Local Militia and State Power in Nationalist China

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Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the organization of local community defense forces, or militia, was a common Chinese response to periods of civil war, popular rebellion, or social disorder. As such, it is hardly surprising to find an increasing level of militia mobilization leading up to and peaking in the "Nanjing decade" (1927-1937) of Nationalist Party (Guomindang) rule. Precisely because the organization of militia was a recurring theme in modern Chinese history, the proliferation of militia in the Nationalist period raises certain questions about the significance of this phenomenon to our understanding of state-society relations in this period. In his groundbreaking study of local militarization in the mid-nineteenth century, Philip Kuhn (1970) showed how the organization of militia in the face of widespread rebellions marked a devolution of power from the weakened Qing state to local elites. Given such historical precedents, one might hypothesize that the widespread mobilization of militia during the Nanjing decade indicated a basic weakness in the Nationalist government's relationship to local elites and a clue to its ultimate failure to achieve broader state-building objectives.

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The scholarly literature on the Nanjing decade provides at least some support for such a conclusion. According to William Wei's (1985) study of the Nationalist "counterrevolution" in Jiangxi province, the Nanjing government saw the mobilization of elite-led militia as essential to its broader anti-Communist campaign. Concerned, however, that militia might provide local elites with a source of power that could threaten the state's own authority over local society, the government initially sought to strengthen official controls over these forces. In the end, Wei finds that the government was unable to obtain the level of elite cooperation necessary for militia effectiveness until these efforts to constrain local elite power were abandoned. As a result, "the elite strengthened their control of the militia and therefore of the local areas" (Wei, 1985: 160). More recently, Xin Zhang (1994) also has shown how elite control of militia in southwest Henan province provided the foundation for a largely autonomous self-governing organization that successfully resisted the state-making efforts of the province's Nationalist government throughout the Nanjing decade. These cases suggest that militia organizations remained a significant source of autonomous local elite power in the Nationalist period and were a continuing obstacle to the extension of state power into local society.

Other research touching on militia organization in the Nanjing decade has, however, suggested a quite different picture. For example, a study of Guangxi province in the 1930s by Eugene Levich (1993) describes how the Guangxi clique established a centralized militia system, over the opposition of local gentry, and made it the cornerstone for a wide variety of reconstruction projects that greatly expanded state influence in local society. This case suggests that the inability of the state to extend greater control over militia in Jiangxi province, as described by Wei (1985), was more a failure of a specific government program than an inevitable outcome rooted in the nature of militia organization.

The first objective of this article, based on research on Hunan province in the 1920s and 1930s, is to confirm the ability of the Chinese state, under certain circumstances, to use militia organization as a means of extending state control and authority into local society. Although building on a foundation of militia organization developed in response to the disorder of the warlord period, militia mobilization

in Hunan reached its peak in reaction to the Communist-led peasant movement of the mid-1920s. While the nature of this threat provided a greater conjunction of state and local elite interests in the organization of militia, the Nationalist provincial government in Changsha still saw extensive local autonomy in militia organization not only as a threat to its aspirations for increased control over local society but as an obstacle to militia effectiveness. The result was a concerted effort, with much more success than in the case cited by Wei (1985), to increase state control over the promotion, organization, command, and funding of local militia. The upsurge of militia organization in this case did not therefore simply result, as in previous periods of local militarization, in an expansion of local elite power. Rather, local militarization ultimately created an opportunity for increased state penetration of local society.

The goal of this article is not, however, to simply supplant the view of militia as a source of local elite autonomy with one of militia as a force for expanding state power. Rather, the broader objective is to provide a framework that can reconcile and accommodate the seemingly different functions performed by militia in Chinese state-society relations in different places and different times. In particular, this article suggests that apparent contradictions in our understanding of the role of militia in Chinese society may be resolved through insights gained from the debate among historians on the emergence of a Chinese "public sphere."

The conceptualization of militia as agents of local elite power, the expansion of which must necessarily lead to a decline in state power, reflects a dichotomized view of state-society relations in China that many scholars have now found wanting. Mary Rankin (1993: 178) noted that one problem in the public sphere debate was the tendency, based on the historically specific Western bourgeois model, to "contrast state control and autonomy as exclusive alternatives." Rather than holding Chinese history up to this model, she argued that a more accurate portrayal of Chinese conditions could be derived from a broader definition of the public sphere that encompasses "intermediate arenas in which open, public initiatives are undertaken by both officials and the populace" (Rankin, 1993: 160). Noting the same problem, Philip Huang (1993: 216) proposed avoiding the term *public sphere* altogether as a construct based on Western experience that

cannot be appropriately applied to China. In its place, he proposed using a new term, the *third realm*, to refer to a "space in between state and society, in which both participated."

The conceptualization of militia as a component of a Chinese public sphere, as defined by Rankin (1993), or a third realm, as defined by Huang (1993), opens our eyes to the range of ways that the state could and often did play a role in militia organization. Certainly, local elites frequently initiated militia organizations, assumed command over their forces, and raised the funds needed to support and arm them. But militia organizations historically were seldom totally free of some degree of official supervision or control. At the very least, the state participated in the formation of militia simply by acquiescing to their existence; at the most, local officials sometimes played a dominant role in the initiation, organization, and even command of militia forces. In most cases, militia were never simply the tools of either local elites or state officials but involved collaborative efforts by both. Thus, attention must be paid to the mixture of roles played by both local elites and the state in different periods and under different conditions.

