

Youth Mainlander Soldiers of the Great Retreat and Their Interrupted Lives under the Authoritarian Regime of Taiwan in the 1950s

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Abstract

This study takes as its subject the “youth soldiers” who were at the specific ages of 20 to 25 at the time of the Great Retreat, and aims to clarify their life process in the 1950s, the early stage of their relocation to Taiwan, alongside the development of an authoritarian regime. In 1949, the “youth soldiers” encountered the Great Retreat, and moved to Taiwan with the army, without telling their families. During the transition to adulthood, they should have experienced military retirement, employment, marriage and other life events. However, the political propaganda of “Recovery,” the political work system, the “marriage ban,” and the semi-compulsory recruitment measures implemented by the Taiwanese authorities in the 1950s delayed the series of life events by more than ten years and restricted the individual initiatives of the “youth soldiers.”

Keywords: “youth soldiers,” the Great Retreat, authoritarian regime, transition to adulthood, life process

Introduction

In 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT, Chinese Nationalist Party) army suffered a major defeat in the third Chinese Civil War (from 1946 to 1949), and approximately 1.2 million mainlanders moved to Taiwan with KMT authorities, which is known as “the Great Retreat.” Among those mainlanders, 582,086 were KMT servicemen (Hu, 1990), of which the army accounted for about 83.13% (Chen, 2020: 107). According to military rank, KMT servicemen (hereinafter referred to as “servicemen”) were roughly divided into officers and “non-commissioned officers and soldiers,” among which “non-commissioned officers and soldiers” were equivalent to ordinary soldiers (hereinafter referred to as “soldiers”). By December 1949, the average age of soldiers was 23 years old for the army, 21 years old for the navy and 23 years old for the air force (Chen, 2020: 173), so it can be inferred that the majority of soldiers were at the ages of 20 to 25 when they moved to Taiwan. The ratio of officers to soldiers at the time of the Great Retreat is not clear, but the overall average of servicemen at that time was 25 years old (Chen, 2020: 173; Hu, 1990: 111), so it can be seen that many officers and soldiers were similar in age.⁽¹⁾ However, in terms of salary, personal freedom, reputation, and the scope of interpersonal communication, officers were obviously superior to soldiers. This study takes as its subject the soldiers who were between 20 and 25 years old at the time of the Great Retreat, and aims to clarify their life process in the 1950s, the early stage of their relocation to Taiwan, combined with the development of an authoritarian regime.

Review of previous studies

The study of servicemen who moved to Taiwan in 1949 is a new research theme that emerged in the 2000s. Its research background lies in the changes in Taiwanese society and the movement of rebuilding old military depen-

(1) The selection of young officers largely depended on the length of service in the early days after the Great Retreat (Zhang, 2021a: 19). With the improvement of military training system and officer selection system, this phenomenon gradually disappeared.

dents' villages⁽²⁾. Since 2000, there have been numerous studies on the preservation of the military dependents' villages and their cultural heritage (Yang, 2009; Li, 2015, 2016, 2019a). However, compared with the research on the space of military dependents' villages, there are very few studies on the life of servicemen. Hu (1990) is regarded as the first work on the life experiences of retired KMT servicemen (hereinafter referred to as "veterans"). The study focused on veterans living in Hualien, Taiwan, and analyzed their living conditions in the late 1980s. Respondents were living at the bottom of Taiwan's social ladder, and 67% of them were unmarried. Even if they were married, their wives were usually prostitutes, aborigines or physically disabled. For them, marriage and family were not perfect.

Lin (2019) focused on the construction process of the social system and analyzed the impact of the system on the development of military population. Before the KMT authorities⁽³⁾ moved to Taiwan, Taiwan had already established a relatively complete household registration management system. However, after the Great Retreat, the Taiwanese authorities⁽⁴⁾ did not carry out household registration management on the military. Instead, they established a military population management system, effectively restricting the military population to a certain social space. Under strong institutional intervention, the unique life course of the military population had gradually formed. However, this study only described the development phenomenon of the military population as a whole, and it did not pay attention to the individual behaviour and consciousness of the research subjects.

Li (ed.) (2010) collected seven master's theses which respectively described the living conditions of "Mainlander Taiwanese"⁽⁵⁾ at the bottom of the social ladder from the perspectives of migration, elderly life, marriage, religious choices, image in novels and literary works. In particular, Wu (2010), Chang (2010) and Lin (2010) took as their subject veterans and pointed out that veterans had suffered from decades of separation and loneliness after moving to Taiwan. These three studies clarified the lasting negative impact of the Great Retreat on the lives of servicemen.

