

Bringing the Military Back In: Military and State-Building in the Kuomintang China, 1924-1937

Chapter 1 Introduction: Military Academies, Modernization and State-Building

This chapter outlines the major theoretical sources and niches of this dissertation. This chapter also outlines the chapter outlines for all the remaining chapters.

This chapter argues that while classic accounts of state-building as an institution-building process portrayed “state” in state-building as a singular entity, recent studies focus more on how particular institutions. Hence, in recent years a transition from macro- to meso- and micro-level studies of state-building could be witnessed.

Classic narrative of “war makes states and states make war” (Tilly, Mann e.t.c.) studies the relationship between military and state-building in macro-level influences. Military is viewed as the “agent” carrying institutional and operational knowledge from battlefield to economy and society. Military is also first social organization to systematically adopt modernist ideologies and practices (standardization, discipline, chain of command, combination of unit organization e.t.c.). Finally, military forges national identity via mobilization.

On the other hand, Phillip Gorski’s “disciplinary revolution” provides a more detailed study of meso-level mechanisms in state-building. While Gorski’s original argument was that state does not need war to make itself (i.e. to produce modernist discipline), the emphasis on particular social institutions on state-building could be used in war and state making. Also, while Gorski suggests that institutions that predated state formation provides disciplinary inspirations to the state, state-building also means institution building; institutions were established in conjunction with state-building that were both part of the state and embedded in the society. Gorski’s study of how Calvinist churches provided “disciplinary” resources to state-building outlined a theoretical background for meso-level institutions that facilitated state-building. Meso-level institutions could serve as conglomerates of state-building elites and provide institutional and knowledge support to the state. At the same time, meso-level institutions also indoctrinated the concept of state legitimacy among social elites

Military and military academies are such are such meso-level institutions. They were conglomerates of social elites (officer corp) and forged bondage among social elites. They were also carriers of modernization knowledge and discipline. Therefore, military academies have both military and civilian implications.

“Latercomer” state is a concept borrowed from Gerschenkron (advantage of backwardness). Latecomer states were states where state-building processes occurred in early- to mid-20th centuries. These “latecomer” states were plagued with institutional

weakness, fragile social order, disruption, and internal chaos. They also faced mounting international pressure in protecting their own sovereignty and territory. Therefore, these states needed a strong state apparatus but lacked the conditions of supporting one. They naturally relied heavily on military as order-building forces

In latecomer states, military academies were founded IN CONJUNCTION with state-building process. Therefore, education and bondage in military academies were more malleable and in flux than in those that were founded AFTER state-building. Whether the military elites 1) were able to remain loyal to the state-building agenda, 2) form an effective and loyal army in domestic and international wars, and 3) carried over knowledge from military to civilian realms were central to state-building in latecomer states.

This dissertation hypothesizes that politicization of military academies and officer corps facilitates their loyalty to the state-building political agenda. Politicization intends to indoctrinate cadets with certain political goals and agenda. Politicization of military academies could take both formal and informal forms. In formal politicization, military academy provides formal curriculum and training of political indoctrination and curriculum on national and civil governance. On the other hand, informal politicization takes place in extra-curriculum organizations, groups and networks within and outside of the academy.

This dissertation argues that the most visible outcome of politicization of military academy would be the biographical trajectories of graduated officers. Officer corps that could facilitate state-building should be 1) loyal to a specific regime and national military, 2) capable of organizing an effective army, and 3) capable of adapting to other political or civilian positions outside of the military sphere and/or able to settle into civilian careers after their military careers. When serving in civilian posts these military officers would also augment civilian apparatuses with higher efficiency, efficacy and discipline especially during social and political turmoil.

Chapter 2 Military and State-building in Republican Era

This chapter argues that the Republic of China (ROC) was a typical “latecomer” state in terms of state formation and state-building. A group of revolutionaries toppled China’s last and faltering dynasty, the Qing dynasty, in 1911 and established the Republic, but the fragile central government in Beijing disintegrated in 1916, plunging the new republic into more than ten years of political factionalism, rebellions, social instability and civil wars among warlords. In 1924 the nationalist Kuomintang (hence after KMT) regime was founded in Canton (Guangzhou) as a militaristic regime aimed at reuniting China and it proclaimed itself as the political descendant of early revolutionaries. KMT achieved reunification (albeit nominal) in 1927 after several years of bloody fighting. What followed was the “Nanking Decade” between 1927 and 1937, in which KMT designated Nanking (Nanjing) as the capital city, consolidated its party-state regime and attempted to thoroughly overhaul Chinese society and economy.