Seeing militia as part of a third realm also provides a framework for understanding changes that could take place in state-society relations in such intermediary organizations. As an arena where state-society relations were constantly being renegotiated, Huang (1993: 225) noted the possibility of the "state-ification or societalization" of the third realm. Thus, under certain conditions, such as those of the mid-nineteenth century, the expansion of militia may have resulted in expanded powers for local elites and a weakening of state influence. In Hunan in the late 1920s and 1930s, however, different conditions led to the state-ification of militia organization. The reworking of militia by Hunan provincial authorities in this period sought, with considerable success, to harness this portion of the public sphere to a broader process of state building.

While focusing on changing state-society relations, one must avoid seeing either society or the state as undifferentiated entities. On one hand, divisions and struggles between local elite factions were often played out within the arena of militia organization. Collaboration as well as conflict with state authorities could be a crucial factor in the outcome of these contests.[1] The case of Hunan in the 1920s shows that elite control of militia could even be challenged by new social forces,

with state support again very much playing a determining role. On the other hand, different levels of the state could also come into conflict over the control of local militia. Indeed, the initiative for greater state control over militia in Hunan in the 1920s came from the provincial government, with the result that local officials sometimes allied with local elites in opposition to this challenge to local interests.

Militia organization in modern China was, in the end, a contested domain in which both state and society, as well as different elements of the state and society, met to pursue their mutual interests or negotiate their differences. We should not be surprised to find that in different periods, or even in different places in the same period, militia mobilization could lead either to an increase of local autonomy or to the expansion of state control. To the extent that developments in areas such as militia organization can be used to measure changing state-society relations in modern Chinese history, the Hunan case described in this article is another reminder that generalizations must be firmly grounded in an appreciation of the significance of provincial and local variations.

MILITIA ORGANIZATION AND THE STATE IN THE LATE QING AND EARLY REPUBLIC

The significance of the changes occurring in militia organization in Hunan province in the Nanjing decade can be best understood when viewed in relation to militia developments in the preceding period, with a particular focus on the role of the state in these developments. After the defeat of the major rebellions of the mid-nineteenth century, most of the militia raised in Hunan province to suppress these rebellions were disbanded. From the 1870s through the first years of the Republic, the organization of local defense forces was for the most part infrequent and impermanent. Militia were normally raised by specific communities on a temporary basis to deal with particular threats to local order and then disbanded when the threat had passed. There were only a few instances when the danger of a wider crisis, most notably the 1911 Revolution, led to the broader organization of militia across the province. Even then, the response to these crises varied from one locale to the next, and the forces raised in these cases

were still fairly short-lived. It was not until the National Protection War of 1916 and the Constitutional Protection War of 1917 initiated a period of prolonged civil warfare in Hunan that an increasing number of Hunan counties began to establish more permanent local defense forces. The continuing political instability and growing banditry of this period led to a steady increase in the number and size of such forces in the decade from 1916 to 1926 (McCord, 1988).

The shifting patterns of militia organization seen in Hunan in the late Qing and early Republican periods cannot be fully appreciated if militia are only viewed in terms of elite power. In principle, the organization of militia always required either direct state approval or indirect state acquiescence. The degree of acquiescence, and thus the boundaries placed around militia organization, varied according to changing state interests and power. In the upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century, gentry had indeed often raised local forces on their own initiative with little reference to the state. State acquiescence in this case was largely the result of the dynasty being too weak to do anything about it. Elite management of militia in this period therefore may have reached a high level of autonomy. The situation changed, however, with the restoration of order and the revival of dynastic power after the suppression of the mid-century rebellions. Local forces that continued to operate with disregard for official authority were suppressed along with the remnants of rebel forces by armies loyal to the dynasty. While local elites might still raise militia on their own initiative in the face of some particular local crisis, it was usually necessary to obtain official permission for the maintenance of local forces for any length of time.

After its experience in the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty clearly sought to increase its authority over local forces and to limit the organization of militia to cases of real need. Thus, in response to the Boxer uprising in 1900, the court approved a request from Hunan officials and gentry for the organization of militia across the province to guard against the spread of disorder there. However, it sought to maintain some central control over this situation by appointing a militia commissioner to supervise what turned out to be a fairly short period of militia recruitment. The court did not, however, always accede such requests. In 1910, the imperial government denied a petition for the recruitment of militia in Hunan to suppress rice riots, arguing that regular military forces and newly organized modern-style

police should be sufficient to deal with any disorder (Fu Juejin and Liu Lansun, 1933: 11-12). Whenever possible, the late Qing state clearly sought to limit both the number and autonomy of local militia. Its success in this regard might suggest that the Qing state, rather than growing weaker in its last decades, was actually becoming stronger.

Shifting political conditions in the early Republican period led to a variety of state approaches to militia organization. The elite-based provincial regime established under Tan Yankai in Hunan during the 1911 Revolution was sympathetic to elite demands for greater political participation and was concerned about the danger of social upheaval presented by secret society participation in the revolution. Tan's government therefore initially encouraged the establishment of militia by local elites as a proper manifestation of local (elite) self-government. Once peace was restored, though, orders were issued to limit the size of any standing local defense forces, renamed *tuzhuo xiaodui* (native corps), to 20 to a 100 men per county and to place these forces under the direct control of the magistrate. Thus, even an elite-dominated government ultimately sought to limit and maintain some official control over local military forces. At the same time, local elites saw little danger in deferring on this issue to a government so obviously committed to serving their own interests. Indeed, in the absence of any immediate need, many counties simply disbanded their militia at this time (Hunan zhengbao, Dec. 20, 1912; Fu Juejin and Liu Lansun, 1933: 13-14, 17-18).

