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Author(s): Chi Man Kwong

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Building a “Total Mobilization State”: Thinking About War and Society in 1920s Manchuria

Chi Man Kwong*

ABSTRACT

After the First World War, Chinese officers in the Fengtian Army were eager to learn the lessons of the war so that China and the Chinese regime in Manchuria could survive the next war. The officers did not stop at the technical and tactical aspects of the war but urged changes in the state and in society. Specifically, they argued that the creation of a “total mobilization state,” namely, the militarization of society and expansion of the state’s responsibility in controlling the economy and the lives of the people, was the means to prepare for the inevitable conflict against the potential aggressors, Japan and the Soviet Union. However, before many steps were taken to build such a state, the Fengtian leadership made a series of strategic mistakes that left Manchuria almost defenseless against the Japanese invasion of September 1931.

Keywords: Manchuria, China, Japan, mobilization, war

INTRODUCTION

Political studies on the history of Manchuria during the Republican Period (1911-1949) usually focus on the emergence of a Chinese regime under Zhang Zuolin and his son and successor, Zhang Xueliang. Diplomatic historians have examined Soviet and Japanese activities in Manchuria, while military historians have studied the development of the Fengtian Army (*Fengjun*, also known as the Northeast Army, *Dongbeijun*).¹ Meanwhile, studies on Chinese

* Chi Man Kwong is an Assistant Professor in the History Department of Hong Kong Baptist University. He is the author of *War and Geopolitics in Interwar Manchuria: Zhang Zuolin and the Fengtian Clique during the Northern Expedition* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Research on this article was supported by General Research Fund of the Research Grants Council, Hong Kong (Project Code: 22602316 ECS). The author wishes to thank all reviewers for their invaluable input.

1 Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977); Michael Pillsbury, *Environment and Power: Warlord Strategic Behavior in Szechwan, Manchuria, and the Yangtze Delta* (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Columbia University, 1980); Sima Sangdun, *Zhang laoshuai yu Zhang shaoshuai* [Old Marshal Zhang and Young Marshal Zhang] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1984); Mizuno Akira, *Dongbei junfa zhengquan yanjiu: Zhang Zuolin, Zhang Xueliang zhi kangwai yu xiezhu tongyi guonei de guiji* [A study of the Northeastern warlord regime: Zhang Zuolin, Zhang Xueliang, and their attempt to resist foreign aggression and aid the unification of China], transl. Zheng Liangsheng (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 1998); Bruce Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1927* (Armonk, NY; London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Cambridge, MA; London: Routledge, 2001); Hu Yuhai

intellectuals during the 1920s usually focus on those active in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, or in universities. This article aims to fill gaps in the research in these areas by examining Fengtian officers as military intellectuals in terms of their understanding of modern war and their attitude towards the perceived lessons of the First World War, especially in regard to relationships among the state, the military, and society. It also shows that this understanding of the war was common among officers who received modern military training in East Asia during the early 20th century.

For soldiers around the world, the First World War offered lessons on equipment, logistics, medicine, communication, tactics, and strategy. During the last decades of the 19th century, the emergence of clip rifles, machine guns, and rapid-fire artillery had transformed land warfare. After 1914, states became more efficient at mobilizing, training, equipping, transporting, and sustaining huge armies. Once these countries had adjusted to the wartime economy, they supplied their armies with an unprecedented quantity of armament, munitions, and supplies. These developments, together, turned the conflict into a prolonged struggle between not only armies but also societies. As states became more efficient, their means and reach of control increased, from coordinating private enterprises to using propaganda to sustain popular support for the war.² To the Japanese and Fengtian officers who were interested in the latest developments of warfare, these were the salient lessons of the First World War, especially the need to industrialize the country and enhance the state's ability to mobilize resources for war.³

This article aims to "give a voice" to the Fengtian Army officers themselves by using articles written by them as a major primary source. Most of these articles were published in the army's journals, which were circulated within the military and were read by many, including civilian intellectuals. Although many of these articles were by no means serious academic works, or well-thought-out pieces, and many of the officers had difficulty articulating their ideas clearly or systematically due to their limited intellectual capability and gaps in their knowledge, these articles provide important clues to the thinking and worldview of the "warlord officers" during the Republican period. A close reading of Fengtian officers' ideas on the role of the military in society in enhancing the power of the state and using the military as "a school for the nation" shows that they differed little from what would be advocated in the Nationalist Chinese military during the 1930s.

A study of the writings of the Fengtian officers suggests that they held a pessimistic view of the international situation facing Manchuria and China, and they saw the military as a tool not only for fighting but also for building a "total mobilization state" (*zongdongyuan guojia*) that would be powerful

and Zhang Wei, eds., *Fengxi junfa renwu* [Important figures of the Fengtian clique] (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2001); Hao Bingrang, *Fengxi junshi* [The military affairs of the Fengtian clique] (Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 2002). For a recent study of the Northeast Military Academy (*Dongbei jiangwutang*), see Wang Tiejun, *Dongbei jiangwutang* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013).

