants were moved by feelings of gratitude to enthusiastically join the army and take part in the war is still firmly entrenched in our minds. But do the historical facts confirm that this is entirely how things were? If so, then the CCP would not have truly needed to repeatedly emphasize to peasants that they should engage in examining their conscience. The CCP had its logic, and the peasants had their own, and though they both came from the same source, they were not necessarily the same, and the complexity of history perhaps lies in this. In the rest of this essay, we can observe that facing the Party’s requests for military service and conscience examination, many peasants placed more emphasis on basic equivalence and fairness within the norm of “repayment,” and that this influenced the attitude of peasants towards joining the CCP military forces.

Repay Each Cup Of Wine With Wine, And Each Cup Of Tea With Tea: Peasant Evaluation Of The Fairness Of Military Service

In ancient China, the concept of “repayment” was not only used amongst ordinary people, but was also applicable to the relationship between lord and vassal (君臣). People described lord-vassal relations using the analogy of a market transaction:

The relationship between a lord and vassal is like an exchange in the market: the lord gives a salary to the vassal, the vassal exerts all his energy to repay this. Should the vassal have an unexpected
success, then his master gives him a great reward. If the master displays an extraordinary generosity, then the vassal must repay this even with his death...If a vassal does not repay the generosity of his lord, but instead seeks personal gain, this is the origin of calamity. If a lord cannot repay the meritorious deeds of a vassal, and is timid in giving a reward, this is also the root of chaos.28

That is to say, only if the “giving” and “repaying” within the lord-vassal relationship maintains a basic balance can the relationship remain stable and unproblematic. Where elite culture was transmitted via classical writings, the main channels for molding peasant political consciousness were village theater, stories, legends, slang, folk proverbs, and sectarian “precious volumes.”29 Through his analysis of these materials, Zhang Ming argues the following concerning peasant mentality:

Although one’s household and polity are mentioned together as important objects of loyalty, when really compared, the portion allotted to the household is undoubtedly somewhat greater...The relationship between a lord and vassal is basically that as between employer and employee: an exchange relationship. As the saying goes, “Even the Emperor cannot employ people for free,” and the saying “After having completed literary and martial studies, one sells one’s skills to the households of emperors and kings,” also refers to the same idea. Furthermore, under ordinary circumstances, peasants do not believe themselves to be “vassals” requiring them to “eat the grain of others as salary, and being loyal to their affairs”; conversely, not eating others’ grain as salary meant peasants did not have to be loyal to anyone else’s affairs, let alone to the person themselves. The saying “if people are not clothed and fed, the way of the lord and vassal is extinguished” (人不衣食，君臣道息) indicates precisely this sentiment.30

Before the modern state formed—a time when servile consciousness (臣民意识) was particularly strong amongst the populace—this culture of reciprocity was a normal phenomenon. Although the CCP made a strong attempt to create a new kind of relationship with the peasantry in the North China liberated region, much of the peasantry still looked upon themselves and the political authority of the CCP through the lens of ruler-subject relations. In regards to military recruitment in particular, the peasants saw this as part of a political system and the law of the land. In April 1948, during military recruitment at Hejian Yaotiangong Village in Hebei, the peasants “in general did not take fulfilling military service as any kind of personal duty, but saw it rather as merely providing soldiers to the government.”31 “Amongst the masses” in Jianping (建屏) County, military recruitment “was seen as a kind of impersonal system, under
which whoever had to go had to go, and for cadres was just something to complete for their superiors.”32 In a different Jianping (建平) County, some peasants thought that “officials want soldiers, and we have no choice but to go.”33 In September 1948, amidst mobilization for military recruitment in Ningcheng County, it was said that “This is the law of the state. People follow the sovereign’s law like the grass follows the wind; if the state wants soldiers, we must go.”34 Under this way of thinking, it was natural that many peasants would evaluate whether to join the army according to a transactional logic, and would thoroughly consider the question of equivalence and fairness in terms of what they got from the CCP and what they did in return.

Within the process of mobilization for military recruitment in the North China liberated region, the CCP stressed the necessity of repaying the Party on the part of the peasantry. Without question, “repayment” is one of the most basic social norms of Chinese rural society, but while a great number of peasants recognized the necessity of repaying the Party when faced with the military recruitment efforts, what the peasants emphasized even more was the fairness (公平性) of this repayment. In the process of bestowing and repaying favors, fairness refers to the idea that only with basic equivalence in exchange could such a relationship be maintained. In his article “Repayment: A Foundation of Social Relationships in China,” Yang Lien-sheng explained this point, saying that in the past, some poor scholars could not bear the cost of returning gifts in an appropriate manner, and so turned down all invitations to banquets. Of course, such a social relationship would be difficult to maintain.35 Folk sayings like “when you obtain a person’s ox, you give them a horse in return,” or “when someone gives you liquor you return the favor; when someone gives you tea you do the same,” emphasize both the necessity of the repayment of favors, as well as the need for a basic equivalence in the favors rendered. Such equivalence was an important condition by which relationships of reciprocity could be maintained long-term, whether among the common people, or between state authority and the common people. 36

Facing the CCP’s mobilization for military recruitment during the period of intense civil war between the Communists and Nationalists, peasants could not but help worry about and calculate their potential gains and losses. Or perhaps we might say, they evaluated whether what they stood to gain in land reform and what they stood to lose in the war were balanced. The most important losses that peasants could suffer included the following:
Sacrifice of life

The vast majority of peasants were afraid of dying, believing that “a good death is not as good as a terrible life (赖活着).” The incredible killing-power of modernized warfare led to extremely high death rates for soldiers. Peasants, having personally seen the horrors of warfare, shrank back from joining the army. During the civil war, a large number of peasants were sent to support the front, and so gained a direct impression of war: “Soldiers returning from the front on stretchers, and fleeing soldiers, on the one hand transmitted news of victories, and at the same time spread a feeling of dread, inflating the power of aerial bombardment to an unimaginable scale.” Stories were relayed such as, “America has huge bombs, one strike can kill many hundreds of people,” and “the Central (Nationalist) Army’s power is awesome, they have America helping them.” For a portion of the peasantry, seeing young people close to them die due to military service made them even less keen on joining the army. During military recruitment in Wuxun County in April 1947, the “transportation of the wounded and the sacrifices of individual soldiers upset the peasants, and many of the masses developed a kind of fear of joining the army, a fear of death,” and this affected the feelings of the masses towards military recruitment. In one village in Yongnian County, “in 1946 twenty men were coerced to join the army; now three of them sacrificed their lives, three or four of them became disabled, and the masses became very discouraged.” Some peasants believed that “as a soldier, if you aren’t killed you’ll end up disabled.” During military recruitment in Yi County in April 1948, it was reported that “since the 1947 recruitment in three prefectures around Baishan (Third District), four soldiers have already been killed, the losses during the campaigns in Laishui and North Baoding are too great,” and “seeing the great number of those killed so far, the peasants were afraid of joining the army.”

The rumors in every locale about the military situation exacerbated the peasantry’s fears. Early 1947, rumors spread in Southern Hebei that “800,000 soldiers from the Eighth Route Army had died in Shandong,” and early 1948 in Laiyuan County it was said that, “around Tianjin the Eighth Route Army soldiers killed by the Nationalist Army formed a great mound; I saw firsthand the bayonets raised, and not a single Eighth Route soldier escaped...” Among the Northern China villages with their undeveloped communications infrastructure, the spread of these rumors rattled the nerves of the peasants, and drawing on the peasants’ imagination of the cruelty of war, caused
peasants to worry even more about the potential dangers of military service, “which had a direct and detrimental influence on expanding the ranks of the army.” A 1948 investigation into military conscription in the Beiyue Region discovered that the main psychological impediment to joining the army on the part of young peasants was fear of serious bodily injury and possible death: “The reticence towards military service on the part of vigorous youths is primarily due to fear of death, especially because, since the war of liberation began, the casualties during attacks in mobile warfare have been considerable, and there are many young, healthy people who have personally seen the cruelty of war, and are fearful.”