The establishment of Yuan Shikai's dictatorship was marked by efforts to increase central bureaucratic control over local government and to reduce further the independent power of local elites. The authority of county magistrates over surviving tuzhuo xiaodui (renamed *jingbeidui*, or police guard corps) was increased, making them little more than a magistrate's guard (Ningxiang xian zhi, 1941: xinzhi, 2/36; Yongshun xian zhi, 1930: 26/1). Yuan also ordered the replacement of local self-government bureaus with more narrowly defined *baoweituan* or "defense offices." The establishment of baoweituan must be seen in the broader context of Yuan's desire to prevent any larger degree of elite participation in local government. Thus, although recognizing gentry responsibility for local defense, the creation of defense offices also meant the restriction of gentry power in other areas. As a matter of fact, given the tightness of Yuan's

controls over local order, very few of these offices actually felt the need to raise militia forces in this period. Instead, their main function seemed to have been the management of *baojia*-like mutual responsibility systems (Ningxiang xian zhi, 1941: xinzhi, 2/38; Young, 1977: 206). Thus, as in the establishment of baojia systems by past imperial dynasties, the baoweituan offices were meant to be tools to increase state control over the lives of the people rather than becoming new bases of gentry power. Although ultimately unsuccessful, Yuan's efforts to increase state power in this period might be seen as a prelude to similar efforts in the Nationalist period. As in this later period, Yuan's concern to control local military forces was one sign of a broader state-building effort.

The conditions of the following warlord period resulted in an increasing degree of militia mobilization under much greater local control. The general civil disorder engendered by warlord conflicts and expanding banditry (which was fed by demobilized warlord soldiers and warlord disinterest in bandit suppression) increased the need for local communities to raise their own forces for their own self-defense. In some cases, militia forces were even specifically raised to provide a defense against marauding warlord armies and often came into conflict with them. Despite such conflicts, the military commanders who controlled Hunan's provincial government after 1917 generally had little interest in local government, including militia affairs, as long as local taxes were forthcoming. Since their personal power arose primarily from the size of their armies, they also sought to avoid wasting their soldiers in efforts to maintain local order or suppress banditry. Thus, as a general rule, they were more than willing to acquiesce to or even encourage local initiatives in the formation or expansion of militia to manage local defense problems (McCord, 1988: 176-82).

Although local militia were largely able to operate free of any higher state controls in the warlord period, there were cases in which the control of these forces could become an issue. The most serious intrusions faced by some militia during the decade of warlord rule in Hunan were attempts by military commanders to expand their own armies by the incorporation of militia units. Several examples of this problem can be found in Ningxiang County in central Hunan. During a drive against Northern army invaders in 1920, all militia in the

county were incorporated into Hunan provincial army units despite the opposition of militia commanders and public protest meetings. After being reorganized from scratch, Ningxiang's militia were again targeted for incorporation by a number of different Hunan military commanders in 1923 during a struggle for the control of the provincial government. This time, the county's militia commanders rejected promises of military appointments and—by temporarily disbanding their units, withdrawing to remote areas, or negotiating delays—they were able to preserve the county's militia intact (Ningxiang xian zhi, 1941: xinzhi, 2/42-45). Incorporations of militia into regular army forces were not, of course, simply attempts to "state-ify" militia organizations but were threats to their very existence. As such, they manifested a clear conflict of interest between warlords and local communities. While local communities viewed the preservation of militia as essential for local order, the warlords saw the incorporation of these forces as an easy shortcut to the expansion of their own military power, with little regard for the potential effect on the self-defense capacities of local communities.

Not all militia commanders, however, resisted such incorporation attempts. For example, in 1924, the head of the Lanshan County militia office willingly merged the county's militia into the Guangxi army in exchange for a military commission (Lanshan xian tuzhi, [1933] 1970: 554-55). The ability of this man to detach these forces from the community reflected a different aspect in the growth of militia in the warlord period—an increase in the personal power of the men who led them.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the power of local militia leaders was usually more than balanced by local officials—primarily county magistrates, who often played an important supervisory role over the organization of local militia. Indeed, militia accounts in local gazetteers for this period report many cases in which county magistrates, while relying on elite cooperation, personally played leading roles in raising, coordinating, and even commanding local militia (see, e.g., Ningxiang xian zhi, 1941: gushibian, 6/18; Yongshun xian zhi, 1930: 25/8-9). In most cases, the local elite acquiesced to or even welcomed the active participation of local magistrates in militia organization because they shared mutual interests—the preservation of local order.

The establishment of larger standing militia units in the warlord period, however, increasingly strengthened the position of local militia commanders over that of local magistrates. Many of these commanders held their positions for longer periods than individual magistrates. Unlike the magistrates, they were also able to give full attention to the increasing demands of militia leadership. While some militia leaders clearly saw their primary duty as the defense of local community interests (as seen in the case of the Ningxiang militia leaders mentioned above), others found ways to use their positions for the aggrandizement of their own personal or family power. In some cases, this meant the extension of their control over tax revenues or intervention in civil suits. In other cases, such as the Lanshan case cited above, a militia leader might use the forces under his command to bargain for a position in the regular army. County magistrates obviously found it increasingly difficult to exert effective control over such militia leaders (although, to be fair, many warlord-appointed magistrates, who were primarily evaluated on their ability to raise taxes, were more than willing to yield this authority).

While militia, under such circumstances, became increasingly autonomous from either provincial or local government control, the end result was not simply strengthening the power of local elites as a group or a class. Rather, it often meant strengthening the power of one particular member of the local elite—the militia commander. In this sense, then, many militia came close to being privatized. In other words, they were being shifted from the public sphere to the private realm. These were the militia leaders later identified by Mao Zedong in his 1927 "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement" as "local bullies and bad gentry" who had become virtual "kings of the countryside" (Mao Zedong, 1951: 1/30). The increased state involvement in militia organization in the decade after Mao's report thus becomes particularly significant in light of the growing autonomy of militia leaders in the preceding period.