2 For the most comprehensive study of the First World War and its impact on state and society, see Jay Winter, *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

3 For a discussion of Japanese and Chinese soldiers' reaction to the changes brought about by the First World War, see Kwong Chi Man, *Minguo hu? Junguo hu? Dierci Zhong-Ri zhanzhengqian de minguo zhishi junren, junxue, yu junshi biange, 1914-1937* [Republic? Military State? Republican period military intellectuals, military education and military changes before the second Sino-Japanese war] (Hong Kong: Chunghwa Book Company, 2017), 29-82.

enough to control all aspects of life in peace and war, including greater state control over the economy and society. In an irony of history, the preference of these officers for state/military control and the total mobilization of society made them little different from the Japanese military and political leaders who took over Manchuria after September 1931. This article argues that these warlord officers were aware of the latest development in military science, and while they adopted the rhetoric of total mobilization, their short-term agenda was rather modest, such as the introduction of conscription and military training in schools or allowing the state to play a greater role in developing military-related industries. Although some of their ideas might have been too advanced for the political situation in Manchuria, there was some chance for the more modest schemes to be achieved. In the end, though, the Fengtian Clique committed a series of strategic errors that left their plans unimplemented and Manchuria largely defenseless. This article first briefly discusses the emergence of Fengtian military power and the small group of intellectual officers within the Fengtian Clique who participated in this process. It then turns to their understanding of the international situation and the threats facing Manchuria and China after the Northern Expedition of 1926-27. The last part of the article covers the Fengtian officers' advocacy for the creation of a total mobilization state that could exert tight control over the economy and could militarize society, even in peacetime.

FENGtian OFFICERS IN THE 1920S AND EARLY 1930S

Manchuria (or the Eastern Three Provinces to the Chinese), as the homeland of the Manchu founders of the Qing dynasty, originally had a predominately Manchu population. In the last decades of Qing rule, though, it witnessed a large influx of Han Chinese migrants from North China. During the 1911 Revolution, a Han Chinese regime emerged through an alliance of local garrison commanders and Qing officials who surrendered to the Republic. During the first years of the Republic, these garrison commanders gradually expanded their military might to establish greater control over the provinces. By the late 1910s, the three provinces of Manchuria were under the control of Zhang Zuolin, the most powerful of these commanders.⁴ Zhang, despite his background as a leader of a local armed band, understood the importance of building a modernized military in order to maintain his position in the face of Russian/Soviet and Japanese pressure as well as rival warlords. By the end of 1924, he had turned the Fengtian Army (the collective name for the armies of the Eastern Three Provinces) into a force of thirty-two modern-organized and equipped brigades. The Fengtian Arsenal was expanded from a small repair shop into one of the largest armament manufacturers in Asia, producing small arms, mortars, artillery pieces, and, by 1931, even automobiles.⁵

The Fengtian Army engaged in most of the major civil wars in China after 1920. Zhang Zuolin eventually became the leader of the National Pacification Army (*Anguojun*) that resisted the Northern Expedition launched by the Nationalist Party in the summer of 1926. On a number of occasions, the efficacy of the modern equipment and training of the Fengtian Army caused devas-

4 Chi Man Kwong, *War and Geopolitics in Interwar Manchuria: Zhang Zuolin and the Fengtian Clique during the Northern Expedition* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 59-60.

5 Ding Wenjiang, *Minguo junshi jinji* [Recent record of military affairs in the Republic] (1926; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 27-30; also see Chi Man Kwong, *War and Geopolitics*, 74.

tating losses for its opponents, as in the Henan Campaign of 1927. As a result of the alliance between Chiang Kai-shek and other northern warlords, as well as constant Japanese and Soviet pressure on the Manchurian border, Zhang Zuolin was forced to abandon his advance position in North China in June 1928. During the withdrawal radical Japanese officers who planned to take over Manchuria assassinated Zhang. His son and successor, Zhang Xueliang, then agreed to work with the Nationalist Government in Nanjing, which had gained control of a substantial part of China and claimed to be the national authority.

The backbone of the Fengtian Army was an officer corps that consisted of graduates from military institutions in China and Japan, including the staff colleges in Japan (*rikugun daigakkô*) and China (*lujun daxue*), the *Shikan Gakko*, the Baoding Military Academy, and the Northeast Military Academy (*dongbei jiangwutang*). The latter alone trained more than nine thousand officers between 1919 and 1930.⁶ The high concentration of modern-trained officers made the Fengtian Army a special case among other contemporary Chinese armies, except perhaps for the Nationalist Army after 1928. Most of the senior and mid-ranking officers of the Fengtian Army, including most of the field commanders after 1922, were graduates of military academies. This did not guarantee competence on the battlefield, but it shows that these officers had at least a foundational understanding of the technical aspects of modern warfare. This group of officers was bound not only by a common regional identity or loyalty to the Zhang family but also by a common education and professional background. They were, in a sense, members of an officer corps, as most of them shared a similar training, worldview, and professional language.

Some of the officers took a more active role in producing knowledge for the Fengtian officer corps by organizing and contributing to the official journal of the Fengtian Army, the *Jingshen yuekan* (Spiritual monthly), and the *Dongbei junshi yuekan* (Northeast military affairs monthly; hereafter cited as NMMA). Thousands of copies of the NMMA were printed each month between October 1928 and September 1931, and they were distributed to all units of the Fengtian Army; in October 1928 alone, five thousand copies were printed. Throughout its existence, thirty-one volumes and 290 articles were published. Many of these articles were original contributions, along with translations of Japanese, British, and American articles. Except for the articles written or translated by the editors, most of these articles were submissions by Fengtian officers. Some of the officers were instructed to write articles as assignments, while others submitted them voluntarily. The NMMA also invited submissions on specific topics.