Household Production

The household occupied an extremely important place within the mental world of the peasantry, and to persuade them to leave their families to join the military was extremely difficult. As was said, “farmland, oxen, chickens, parents, wives and children are all flesh united by the same heart,” and they “cannot bear leaving their parents, wife, land and home”; there was also the saying, “travelling a thousand li to become an official is not as good as farming two mu of land.” Later on, the CCP official and historian Li Xin recalled: “The peasantry are attached to their native land and unwilling to leave it; all they want is a peaceful life, so to get them to go out and make war is not an easy task at all.”

Young men joining the military was especially damaging to their families. After young people left for the military, their household’s economic production would normally decrease. While investigating Northern Shaanxi in 1942, Zhang Wentian discovered that “the livelihood of one with family members fighting in the resistance is nothing like that of everyone else!” In 1945, the Jinchaji Military Region Political Bureau commented that “when an average member of the masses joins the army, within a few years, it is common for their household’s livelihood to fall, some even becoming wandering beggars, vagrants, and dying.” In May 1945, at a “supporting the government, loving the people” discussion meeting (拥政爱民座谈会) held by the Chahar Provincial Government, soldiers commented that “because family members of those in the resistance lack labor power, their fields are left out of cultivation; lacking firewood and water is an even more common phenomenon.” In May 1948 the Logistics Command of the Third Sub-Region of the Beiyue Region carried out a statistical survey of the livelihood of families of active service personnel and martyrs of a number of villages in Wanping; the results showed that such fami-
lies were all unable to remain self-sufficient. In March 1949, a North China People’s Government Political Bureau notice stated that within the base area, “the livelihood of families of service personnel and martyrs was still fairly strained, the economic production levels were lower than that of the ordinary masses, and had manifested a continuous decreasing trend.”

The decrease in livelihood and economic production of military families not only exacerbated the dissatisfaction of soldiers, but also increased the worries of others regarding military service. In November 1945, the Jinchaji Central Bureau Research Office stated that “in the eight years of the War of Resistance, in the base areas, whenever a household has labor power, in general their economic prospects have risen; but on average the economic circumstances of military families has worsened, which has had a large negative influence on expanding the army.” The situation regarding expanding military forces in southern Hebei in 1946 was such that:

For several years now, the masses not having been fully mobilized, and class education of the masses having been inadequate, has led to the masses not voluntarily supporting military families; a significant number of villages have been coerced into supporting the resistance, and there are many expressions of dissatisfaction among the masses in being forced to do so. This situation regarding supporting the resistance naturally cannot be maintained. Regarding families of military personnel, they do not feel any kind of glory. The work of giving preferential treatment to military families has not been carried out sufficiently, a mass movement has not been created, and this necessarily causes military families to become dissatisfied with their children or husbands having joined the army. This inevitably creates a stumbling block for soldiers, with their families dragging their legs, and negatively influences the consolidation of the military forces, and other members of the masses joining the army.

At a land conference in Jinchaji in March 1947, Luo Ruiqing reiterated the words of some peasants: “Go be a soldier? My family and obligations are still there. If I left to become a soldier there would be no one to manage my household, so why would I go become a soldier?” Luo further believed that “these are the heartfelt words of the peasantry.” In an investigation into military conscription, Beiyue Region authorities admitted that “when mobilizing for military recruitment, the greatest consideration for young people is the question of economic production and livelihood back at home, because they have personally seen the poor treatment of military families and martyrs in the villages, causing such families low harvests, and problems of livelihood,” and thus were unwilling to join the army.
Dissolution of marriage

After young peasants joined the army, not only would their families’ economic production and livelihood be reduced, but their marriages would face various problems. First of all, this was because their families’ livelihood had diminished. Impoverished and without support, the wives and children of soldiers would sometimes have to flee or remarry. As previously described, on average, military families experienced a drop in standards of living after their young people joined the army, and “under the problematic circumstances of a decreasing livelihood, two more kinds of changes occurred within the lives of military families: one was that it created dissatisfaction with regional and village cadres as well as with their own village, feeling they had been taken advantage of; and another was that feeling the effects of hunger, women left for new marriages, and the elderly and infants passed away.” In September 1946 in central Hebei, “there existed a problem with the marriages of military families, especially the problem of military wives changing spouses, most having occurred before May First,” the primary reason being “both natural and man-made disaster.” During a land conference in Jinchaji in December 1947, Luo Ruiqing commented:

The care and support of local poor military families, and assisting them in solving their difficulties, has been inadequate; there have been many poor military dependents for whom destitution has led to a lack of food, and also families where because the family has not received care, the wife has remarried. What makes soldiers most anxious and most dissatisfied, is that some rotten cadres have induced military wives to remarry; some cadres do this out of greed; there are even some rotten cadres, rotten Party members, that rape, induce adultery via bribery, and trick military wives into adultery. Some bad cadres deliberately force people to join the army so as to be able to steal their wives. Such phenomena have had a truly destructive effect on the military.”

“Village cadres having affairs with or raping military wives has caused soldiers to feel as though their wives are not secure,” and because of this youths that had not yet joined the army became hesitant to do so. In September 1946, when a cadre went to recruit a youth from Dongjiazhuang Village in Wuqiang County (Fourth District), the youth stated that, “Being a soldier is fine, but you have to guarantee that my wife won’t divorce me.” After the district head answered him affirmatively and assuaged him, he joined the army. That same year in southern Hebei, some soldiers asked: “What benefit does mixing men and women together have?”; “Mobilizing women [to work outside the house], men and women being together all the time, something will
go wrong!"; “If I’m not at home, the women will make a ruckus, and I just can’t relax!” This report’s investigator believed: “since there locations where promiscuity is rampant (性乱), married soldiers fear that if their wives are mobilized for Party activities there will be trouble.” In June 1947, a newly joined soldier in the Handan New Soldier Unit, Zhang Bin, said: “When I joined the army I had only just married a few days ago. I didn’t want to consummate the marriage because my wife is young, but after I left someone else took her virginity. What an injustice!”

Even some village cadres “were afraid that after they left, local village hoodlums would violate their wives,” and were unwilling to join the army. In December 1947, the Eleventh Prefectural Committee of the Central Hebei Region commented that “the rape and cruel treatment of military dependents by some individual bad elements,” has “created huge difficulties for the work of military recruitment.”

Facing the possible losses that joining the army could bring, some peasants regretted the policies of “rent and interest reduction” and “dividing property.” After the war against Japan ended in 1945, in Junan County, facing the CCP’s military recruitment mobilization, some peasants said: “Fanshen and two mu of land, and now we’re screwed.” Others said, “if you said before that after ‘rent and interest reduction’ we’d have to join the military then I’d say don’t lower the rent, but you kept insisting.” Others frankly said, “you just take back the land you distributed and the property confiscated in struggle; I’m not joining the army.” “Bad elements” used this as an opportunity to say negative things like “look, how great it was to divide up the property” (你看, 分果实, 行了). In the same vein, in central Hebei, some peasants facing military recruitment regretted having property distributed to them, saying: “If only I had known they’d be asking me to join the army; I wish I hadn’t participated in struggle, and hadn’t been given any property.” During the civil war, a small rebellion broke out against military recruitment in eastern Hebei, the slogan of these young people being: “I want to die at home, not on the front line. The KMT can’t improve, but we can’t benefit from the CCP either” (国民党好不了, 共产党也得不了好); “What fanshen? The ‘fanshen’ gold all went to the government. All we got was some tattered old bills.”