MILITIA AND THE 1926-1927 NATIONAL REVOLUTION

The social revolution that accompanied the passage of the Northern Expedition through Hunan in 1926, sometimes referred to as the

"National Revolution," placed militia organizations at the center of new contests over local power. Peasant associations, strongly influenced by Communist activists, sprang up in nearly every county in the province and struck out against existing local power structures. In many cases, militia, led by members of the local elite, attempted to crush the rising peasant associations. The peasant associations, in turn, targeted militia controlled by "local bullies and evil gentry" for elimination. These struggles generally resulted in the disbandment of existing militia and the use of their guns in the formation of new pro-revolutionary militia, redefined as peasant self-defense forces. These forces were then placed in service of the revolution and were set to the task of uncovering and suppressing its enemies. At this point, many notorious militia leaders fled their counties or even the province. Some of those who remained were arrested, and some were even executed (Hunan sheng zhi, 1959: 522-27; Zhongyang dang'anguan, 1983: 24-25, 145-49, 152-53).

A fairly representative example of this type of conflict between local militia leadership and the new social forces of the National Revolution is the case of Cao Mingzhen in Yiyang County. Cao began his militia career as the vice-head of a local militia bureau in 1925. Following the conquest of Hunan by the National Revolutionary Army in 1926, Cao sided with local landlords opposed to the burgeoning peasant movement. Finally, in the spring of 1927, Cao ordered his men to open fire on a parade organized by the local peasant association as it passed the militia headquarters, killing the association's head and wounding many other participants. Rather than being intimidated, the crowds turned in anger to attack the headquarters. Cao and his men were forced to flee, and Cao himself soon left the province to escape prosecution (Tian Shiqing, 1963a: 2; 1963b: 130-31).

Internal dissension over the revolutionary activities of peasant associations was one factor in the breakup of the Nationalist-Communist United Front and the initiation of a decade of civil war between the two parties. Opposition to radical social revolution was particularly strong within Hunan components of the National Revolutionary Army, many of whose officers came from landlord or other elite families targeted for attack by peasant associations. Thus, in May 1927, portions of the Hunan army initiated a political coup in Hunan aimed at the eradication of the Communist Party in the province.

Allying itself with the right wing of the Nationalist Party, the army began suppressing Hunan peasant associations and peasant self-defense forces.

Many of those targeted by the revolution, including many previous militia leaders, reemerged at this point to raise new local forces to join in this struggle. Thus, Cao Mingzhen returned to Yiyang County in the wake of Hunan's anti-Communist coup, where his previous crimes were now considered credentials for promotion to head the county's militia bureau. Cao quickly rebuilt and expanded Yiyang's militia by seizing local arms wherever he could find them, including guns that had been collected by peasant associations for their own self-defense forces. In less than a year, more than a thousand armed men were organized in county-level and township forces under Cao's supervision (Tian Shiqing, 1963b: 131). There was a similar expansion of militia in other counties, usually increasing the number of men under arms to levels far above the preceding period. For example, the number of armed militiamen maintained at the county level in Yizhang County reached 630 by 1928, in contrast to only 60 in 1926 (Yizhang xian zhi, 1941: 14/12-13). Rucheng County also only had a 60-man county-level militia in 1926, whereas in 1929, there were 500 armed militiamen under the general county militia bureau and nearly an equal number under branch bureaus (Rucheng xian zhi, 1932: 19/17-19). In Liling, appeals to the county's leading citizens and army officers for weapons and funds to arm anti-Communist militia brought in enough weapons to equip nearly 800 men (Wen Bin, 1963: 1-3). This is in contrast to just over 100 armed militiamen in the county before 1927 (Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 510).

The dramatic changes in the fortunes of various militia forces during the National Revolution offer unique insights into the role of the state in defining the parameters for militia activity. Although by the mid-1920s militia forces in Hunan had achieved a large degree of autonomy from direct official control and had become a considerable source of local power, they were ultimately no match for the peasant associations that arose in late 1926 and early 1927. The ability of peasant associations to disperse or reorganize local militia was not, however, simply due to the strength of the social forces they represented. Rather, they operated within the political context of the United Front policies of the period, backed by the military power of the National

Revolutionary Army. Their dependence on this political and military support can also be seen in the fate of the peasant associations and their own militia following the anti-Communist military coup in May 1927. This change in political circumstances likewise encouraged an explosion of anti-Communist militia in late 1927 and 1928. Thus, the militia seen in this period, whether pro- or anti-Communist, existed within a framework defined not only by the changing relations of social forces but by the shifting context of military and political authority.

The Nationalist provincial government established in Hunan after the anti-Communist coup also had reasons to take a stronger interest in militia that went beyond simply allowing their existence. Prior to 1926, the main political threat to provincial warlord regimes in Hunan came from other warlords. As long as tax revenues were not interrupted, the maintenance of local order was never a top political priority. A large degree of militia autonomy, as well as some resulting abuse of power by local landlords and gentry, was a small price for warlords to pay to avoid having to use their armies for maintaining local order. In its struggle with the Communist Party, however, Nationalist authorities in Hunan faced a political threat that organized new power out of local society. These authorities therefore saw local militia as an essential adjunct to their own political struggle against the Communists. This provided a stronger basis for government interest in and collaboration with militia forces. At the same time, insofar as militia performance affected the political interests of the government, provincial authorities were also more concerned to ensure that militia performed effectively. These concerns underpinned a series of state challenges to militia autonomy.