The core group of "intellectual officers"⁷ were heavily influenced by the Japanese Army, which sent 306 officers to Europe to study the First World War and published reports on the many different aspects of the war.⁸ These intellectual officers included the editors of the NMMA, who contributed

6 Li Chuanxi, "Dongbei jiangwutang" [The Northeast military academy], *Liaoning wenshi ziliao* 6 (1981), 73-75.

7 For a discussion of the definition of this term, see Chi Man Kwong, "Intellectual Officers, Professional Journals, and Military Change in the Northeast and National Revolutionary Armies, 1928-1937," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 11, no. 2, (2017), 180-89.

8 Katsurahara Kazumi, "'Sentô kôyô' no kyôgi keisei to kôchoku ka [The emergence of the rules of "tactical principles" and their rigidification]," *Gunji shigaku* [Study of military history] 40, no. 1 (2004), 19.

many of the articles published in the journal, which was managed by the General Staff of the Headquarters of the Eastern Three Eastern Provinces (*Dongsansheng baoansilingbu junlingting*). The first editor-in-chief of the NMMA was Zhou Yawei (1889-1976), a graduate of staff colleges in both Beijing (*lujun daxue*) and Japan (*rikugun daigaku*). He worked as a military educator and a staff officer in the Beijing Government and played a similar role during the Nationalist period, eventually becoming the Deputy Inspector of Training of the Nationalist Army.⁹ His successor was Xu Zhuyi (1895-1976), the head of the 5th Department of the General Staff, which was responsible for planning, training, and general administration, including the writing of military history (*zhanshi*).¹⁰ He graduated from Baoding Military Academy and was also educated at the Staff College of Japan. Other editors and authors of the NMMA were graduates of the Baoding Military Academy in the late 1910s. During this period, the Chinese officer cadets were exposed to the many new ideas and perceived lessons of the First World War, mainly through the conduit of the Imperial Japanese Army.

FENGtian OFFICERS VIEWS OF THE POST-WWI WORLD

The First World War reaffirmed the Fengtian officers' understanding of the nature of the international order: survival of the fittest, rather than international cooperation or even conforming to the existing order, was the fundamental dynamic. While this understanding of world order was not new, it is worth noting that the Fengtian officers showed an immediate distrust of the pacifist movement that prevailed after the end of the First World War. To them, the international peace forged in Versailles was merely a truce, and a Second World War was seen as almost inevitable. Thus, to these officers, the survival of China depended on nothing but the military might of the Chinese nation. While many of the Fengtian intellectual officers came from a Manchurian background, the majority of them were exposed and sympathetic to modern Chinese nationalism. Although none openly questioned the fact that the Chinese regime in Manchuria was effectively autonomous from the central government (at Beijing and Nanjing in different periods of time), they usually approached the defense issue from a Chinese national rather than a Manchurian perspective. At the same time, when they were suggesting solutions for security problems, they usually prioritized Manchuria, as they believed that it faced the most immediate threat from Japan and the Soviet Union.

Zhou Yawei denounced the Kellogg-Briand Pact in a speech delivered in September 1928 with the goal of instilling civil militarism among the Chinese in Manchuria. Zhou wrote, "Today's world is the same as the Spring and Autumn period, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact was little different from the disarmament meeting of the Spring and Autumn period. . . Alas, conflict is inevitable between nations in the world!"¹⁰ The prevalence of this sentiment among the Fengtian officers led to a distrust of the League of Nations. Zhou Yawei wrote of the League, "the League of Nations and the arbitrary system it

9 Qian Fanglai, "Zhou Yawei zhuanlue" [A brief biography of Zhou Yawei], *Shengxian wenshi ziliao* [Historical documents of Shengxian] 5 (1987), 86-89; Chen Yuhuan, ed, *Lujun daxue jiangshuaihu* [Compilation of officers who graduated from the staff college] (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 2013), 582-83.

10 Zhou Yawei, "Duiyu wanguo 'feizhan gongyue' zhi suogan" [Some reflections on the international disarmament treaty], *Dongbei junshi yuekan* [Northeast military affairs monthly; hereafter cited as NMMA] 1 (1928), 3-4.

introduced can only delay the coming of war but not eliminate it altogether."¹¹ Thus, he concluded that "war will always be part of human life; and a nation should always be militarily prepared in order to survive."¹²

As the officers had little faith in any international peace effort, there was already talk about the coming of another world war. Fan Zongli, a lieutenant colonel working in the General Staff of the Fengtian Army, who contributed a piece to the NMMA as a summer holiday assignment, wrote,

since the failure of the Geneva Conference, the Powers have increased their military spending and built up their forces for war. The League of Nations failed to resolve the conflicts between the nations, while the disarmament treaties were powerless in stopping wars. . .¹³

As early as 1930, an officer claimed that the "Second World War" was coming, using this term before any other powers officially adopted the nomenclature:

After the First World War, [the nations of the world] could focus on recuperation and reconstruction; [however], the countries never relaxed military development, such as improving armament, developing chemical weapons, expanding air forces, refining tactics, and mechanizing equipment. . . The Second World War is not only inevitable, but it will be many times more intense and would bring many more casualties. . .¹⁴

In their understanding of the nature of the international order, the Fengtian officers of the 1920s and 1930s were little different from their predecessors in the late Qing Dynasty, such as Cai E, who advocated civic militarism (*junguomin zhuyi*) and saw international relations in Social Darwinist terms. It was also reasonable for the officers to show little faith in international cooperation after the Versailles Peace Conference, since many Chinese felt the powers at the conference treated their country unfairly. The subsequent Washington Disarmament Conference did little to alleviate such distrust. The Fengtian intellectual officers invariably advocated for not only a strong but also a self-sufficient military, as they expected that China would be alone in facing external threats. The external threats they perceived, their understanding of the nature of the international order, and their distrust towards international efforts to maintain peace and limit arms shaped the intellectual officers' understanding of China's strategic situation, and the potential responses to this situation.