The impossible situation of the peasantry in facing military recruitment is clearly evident. On the one hand, ‘repaying kindness with overflowing gratitude’ was an important social convention of traditional society. They had already received land and property, and from this perspective, they believed they should join the army. But on the other hand, many peasants were truly unwilling to expose themselves to the
potential losses that joining the military could bring.

In March 1947, the Southern Hebei Military Recruitment Committee discussed the peasants’ resistance to the logic of “fanshen and joining the military,” with some peasants even believing that land reform was a method the CCP used to trick (耍的手腕) them into joining the army. Within mobilization for the army:

Some grassroots cadres overlooked “carrying out anti-Chiang Kai-shek, protecting the land (保田) education, in order to arouse the enthusiasm and self-consciousness of the masses for joining the army,” and were merely going through the motions of conscience examination and education for supporting the Party and the military. Some cadres, when mobilizing, simply said: “You need to examine your conscience; do you not have a conscience? If you drink water you have to remember its source! The Communist Party came and helped you fanshen, gave you land, and you’re not going to join the army?” This easily excited the antipathy of the masses, and led them to the misunderstanding that “land reform is a trick, it’s really about joining the army.” Therefore, some of the masses said: “Comrades! Don’t take part in examining your conscience; it’s just a way to get us to join the army.”

Some youths said, “didn’t you say that because I got some land, I don’t have a conscience if I don’t join the army? I’m willing to not take land, and I also won’t join the army.” Some of the masses said: “It’s better to not get any land. They give you two mu and then take your child!” Some people thus returned the land titles they had obtained.72

During military recruitment in Renhe County in 1947, some among the masses said: “First it was fanshen of the mind, then of the body; and after fanshen, it’s time to join the army.” The Hebei Central Party Committee believed that “These remarks on their surface seem fine, but in reality they contain the deep dissatisfaction of the masses.”73 During recruitment in Huanghua, some peasants thought that “the Eighth Route Army carries out land reform for the purpose of military recruitment, so let’s make sure not to fanshen.” Some people said to their sons: “Wow, you’re so progressive! You’ve eaten the fruits of property confiscation. Now you’re crying, but it’s too late for regrets.”74 In Shandong’s Laixi, “some of the masses view land reform as a method of purchasing soldiers, where if you get land you must become a soldier. When cadres come to the village to work, they are viewed as looking for soldiers, and this has led to many youths not being willing to take part in meetings, and in some regions the masses not being courageous in asking for land.”75 During recruitment in Ningcheng County in September 1948, some people said: “The Eighth Route Army’s tricks are high-level: when they give you something you have to become a soldier,” and “peasants stressed they couldn’t leave their families and couldn’t become soldiers. The mobilization was
tense, and they would only give you a two word answer: not going (不去), or they would just not show up. When you said something like ‘You were given things, you should go,’ they would say, ‘I’ll give it back.’” When a recruitment meeting was held in Qing County’s Fenghuangdian in April 1949, some people picked up chunks of [blank] (the character is unclear in the original archival material; similar instances will be marked as [blank]): “The cadres have written down that you attended the previous land distribution meeting, that you were distributed land and houses, and then they get you to join the army, get you to go and die fighting south of the Yangzi, and so on.”

The attitude towards military service of those middle peasants who had not received benefit from land reform, and had also been attacked, was even more negative, and they actively resisted joining. In March 1948, the Party Committee of the Central Hebei Region stated in a report that:

Because of an insufficient rallying of middle peasants around the land equalization movement, and being relabelled to a wealthier class, some middle peasants passively watch military recruitment. When the military recruitment movement in Wuji County’s Wangzhuang reached one middle peasant, he said: “I’m not a fanshen peasant, I don’t have any newly distributed land or house to protect. You go ahead and join the army; we’ll join after you.” A middle peasant in Xizhongbao Village said, “why do you come looking for us now? You didn’t come looking for us when it was about distributing property!”

During military recruitment in Xilong [Blank] Village, Laixi County in April 1948, six to seven young peasants steadfastly refused to join the army, saying: “spoils were given out from the struggles, but it’s you that ate meat. I’m sure that when you were chewing it was oh-so fragrant, and when you swallowed it was oh-so smooth, but now it’s us that are supposed to become soldiers, when it was you that were able to fanshen; what distributed property are we supposed to protect?” During recruitment in the Beiyue Military Region, middle peasants said, “it’s the poor peasants that were able to fanshen, so what is it exactly that we’re supposed to protect?” In central Hebei recruitment, “some middle peasants believed that equalizing land was beneficial for poor peasants and hired hands, but had no benefit for themselves, and they felt having to join the army was unjust.” In September 1948 in Ningcheng County, some peasants said: “I didn’t get anything and I won’t go. When land and property were distributed, poor peasants and hired hands got first pick, so let them be sent first to protect the land and the property.” Some middle peasants who had been mistakenly struggled
against said: “I’m willing to be a rich peasant again, not a middle peasant.” Landlords and rich peasants commented: “People like us aren’t even treated like people. I have no idea what the government is doing; to them we stink so bad we couldn’t stink any more. We don’t have anything, they don’t let us do anything, and after they gave away our land we still have to become soldiers. If you want us to be soldiers, then give us our property back.”

The CCP’s land reform, using coercive force to redistribute land and social wealth, shocked many peasants. However, the peasants’ traditional economic ethics and understanding of property remained. For many peasants, a “wealthy person (财主)” or “master (东家)” was not a synonym for someone who lived a dissolute life, as it was for the revolutionaries. Instead, for them, land and property was proof of high morals. This was because, under the traditional socio-economic system, if you diligently worked your land or business, frugally ran your household, and met with good opportunity, a poor household could become wealthy, and hired hands as well as tenant farmers could become yeomen farmers, rich peasants, or landlords. “Even the land of landlords was earned with sweat and toil, and it’s wrong to put someone else’s meat in our own bellies.” Precisely because of this, many middle peasants believed that through hard work they could become rich, such as the middle peasant from Hejian Xiliuwa, Jia Xiuchang, who said, “I myself mostly eat the food I produce. I didn’t receive any property from the redistribution, and so I won’t go join the army.” From this we can see that a section of middle peasants believed that if relying on their own labor they could gain land and property, why would they join the army and go to war?

Repaying favors is an important norm of traditional Chinese society, but the behavior of individual people within social relationships is not mechanically determined by society and culture; on the contrary, the individual has a relatively large degree of freedom and agency. Especially in moments when the individual faces political authority, the stipulations of social norms can appear even more hollow. Joining the military meant an enormous sacrifice of personal interest. A great many peasants placed their personal interest above the revolution. As such, they were unwilling to have either their children or themselves join the army. As it was put: “The masses are of course willing to resist Chiang Kai-shek, but if you try to mobilize their children, they are not willing, because this is in contradiction with their direct interest.” The result was that “although the CCP requested that the masses join the army, the masses only requested that they could spend their days happily at home.” This phenomenon
is the inevitable manifestation of the constant interaction of the self-interest of two independent subjects.