THE STATE-IFICATION OF HUNAN'S MILITIA

The institutional framework for the extension of greater state control over Hunan's militia was created in early 1928 with the establishment of a special provincial-level anti-Communist military office, the "superintendent of rural pacification" (*qingxiang duban*). In 1929, the title of this position was changed to "rural pacification commander" (*qingxiang siling*) and then changed again in 1933 to the more

positive-sounding "peace preservation commander" (*bao'an siling*) (Lin Zengping and Fan Zhongcheng, 1991: 499-502). The power of this position was enhanced by making it a co-post for the provincial governor, or "chair." However, so much of the executive business of the province was eventually carried out through this military office that it carried nearly as much weight as the title of provincial chair. The main task of this office was the suppression of Communist revolution, and it is on this basis that it asserted the authority to supervise and ultimately to control and command the province's militia.

He Jian was the person most responsible for evolving Hunan's militia policies within this office. He Jian was a Hunan military commander whose forces were incorporated into the National Revolutionary Army in 1926. Troops under He's command initiated the anti-Communist coup in Hunan in 1927 and, although not a direct participant in the coup, He clearly supported its goals. With the establishment of the office of superintendent of rural pacification in 1928, He was appointed assistant superintendent under two successive provincial chairs. Following the early 1929 transfer of the second of these chairs, Lu Diping, He was promoted to replace him as both provincial chair and rural pacification commander (Hunan guomin ribao, April 14 and 28, 1928; Zong Zhiwen and Zhu Xinquan, 1981: 3/200-202; Lin Zengping and Fan Zhongcheng, 1991: 499-500). Even before achieving Hunan's top office, though, He took the lead as assistant superintendent of rural pacification by increasing official oversight and control over militia organizations (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, bianyan, 1-2).

The recruitment of anti-Communist militia in late 1927 and early 1928 had been both spontaneous and haphazard. The initiative for this recruitment was mainly local and resulted in a variety of forces of different types, sizes, and resources at county, township, town, and village levels. In the eyes of many contemporary observers, the lack of an overall command structure to coordinate forces at different levels and strong localist orientations that prevented cooperation among them were obstacles to greater militia efficiency. He and other provincial authorities were also critical of the "local bullies and evil gentry" in control of many local militia who antagonized the masses by the ruthless pursuit of their own interests. Seeking to reduce these problems, the office of the superintendent of rural pacification issued a set of

regulations in mid-1928 for the comprehensive reorganization and reform of militia forces (Hunan guomin ribao, June 9 and Aug. 31, 1928; Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 1; Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 836).

The militia regulations of 1928 called for the standardization and unification of all militia in each county under the designation of *aihutuan* or "household conscription militia." Each county was to establish a general militia bureau that would have ultimate authority over the funding, arming, personnel, and dispatch of all militia. Significantly, the county magistrate was to act as head of this bureau, confirming direct official control over militia and, at least theoretically, reducing the influence of corrupt local elites. The magistrate was to be assisted, though, by a vice-head, appointed by the magistrate from candidates nominated by the county's public organizations. The regulations then called for the organization of two types of militia forces in each county. First, one out of every three men between the ages of 18 and 40 were to be formed into unsalaried "watch patrols" (*shouwangdui*), armed with spears, knives, cudgels, and fowling pieces. These patrols were to be organized according to baojia divisions and led by baojia heads. Second, the best men from these watch patrols were to be selected to serve three-year terms in 60-man (later changed to 90-man) "standing companies" (*changbeidui*). Unlike the watch patrols, these companies would be salaried and armed with standard-issue guns. Each county would maintain five to twenty such standing companies depending on their needs and resources (Hunan sheng zhengfu gongbao, no. 11, Aug. 17, 1928: 31-36).

In implementation, the new militia system fell considerably short of its objectives. First, given their other duties, most magistrates were unable to concentrate effectively on militia affairs or provide adequate supervision (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 1; Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 836). Indeed, in many cases, the county militia bureau vice-head, drawn from the ranks of the local elite, remained unchallenged in the actual management of militia affairs (Gui Qiufang, 1963: 1). Another weak point in the new militia system was the organization of watch patrols. Beyond their role in local defense, the formation of these units was intended to provide a context for the political indoctrination of a substantial portion of the male population in the regime's anti-Communist goals. In practice, many

locales lacked either the resources or the incentive to create the training programs necessary to implement the watch patrol system fully. Thus, in most cases, the system was only perfunctorily established, if at all (Hunan guomin ribao, Oct. 31, 1928; March 14, 1929). The absence of functioning watch patrols undermined, in turn, the theoretical household conscription base of the standing companies that were to have been drawn from them. In practice, most counties simply redesignated existing standing forces as household conscription companies. The essentially mercenary nature of many of these forces hindered government efforts to link these forces to a broader popular base (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 1, 3; Hunan guomin ribao, July 3, 1928).

There were also other problems with the standing companies that were inadequately addressed by aihutuan regulations. Many company commanders and lower militia officers lacked military training or experience, which limited their military effectiveness. The division of militia into numerous small units also limited their ability to deal with larger bandit bands or Communist armies. Finally, despite the coordination of the general county militia offices, many units were still slow to respond to alarms outside their own immediate communities, and almost none would go to the aid of neighboring counties (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 1; Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 836-37; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 15).

A series of new regulations were soon enacted to address these problems. First, in September 1930, there was an attempt to expand, reorganize, and invigorate the watch patrol system. New regulations redesignated the watch patrols as "Communist extermination volunteer corps" (*changong yiyong dui*). Although the basic goals and organization of the system remained much the same, it was expanded to include all law-abiding men from ages 18 to 40, not just a portion of these men (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 3-4; He Jian, n.d.: "Fu Hunan changong yiyongdui zhanxing zhangcheng," 1-10). The explicit goal of this new system was "to militarize (*wulihua*) the people of the entire province" (Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 16). The goal of this militarization, however, went beyond simply strengthening local military power. Indeed, in rejecting the need to arm volunteer corps with guns, He Jian noted that their function was to "organize the people" against communism (Hunan guomin ribao,

July 21, 1932). Thus, the political purpose of the militia system was given even greater emphasis.