As the Fengtian intellectual officers saw the international order as essentially abiding by the law of the jungle, they naturally portrayed China as a country surrounded by aggressors and a nation whose very survival was being threatened. Among the potential aggressors, Japan and the Soviet Union were the most cited. The NMMA published numerous items of military news about the two powers. For example, the NMMA published articles concerning Soviet training manuals, information about the Japanese and the Soviet militaries, the size of their navy and air forces, and their conscription systems. One battalion commander even rewrote the lyrics of the Song of National Unification (*guomin geming ge*) from "smash the powers and the warlords" (*dadao lieqiang, qu junfa*) to "smash the powers and expel the Japanese and Russians [the Soviet Union]" (*dadao lieqiang, qu ri-e*).¹⁵ External threats be-

11 Zhou Yawei, *Guofanglun* [On national defense] (Beijing: Jinghua yinshuju, 1926), 1.

12 Ibid.

13 Fan Zongli, "Guomin junshi jiaoyu zhi biyao ji qi shixing zhi fangan" [The necessity of introducing national military education and a plan for implementation], NMMA 3 (1929), 3.

14 Yi Xin (pseudonym), "Woguo zhi guofang" [Our country's national defense], NMMA 22 (1930), 3.

15 "Junmin shiyuan gepu" [Songs for soldiers and civilians to pledge allegiance], NMMA 8 (1929), 1.

came real after the Nationalist Party took control of the country. In 1929, war broke out between the Soviet Union and the Fengtian Clique over the Chinese Eastern Railway. When the war ended, the NMMA published the text of an ostensibly secret memorial submitted by Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi advocating the conquest of Manchuria. Prefacing the published letter was an admonition to the presumed readers, Fengtian (or even other Chinese) officers: "Attention, readers! If your heart is still beating and blood is still flowing in your body, and if you still have in mind the *full* map of China, then you must read through this piece no matter how busy or lazy you are. After that, think thoroughly of their (the Japanese) plan and the means of achieving their goal; what about us? What would be our counter? And with what?"¹⁶

TOWARDS "TOTAL WAR"

The Fengtian officers were well aware of the technological advances of the First World War and saw the need to introduce institutional reforms and social changes that would allow the Chinese Republic (or Manchuria alone) to better cope with the new mode of war. The NMMA, unlike other professional military journals at that time, accepted not only articles on military affairs but also "[works about] politics, the economy, education, diplomatic affairs, communications, and sciences related to war."¹⁷ As the articles published in the NMMA show, the Fengtian officers, and to some extent their readers in different parts of China, were aware of the idea of "total war" even before the term was popularized in China as the result of the publication of the Chinese translation of Ludendorff's *Der Totale Krieg* (total war). The origin of this awareness can be traced to the understanding that attacks on civilian populations were common during the First World War and that it was necessary for a warring state to fully mobilize its society in order to survive in a protracted conflict. During the First World War, Germany launched a sustained albeit ineffective air campaign against Britain and used long-range artillery to shell Paris. These moves convinced observers in Japan and China that one should not expect a clear line between "the battle front" and "the home front" in the next war. In an article that was originally written in Japanese and then translated, it was noted that, as the result of the emergence of aerial warfare, no one would be exempted from enemy military action, and thus the entire population should be at least mentally equipped:

During the previous wars, combat occurred only near the frontlines and contested searanes. If our army and navy were in an advantaged position and the enemy were unable to encroach on our territory and territorial waters, the population would not feel any danger. The situation could be immensely different in the future, as combat action may take place not only on the surface of the globe but also in three-dimensional space. From the beginning of the war, the fear of death would sweep across the country, and thus the whole nation should think as if they are on the battlefield.¹⁸

Another major reason why officers "discovered" the "total" nature of modern warfare was the perceived importance of economic mobilization during the

16 "Tanaka shouxiang zhi gongnei dachen qing dai zouming jizhi zhengce han" [Letter from Prime Minister Tanaka to Lord Steward Ichiki Kitoku asking the latter to report to the Emperor on the forward policy [in Manchuria]], NMMA 9 (1929), 3. The "translator" of this memorial miswrote the name of Lord Steward Ichiki Kitokurô throughout the article.

17 "Junshi yuekan tougao zhengwen guize" [Submission guidelines for NMMA], NMMA 1 (1928), 1.