Li (2019b) analyzed the formation and transformation of the "Mainlander Taiwanese" ethnic group in the second half of the 20th century. In the early days after the Great Retreat, mainlanders had no intention of settling in Taiwan. Because mainlanders moved to Taiwan together with the KMT authorities, they were relatively superior to the native Taiwanese in social status⁽⁶⁾. The "Mainlander Taiwanese" ethnic group gradually formed. However, with the social and economic development, the socioeconomic status gap between "Mainlander Taiwanese" and native Taiwanese was gradually narrowing. Especially after the 1980s, "Mainlander Taiwanese" lost their advantages in social status. At the same time, they faced an identity crisis.

Research themes and survey

Correcting deficiencies in previous studies' viewpoints

Li (2019b) emphasized that before the 1980s, "Mainlander Taiwanese" belonged to the minority with dominant political, cultural, and economic status. However, in fact, not all "Mainlander Taiwanese" had social advantages. According to social status, "Mainlander Taiwanese" could be roughly divided into upper and lower classes. The upper class referred to the leadership of the Taiwanese authorities and the staff of various public institutions, namely

(2) A military dependents' village is a community in Taiwan mainly built in the 1950s and 1960s, whose original purpose was to serve as provisional housing for KMT servicemen and their dependents. In 1980, Taiwan's "Ministry of Defense" introduced key points of rebuilding old military dependents' villages. However, the administrative order was not binding, so the renovation process of old military dependents' village was slow (Li, 2019a: 26). In 1996, Taiwanese authorities implemented the *Act for Rebuilding Old Quarters for Military Dependents*, which accelerated the renovation process. Since the late 1990s, the preservation of military dependents' villages has attracted social attention.

(3) This study refers to the KMT regime led by Chiang Kai-shek before the Great Retreat in 1949 as "KMT authorities," and after the Great Retreat as "Taiwanese authorities."

(4) See footnote (3).

(5) Specifically refers to the 1.2 million mainlanders who moved to Taiwan in 1949, including servicemen.

(6) In terms of language use, the Taiwanese authorities carried out a national language policy and dwarfed Taiwan's local language (Li, 2019b: 308). As for social resources, mainlanders got more employment opportunities, and most of them worked in the public sector with higher occupational prestige (Li, 2019b: 310-311).

the so-called “military officers, civil servants and educators.” The lower class was composed of numerous soldiers whose fate was directly controlled by the upper class, especially by the Taiwanese authorities. The social context and institutional changes related to soldiers before the 1980s can be summarized as follows.

In May 1949, *the Declaration of Martial Law* was enacted throughout Taiwan. In April 1950, the Taiwanese authorities rebuilt the political work system in the military. In July 1951, an act of marriage for military personnel was formulated, which clearly stipulated that soldiers in service were not allowed to marry except officers, military civilians and technical sergeants. The act came into force in January 1952, which was the beginning of the “marriage ban.” As early as 1959, the Taiwanese authorities promulgated regulations on military services, and a system specifying the upper age limit for service, salary and retirement gratuity for military personnel was established (Lin, 2019: 337). In the same year, the “marriage ban” was abolished. In July 1961, the “*Act of Military Service for Non-commissioned Officers and Soldiers of the Armed Forces*”⁽⁷⁾ was newly formulated, which formally stipulated the standard of soldiers’ pension for the first time (Lin, 2019: 339). In 1969, the military population was registered to the household registration management system. In January 1979, the Chinese government issued the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan*, hoping that the two sides of the strait could realize navigation and postal services as soon as possible and put an end to their confrontation (Guo, 1992: 328-331). However, the Taiwanese authorities refused contact with the mainland by pursuing the policy of no contact, no negotiation and no compromise, which was the so-called “Three Nos” policy, well-known between the two sides of the strait. In July 1987, *Martial Law* was lifted, and “Mainlander Taiwanese,” including veterans, could apply to visit their relatives on the mainland from December of the same year.

The upper class was the founder of the abovementioned authoritarian regime, while the lives of numerous soldiers, as the lower class, had been affected by this regime for decades. Even if they belonged to the same lower class, the life experiences of moving to Taiwan and those later were diverse with different services. For example, during the Great Retreat, air force and navy personnel took advantage of their positions to bring their family members to Taiwan, while army personnel, which accounted for more than 80% of the military population, moved to Taiwan alone regardless of whether they were married or not.