While efforts of the KMT regime never materialized to the fullest degree, there was little doubt that the regime achieved many successes not rivaled by its Beijing predecessor.

During the Republican China period from 1916 to 1937, warlords relied heavily on military for Military academies mushroomed in the Republican China period, mostly founded by warlords of various origins. However, many of the prominent officers in warlord armies and most KMT officers during the Nanking Decade were graduates of two prominent military academies: Baoding Military Academy (hence after BMA) and Whampoa Military Academy (hence after WMA). Both were founded as training institutions for modern military officers in China; both actively learned from foreign precedents; and both were initially headed by military strongmen who sought to combine political authority with military discipline. However, graduates from the two academies had drastically different paths of career. A large number of BMA graduates became warlords or officers in warlord militaries before eventually joining the KMT regime, while most WMA graduates formed the backbone of the KMT army that successfully unified the country. Many BMA and WMA graduates even fought against each other before joining the KMT regime.

WMA was founded by the KMT regime with support from the Soviet Union in 1924 as a training ground for officers to staff the KMT Expeditionary Army and was under direct control of KMT's Central Committee (Wilbur 1983). WMA incorporated military training, civilian education and political indoctrination in its curriculum. Civilian training courses included national and international politics, law, social governance, economy and the necessity of revolution (Lin 1936). Soviet-style "political training" was intended to foster cadets' loyalty to the KMT. Cadets were required to subject themselves to regular supervision and inspection by political commissars (Li 2016). During the brief cooperation between KMT and Chinese Communist Party (CCP), both parties staffed the political training section. However, after the internal conflict and split of the two parties in 1927, KMT purged CCP personnel and monopolized the political training section. Since then, graduates of the WMA were mostly loyal party members of KMT.

In comparison, BMA was modeled after Japan's Imperial Army Academy and founded during the Qing dynasty in 1902 in Zhili (currently Hebei) province near Beijing. Amid the tumultuous pendulum of regime changes in Beijing from 1911 to 1923, actual management and training in BMA was handled by warlords with little or no attachment to a specific regime. BMA's curriculum was divided according to specific military branches, but it lacked any systematic component of political indoctrination or statecraft education. Therefore, BMA cadets were immersed in training in military and warfare but rarely had any sense of national loyalty and legitimacy. Many BMA graduates shifted allegiance between different warlord armies before joining the KMT regime.

Another difference was participation of political organizations affiliated with KMT. Starting in 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek sought to consolidate his power and maintain loyalty of military officers through KMT party apparatuses as well as with a number of political organizations aimed at further indoctrinating young officers and promoting Chiang's political agenda. Prominent political organizations included Blue Shirts society (Lan Yi She), Lixing Society (Li Xing She) and Youth Society (Qing Nian Hui). A significant proportion of WMA graduates became members of these organizations while BMA graduates appeared to be less interested in participating.

Chapter 3 Studies of Whampoa and Baoding Cohorts

Empirical studies of alumni of WMA and BMA will focus on how the two academies provided disciplinary training to produce a cohort of officer corps who occupied key positions in military and civilian apparatuses. Comparatively, Whampoa was founded with Soviet support, was equipped with political indoctrination department and activities, and was under constant control of KMT. On the contrary, Baoding academy experienced transition from dynasty to the Republic and shifted control among several warlords; severe political infighting eventually led to its closure.

This dissertation has gathered newly compiled and published biographies of WMA and BMA graduates. The published biographies cover the first seven cohorts of WMA graduates typically referred to as the "Whampoa Clan"; they were the backbone of KMT army from 1927-1937. The biographies also covered all BMA graduates reaching the rank of general or above in any warlord or national armies. Due to completeness of the WMA alumni records, primacy will be given to WMA alumni, with BMA alumni data included as comparison when necessary. I will conduct a statistical survey of all graduates based on five indicators:

- 1) Basic information including name and places of birth;
- 2) Nature of the position held between 1927 and 1937 (military only, civilian only, or traversed between military/civilian position);
- 3) Loyalty to KMT regime (whether the individual remained loyal to KMT regime throughout, or had served in the opposing army, a warlord army or defected to CCP);
- 4) Participation in formal or informal party/political organizations (whether the individual participated in any sort of KMT party apparatus and/or KMT-affiliated political organizations), and
- 5) Military rank (in three tiers: general officer, field officer or junior officer).