18 Qi Xufang, "Guotu fangkong shang zhi yanjiu [Study of national air defense]," NMMA 2 (1928), 2.

First World War. Yang Kuiyi, claimed in his article “Jindai zhi zhanzheng (modern warfare),”

Today, the decisive factor . . . is not the size of the army but the amount of war materials (controlled by the state). The availability of war materials depends mostly on the industrial capability of a state, and outcomes of war are not decided on the battlefield but the size of a country's economy. . .¹⁹

Zhang Xiguang, an editor of the NMMA, thus urged his readers to try to adopt a more holistic approach to understanding their potential foes:

The size of the enemy armed forces is only one of the many elements that should be taken into consideration when one is trying to gauge the capability of a potential enemy. One should also take into account the culture, intuition, national traits, conscription system, training, armaments, officer training and capability, as well as resources available for war and the ability to turn them to military use. . . it is not until then that one can fully appreciate the capability of a potential enemy. . .²⁰

It was based on this understanding that the Fengtian Army officers understood the need to mobilize the entire society to at least support the military in its efforts to fight. Another contributor to the NMMA wrote,

in the future, it is not only the soldiers' responsibility to fight a war, although they are the ones who fight at the front. To increase their chance of success, the entire nation should contribute in all their might to support [the soldiers]. . . Thus, in the future, the most important element will be the total mobilization [of society] by the state.²¹

Fengtian military officers claimed that Japan was already well ahead in transforming the state into one that could mobilize all of society's resources for war:

After the end of the European war, every country that had participated in it had acquired this new lesson, namely, the necessity of seeing war as something that is related not only to the military but also the society and all economic activities. “Nationalization of the army (*jundui de guominhua*), full mobilization of economic activities (*canye de zongdongyuan*), and full mobilization of the nation (*guojia de zongdongyuan*)” are now facts. [These changes] had already prevailed in Europe; Japan. . . was also keen to introduce related measures. Tanaka Giichi, the current Prime Minister, is the most passionate on this issue. . .²²

Thus, unlike professional military journals from previous decades, the NMMA paid much attention to wartime economic mobilization. Liang Ji, one of the editors of the NMMA, wrote (or partially translated) a long article in 1929 discussing the British and German mobilization of the munitions industry and post-war industrial mobilization organizations in the United States.²³ Unlike many other Chinese officers at that time, Liang did not show an almost blind confidence in the German state and the military. He suggested that the Germans failed at price control, standardization, and the management of transport; it also conscripted too many experienced workers for military service.²⁴ Liang, on the other hand, praised the efforts of the British Ministry of Munitions, and the National Defense Act of 1920 in the United States, which allowed the US military to study wartime industrial mobilization and led to the establishment of the Army Industrial College in 1924. The Act

19 Kui Yi, “Jindai zhi zhanzheng” [Modern warfare], NMMA 1 (1928), 7.

20 Pei Wen [Zhang Xiguang], “Xianzai ji jianglai zhi zhanzheng yu gongji jingshen” [Offensive spirit and war now and then], NMMA 4 (1929), 16.

21 He Ao-xi, “Jianglai de zhanzheng” [Future wars], NMMA 8 (1929), 8.

22 Fan Zongli, “Guomin junshi jiaoyu,” 3.

23 Du Min [Liang Ji], “Ouzhan shi de-ying liangguo zhi junxu gongye dongyuan ji zhanhou meiguo zhi gongye dongyuan zuzhi” [Industrial mobilization of Germany and Britain during the European war and the post-war American industrial mobilization institutions], NMMA 3 (1929), 7.

24 Ibid., 7-11.

allowed the U.S. Army to establish agencies that worked with industries at the local level to prepare plans for economic mobilization. The key, Liang believed, was “cooperation between the business and industrial community and the army,” namely, cooperation between the state and industry rather than one-sided control (*tongzhi*) or even competition between the two. Although he did not elaborate, what he was suggesting was similar to the notion of a “military-industrial complex.”

The interest shown by the Fengtian intellectual officers in the economic dimension of war led to the publication of many articles about logistics, transportation, resource management, and munitions production.²⁵ Articles urging the government to play a more active role in developing industry by providing incentives and introducing supervision also appeared in contemporary academic journals of the Eastern Three Provinces.²⁶

CREATING A SOCIETY READY FOR “TOTAL WAR”

The Chinese regime in Manchuria in the late 1920s could be roughly described as an authoritarian oligopoly, led by Zhang Xueliang and the military heads of Jilin, Heilongjiang and Rehe. The Fengtian Clique enjoyed some civilian support as it had the cooperation (sometimes grudgingly) of the provincial assemblies and the chambers of commerce. It was also supported by a relatively capable bureaucracy, gradually created following late Qing reform. In some areas, local governments were even able to form *baojia* (local security) units that could draw manpower to provide replacement soldiers for the Fengtian Army. By 1931, there were 10,404 schools set up in Manchuria, supervised by the state.²⁷ These infrastructures were far from enough to obtain the high degree of control that was needed for the persecution of “total war” envisioned by the Fengtian intellectual officers; and the Clique by no means enjoyed real popular support. Thus, the Fengtian intellectual officers, while adopting the rhetoric of total war, suggested rather modest reforms within the area under Fengtian control, namely enhancing the role of the state in managing the economy and introducing conscription as well as military training at schools. Given the infrastructure available, it may have been possible for the Fengtian Clique to achieve some success in these aspects if it had the time to plan and implement relevant measures.