Although the CCP saw land reform and peasant military recruitment as having a natural and inseparable connection, from the point of view of many peasants considering their own self-interest, the CCP’s political-economic revolution and military service in the army were seen as relatively independent matters. The reason peasants supported joining the CCP’s political and economic reforms was because these reforms brought them concrete benefits, and there was a correspondence between both sides. But in the period when the Party’s focus moved to mobilization for war, the peasantry faced an existential choice. Surrounding the question of whether to join the army, the interests of the two sides diverged. For this reason, it was not the case that the move between these phases, from land reform to army recruitment, could simply be accomplished via the peasants’ gratitude. Due to the variability of personal interest entering the equation, many peasants abandoned the political expectations of the CCP, and saw joining the army as a perilous undertaking. The Party Committee of the Southern Hebei Region had a particularly deep and vivid analysis of this phenomenon:

After two years of defensive war and a year of economic liberation movements (although land reform was not completely thorough), the degree of consciousness of the masses has improved: their hatred of the landlord class has on average increased; the ugly crimes of Chiang Kai-shek, and the need to overthrow him are clear; they see the strength of the CCP and People’s Liberation Army, have a determination to follow the CCP, and faith that Chiang can be defeated. There is certainly a portion of the masses that hold deep moral conviction, and under our slogans have voluntarily joined the army; but the ordinary member of the masses can still be quite backwards at times. That is to say, they know that Chiang Kai-shek should be overthrown, and that if he is not then their future will not be easy, so they support military recruitment in principle. But then they are not willing to join the army, and instead want other people to go fight Chiang, with themselves instead staying at home living well. They are unwilling to leave their households, their wives, and parents. Their parents and wives feel the same towards their children or husbands: they support other people going to join the army, but they are pained to see their own son or husband go. Even fanshen peasants partake in this way of thinking. This is a problem of the contradiction between the peasants’ immediate interests and their complete, long-term interests.91

To summarize, we can see the inevitable challenges the CCP faced in creating a movement to recruit peasants into the army through emphasizing the idea of “repayment.” Those who had been expropriated during land reform, like landlords and
rich peasants, as well as some of those middle peasants who had been attacked, held a negative attitude to military recruitment, and their willingness to join the army was naturally not high. Some of those people who benefited from land reform also believed that “land being exchanged for military service was a trick,” and between joining the army versus returning to their previous circumstances, they preferred the latter, and were not willing to sign up: there still existed the possibility of rising in social and economic position through steady accumulation, and there was thus no need to take on the risk of losing their life and family. What the majority of peasants paid most attention to was the possible losses to their bodily selves and family, and not the material benefits that liberation had brought them. Looking at military service as a form of repaying the debt of the CCP’s political-economic reforms, peasants could either choose to repay it, or refuse to do so. Even if they chose to repay, they could choose to do so via a different means, and this was entirely decided by their personal judgment; that is to say, their level of consciousness. But it was just as the Party Committee of the Southern Hebei Region stated: “Among the peasantry, the advanced masses are a minority, the middle and backwards elements are the majority.”

This was precisely why the CCP repeatedly stressed conscience examination during its military recruitment. Facing the CCP’s repeated stress of the logic of gratitude while mobilizing for military recruitment, the peasantry thus emphasized the enormous losses that military service brings, leading them to believe that repaying the CCP with military service was not an even trade; or rather that it was not worth it. What they emphasized was the aspect of fairness within relations of reciprocity.

**Whoever Was Wronged Will Certainly Take Revenge: The Retaliatory Behavior Of The Peasantry**

Facing the CCP’s military recruitment, many peasants found they were in an ethically compromised position, as it was clear that protecting one’s family and country is a great ethical principle, and that reciprocating after having received land would be the right thing to do. However, for the peasantry, military service certainly implied suffering many losses, foreseeable and unforeseeable, and some peasants harbored dissatisfaction with the CCP’s mobilization efforts. As ordinary peasants, they could not look at the circumstances of their personal dilemma from the lofty perspective of the reform of the social system but this didn’t make their dissatisfaction any less real.
Amidst this kind of indescribable difficulty, many peasants cast their dissatisfaction into the arenas of their daily lives. Because of this, many grassroots cadres carrying out the work of military mobilization became the target of peasants giving vent to their dissatisfaction, and suffered their retaliation and attacks.

Some of the villagers’ retaliation was spontaneous, emerging out of heated conflicts between the two sides during military recruitment mobilization. In December 1945, during recruitment in Jianping (建屏) County, the following was reported:

In Baijiazhuang we mobilized a number of party members and the masses to join the army, but one party member did not want to go. When he returned home, his family asked him about it, and he said, ‘I don’t have any choice in this, it’s the Party’s decision.’ After this, the family members of those who were mobilized were unwilling to let the cadres off easily, and went to the district cadres and cursed them out. It’s said that night one family member went and found the district cadre’s residence and pointed at them and cursed…Our district cadres dared not argue back, just said kind words, and two or three of them escorted the villagers home while enduring their curses along the way. The second day some of the villagers shouldered hoes and were intent on digging up the foundation of the branch secretary’s house. The secretary was so scared that he didn’t dare return home for a number of days. Cadres in the Fifth District Tangjiagou Village Military Committee tried to pick a fight multiple times with a district cadre trying to mobilize him for the military, and if people hadn’t held him back, it would have come to blows. During a mobilization effort in Shangguanyintang (Sixth District), when the village head grabbed a village youth and dragged him to the district secretary, he was surrounded by the masses who wept and said they wouldn’t become soldiers, threatening the district secretary.94

During recruitment in Qingyuan County in March of 1947, village cadre Liu Shirong tried to mobilize Liu Shiyin to join the army. Liu Shiyin said to his family, “Liu Shirong is forcing me to join the army. If I die, get revenge for me.”95 In December 1948 during recruitment in Yi County:

There were twelve occurrences of the masses beating and cursing district and village cadres. In Huachang Village (Ninth District), after Du Luo was selected for the army (公议), his son grabbed a knife and went looking for the cadres, going to their houses looking for a fight. Liu Gang and Chen Luoyn, dissatisfied with being chosen for the army, used rocks to attack a cadre. In Yiehezhuang (First District), the wife of Hou Luo beat public safety personnel because her son was to join the army. In Jianxin Village (Third District), after Liang Bo was chosen to join the army, when the cadres went to his house to mobilize him, five household members resisted them with axes, and the cadre fled. In Qilizhuang (Third District), Wang Zhenshan and his three brothers had in the past deserted from their unit and joined the enemy, and then been recaptured; this time, discussing their younger
brother joining the army, they made a big fuss on the main street. In Dong Dailing (Seventh District), when Shen Luoyu's son was chosen, he used a rod and chased and beat the cadre, and when sent to the district office, pretended he was sick and fled. In Hexi (Tenth District), Zhang Luohai also resisted using a knife. In Sixth District, Li Jiazhuang, a new soldier mistakenly believed that his becoming a soldier was the fault of a cadre, and beat up the village head. In Weidu (Fifth District), when a new soldier named Liu Shan told his spouse he was going to flee, his unit leader prevented him from doing so, and he beat him up. In Jin Po (Tenth District), Hao Luoyin had been labeled a KMT agent during a previous movement due to his wrecking activities; he lived with his brothers, altogether four people, and after he was selected for the army, they almost kicked the local safety official to death.96

Of course, in the outbreak of spontaneous conflict between villagers and cadres over military recruitment, the villagers had great difficulty in gaining the advantage. Some villagers kept themselves in check, quietly waiting for the optimal moment to retaliate against village cadres. Land reform and Party rectification (整党) provided such an opportunity for some peasants. As some cadres said after the fact: “In the course of carrying out work you’ll always end up with someone feeling wronged, and whoever feels wronged is bound to retaliate.” Due to coercive recruitment in Dongzhuang in Baode (Third District), one cadre “was beaten by a woman who harbored a grievance against him and who took up a wooden rod, breaking his lower legs. In Fourth District there also occurred a similar incident.”97 During Party rectification, the reasons villagers retaliated against cadres were unusually complex. As Huang Daoxuan’s research on the rectification of cadres during land reform has made clear, “contradictions in villages between kinship groups, private individuals, and cadres and villagers that were complex and long-accumulating during the process of Party rectification, manifested during mass movements in complicated and overlapping ways.”98 Obviously, the conflict between village cadres and villagers spurred by military recruitment cannot be overlooked.