Cohort setting and main research themes

Based on the review of previous studies and the above analysis, this study sets the army soldiers who were 20 to 25 years old (born from 1924 to 1929) at the time of the Great Retreat as a cohort and names them “youth soldiers.” “Youth soldiers” encountered the Great Retreat during the transition to adulthood. Compared with other “Mainlander Taiwanese,” they suffered a more and longer-term negative impact on their subsequent lives from the authoritarian regime. My academic theme is to put the whole life course of “youth soldiers” into the research range, especially to link the life strategies of “youth soldiers,” their comrades-in-arms, and their families with the development process of the authoritarian regime to clarify the life experiences of “youth soldiers” during the *Martial Law* era (from 1949 to 1987). Figure 1 describes the life course of “youth soldiers.” As shown in the figure, the institutions, laws and regulations frequently changed especially from 1949 to 1959. As one essential part of the above academic theme, this study aims to clarify the life process of “youth soldiers” during their transition to adulthood in the 1950s, combined with the development of the early authoritarian regime. Specifically, it is divided into the following three research topics: (1) Living conditions and consciousness of “youth soldiers” when they encountered the Great Retreat, (2) The development process of the authoritarian regime in the 1950s, and (3) The life process of “youth soldiers” in the first decade of the *Martial Law* era.

Overview of the surveys

“Youth soldiers” living in the Ching Chuan Kang District (hereinafter referred to as “CCK”) are the main interviewees. CCK, formerly known as Gongguan, is located in the northwest of Taichung City. Before 1949, CCK had nothing else but the Gongguan airport and eight medical buildings left by the Japanese. In 1949, about 80 KMT air-

(7) The official name of the law cannot be confirmed only by references.

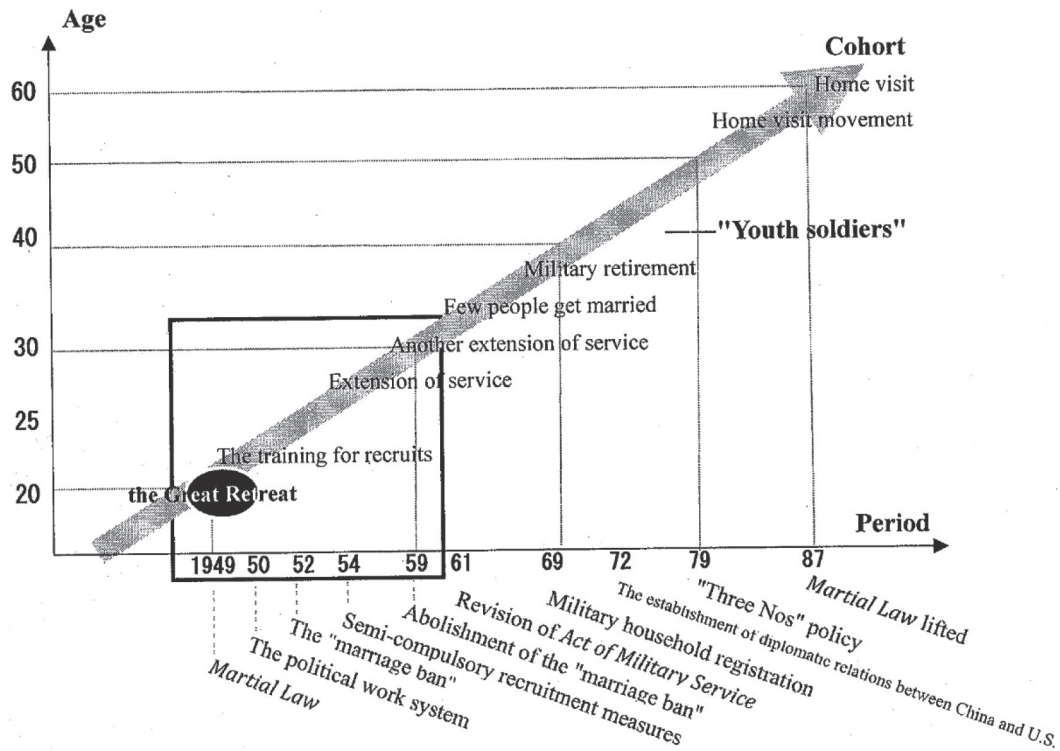


Figure 1. The life course of "youth soldiers"

men were assigned to Gongguan airport, and the medical buildings were designated as provisional residences for their dependents, who were the first wave of residents in the area after the restoration of Taiwan. In 1950, Gongguan and the surrounding district were named CCK. Before the armoured force settled in CCK in 1954, it was desolate here.