The provincial government also increased its efforts to ensure that the volunteer corps system was actually implemented. Inspectors were dispatched to every county to promote and supervise the organization of these forces, and arrangements were made to provide them with better training and indoctrination (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 4; Hunan guomin ribao, Nov. 9 and Dec. 26, 1931, April 5 and July 5, 1932). Periodic complaints about counties that continued to approach the organization of volunteer corps in a perfunctory manner showed that these efforts were not completely successful. Rather than abandoning the effort, though, such reports led to new rounds of inspections to promote fuller compliance (see, e.g., Hunan guomin ribao, Feb. 26, 1932). That some success was achieved is shown by increasingly frequent newspaper reports of cases in which volunteer corps joined military and standing militia forces in campaigns against bandits or Communists (numerous examples are reported in the Hunan guomin ribao, 1933-1934).

Even as efforts to strengthen the volunteer corps system got under way, a four-province military conference in 1930, calling for the unification of militia organization and command, also set the stage for an even more drastic state intervention in the organization of Hunan's standing militia forces. Subsequent to this conference, He Jian issued regulations requiring each county to reorganize their various household conscription standing companies into a single "peace preservation regiment" (*bao'antuan*) or a "peace preservation battalion" (*bao'an dadui*), depending on the total number of standing militiamen in their county.[2] Except for the remote counties of western Hunan, where the reach of the provincial government was still very weak, most counties in the province completed this reorganization within a year (Hunan guomin ribao, June 22, 1932; Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 1-2).

This peace preservation reorganization had a number of significant provisions that strengthened local militia while increasing official control over them. Most obviously, scattered companies that had only been generally supervised by a county militia office could now be concentrated for action through more unified regiment or battalion commands. A second important change was to begin the process of

regularizing militia units according to army standards. From the beginning, peace preservation regiments and battalions were deliberately modeled on army units (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, bianyan, 2; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 15). Subsequent regulations sought to bring these units into line with army standards in areas such as personnel, pay, and injury and death compensation (Hunan guomin ribao, Nov. 12, 1933; Feb. 9 and 23, 1934; Feb. 2, 1935). The regularization of these forces also included efforts to professionalize their officers. Military training or experience was stressed in the appointment of upper level officers, while a variety of programs were instituted to provide regular military training for lower level officers—including short-term transfers into regular army training units (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 4-5; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 77).

The most significant change in the peace preservation system, though, was to place all regiments and battalions directly under the command of the office of the provincial rural pacification commander (namely, He Jian), instead of under the county magistrates. One aspect of this change was that top commanders (and eventually all officers) were to receive their appointments directly from He Jian (Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu, 1931: 2/728; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 75; Hunan guomin ribao, June 8, 1934). The eventual goal was to replace militia commanders who had arisen from local bases with regular military officers. Over time, He successfully filled a large number of these posts with men who had served on his military staff or in regular army units (for examples of such appointments, see Hunan guomin ribao, May 8 and 16, 1932). The result not only improved the quality of militia commanders but made them more amenable to He's control.

While peace preservation regulations gave the provincial rural pacification commander ultimate authority over the most highly militarized militia units, the dispatch of militia in response to specific local problems and the coordination of local campaigns could not be adequately handled from the provincial level. He Jian therefore divided the province into a number of special multicounty "militia districts" (*tuanfang qu*), or "peace preservation districts" (*bao'an qu*), the size and number of which varied over time. The province then appointed "district commanders" (*qu siling*), either from the ranks of peace preservation regiment commanders or from among regular military

officers garrisoned in those areas, who were given direct command over all the peace preservation units in these districts.[3]

The appointment of district commanders also served one final purpose of the new peace preservation militia system—to eliminate the limits of county boundaries in the use of militia forces. Although based in specific counties, peace preservation regiments and battalions were frequently dispatched, either by district commanders or by the rural pacification office, to trouble spots in other counties or combined together for campaigns ranging over several districts (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 2-3; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 17; Hunan guomin ribao, April 4, 1933). Likewise, militia originally organized in one county could be transferred for garrison duty in another county. Thus, Ningxiang County, which had taken such efforts in the previous decade to preserve the integrity of its militia, saw its peace preservation battalion transferred out of the county in 1935 and its garrison duties replaced by forces rotated in from other areas (Ningxiang xian zhi, 1941: xinzhi, 2/48). While the rotation of garrisons was clearly an effort to decrease the "localism" of militia forces, which He had seen as a main obstacle to their effectiveness, it also meant an increase in higher level state control over these forces at the expense of local power interests. The logical conclusion of this policy came in 1933, when consolidated peace preservation regiments were formed out of the forces of several counties, leaving a total of 29 regiments for the entire province. At this point, numerical designations replaced county-specific designations.[4]

From its inception, the peace preservation system provoked very strong local opposition. First, there was obviously opposition from militia commanders who lost their positions and hence their local power as a result of successive reorganizations. Second, and more important, there was broader local community opposition to the loss of control over militia forces. For example, public associations in Xiangtan County protested the loss of local control over forces that were paid for by county taxes and complained that local approval had not been appropriately sought (Hunan guomin ribao, Jan. 30 and Feb. 20, 1931). A petition by public associations from Hengshan County argued that county forces transferred to other areas would lose the advantage of local knowledge and become less effective (Hunan guomin ribao, July 20, 1932). More forceful protests pictured the

reorganization as an attempt by "warlords" to deprive the people of their own self-defense forces (Hunan sheng zhengfu gongbao, no. 88, April 26, 1931: 78). Significantly, local officials, including local magistrates, were often allied with local elites in opposition to the new militia system and joined them in their protests (Xie Liangyu, 1964: 1, 5-6). From their vantage point, the most important issue at stake in the disposition of locally raised militia was a conflict between local community and provincial government interests, not the balance of state-society relations. Nonetheless, the end result of these provincially promoted changes to the militia system was an overall increase in state control.