The ultimate goal, according to some of the Fengtian intellectual officers, was to create a militarized society ready for total war. Fan Zongli noted that the very nature of the Chinese Republic required its population to take an active role in its protection. Fan wrote, “a modern state is a state of the people; wars between modern states thus become wars between peoples.”²⁸ Thus, Fan argued, “a country’s agriculture, industry, commerce, transportation, shipping, and all kinds of production should be subjected to the demands of national security.”²⁹ The editor-in-chief of the NMMA, praised Fan’s article and wrote, “future wars will not be fought by the military alone; it will involve

25 For example, Qi Xufang, “Duiyu muliao qinwushang tielu yewu zhi diwei” [The role of railroads in staff work], NMMA 5 (1929), 1-15; Min San (pseudonym), “Zuijin shijie bingqi zhi jinbu [Recent advancements in weaponry], NMMA 7 (1929), 39-47.

26 “Cai Encheng, “Fazhan dongbei gongye jihua” [A plan for industrial development in the Northeast], *Fengyong daxue xiaokan* [Journal of Fengyong University] 3 (1930), 68.

27 Chi Man Kwong, *War and Geopolitics*, 39-41, 60-65.

28 Fan Zongli, “Guomin junshi jiaoyu,” 3.

29 *Ibid.*, 5.

all citizens. . . people will have to contribute their skills in different areas in order to aid the war effort directly or indirectly.”³⁰

The goal of militarizing society through state action led to support by officers for the introduction of conscription and widespread military training in Manchuria. Officers argued that the volunteer enlistment system adopted during the Qing dynasty and the early Republican period was one of the sources of Chinese military weakness and led to a gradual separation between the military and society.³¹ It was in the context of this continuous urging by intellectual officers, and the constant pressure from Japan and the Soviet Union, that Zhang Xueliang proposed the introduction of compulsory military training for all men aged between 20 and 50 in Jilin and Heilongjiang after the defeat by the Soviet forces in 1930. Wang Shizong, an editor of the NMMA, wrote:³²

After the European War, national compulsory conscription became an international norm, and nations adopted this system one after another. Some, however, expressed their distaste and argued that such a system went contrary to the prevailing liberal ideals. . . [however] national compulsory conscription is the only way to preserve the freedom of a nation; it is through compulsory service that real liberty is guaranteed. France, a country that embraced the values of liberty and equality, introduced compulsory conscription a long time ago; Russia, the country of peasants and workers, also adopted this system.

Zhou Junxi, an economist who published in the NMMA, also supported the idea of introducing conscription in order to prepare for the coming of the Second World War. He wrote:³³

I am afraid that a Second World War centered on the Far East will be ultimately inevitable and in fact will not be far away from us. Our country would be the first to suffer in such a war; if we have not prepared accordingly, how are we going to deal with it? Opponents of introducing conscription in China have always argued that such a system would be harmful for peace, and China would follow the path of the imperialists if it were militarily capable. However, peace is no longer guaranteed in the modern world, with or without conscription. Ours is a weak nation; our military buildup is certainly for self-defense and is never aimed at overseas expansion.

To militarize society, the Fengtian officers did not propose relying only on administrative measures. Fan Zongli suggested that it was the responsibility of the citizen to be militarized, and the state should train its citizens for war. While it was practically impossible to introduce military training for the entire population, the solution was, according to Fan, to introduce military education on two levels: at school for students and with popular military training for the general public.³⁴ A regimental commander argued that the army was to be the “school of the nation” to turn illiterate peasants into citizens. The officers also proposed absorbing more university graduates into the army to instill in them a civil spirit and martial values.³⁵ Some even went so far as to suggest the militarization of schools and “turning the army into a school” so that the military and society would “merge into one (*dacheng*)

30 Ibid., 5.

31 Huang Dajue, “Gailiang jundui zhi guanjian” [Suggestions on reforming the army], NMMA 27 (1931), 1-4.

32 Jing Yuan [Wang Shizhong], “Zhengbing zhidu yu guojun zhi guanxi” [The relationship between conscription system and the national army], NMMA 4 (1929), 3-5.

33 Zhou Junxi, “Zhengbing zhidu yu Zhongguo” [Conscription system and China], NMMA 6 (1929), 4-5.

34 Fan Zongli, “Guomin junshi jiaoyu,” 3-4.

35 Li Yonglin, “Gaishan jundui zhi wojian” [My view on improving the army], NMMA 28 (1931), 7.

yiqi).³⁶ Articles about reservist systems, physical education, cadet corps in universities, and the Boy Scout movement also appeared in the NMMA, as the officers were interested in similar efforts in industrialized countries.³⁷

When advocating for the militarization of society, the Fengtian officers placed great emphasis on education, spiritual mobilization, and propaganda; this shows the adaptability of the warlord officers as they learned from their “more successful” Nationalist and communist competitors and indicates that they were receptive to the “totality” of mobilization. A shortcut to mobilizing the minds of the public, not only in Manchuria but also in China, according to the Fengtian intellectual officers, was to emphasize “national humiliation” and the existential threat facing the Chinese in Manchuria under Russian (Soviet) and Japanese pressure. For example, Dong Minxiu wrote that it was necessary to educate the officers about “state-ism” (*guojia zhuyi*) and to give them an understanding of “the state and society (*guojia yu shehui*).” He also proposed to indoctrinate soldiers regarding the importance of “what is a family and what is a country,” so that “loving one’s family is loving one’s country, and vice versa.” More importantly, soldiers should be educated about “the history of national humiliation, the extent of China’s borders, the true understanding of equality and freedom, and other novel ideas.”³⁸ Li Yonglin, a regimental commander who was educated in Japan and saw extensive service during the civil wars in 1924-1928, also proposed the introduction of education on “national humiliation” so that soldiers and the public could understand “the geographical extent of the nation, the treaties that led to the cession of territories, past humiliations, the signing of unequal treaties, the cultural and economic penetration of the imperialist powers, as well as the current status of China in the world.”³⁹ It was along these lines that the NMMA often published content about China’s “national humiliation,” such as charts and lists of lost territories or unequal treaties signed.⁴⁰