The KMT army underwent three reorganizations from 1950 to 1954. As one part of the army, armoured force was no exception. In 1954, the first, second, third and fourth corps of armoured force were reorganized into the headquarters, the first division, the second division, the first solo battalion, the second solo battalion, and the third solo battalion (Chen, 2020: 137-149). In the same year, the first division and the third solo battalion were stationed in Hukou, Hsinchu City, while headquarters, the second division and the first solo battalion moved in CCK.⁽⁸⁾ By the end of 1954, there were approximately 13,000 soldiers in the CCK army base, all of whom were mainlanders. In the 1960s and 1970s, soldiers moved out of the base after they were married or retired and built houses in CCK or nearby areas. Especially in the late 1960s, the number of soldiers (and veterans) that settled down in CCK increased sharply. In July 1969, the residential area in CCK was named "Zhongyi military dependents' village" and became a separate household administration unit.⁽⁹⁾

In 2019, there were fewer than 50 "youth soldiers" living in Zhongyi military dependents' village, including those with serious diseases. In order to ensure the representativeness of the subject, the chairman of Zhongyi military dependents' village introduced to the author three "youth soldiers" with relatively healthy bodies and excellent memory. From August 2019 to November 2020, the author interviewed the three "youth soldiers" 24 times about their life history. Table 1 shows the profiles of the three interviewees. In 1949, they experienced the Great Retreat at the age of about 21. Before they moved to CCK in 1954, they participated in military training as recruits in various places. They married (or remarried) around the 1960s and retired from the army in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

(8) The second solo battalion moved to Kinmen.

(9) Before 1969, the military population was not registered in the household registration management system. Instead, it was managed by the military through military status. For the development history of CCK and Zhongyi military dependents' village, refer to Zhang (2020) for details.

Table 1. The profiles of three interviewees (November 2020)

No.	Birth year	Educational experience	Before 1949		In 1949		After 1949		
			Occupation before joining the army	Year of joining the army (age)	Marital status	Age	Marriage year (age) in Taiwan	Retirement year (age)	Highest rank before retirement
1	1927	None	Farming	1947 (20)	Married	22	1961 (34)	1968 (41)	Staff sergeant
2	1928	Private school ⁽¹⁰⁾	Vehicle repair	1949 (21)	Engaged	21	1961 (33)	1973 (45)	Captain
3	1929	Primary school	Unemployed	1948 (19)	Unmarried	20	1959 (30)	1973 (44)	Captain

Sources: The author made this table according to interviews.

The development of the authoritarian regime and the life process of “youth soldiers”

The Great Retreat in 1949

“Youth soldiers” have various experiences in joining the army, among which the following five types are the most common. The first type is those who joined the army under the military service system of the so-called “one out of three and two out of five.”⁽¹¹⁾ The second type is the 100,000 “youth army” who joined the army when they were in high school or university in response to the call of KMT authorities at the end of the second Sino-Japanese war. The third is the youth who joined the army due to unemployment or poverty during the third Chinese Civil War. The fourth type is those who were forced to perform military service by the KMT army in order to replenish its strength at the end of the third Chinese Civil War. The fifth type is the students who had no alternative but to be soldiers during the Great Retreat. It can be inferred from the above that a considerable number of “youth soldiers” were forced to join the KMT army during the third Chinese Civil War.