Spontaneous conflict between villagers and cadres, and villagers using Party rectification as an opportunity for retaliation against cadres, took place in public, and took advantage of organizational change. Rumors regarding military expansion, and the idea that the recruiting cadres would have a bad afterlife (损阴德), by contrast, can be seen as veiled or hidden form of revenge by villagers. In 1947, a rumor spread in Handan County that “Linmingguan has ghost soldiers that are only attacking the cadres doing military recruiting.”99 In 1948, the saying that “the forces doing military recruitment will receive bad karma (缺阴)” spread in the Bohai Region.100 Although
phrases like “ghost soldiers” and “bad karma” were totally fantastic, they reflected a certain attitude of the populace. In a rural society that believed in karmic retribution, unknowable retribution in the world after death caused people to shiver, and brought a great uncertainty and dread to those cadres involved in military recruitment. This is just as James Scott has said regarding the “cover of darkness” (幽暗的处境) of the weak, “where gossip, tales, slander, and anonymous sabotage mocks and negates the public ritual order.”

Recruiting More Soldiers Is Like Treating Your Fellow Villagers As Gifts To Be Given Away: The Behavior By Which Cadres Evaded Reprisals

The foundation of traditional Chinese social relationships, “repayment,” contained the meaning of “to know generosity is to plan to repay it” (知恩图报), and “a drop of generosity should be repaid with a torrent”; it also contained ideas like “one cannot live under the same sky as the killer of one’s father,” “if you have a blood debt that goes unpaid you are not a gentleman,” and “for a gentleman, even ten years is not too late to repay a blood debt.” The norm of “repayment” held together the existence of the village as a shared entity, with its dual nature of incentive and constraint. It required mutual assistance and the cultivation of friendship:

In Chinese traditional villages, there existed all manner of mutual aid networks amongst the populace. This primarily had its basis in labor-sharing networks formed from relationships between well-known neighbors, in giving aid based on blood ties, and in the responsibility that kinship groups took for helping their weaker members. To survive, villagers had to form close connections with one another. The reason for this was the material benefit mutually provided; but even more so, it was the way this worked to create bonds of kinship and friendship.

Thus, every village member would do their utmost to construct and maintain good relationships within blood-based and local networks, so as to uphold a normal life of economic production. The flip side of the relationships between villagers was such that even a slight offense had to be avenged, so that villagers were very careful in their daily lives to not offend others and to avoid others seeking revenge against them, since this would make their lives much more difficult. To a certain degree, for most villagers, cultivating good relationships with neighbors was less of an ideal ethical
standard than a principle of survival. The norm of “repayment” also constrained the behavior of village leadership. Village leaders were not necessarily the representatives for and active upholders of village interests as a whole, but they did ultimately have to live among their blood and local relations; even if they were looking out for their own personal interests, they could not totally infringe on the rights of other villagers. The grassroots cadres in base areas had difficulty extricating themselves from the expectations and norms of traditional village ethics.

For peasants, joining the army entailed not only costs in their economic, family, and marital lives, but also the possibility of losing their very lives. Village cadres had a deep understanding of this. During recruitment in Fuping County in August 1945, some cadres said: “Mobilizing almost anything is possible: if they want money, that’s not a problem; but if they want people, then it’s impossible to deal with.” In August 1946 in Tang County, mobilizing new soldiers produced a number of problems, and village cadres all recognized that “mobilizing living beings is hard; mobilizing non-living things is easy.” A cadre in Gaocheng County said that “even if you give someone a mountain of gold, they still won’t come out to join the army.” During recruitment in Laiyuan County in April 1948, a representative said, “we need a great heap of living people, but this is a pain; this is asking for these yokels (大老粗儿们) to give their lives!”

Life experience, common sense, and custom made it clear to cadres that after mobilizing people to join the army, the possibility that they themselves and their families might suffer retaliation would drastically increase. Due to this, fear of reprisals by villagers became a serious apprehension while mobilizing for military recruitment on the part of some cadres. During recruitment in Junan County in 1944, cadres, “feared offending others, believed that recruiting for the military was evil, and were unwilling to act. [Blank] District [Blank] Party Member said: mobilizing people to join the army goes against the principle of Heaven (天理)! When [Blank] District [Blank] Branch Group in Gaofengzhuang sent six youths to join the army, he wept and didn’t dare do the work of consoling the relatives.” During recruitment in Jingxing County in August 1945, some cadres “only relied on district cadres to do the mobilization, and themselves believed that mobilizing people to become soldiers was not right, and feared wrongdoing villagers.” During recruitment in Central Hebei in November 1946, “some village level cadres still had a low level of consciousness, and believed that mobilizing anyone to become a soldier was sending them to their death; fearing
doing wrong by them, they did not actively call on people to join the army, with the result that it has been entirely impossible to launch a mass movement.”

In Nanpi County, some cadres “feared wronging others, sending soldiers to their deaths, and the soldiers’ relatives finding them,” and so had misgivings regarding recruitment. During recruitment in Handan County, it was reported that:

There are more than thirty villages in which the military dependents and village cadres have become antagonistic to one another after military recruitment; the village cadres feel very hurt, thinking that they have failed their superiors, while in the village they have wronged their relatives. Now if the village cadres and the masses are asked to evaluate their work they refuse, both sides are refusing to receive us. The military dependents have banded together to make things difficult for the cadres, and the cadres are afraid of being attacked, requesting to leave their positions. Some village cadres say, in the past we wronged the landlords, this year we’ve wronged the masses; they feel besieged on all sides, with no way out.

In an April 1949 report, the Social Affairs Department of the Fourth Prefectural Committee of the Beiyue Region reported that slogans had appeared in many locations. Regarding village cadres, some said: “Those who force the People to become soldiers are enemies,” “evil cadres are enemies, sooner or later we’ll settle our accounts with them,” and “evil cadres are enemies, pushing us to become soldiers; if one day the skies clear, we’ll settle our accounts with them.” These slogans corroded the determination and will of cadres to mobilize peasants to join the army.