He Jian made some superficial efforts to placate this opposition, such as temporarily allowing peace preservation units to maintain county designations until 1933 (Xie Liangyu, 1964: 6). In the end, though, He did not allow these protests to impede his unification of militia organization and command. Although the peace preservation forces continued to be referred to as militia (*tuanfang*), to a large extent, they had in fact been transformed into regular army auxiliaries.

It should be noted that not all local militia leaders resisted changes in the militia system, and some even benefited from them. One of the main examples of this was Yiyang County's Cao Mingzhen, who survived all the changes noted above with successive appointments as household conscription bureau vice-head, peace preservation regiment commander, and peace preservation district commander. Cao's success, though, owed as much to He Jian's patronage as to his own local power base. He Jian no doubt developed some early appreciation for Cao's notoriously ruthless suppression of suspected Communists in his county. A closer relationship between the two men developed, however, when Cao offered He refuge in Yiyang after the temporary fall of Changsha to Communist forces in 1930. After this experience, in appreciation for his loyalty, He promoted Cao to the command of Yiyang's peace preservation regiment and gave him special authority over the "bandit extermination" forces of four counties (Tian Shiqing, 1963b: 135).

Within his own bailiwick, Cao's power in subsequent years became increasingly unrestrained. Although clearly supported by crucial elements of the local elite in his initial rise to power, Cao later came into conflict with other members of this elite as he sought to increase local

taxes to support the expansion of his forces and, in a number of notorious cases, used his power to settle grudges with local factional enemies (Tian Shiqing, 1963a: 19-21; Liu Delian, 1964). In the end, his ability to wield such power in the face of opposition by other local elites was still dependent, to a large extent, on He Jian's favor and protection. This dependence is reflected in Cao's fate after He Jian lost his Hunan post in 1937. Seeking to reduce the influence of He's favorites, the new administration eliminated Cao's four-county command and reduced the size of his regiment to a battalion. Finally, in 1939, Cao was arrested and executed after his forces tried to seize the arms of a passing National Revolutionary Army unit (Tian Shiqing, 1963a: 24-26; 1963b: 136). Rather than representing a simple example of either state-society collaboration or state-society conflict, the case of Cao Mingzhen shows the complex ways in which different elements of the state and society could interact within the realm of militia organization. Clearly, the continued importance of some locally based militia leaders such as Cao cannot be simply interpreted as a sign of the weakness of state authority in the face of established local military power.

Faced by the threatened or actual removal of peace preservation units from their original communities, many counties sought to create new standing militia forces that could still be locally controlled and available only for local use. Thus, some counties used Communist extermination volunteer corps as a base from which to recruit and arm new standing forces (Hunan guomin ribao, Dec. 5, 1931; March 21, 1932). The Hunan government was forced to acknowledge that some locally controlled forces might still be needed in some areas. Thus, it permitted the formation of some new units of this type and passed regulations to govern them (Hunan guomin ribao, March 5, 1932).

He's government was not, however, willing to permit a return to unrestrained local militia formation, which would simply re-create the problems that He's reforms had sought to eliminate. For example, concerns were raised that "bad elements" might again take control of such forces to the detriment of the government's authority. Hunan's relative success in eliminating most large Communist forces in the province had also reduced the political threat that had made the relatively uncontrolled militarization of the past more acceptable. Thus, as a general principle, He's government continued to insist that

irregular volunteer corps, armed only with knives and spears, should be able to handle any small disturbances and that troops from peace preservation forces could be sent to any locale in cases of more serious need. Thus, the requests of many communities to form new standing forces were denied (Hunan guomin ribao, April 29, 1932; Hunan sheng zhengfu gongbao, no. 295, Dec. 13, 1935: 9; Xiangxi suijing zhoukan, no. 44, June 7, 1936: 2). Recognizing that some spontaneous recruitment had occurred, periodic orders were also issued for across-the-board reductions in all local standing forces (Hunan guomin ribao, March 4, 1935; Oct. 7, 1936). Although local-level standing militia outside the peace preservation system would continue to exist, they remained smaller and fewer than the previous forces that had been incorporated into peace preservation units.

The final stage of the state's intrusion into local militia organization occurred in 1934 with the extension of provincial government control over local militia funds. Over time, a variety of local taxes had grown up in different locales to fund local militia. In many cases, the assessment of such taxes was in the hands of the militia itself, and embezzlement by militia commanders was frequent. A series of efforts were made to eliminate some abuses by requiring the organization of local committees to oversee the collection and disbursement of these funds and by regulating various reporting procedures (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 5; Hunan guomin ribao, Oct. 18, 1931). Militia funding became more complicated after the institution of the peace preservation system since each county remained responsible for funding forces that had originated in the county, although they were often no longer garrisoned there (Minguo ershisinian, 1935: 225). Perhaps as a form of resistance to the new system, many counties soon fell behind in payments to "their" peace preservation forces whenever they left the county. In a number of cases, troop pay was many months in arrears, which provincial authorities blamed on obstructionism by "evil gentry" (Hunan guomin ribao, Sept. 29 and Oct. 14, 1933).