Before the Great Retreat, many “youth soldiers” had no battle experience. They were either unmarried or married at the time of the Great Retreat, and there were also many people who had already become engaged. “Youth soldiers” received an order for “participating in short-term training in Taiwan” and moved to Taiwan in a hurry without telling their family members. Interviewee No.2 had worked as a vehicle repairman in Shanghai. In 1949, he was fired due to the economic depression. In the same year, he joined the armoured force at the age of 21, and soon followed the army from Shanghai to Keelung, Taiwan. As for his mood during the Great Retreat, he recalled:

When we were in Shanghai, the commander told us that we were going to Taiwan for military training, and that we would return to the mainland soon. Sitting on the deck of the ship to Keelung, I was thinking that when I return to the mainland, I must find a good job instead of being a soldier. Unexpectedly, I couldn't go back when I came to Taiwan. The soldiers on the same ship were about the same age as me. Most of them had just joined the army, so they didn't have any fight experiences. (No.2, 2020, personal communication)

Military training in the early 1950s: actions and thoughts were extremely restricted

After the Great Retreat, Taiwanese authorities formulated a series of military plans to achieve the goal of “the Recovery of the Mainland.” In 1951, “Plan No.1 (Plan of assault),” “Plan No.2 (Plan of limited target attack)” and “Plan No.3 (Plan of large-scale recovery)” were successively formulated. In 1952, the Taiwanese authorities formulated the “Five-Three Plan” drawing up 20 coastal cities on the mainland for landing. In 1953 and 1954, some other plans were made successively (such as “Guang,” “Kaian,” etc.). In 1955, the “Five-Three Plan” was renamed the “Five-Five Plan.” These plans can be collectively referred as the early plan of “the Recovery of the Mainland” (hereinafter referred to as “Recovery”).

Meanwhile, the authoritarian regime which imposed various restrictions on the actions of military personnel,

(10) Chinese old-style private school (“Si-shu”).

(11) It was a military service system which was conducted by KMT authorities before 1949. According to the system, one of three brothers, and two of five brothers had to serve in the military.

especially “youth soldiers,” came into being and gradually developed. In 1949, KMT authorities declared *Martial Law*. From then on, Taiwan entered the *Martial Law* era (1949.5-1987.7) which qualified as the longest imposition of martial law by a regime anywhere in the world (Mulvern and Yang, 2003: 172). In April 1950, the army and other military units rebuilt the political work system, the main purpose of which was to deepen the ideological and political education in the military and to intensify supervision of the life of soldiers. Of course, the implementation of this system was based on the sacrifice of soldiers’ human rights (Chen, 2020: 103). In January 1952, the “marriage ban” came into force. After that, soldiers were forbidden to marry for up to eight years.⁽¹²⁾ From 1950 to 1953, interviewee No.1 took part in the training for recruits in southern Taiwan. He recalled the life of “youth soldiers” at that time as follows:

Chiang (Kai Shek) said to the mainlanders of the Great Retreat that the “Recovery” would be realized within five years.⁽¹³⁾ We all believed it. At that time, there were ideological and political lessons every day, and the instructor told us that “we will definitely be able to go back. Don’t get homesick.” Each company had an instructor and “political fighters.” You don’t know who the “political fighters” are. They kept watch on actions of the soldiers all the time. ... When we knew that we could not return to the mainland, some of us complained. In the end, they were all sent to the military court as “spies” of CCP. No one was not homesick. When we missed our parents, we could do nothing but wipe tears secretly. (No.1, 2019, personal communication)

In the early 1950s, the atmosphere of “Recovery” and “white terror” had gripped the entire Taiwan region. In this social context, especially the political work system and the “marriage ban” severely restricted the freedom of “youth soldiers.” As of the mid-1950s, most of the troops had no barracks, so soldiers had to temporarily stay in temples, warehouses, air-raid shelters and schools. Obviously, they were in poor living conditions. For example, several “youth soldiers” slept on a simple bed. In the summer, they shared one mosquito net, and in winter, they had nothing to cover themselves with except their own coats. “Youth soldiers” had no personal freedom at all except on weekends. Even if they “yearn for their hometown,” “miss their parents” or “at least want to tell their parents that they are still alive,” they could do nothing but suppress their emotions under the strict political work system. In order to control the daily lives of soldiers, the army carried out the implication system in each company. Specifically, every five soldiers were in a group. If one of them violated the discipline, the other members of the same group would be punished for accountability.⁽¹⁴⁾

While the actions of “youth soldiers” were closely surveilled, their thoughts were also strictly controlled. Each company had an instructor and several “political fighters,”⁽¹⁵⁾ who recorded soldiers’ actions and mental states all the time. In the early 1950s, Taiwan was in the period of “white terror,” and the phenomenon of soldiers being unjustly arrested occurred from time to time. “Youth soldiers” were so afraid of the centralized military administration that they always paid extra attention to their words even in their daily conversations. They were gradually emotionally paralyzed, just acting like machines. On weekends, “youth soldiers” could have certain personal freedom within a specified time. However, they were penniless because of the extremely low allowances, so even the most basic personal consumption was difficult for them. Cinemas and theatres regularly issue complimentary tickets to the army, so the weekend entertainments of “youth soldiers” were nothing more than watching movies or theatrical performances. Some people were tired of military life and hoped to be forced out of service by pretending to be sick (such

(12) According to the interviews, in fact, since July 1951, when the bill of “marriage ban” was carried, soldiers could no longer get married.

