

Original Paper

The Cultural Publicity Function and Influence of the Chinese Militia during World War II

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Abstract

During the Second World War, in the Sino-Japanese battlefield where China resisted Japanese invasion, the importance of the militia publicity and education for the construction of the base area was self-evident. It not only played an important role in the battles, but also encouraged members to actively participate in promotional activities, using leaflets, slogans, broadcasts and other media to convey the importance and necessity of the war of resistance to the public, which stimulated the public's enthusiasm and determination to resist the Japanese invasion. At the same time, militia also enhanced publicity and education through the organization of classes, lectures and other forms of activities, improving the public's political awareness and sense of resistance. Because of their close relationship with the public, the militia were able to better carry out the functions publicity and education, which had an important impact on the cultural construction of the base areas behind enemy lines.

Keywords

militia, publicity and education, World War II

From the perspective of military science, people's armed forces are often the reserve force of the main force, undertaking military auxiliary tasks. However, in the battlefield of China and Japan during the World War II, the people's armed forces played an important non-military role in the construction of the base areas behind enemy lines, especially in the publicity of culture and education. This paper takes Shandong Base Area as an example to demonstrate the role and influence of the militia in the publicity of culture and education.

1. The Basic Methods of Cultural Education and Publicity by the Militia

During the Second World War, in order to effectively disintegrate the enemy (mainly the Japanese and puppet armies), most militia village headquarters established disintegrating squads or formed armed publicity teams together with the main forces. They mobilized the mass to record “red and black points” and “good and evil books” for the puppet troops, and taking advantage of the night and the favorable opportunity to besiege the Japanese and puppet army, they called out to the Japanese and puppet army in the stronghold, regularly announcing the to the puppet army their points and records, encouraging puppet soldiers with sense of justice to leave the traitor team as soon as possible, and warning those who commit heinous crimes to do less harm. (Note 1) In addition, sending publicity materials to the Japanese and puppet strongholds and mobilizing the families of puppet soldiers to carry out the “Calling Our Husbands and Sons” and “A Letter” campaign are also important methods for disintegrating the enemy. Governments at all levels have also issued permits and established guesthouses for the returned puppet soldiers, which have achieved good results in practice. (Note 2) For example, the militia in Siwen Village (Note 3) Wenshang County often went to nearby Japanese puppet strongholds for calling and posting slogans, and successfully won back over 40 puppet soldiers. In the coastal area, the militia adopted the method combining siege and political disintegration in January and February 1945, forcing the Japanese and puppet forces in three strongholds to retreat. These examples fully demonstrate the success and effectiveness of the strategy to disintegrate the enemy.

Militia organizations bear the major responsibility of organizing and guiding youth to study, which is also an urgent need of the people. The youth in the liberated areas deeply experienced the suffering of slavery and cultural deprivation endured by the old society, and many young people suffered losses due to their illiteracy. Therefore, improving educational level and getting rid of illiteracy have become the conscious aspirations of the vast majority of young people. With the improvement of people’s living standards, the demand for learning has become increasingly urgent. To ensure that the needs of young people are met, militia organizations have assisted democratic governments in establishing various learning organizations, including youth’s study rooms, youth’s literacy classes, children’s literacy classes, etc. The director of the Youth Rescue Association or the village director served as the head of the learning group. The study time was arranged according to the actual situation, either at noon or in the evening. They established “young teachers” system, which involves senior students tutoring junior students to achieve mutual assistance. Beginners use direct teaching methods, such as hanging a sign with the word “cow” on the horn of a cow and writing the word “door” on the door. Militia also organize various cultural activities for young people, such as yangko teams and youth theater troupes. These activities were all based on the central work at that time for publicity and promotion, playing a certain role in promoting the central work of supporting the front line, tenant revolution, supporting the army and

giving preferential treatment to families, and promoting mutual assistance and cooperation in mass production.