Retaliation by peasants against village cadres was not just constant, but also worsened during land reform and Party rectification. Cadres who suffered retaliation expressed discontent, and developed negative attitudes towards military recruitment. Cadres in central Hebei reported to their superiors that “earlier the region pressed onwards and it ended in a deadlock; and now you’re still carrying on with this” (早先区里豁出死的挤, 这时又闹这个). Some said, “we’re like a stick for wiping shit: when you need to use it you grab it, when you don’t, you throw it away.” Others said: “This time I’m not doing it any more. Instead, I’ll cultivate some land, and if labor is needed, I’ll work; if sentry duty is needed, I’ll stand guard. This is better than anything.” A cadre in Pingshan County said, “doing this work there is never any result; the fruits of what you do go to the public, but your mistakes are your own.” Another person said, “the fruits of your work are the public’s, but when you wrong someone that’s your own problem.” During recruitment in Qingyuan County in March of 1949, the
following was reported: “with the equalization of land, a portion of the village cadres were attacked because they had once recruited poor peasants and hired hands as soldiers; after this they saw recruiting one soldier as adding one more enemy, and were reticent to do so.”114

Some new cadres that emerged during land reform, having personally seen the bitter experiences of the older cadres, hesitated in carrying out mobilization for military recruitment. In March 1948 in Yi County, new cadres “had seen that old cadres had invited the displeasure of the masses during military recruitment, and became the targets of criticism. Thus seeing the difficulties involved in the task of military recruitment, lacking alternative methods, not daring to order people around, they did not courageously take responsibility, and could not complete their task, afraid of ‘becoming stones’ [whom the masses will want to remove] (当石头).”115 In central Hebei, “cadres from poor peasant groups and new peasant associations also had misgivings, thinking that the old cadres had been attacked by the masses for using coercion to recruit soldiers; now, facing the task of recruitment themselves, they fear doing so. Some village representatives and district cadres in Suning County have said: If you tell me to recruit soldiers, I can’t do it; how about we draw straws (抓球); how about I have the strong youths come to the district and you choose.”116 During recruitment in Wan County in December 1948, village cadres had many apprehensions:

They fear wrongdoing people, afraid that if the recruits flee they can’t do anything; afraid that the families of the soldiers will make a row—cursing them out and threatening to commit suicide, and so on—afraid they would become targets of mass criticism later on; afraid that the district and county will not back them up, afraid the leadership will have diverging opinions. There are cadres who say, “I don’t fear retribution; after some time passes, if I can’t stay here I’ll go elsewhere.”117

Grassroots cadres in the Northern China Liberated Region lived within set kinship and local networks, and maintaining good social relations was a basic condition for having a normal daily life. Because a large number of villagers were heavily apprehensive of military service, in the eyes of village cadres, military recruitment was like a mission to wrong their neighbors, and the revenge taken upon grassroots cadres and Party members during Party rectification only strengthened this kind of thinking. Many village cadres were caught in a dilemma between revolutionary authority and the peasantry, with some saying: “If you don’t deal with it, you don’t complete your task. If you deal with it, you fear becoming accused of commandism, and afterwards
the masses will want to remove us (搬我们的石头).” This caused many village cadres to be overcautious or to take a perfunctory attitude towards recruitment. In August 1948, the First Prefectural Committee of the Bohai Region stressed that some cadres “do not have an earnest and responsible attitude regarding expanding the main military force, but instead merely send people away without caring, feeling that if they just send the recruits to the unit and get a receipt, they have completed their ask; ‘completing their task’ is just completing some official business that their superior has given them.” The Sixth Prefectural Committee of the Beiyue Region believed that, “many cadres simply focus on throwing together the requisite number (凑数) and completing their assignment, so that when mobilizing they do not care about the methods or the consequences; as long as they complete their task, then it’s fine.” In some districts in Jianping (建屏) County, cadres believed that “after sending soldiers to the county their assignment was complete; that having handed over a certain number they finished their mission, and had no other responsibility.” In October 1948 the Party Committee of the Beiyue Region pointed out that, “village cadres do not take responsibility for military recruitment; they believed that as soon as they’ve delivered recruits to the district they count it as having completed their task. If people run away, they think it is not their concern.” In March 1949, some village cadres in Gaocheng County were of the view that “they would just complete the number they had resigned themselves to undertaking, and that they couldn’t recruit more, believing that recruiting more was taking their fellow villagers as gifts to be given away.” Overall, “some village cadres are perfunctory in their work attitudes and their work for the Party is influenced by personal relationships.” The methods by which cadres coped with military recruitment mobilization, placating their superiors without doing what was requested of them, were numerous and varied.

**Notifying village youths to flee**

In order to avoid offending the villagers and to safeguard village interests, some village cadres, upon hearing of upcoming recruitment, would surreptitiously notify local village youths to allow them to flee. During recruitment in Jianping (建屏) County in September 1945, “after the Vice-Director of the Military Committee began a military mobilization conference, cadres notified village youth to flee.” In December, when the Sanjiadian Village (Fourth Village) branch organization mobilizer Qiao Ji returned from a district meeting, “he sent one of his brothers and seven or eight youths to
Shanxi.” In April 1948 in Dongtuanbao, Laiyuan County (Sixth District), “all the good recruits have fled, and cadres have selected the disabled to go to the district... The cadres won’t mobilize the strong youths except as a last resort.” During recruitment in Yi County in December 1948: “After the district announced cadres’ tasks, in Banbidian (Eleventh District), a Commerce and Industry Committee member sent word to his family, which then fled. In Third District, the Fenzhuang branch secretary Liu Jiuwen’s three brothers fled after the district held a meeting. During the previous recruitment in Shimen, he himself sent a note leading to three people fleeing, and this time he again sent seven people to flee, outwardly saying that he couldn’t do anything about the fleeing recruits, or people carrying out passive resistance and wrecking.” In Laiyuan County, “after the Training Class released a notice for recruitment, some cadres sent notes back.”

*Only caring about the number of mobilized soldiers, not caring about quality*

During recruitment in Jingxing County in August 1945, some cadres, “knowing full well that recruits were ill, or that they their legs were limp, feet in pain, that they had night blindness, internal illnesses, that they had lamb's madness, or didn’t meet the height requirement, and so on, they still sent them to burnish the recruitment numbers.” During recruitment in Jianping (建屏) County in December 1946: “Nanguyue (First District) selected two disabled people for recruits, Shunzigou sent one person lacking an arm and another with a limp leg. Guanyintang sent one person with thyroiditis and one person with cellulitis on their leg, and in Wanzi Village (Third District) forty two year old Kong Fengtun shaved his beard and pretended to be twenty eight years old. Of the forty three people Sixth District sent, twenty were children, and that district’s Xiazhuang, Daping, Kangzhuang and others sent to the district and county soldiers that had been previously sent back five or six times.” In some districts in the Hebei-Shanxi First Sub-Region (冀晋一分区), “the phenomenon of grabbing men to put together the quota and not taking responsibility is very serious. Out of 130 people sent by Hunyuan only twenty were accepted; in Datong out of over one hundred people only a few were accepted; in Guangling out of ninety people only twenty were accepted, and they again mobilized people who did not meet requirements and had been rejected and sent home multiple times.” During recruitment in the Eleventh Prefecture of Central Hebei in August 1947, “in the process of inspecting recruits, every kind of disability was found: one person missing a right arm or with a lame leg,
another with a finger that could not bend, another missing an entire toe. They had every kind of illness: someone with only one eye, one with an ulcer and unable to walk, the mentally handicapped, epilepsy, hernia, and so on, and children not meeting either age or height requirements.” 133 It was also said that “in Ningcheng’s Third and Tenth District, during the first inspection of recruits, the recruits sent back for not meeting requirements totaled 700: there was gonorrhea, scabies, eye disease, physical disabilities, vomiting, spasms, hernia (气蛋), epilepsy, a bent back, cellulitis of the leg, serious stomach problems, thyroiditis, the elderly, small children, the weak, the small, those currently in cupping treatment (扎针的), the deeply anxious, those with difficulty walking, and so on.” 134 During recruitment in Jianping (建屏) County in December 1948, “Xiwan Village (Second District) sent a mentally handicapped person to be a soldier, who had in the past multiple times been rejected, and who had his name changed. This time they sent him again to meet the quota for soldiers. Wenlongtan-zhuang (Fifth District) sent someone with cellulitis in their legs, with the bump as big as a small bowl, to meet the numbers…” 135 Additionally, “Daoyaokou in Wei County the first time sent a child, and the second time sent someone who couldn’t speak, and who seemed to be mentally handicapped.” 136