(13) Regarding to the “Recovery,” the most famous political propaganda is “preparation in the first year, recovery in the second year, mopping-up in the third year, and success in the fifth year.”

(14) This paragraph was made according to the interview surveys. For details, refer to the following interview collection: Zhang (2021a).

(15) The army selected several soldiers from each company to serve as “political fighters.” “Political fighters” had two identities. One was to take care of the daily life of the soldiers in the same company, and the other was to secretly record the mental states and actions of the soldiers and report them to the instructor.

as drinking ink) or deliberately violating the discipline, but it was usually difficult for their dreams to come true. In other words, under the strict authoritarian regime, it was impossible for “youth soldiers” to bring individual initiatives into play. In the early 1950s, “youth soldiers” believed that they would return to the mainland within a few years.⁽¹⁶⁾

Service experiences in the late 1950s: unable to make a life plan

In the late 1950s, although the “Recovery” advocated by the Taiwanese authorities within five years failed to come true, the political propaganda of “Recovery” was still fierce. For example, “A full-scale war is expected to break out at any time” (in 1955), “A turning point of Recovery” (in 1957), “The year that determines the fate of the world” (in 1958) and “The year that determines success of Recovery” (in 1959) are typical slogans (Lin, 2009: 61-62). Like other forces, the armoured forces responded to the political propaganda and continued to carry out ideological and political lectures, in an attempt to eliminate the homesickness of soldiers. Different from the early 1950s, the life focus of “youth soldiers” in this period gradually changed from military training to participating in the infrastructure construction of CCK.

In the late 1950s, although “youth soldiers” were between the ages of 25 to 30, they were unable to get married because of the “marriage ban.” Taking into account the needs of “youth soldiers,” the military vigorously attracted investment and introduced sex trading facilities. In 1955, the first brothel in CCK, “Paradise in service,” opened for business. It is said that there were more than 30 women working in it in the 1950s. According to interviews, almost all of the “youth soldiers” had used the “Paradise in service” for a long time and become dependent on it. Stores and entertainment facilities in the base had increased, but the salaries of soldiers were still low, and the consumption in these places was beyond the reach of “youth soldiers.” On weekends, under the arrangement of the base, “youth soldiers” collectively went to Taichung City to watch movies for free. Compared with the early 1950s, “youth soldiers” enjoyed some freedom of action. However, they could only act within the limits set by the military.

During this period, the implication system was abolished, and the daily lives of “youth soldiers” were no longer surveilled by “political fighters.” However, soldiers lived in the same dormitory building as a company and continued to be under the supervision of the instructor. At the same time, the ideological control of the military over “youth soldiers” remained strict. Interviewee No.3 was a monitor at the age of 27 in 1956. He recalled that a “youth soldier” in his dormitory was punished for complaining about military life.

He was a very honest guy. One day, whether he was in a bad mood or something, he wrote bad words about our commander on the schedule, which was tantamount to complaining. The instructor was trembling with fear when he saw it, and immediately called the security department. A few minutes later, many officers came to our dormitory and asked us to gather and searched all our luggage. Finally, the guards tied him with a rope and took him to the security department. I was the monitor, so I was called to the torture room of the security department to visit him three days later. The head of the security department said that they had interrogated him in turn for three days and kept him from sleeping. It's all about extorting a confession. Finally, he was sentenced. It is said that he was sent to Kinmen to dig a tunnel. (No.3, 2019, personal communication)

In 1951, the conscription system was implemented in Taiwan, which stipulated that the service life of Taiwan local soldiers was two years, while that of soldiers from the mainland was two and a half years. In 1954, mainlander soldiers should have retired, but the military prevented them. In May of the same year, Taiwanese authorities promulgated the “Detailed Rules for the Implementation of the Regulations on Granting Land to Anti-Communist and Anti-Russian warriors.” Specifically, for those who had served for more than two and a half years and continue to serve voluntarily, they would be granted a field with an annual output of 1,000kg of rice after the “Recovery.” In July 1956, “Measures for Issuing Land Grant Credentials for Anti-Communist and Anti-Russian warriors” was pro-