In addition to cultural activities, the militia also provides education in various mass organizations of workers, peasants, young women, and women, meeting the specific requirements of each organization based on their situations. For example, they fought for workers to increase wages, and carried out liberation struggle for women to resist abuse and realize gender equality. In private schools and literacy classes, the education of reduction of land rent and the real supporting relationship are also implemented according to the plan. The government also held joint meetings of primary school teachers to provide education on reducing land rent. Through primary school teachers, they further promoted learning activities among primary school students, private schools, literacy classes, and other organizations, greatly promoting the development of cultural and educational undertakings in Shandong's base areas.

2. The Influence of Publicity and Education of the Militia on the People in the Base Areas

After being educated and publicized by the militia, the county and district governments specially convened a symposium for landlords to promote and educate on rent reduction policies and laws, and called on them to play a model role. In addition, according to the division of the joint defense zone, tenant meetings and tenant women's meetings were held, in-depth publicity and education were carried out, and relevant activities were organized.

Elementary school students, literacy classes, and children's groups were particularly active in publicity work. They first practiced shouting out slogans at home, then went to the market and streets for promotion, post slogans, and shouted to the attending crowd at the entrance of the venue, "Welcome tenant brothers! Wishing you victory in rent reduction!" There were also male and female students around the venue explaining the meaning of the slogans to the crowd. In addition, elementary school students and students with specific class backgrounds in literacy classes were also organized into groups and dispersed to tenant households for publicity. Their publicity might not be profound or fully understood, but their actions had played an important role in expanding the influence of the slogan of rent and interest reduction. The children of landlords were also encouraged to take part in relevant activities to mobilize their parents and friends. They also shouted, "Good places mainly reduce rent!" "Those who don't reduce rent must fight him!"

The improvement of the material life of farmers in the base areas of Shandong also increased their demand for cultural life. They began to receive education more suitable for their own needs in farmer schools. "Women's literacy classes were generally established in various villages to learn how to write permits, keep accounts and how to produce, and learn knowledge about who is the true supporter and who to rely on to counterattack". They attended classes in groups or collectively in winter and hung literacy cards and small blackboards in the fields, and hoes to read at any time in spring and summer. There were small wall posters and blackboard newspaper in the village.

“After the liberation, the masses had stood up culturally and have mastered the weapons of the New Democratic cultural struggle on their own.” “Due to the continuous improvement of the political level of the masses, the recreation of the masses’ literature and art were also improved. Rural theater troupes had been widely established in the central base areas. During the Spring Festival, gongs and drums could be heard everywhere in the countryside, and young women worn colorful clothes. They organized yangko, stilts, and rural theater troupes to perform and sing, engaging in cultural and entertainment activities. The masses attempted to carry out their new culture campaign of the base areas, and their class consciousness had been greatly improved. Peasants who had stood up began to “follow Chairman Mao”. “It was a common phenomenon to require to see the Party flag and the portrait of Chairman Mao.

Among them, Junan County is excellent. (Note 4) Junan County’s Guanzhuang (Note 5) militia organization was a good village for leading the public to learn. There were 215 young men, women and children enrolled in school, and there are six youth learning rooms with four classes. From 1943 to 1946, in the three years and more time, due to the earnest efforts of young children, their levels of education were significantly improved, According to the data at that time:

Table 1. Statistics on the Learning Situation of the Militia Organizations in Quanjiaoguanzhuang, Junan County in 1946

	Over 2000	1000-2000	500-1000	300-500	200-300	50-200
Number of people	23	37	28	51	57	19
percentage	10.7%	17.2%	26.7%	23.7%	26.5%	8.8%

All teenagers became literate, and ignorant youth stood up culturally. The association of youth rescue were to be selected as learning models for the whole county at the county-level learning activist congress due to their excellent academic performance. The association of youth rescue at all levels paid attention to cultivating learning activists and models. A large number of learning model figures emerged in the learning campaign, such as Gao Hong’an, who was diligent in learning in central Shandong, and Mr. Jiang Tianfu, who was a model in Jiaodong. (Note 2)

After the consciousness of the broad peasant class was aroused, they actively broke down feudal superstitions and various old customs. They demolished land temples, refused to buy paper to celebrate festivals, simplified marriage procedures, and supported free choice of lovers for young men and women. Civilized marriage began to emerge. In the past, the rural marriage system was very uncultured. For example, in some places in Shandong, landlords even implemented the so-called first night right system. However, with the new understanding and consciousness of the feudal bondage and unreasonable phenomena in the past, the ethos of free love and free dissolution

of marriage contracts began to prevail. Many places abolished traditional customs such as sedan chairs and floats, and instead they greeted or welcomed newcomers by yangko dance in a sisterly way with women's literacy classes.