In many cases, the intentional mobilization of soldiers who did not meet recruitment standards came from a tacit understanding of village cadres and villagers. There were some cadres who even reached an agreement with those joining the army to “flee back to the village after you go and fill the quota, and then to not pursue them.” In August 1947, among those mobilized in Zhengding County Heying Village were two soldiers with anal fistula and illness, and the cadres said to them, “you guys just go and fill the quotas; if you don’t go, the district will ask our village for even more soldiers, and we can’t meet it.” 137 In June 1948, a village cadre in Wan County told a new soldier: “don’t cause the district to lose face; when you get to the county don’t flee, but when you get to your unit then you can desert.” 138 In December 1948, while village cadres were mobilizing new soldiers in Wangmiao Village, Jingxing County (First District), they said that “we know that you aren’t up to standards, go let them examine you and come back.” 139 A village cadre in Yuanjiazhuang, Xingtang County (Second District), said: “go and fill our village’s quota again; go and pretend that you are strong, say you’re a new soldier. Afterwards, you’ll definitely be sent back after the inspection. If you aren’t, you can run back and the village will protect you” (以后非检查下来不行, 如果检查不下来, 你跑回来村中掩护). 140
Helping new soldiers desert

In July 1946 during military recruitment in the Sixth District of Fuping County, “Party members, the masses, and cadres created the ‘three won’t gos’ (三不去): first, if you threaten to kill me I still won’t go; second, if you find me ten mu of good land I still won’t go; third, if you don’t threaten to kill me or offer to give me land, there’s absolutely no way I will go. A few villages, having no other choice, said ‘You go to the county and then flee back.’”¹⁴¹ In December 1948 in the Fifth District of Jinxing County, village cadres in Dongzheng and Xi’anxiang said: “You have all been soldiers and are good at running; just run back to the village that’ll be it.”¹⁴² In Zhengding County, Third District, village cadres in Botang said to mobilized soldiers: “Just go, we’ll take care of you. Go there and then flee back, and we’ll ignore it. If people come looking we’ll say we don’t know.”¹⁴³

Road passes (路条) were the guarantor of free movement within the base areas. When new soldiers entered a unit, passes were prepared in advance to be used in escape, and some portion of these passes came from the hands of district and village cadres. A report by the Handan New Soldier Group from June 1947 read: “In about every village there is some soldier getting road passes, and these come from the village cadres.”¹⁴⁴ In the First Sub-Region of Bohai Region, “cadres in some areas openly give travel passes to new soldiers, telling them to go to their units to carry out some public affairs, and then they can leave and return home.”¹⁴⁵ In September 1948, Liu Qingshan pointed out: “Some village representatives and cadres give new soldiers road passes, which is opening the door to deserters.”¹⁴⁶ During recruitment in the Fifth Sub-Region of Beiyue Region in June 1948, units discovered a number of blank passes and certifications of movement (通行证) to prepare for fleeing at any moment. For incomplete statistics see Table 1.

According to Table 1 we can see that 30% of the road passes held by soldiers came from village authorities, and the rest from military units, district offices, commercial shops, Party Center guesthouses, Party Center commissariats (中央供给科), logistics offices, and so on. This shows the attitude of village cadres towards dealing with mobilization, and the blank road passes from the various bureaus and offices show how some new soldiers did not shrink from using every kind of relationship in order to flee military service. Moreover, these blank passes involve Dingxing and Wan
Counties, and the passes from Tang County are not included, which shows that giving new soldiers blank passes was a fairly common phenomenon. There are two points which must be clarified: first, these blank passes were perhaps manufactured by the soldiers themselves; secondly, for a large amount of the blank passes, “if they were not voluntarily turned over, they were very hard to discover.” Because of this, it can be inferred that that number of existing blank slips was not limited to these forty-nine slips.

Although village cadres were part of the CCP’s political apparatus, at their core, a great many cadres still lived within the set networks of blood and locale, and village cadres could not but consider what kind of effects mobilizing peasants for the military would bring them. Villagers retaliating against cadres due to having been mobilized was a common social phenomenon. Many cadres deeply understood this, and due to this they wished to keep villagers’ retaliatory behavior to the very minimum level. They thus took up a perfunctory attitude towards carrying out the CCP’s military mobilization, surreptitiously sending their village’s youth news of mobilization, using recruits that did not meet military standards to fill their quota, encouraging new soldiers to flee, and writing fake travel passes to aid in desertion. From this we can see that the norm of “repayment” in traditional society deeply influenced and constrained the behavior of village cadres in military recruitment mobilization, and reduced the effectiveness of the CCP’s mobilization of peasants for the military.

**Difficult To Fully Describe: The Complexity Of Manifestations Of The Logic Of “Repayment”**

China underwent drastic transformations in the twentieth century, but some basic social norms did not experience fundamental changes, and continued to guide people’s behavior. As the CCP took up the theory of class differentiation and class struggle as its basic guiding thought, it came up with policies and measures according to this to remake society, and even hoped to hammer out a new kind of person who acted entirely according to class theory. In the descriptions within the CCP’s revolutionary classics, the reason the peasants joined the CCP armies in great numbers was because of the awakening of their class consciousness. However, the concrete process of military recruitment mobilization in the Northern China Liberated Region reveals that regardless of whether it was the grassroots cadres in charge of the work of mobiliza-
Table 1: Statistics of blank road passes stamped with CCP organ seals prepared to use in absconding, submitted after confession from the Fifth Sub-Region of the Beiyue Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seal</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>司仓中队部</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>东于家庄农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>于丙午</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>王各庄贫农团</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>刘至</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>保安大队部</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>王文如</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>西白司城农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>辛庄农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>冯景明</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>南关农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>张树民</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>完县北街中队部</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>二区大队部</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>郝树号</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>家庄中队部农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>李秀亭</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>西安阳农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>王振江</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>四区大队部</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>冯小福</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>北朝阳生产推进社</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>杨俊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>区联社</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>聂长兴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>贡村公所</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>高登源</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>北街农会</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>张双尔张兵立</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>西夏淑中队部</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>杨志</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>定兴县西双屯农会</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>都第四区区公所</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>庞双儿</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>三纵队裕民商店</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X玉章</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中央局招待科</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>郭玉琴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>中央局供给科</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>旅四团二营部</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>许良立</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>戳子模糊的</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures on this table are incomplete. For instance, the passes from Tang County came directly from a supplementary instruction team, and are not included. According to the above statistics, the amount of passes stamped by farmers' associations and poor peasant groups (贫农团) was 30%, and from this we can see Party village organizations also had problems. Source: Fifth Prefectural Committee of the Beiyue Region, “五分区扩军工作简要总结” [Brief Summary of Military Expansion Work in the Fifth Sub-Region], June 23, 1948, 河北省档案馆藏 [Hebei Provincial Archive], 84-1-12-8.