(16) This paragraph was made according to the interview surveys. For details, refer to the following interview collections: Zhang (2021a; 2021b).

mulgated, and the Taiwanese authorities started issuing “*Warrior Land Grant Credentials*” at the same time. In the late 1950s, most of the “youth soldiers” chose to continue to serve under the pressure exerted by the military. Interviewee No.2 recalled the scene of “youth soldiers” signing the consent to continue to serve as follows:

We had served for more than two and a half years, and should have retired, but Chiang did not want us to retire. If the soldiers from the mainland retired, his military would come to an end, so he gave us benefits in order to keep us. One of them was the issue of Warrior Land Grant Credentials. Retire or continue to serve? I remember that there was a table on the playground with a signature book. Everyone lined up to sign. Instructors and officers were watching us sign from the side. Almost all of us chose to continue to serve. Actually, it was all deceitful. He said that after the “Recovery,” he would give us a field with an annual output of 1,000kg of rice, but it was impossible to realize the “Recovery.” Only soldiers didn’t know it at that time. (No.2, 2020, personal communication)

Although the “marriage ban” was abolished in 1959, it was not easy for “youth soldiers” to get married. “Youth soldiers” had been poorly paid during their long service and resultantly had no savings. In addition, they were subject to prejudice and discrimination from Taiwanese society⁽¹⁷⁾, making it extremely difficult for them to find marriage partners. In the late 1950s, although “youth soldiers” realized that it would be impossible to return to the mainland in a short time, they still regarded themselves as passers-by in Taiwan and had no intention of settling there.

Conclusion

This study clarified the life process of “youth soldiers” during their transition to adulthood in the 1950s, alongside the development of an authoritarian regime.

“Youth soldiers” encountered the Great Retreat at the specific ages of 20 to 25. They had never thought that this retreat to Taiwan would separate them from their hometowns and relatives for nearly half a century. In the 1950s, in order to achieve the “Recovery,” the Taiwanese authorities not only vigorously produced political propaganda, but also rebuilt the political work system and implemented the “marriage ban” in the military. “Youth soldiers” were the direct targets of the authoritarian regime. During the transition to adulthood, they should have experienced military retirement, employment, marriage and other life events. However, the political propaganda, political work system, “marriage ban,” and semi-compulsory recruitment measures implemented by the Taiwanese authorities in the 1950s delayed the series of life events by more than ten years, and severely restricted the individual initiatives of “youth soldiers.” In other words, the authoritarian regime and the unstable state of life and consciousness of “youth soldiers” caused by the regime turned the most important life planning period of “youth soldiers” into a blank sheet of paper.

The policy, regime changes and life process of “youth soldiers” in the early days after the Great Retreat are an important part of modern Taiwanese history. This study clarified the life process of “youth soldiers” in the 1950s by combing the personal life history of soldiers at the micro level, the social context and military life at the meso level, and the changes in an authoritarian regime at the macro level. This study has the following three points in the history of Taiwan. Firstly, focusing on the transition to adulthood, this study clarified the negative impact of the authoritarian regime, which can be called a kind of social violence on the life course of “youth soldiers.” Secondly, choosing “youth soldiers,” a neglected group, as the research subject, this study vividly illustrated the “white terror” state of Taiwanese society in the 1950s from a different perspective. Thirdly, this study is a miniature of the military history and even the social history of Taiwan in the 1950s.

“Youth soldiers” had different life experiences before 1949, but after the Great Retreat, they shared a service life of about 20 years. During the transition to adulthood, young people usually accumulate necessary human capital

(17) “Youth soldiers” were discriminated against by Taiwanese society mainly because of poverty and lack of professional skills (Zhang, 2021b: 16).

(such as educational experiences, skills, etc.). However, under the influence of the authoritarian regime, “youth soldiers” failed to plan their life at the best time, nor did they save any human capital. As the life of “youth soldiers” was limited to military bases and isolated from Taiwanese society for over ten years, they had a serious lack of social relations. In addition, due to the high age and the lack of understanding of the local language, they could only engage in physical labour after military retirement. Under what living conditions did “youth soldiers” retire? How did they get employed? What obstacles did they encounter when it comes to marriage? I will focus on these issues in the next study.

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