In addition to the introduction of conscription, the Fengtian intellectual officers advocated for a new type of soldier different from typical “warlord officers.” The intellectual officers argued that new soldiers should be patriotic, obedient, collectivistic, disciplined, diligent, and, most importantly, infused with civic spirit and respectful of civilians.⁴¹ These qualities, according to the intellectual officers, were essential not only for soldiers on the battlefield but also for the stability of the Republic. A company commander claimed in an article in the NMMA that the first quality of a “model soldier” was to be infused with the idea of the nation.⁴² Role models were also being portrayed in this light in order to present a clear image of the model new soldier. Articles on Han Guangdi, a brigade commander who was killed in action during the Sino-Soviet War of 1929, claimed that he was “well versed in the Six Secret Teachings (*liutao*), the Three Strategies of Huang Shigong

36 Wen Bocheng, “Junren shengji jiaoyu de yanjiu (xu)” [A study on the vocational education of the soldiers (continued)], NMMA 6 (1929), 31.

37 See for example, Dun Yong (pseudonym), “Oumei zhuguo junshi yubei jiaoyu” [Military preparatory education in Europe and the United States], NMMA 7 (1929), 1-47.

38 Dong Minxiu, “Jingshen jiaoyu” [Spiritual education], NMMA 7 (1929), 21.

39 Li Yonglin, “Gaishan jundui,” 8.

40 “Bu pingdeng tiaoyue yilanbiao” [A list of the unequal treaties], NMMA 4 (1929), appendix.

41 Wen Shuzhong, “Junren zhi zeren ji qi yingyou zhi jingshen [A soldier’s responsibility and values that he should Treasure],” NMMA 4 (1929), 7-11.

42 Han Dechong, “Zhenyang zuo yige mofan junren [How to be a model soldier],” NMMA 12 (1930), 6.

(*sanlue*), *Sunzi*, *Wuzi*, as well as modern military works." He also "spent much time recently on [Sun Yatsen's] Three People's Principle, the Constitution of the Republic of China, and Plans for National Reconstruction (*jianguo fan-glue*)."⁴³ Thus, instead of discouraging the soldiers from "interfering with politics (*ganzheng*)," soldiers were expected to be politicized as they were to serve as the protectors of (very vaguely defined) Republican institutions that were supposedly "for the people and by the people."

The perceived need for the state to be powerful enough to control and mobilize all aspects of life in wartime, the endorsement of a militarized society, and the advocacy for a new type of politicized soldier led to discussions on the relationship between the army and the state among the contributors to the NMMA. To many Fengtian intellectual officers, a militarized society was a bulwark against the threat of dictatorship in China. To many of those who advocated compulsory military service in Manchuria, militarization was different from ignoring or even suppressing individual rights and freedom. Rather, it was a means to protect the independence of the state that could in turn guarantee individual rights. A contributor wrote in the NMMA, "during the Republican era, a citizen of the Republic had two major responsibilities: paying taxes and serving in the military. . . a citizen serves his country by joining the military, while a country protects its citizen by training them."⁴⁴ He even attributed the decline of China to China's authoritarian tradition:

How did the Chinese lose their martial tradition? This happened ever since the implementation of unified and authoritarian rule (*tongyi zhuanzhi zhengti*); such a system aims at making everyone weak and only allows the existence of a single strong man (the emperor).⁴⁵

According to some of the contributors to the NMMA who touched upon this subject, militarization of society led by the military was a means to rejuvenate national politics and ensure that the people's rights and freedom would be protected from a particular class, the warlords, or even a particular political party. To some of the contributors, the people should be educated by the army rather than by a political party (as the Nationalists envisaged) to become ideal members of the Republic. Fan Zongli suggested that the goal of popular military training should nurture patriotic citizens "with individual thoughts and character and sound morals," as well as an "understanding of their responsibility to the nation."⁴⁶ A company commander of the Fengtian Army wrote in 1930 that, "a monopoly of power by a party is a party dictatorship; by a class is a class dictatorship, by a number of military leaders is warlordism. . . [these are all] autocracy under a nobility, only in a different form. . . and should not exist [in China]."⁴⁷ Thus, he suggested that a modern soldier should not shy away from politics and fear the accusation of "interfering with politics"; instead, he should understand politics, be "determined to reform the government," and, if necessary, "remove obstacles to a people's government."⁴⁸ Some contributors to the NMMA even went so

43 "Han Doudan luzhang shilue [A short biography of Brigadier General Han Doudan)," NMMA 13 (1930), 1-9.