Institution, or the peasants being mobilized, neither had a clear class consciousness. On the contrary, the basic norms of traditional social relations had a much greater effect on
the peasantry. Within the concrete process of drawing up policy and mobilizing the peasants for military recruitment, the CCP took full account of the norm of “repayment” and the constraints it placed on the peasants, and emphasized the absolute necessity of the peasantry repaying its debt of gratitude. However, individuals did not mechanically respect this conception of “repayment,” and had significant agency. The peasantry and the CCP understood military recruitment through the same logic, but peasants put more emphasis on the fairness of military service. Many poor peasants believed in the slow and steady accumulation of land. Despite this, having attained land in a short amount of time through coercive force, some of them were very content. But even so, if they had to give up their lives to pay for this, they would shrink back. Therefore, some villagers were angry with the cadres who mobilized them into military service, and waited for opportunities to retaliate. Village cadres feared peasants’ revenge, and took a perfunctory attitude towards military mobilization, using every kind of method to evade retaliation.

The charm of history is that we can never return entirely to its full complexity. The limited materials we possess remind us that the logic of “repayment” in military mobilization had an additional manifestation that is worth noting. If village cadres protected villagers’ core interests to the extent that they were able to, the villagers would feel glowing gratitude. Li Kang’s investigations into Xi Village of east Hebei found that, during military recruitment in 1948, Xi Village’s youth, under the instigation of one Lin Zhi, had fled from military conscription. Lin Zhi was judged to deserve capital punishment, but many villagers objected, believing that Lin Zhi had done good deeds for the soldiers’ parents. On the other hand, Xi Village’s residents remembered that military conscription time and time again became an excuse for cadres grabbing power and a tool for oppressing the masses, and a means of avoiding calamity for themselves (一走了之的避祸手段). Towards the end of 1947, after Xi Village’s old cadres had been released from Party investigation, the new cadres wanted to have them join the army so as to never return and get rid of the root of the problem. From this it can be seen that fearing revenge was merely one of the many kinds of manifestations of the logic of “repayment” within the process of mobilization for military recruitment by village cadres. At the same time, some village cadres used sending people to the army as an important way of getting revenge themselves. Fearing retaliation and retaliating against others were both present in this process. From this we can imagine that in some instances, village cadres who controlled the authority to mobilize could turn
military recruitment into a means of repaying the generosity of others, by enabling specific people to avoid being recruited. This, in essence, was also a case of the logic of “repayment” in the process of military mobilization.

These various forms all influenced the specific unfolding of the CCP’s mobilization of peasants for military service. Outside of this, the various concepts of common decency (人情) and “face” (面子) interacted with the norm of “repayment,” and had a complicated influence on the CCP’s military recruitment. However, it is difficult to lucidly describe this complexity. To summarize, when we get rid of ideological language and instead enter into historical detail, we discover that many basic norms had not changed; rather they revealed themselves in different ways. In the process of the CCP’s revolution, there existed on the one hand, drastic change, and on the other hand, the unchanging. The mingling of these two forged the communist revolution’s complex appearance.
Endnotes

1 Qi's first monograph is 当兵: 华北根据地农民如何走向战场 [Becoming a Soldier: How peasants from the North China Base Areas joined the battlefield] (Chengdu: 四川人民出版社 [Sichuan People's Publishing House], 2015); for Qi's work on the expansion of wireless communication, see “全面抗战时期中共军队无线通信系统的结构性扩张” [The institutional expansion of wireless communication systems in the CCP's military during the period of total war], in 河北学刊 41:5 (2021); for gunpowder, see “抗日战争期间八路军弹药来源问题研究” [Research on the question of the Eighth Route Army's sourcing of gunpowder during the War of Resistance Against Japan], in 近代史研究 5 (2020).


8 Li Jinzheng 李金铮, “Why did peasants support and join the Chinese Communist revolution?” 136; for the critique of “bottom-up” perspectives see Li Jinzheng 李金铮, “Turning to ’New Revolutionary History,’ ” 81.

9 Ibid, 81-82.

10 Li Jinzheng 李金铮, “Why did peasants support and join the Chinese Communist revolution?,” 134.

11 Qi Xiaoli, Becoming a Soldier, 5.

12 Ibid, 457.


14 Yang, “The Concept of Pao as a Basis for Social relations in China,” 291.


16 Li Jinzheng 李金铮, “Peasant mind-states during land reform,” 94.

17 Trans: In dynastic times 恩 (en) referred to, among other things, the grace of a superior who pro-
vided something to a subordinate out of their own generosity and benevolence. The concept of *baoen* [repaying generosity] is a loaded term with roots in Chinese moral philosophy dating to the dynastic periods.


23 “山东省战时行政委员会为准备反攻开展拥军运动的指示” [Shandong Provincial Wartime Administrative Committee directive on supporting the military in preparation for counterattack], (December 28, 1944), in Shandong Provincial Archive, Shandong Provincial Academy of Social Sciences Historical Research Center ed. 山东省档案馆, 山东省 社会科学院历史研究所, 山东革命历史档案资料选编第 13 辑 [Shandong Revolutionary History Archival Materials Selection No. 13], (Jinan: 山东人民出版社 [Shandong People’s Publishing House], 1983), 268.

24 “淮北苏皖边区冬学委员会关于大规模开展今年冬学运动的指示” [Northern Huai Jiangsu and Anhui Border Area Winter Study Committee directive on opening a large-scale winter study movement this Year] (November 7, 1944), in Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Shandong Border Area Party History Office, Anhui Provincial Archive ed. 豫皖苏鲁边区党史办公室、安徽省档案馆, 淮北抗日根据地史料选辑第 7 辑 (文化教育部分) [Historical Materials of Northern Huai Resistance Against Japan Base Areas No. 7 (Cultural Education)], (1985), 249.

25 Propaganda Department of the First Prefectural Committee of the Bohai Region 中共渤海一地委宣传部, “对去年大参军工作的初步 检查(草稿),” [A preliminary evaluation of last year's large-scale military recruitment work (draft)] (August 8, 1948), 河北省档案馆 [Heibei Provincial Archive], 248- 1-27-2.


28 Yang Lien-sheng 杨联陞, “The Concept of *Pao* as a Basis for Social Relations in China,” in Yang Lien-sheng 杨联陞, *中国文化中“报”、“保”、“包”之意义* [The meaning of “Repayment,” “Protection,”...
and “Contracting out” in Chinese culture (2009), 75.


31 Eighth Prefectural Committee of the Central Hebei Region 冀中八地委, “归扩广播——河间五区姚天宫的参军工作从复杂困难中怎样搞起来的” [Spreading military recruitment and returning Soldiers to their units—How Yaotiangong's (Hejian Fifth District) military recruitment work was carried out under complications and difficulties], (April 27, 1948), 河北省档案馆 [Hebei Provincial Archive], 11-1-29-6.

32 Jianping County Recruit Reception Division 建屏县收兵处, “关于扩军问题——调查研究材料之十二” [Problems relating to expanding the military—investigation and research materials No. 12] (August 1948), 平山县档案馆 [Pingshan County Archives], 1-1-37.

33 Reliao Prefectural Committee 热辽地委, “大风暴总结: 新惠县、建平县、北票县、朝阳县” [Summary of the Great Storm: Xinhui County, Jianping County, Beipiao County, Chaoyang County] (6/1/1948), 河北省档案馆 [Hebei Provincial Archive], 205-1-25 -18.

34 Ningcheng County Committee 宁城县委, “关于扩军简介报告” [Introductory report on Expanding the military] (September 8, 1948), 河北省档案馆 [Hebei Provincial Archive], 520-1-843-3.

35 Yang, “The Concept of Pao as a Basis for Social relations in China,” 291

36 See Zhao Xudong 赵旭东, 权力与公正 [Power and Justice] (Tianjin: 天津古籍出版社 [Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House], 2003), 115—159.

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