In some villages, the whole village helped impoverished households get married by sending 2 bundles of cloth, 2.5 kilograms of oil, and 1 cool mat. There were no longer the traditional etiquette of kneels and kowtows, which was replaced with a simple and practical form of congratulations and responses at a new-style meeting. (Note 6) The masses gained various political and economic rights in the base area, which was an evident example of liberation, so the greetings of "Congratulations on prosperity" during the New Year became "Congratulations on liberation". Some people set a liberation day, while others ate liberation food. The liberated farmers also launched their own new cultural movement. According to incomplete statistics from nine counties in the south of Shandong province, by March 1945, the winter school had grown to 3,348 places with 197,708 students. (Note 7) The masses were mutually supportive and loved each other, and the production was mutually assisted. A new atmosphere was displayed in the base area.

3. The Historical Significance of the Education and Cultural publicity Movement of the Chinese Militia

The struggle to eliminate the enemy through militia armed forces in the revolutionary base areas of Shandong provided a solid political guarantee for the victory of the war. At the same time, the victory of armed battles also provided strong military support for the CCP militia. These victories are inseparable from the attention and organization of the Communist Party leadership in the Shandong Base Area. Through training the militia team and learning the successful combat strategies of the main forces, the combat effectiveness of the militia has been improved.

The military led by China has accumulated rich combat experience and tactical system in long-term revolutionary practice. These experiences and tactics are of great value to the militia. Through learning, the CCP militia can gain a deeper understanding of the enemy's characteristics, combat methods, and response strategies, thereby to improve their combat capabilities and the quality of completing tasks. Armed struggle is not only a military struggle, but also a spiritual war. This spiritual power played a crucial role in the victory of the war. It was through the positive victory of the war that China effectively ensured the construction of the base areas. The militia promoted the revolutionary struggle spirit through cultural education, stimulated the national self-esteem and confidence of the people, and enhanced the cohesion and combat effectiveness of the entire nation.

Armed struggle has honed the willpower and perseverance of the Chinese people. The Chinese people have experienced countless hardships and sacrifices, but they have never given up their pursuit of victory and their desire for peace. Their strong willpower and perseverance not only enabled the Chinese people to achieve victory in the war, but also provided valuable experience

and inspiration for political construction and cultural and educational development in the base areas. Besides, respect and recognition for China's international status and reputation were earned as well. In World War II, the Chinese people's resistance not only made tremendous contributions to the victory of the world's anti-fascist war, but also demonstrated the courage and strength of the Chinese people. This strength and courage not only earned the Chinese people respect and recognition internationally, but also played a positive role in China's subsequent international affairs.

Notes

Note 1. Research Institute of Party History of the CPC Shandong Provincial Committee, Yang Dongqi. History of the CPC Shandong 1921-1949, Volume 1 (II), Beijing: Central Party History Press, 2021, 716.

Note 2. "The Youth Rescue Association active in the liberated areas of Shandong". This file is kept in Shandong Provincial Archives. Case number: G003-02-0007-005.

Note 3. The name of a county in Shandong Province.

Note 4. The name of a county in Shandong Province.

Note 5. The name of a county in Shandong Province.

Note 6. Edited by the Shandong Provincial Archives and the Party History Research Office of the Shandong Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. Rent and interest reduction in Shandong, Beijing: Communist Party History Publishing House, 1994, 368.

Note 7. Yuan Pengxin. The Rent and Interest Reduction Movement in the Anti Japanese Base Area of Lunan. Journal of Shandong Agricultural Engineering College, 2016, (05), 5.