44 Pan Minsan, "Jingshen jianghua jilu [A compilation of spiritual talk materials)," NMMA 15 (1930), 36.

45 Ibid., 51.

46 Fan Zongli, "Guomin junshi jiaoyu," 3.

47 Liu Longjiu, "Zhengzhi yu junshi de guangxi ji junren dui zhengzhi yingyou de taidu [Relationship between politics and military affairs and how soldiers should respond to politics)," NMMA 15 (1930), 19.

48 Ibid., 21.

far as to suggest that a more open form of government would actually help to achieve the militarization of society, as the people would be more willing to protect their own rights and freedom. Another company commander of the Fengtian Army, wrote that the army should become an integral part of society and that the government should maintain a high degree of freedom, including the freedom of the people to “speak freely” so that they could participate in the political process.⁴⁹ It is unlikely, however, that these officers supported a more open form of government as an end in itself; they probably saw it as a means to encourage the militarization of society and provide additional incentives for the people to serve in the military willingly.

Despite these conversations about more freedom and political participation by the public (including the soldiers), there is a distinct lack of discussion on who should ultimately be responsible for making political and grand strategic decisions, though it was implied that the military should have a prominent voice. These ideas were similar to the official line of the Nationalist Party, namely, that the country was still not ready to adopt “constitutional rule” (*xianzheng*) and the mobilization and militarization of society should be guided and controlled by the party, which, according to Chiang Kai-shek, was to become an army (*junduihua*) under a “single will.”⁵⁰ In the end, as the country was under a party dictatorship and different regions were controlled by military leaders with almost dictatorial power, it was unlikely that the political ideas of the Fengtian intellectual officers could have been introduced in other parts of China, or even in Manchuria.

CONCLUSION

In response to the popular idea of introducing wide-ranging reforms to strengthen the national defense of Manchuria, in June 1931 the NMMA invited submissions about national defense and the introduction of conscription in Manchuria, specifically asking contributors to comment on “practical ways to improve the defense of the Eastern Three Provinces” and on “conscription mechanisms, procedures, establishment of conscription areas and related institutions, the role of the local authorities, and other immediate measures.”⁵¹ Before these submissions could be published, however, Manchuria was invaded in September 1931 by Japanese forces and the NMMA was forced to discontinue. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria was of course the product of the action of a group of radical officers within the Imperial Japanese Army. It was, however, also the result of a string of poor judgements on the part of Zhang Xueliang and the Fengtian leadership. After the Northern Expedition, Zhang chose to disband a portion of his army to show his allegiance to the Nationalist Government, without concrete reassurance from Nanjing that he would be protected against Japanese or Soviet encroachment. He then blundered into a war against the Soviet Union over the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1929. The resultant defeat exposed the weakness of the Fengtian Army and his regime to the world. Slightly more than a year later, in September 1930, he sent the bulk of his army into North China in an attempt to “mediate” a civil war between Chiang Kai-shek and the northern

49 Qi Lian, “Guanyu dongbei bianfangjun gaige zhi guanjian [Suggestions for the reform of the Northeast border defense army],” NMMA 14 (1930), 34-35.

50 Jiang Zhongzheng “Jinri dangyuan yu zhengfu jundui ji shehui zhi zuzhi weiyi yaosu [The only principle of organization for the party, government, army, and the society],” *Junshi zazhi* [Military affairs magazine] 3 (1928), 1-4.

51 “Benshe tiebie qishi [Special notice of the publisher],” NMMA 29 (1929), unpaginated.

warlords Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan, again without sufficiently strengthening his own position in Manchuria. The bulk of his army then stayed in North China, leaving his base in Fengtian lightly defended until it was invaded.

It should be noted that it was impossible that all of the suggestions put forward by the Fengtian intellectual officers, especially the calls for a general militarization of society in Manchuria, could be implemented under the political and economic contexts facing them even if the Japanese invasion had not taken place. However, in view of the infrastructure and tools available to it, the suggestions for greater state control over arms-related industries, military training at schools, and conscription stood some chance to be partially carried out if the Fengtian leadership was given more time. However, its strategic blunders deprived it of any such opportunity.

After the fall of Manchuria, only a small number of Fengtian officers remained in Manchuria. Some did join the new Manchukuo regime, notably senior Manchu officers such as Xi Xia. Many more followed the main body of the Fengtian Army into China proper and later joined the Nationalist Chinese military in different capacities. Both Zhou Yawei and Xu Zhuyi became important educators of the Nationalist Army and served in staff positions. Ironically, the idea of turning Manchuria into a highly centralized mobilization state was to an extent realized by the Japanese, who saw the place as a bulwark against Soviet invasion and a rear area for their expected struggle against Western powers.⁵² However, it should be noted that it was not the ideas of the Fengtian officers that informed the Japanese decision-makers in the establishment of Manchukuo as a total mobilization state. On the contrary, it was the Japanese themselves who, similar to the Fengtian officers, believed that Japan had to learn from the lessons of the First World War and establish a total mobilization state, and who then advocated for reforms in Manchuria to resist a potential Soviet invasion. The total mobilization state of Manchukuo, however, did little to prevent the downfall of the Japanese Empire, which found itself fighting the Western powers, the Soviet Union, and China at the same time after a series of strategic blunders. It was in this sense that the Japanese decision-makers made the same mistake as their Fengtian counterparts, whom they had defeated in 1931. No amount of planning and state mobilization could compensate for poor strategic decisions.

⁵² For a study of Manchukuo as a total mobilization state, see Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).