In the face of these problems, in 1934, He's government stepped in to take direct control of all militia funding. All militia taxes were eliminated except for a single tax added on to the regular land tax, which was to be uniformly applied to all counties. This militia tax was to be collected along with the land tax, and all the proceeds were to be deposited directly into the provincial bank. After this, the provincial

government would make disbursements to militia forces as needed (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 5-6; Minguo ershisinian, 1935: 225-26; Hunan guomin ribao, March 18, 1934). Besides ensuring more consistent funding for peace preservation forces, which always took top priority, this new funding system became an additional means to restrict the recruitment of unauthorized local militia by limiting funding sources. At the same time, by eliminating many of the abuses of previous local levies, the new consolidated system reduced the total amount of militia taxes by more than a fourth, from about eight million yuan to a little over five million yuan (Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 6; Minguo ershisinian, 1935: 226). Periodic complaints about irregular militia taxes in some areas showed that provincial control over militia funding was never complete (Hunan guomin ribao, July 31, 1934; Hunan sheng zhengfu gongbao, no. 318, Jan. 13, 1936: 12-13). The provincial government did, however, capture the main share of these funds and used them to reinforce further its control over the province's militia.

The absorption of local militia taxes into Hunan's provincial revenues was the culmination of a long series of efforts by He Jian that successfully extended an unprecedented degree of control by his government over the organization, recruitment, staffing, and funding of local militia. Rather than representing the inability of a weak state to control local military forces, the widespread mobilization of militia in Hunan during the 1920s actually presented an opportunity for the expansion of state power into local society through greater state control over local military and financial resources and greater state intrusion into the lives of ordinary citizens. In that sense, then, the transformation of Hunan's militia was indicative not of state weakness but of a broader process of state building.

CONCLUSION

This article provides a corrective to views that equate the proliferation of militia in Chinese society with the expansion of local elite power at the expense of the state. By focusing more on state actions, though, this article clearly runs the risk of exaggerating the degree of

state control over militia in the Nationalist period. Despite all of He Jian's efforts, many small militia units no doubt continued to function in Hunan with only perfunctory regard for his regulations. Likewise, many powerful local militia leaders continued to operate with a considerable degree of autonomy. In this regard, state control was never complete.

At the same time, complete, centralized state control over all militia forces was never He's goal. Indeed, although control over standing militia forces in Hunan increased to the point at which they became almost indistinguishable from the state's regular army, lower level militia organizations (the watch patrols and volunteer corps) continued to be officially identified as local, community organizations. While well regulated by the state, Hunan's "true" militia organizations (based on unpaid, part-time service) would remain, and were intended to remain, outside the direct bureaucratic structure of the state. Thus, it is important to understand both the limits on, as well as the extension of, state control over militia in this period.

Here again, the conceptualization of militia organization as a component of a Chinese public sphere or third realm proves its usefulness. Freed from the straitjacket of a winner-take-all state-society dichotomy, changes in militia organization in this period may be seen as part of a more nuanced and negotiated remaking of state-society relations. Indeed, given tendencies toward the privatization of militia in the warlord period, the first achievement of increased state involvement in militia organization under He Jian may have been to move militia more firmly back into the public sphere. While subsequent increased state controls over militia did represent a state-ification of a significant portion of the public sphere, the end result still did not remove militia completely out of this intermediate realm.

Some caution must be taken against any overgeneralization of the Hunan case to other parts of China in this period. Specific social and political conditions may have actually led to the societalization, rather than the state-ification, of militia in other provinces and regions in the very same period. Again, conceptualizing militia as a component of a public sphere that involved the participation of both state and society makes it possible to analyze these variations within one framework. Having said this, though, the Hunan case, even if not replicated everywhere, was significant because it received high praise from the

Nationalist government in Nanjing and was frequently cited as a model for other provinces seeking to eliminate the threat of Communist uprisings within their own borders while enhancing Nationalist Party authority (Hunan guomin ribao, June 12, 1932; June 7, 1934; Dec. 15, 1935). The state-ification of militia in Hunan thus reflected broader objectives of the Nationalist government with ramifications beyond Hunan's own borders. Official promotion and regulation of militia in Hunan in the Nanjing period thus appears as one particularly revealing facet of efforts by an increasingly intrusive state to influence and organize the lives of its citizens. Indeed, one might argue that it reflected tendencies that went beyond the Nationalist Party itself to foreshadow the even greater state-ification, and eventually the elimination, of the public sphere that would occur after the Communist victory in 1949.

NOTES

1. An earlier article by this author, based on a case study of one family involved in militia organization in the Guizhou province, showed how militia leadership could be used to enhance the local power of rising as well as established elites. In establishing their power, this family came into violent conflict with both rival elite-led militia groups and local officials who favored their enemies. Their eventual success, however, also relied not only on their own local elite allies but on a variety of official ties (McCord, 1990: 168-73).

2. Xie Liangyu (1964: 4-6). A copy of these regulations can be found in *Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu* (1931: 2/727-30). Counties with sufficient militiamen to form six or more army-regulation-size companies were to organize a peace preservation regiment, while counties with only two to five companies would form a peace preservation battalion.

3. Plans were originally made to establish 21 or 22 "militia districts," but because of financial limitations, the actual number established varied from 17 to 13. In 1933, the province was organized into 6 peace preservation districts, the commanders of which mostly held co-posts in the 4th Route Army (commanded by He Jian) (Dagongbao, March 19, 1931; Minguo shijiunian, 1931: 837; Minguo ershiyinian, 1932: 15-17; Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 2).

4. These 29 regiments were also consolidated several more times, until only 18 were left in 1937 (Hunan guomin ribao, Dec. 2, 1933; Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian [1938?]: bao'an bian, 2-3; Minguo ershisinian, 1935: 225).

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