The dissertation shall include tables and graphs that outline the discovery of empirical studies. The tables and graphs shall outline the proportion of alumni who occupied

military positions only versus those who held civilian positions only or traversed between military and civilian posts; who remained loyal to KMT versus those who defected to other warlord militaries or CCP; who participated in party/political organizations of KMT versus those who did not. The dissertation currently hypothesizes that due to the inclusion of political indoctrination organizations in WMA, a higher proportion of WMA alumni took up civilian positions and were more active in KMT-related party and political activities. However, due to the seniority of BMA graduates, they ironically reached higher military ranks than WMA, meaning that maintaining control of the military became a contentious issue for Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT regime.

Incorporating these two distinctive groups of military elites proved to be a challenge. Initially, a delicate balance was maintained by the personal charisma of Chiang Kai-shek, who was simultaneously a former student of BMA, the headmaster of WMA, and the *de facto* supreme leader of KMT regime since 1927. However, internal conflicts quickly embroiled the KMT regime and undermined Chiang's legitimacy, and pitted BMA and WMA graduates against each other. Ironically, BMA graduates occupied even higher positions during the Nanking Decade than WMA graduates despite the latter's political affinity to KMT. The conflict also extended to the battlefield. In the 1929-1930 Central Plains Civil War (*Zhongyuan Da Zhan*) between the KMT regime and disgruntled former warlords, KMT's central army were staffed primarily with WMA graduates and some loyal BMA graduates, while the warlord armies were staffed with many BMA graduates.

Chapter 4 Representative Cases of Whampoa Alumni

This chapter introduces several representative cases of WMA elite alumni who met one of the following standards:

- Successfully transitioned from military to civilian realms and remained outside of state/government posts for the rest of their lives;
- Remained loyal to KMT in either military or civilian posts;
- Oscillated between KMT and CCP (considered as "rebels" to the ROC state).

Please see the attached "representative cases" at the back for reference. Some representative cases of BMA could also be included as comparison. This chapter may also be combined with Chapter 4 to form a larger chapter of empirical studies.

Chapter 5 Comparative Studies of Military Academies in Turkey and Japan

Depending on necessity, the dissertation may also provide a comparative study chapter on military academies and elites of Japan and Turkey.

In Japan, from early 1920s onward military technocrats trained in Army War College (*Rikundai*, for army military officials) and Imperial Japanese Naval Academy (*Kaihei*, for naval officers) began to take over key positions in military and civilian apparatuses (Fukai and Fukui 1992). These technocrats, most of whom considered themselves

fanatically loyal to the Japanese Emperor, favored a more centralized economy and imperial expansion in East Asia and Southeast Asia to augment Japan's industrial might and challenge Western hegemony (Beasley 1991). They also generally despised the risk-aversion attitude of their civilian counterparts (Kitaoka 1993). In the aftermath of political turmoil from 1932 to 1936, and especially after the bloody failed coup on February 26, 1936, military technocrats became far more powerful and subordinated civilian elites in mobilizing the country for "total war" against the West (Berger 1988, Kitaoka 1993, Mimura 2011).

In Turkey, by late 19th century the once powerful Ottoman Empire was threatened both by foreign incursion and domestic secession (Quartaert 2012). Desperate to protect itself, the empire attempted to modernize its military first, unintentionally making the military the hot bed of reform-oriented elites. Young officers in the early 1900s emerged primarily from the Ottoman Military Academy. These young officers established alliance with civilian bureaucrats with similar visions for modernization and became increasingly disgruntled by the absolute monarchy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (Findley 2010). During the turbulent 1910s and 1920s, Mustafa Kemal emerged as the charismatic leader of the Young Turks movement and rallied social elites to form the Republican People's Party (RPP), which took power in the new Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Kayali 2008). While the RPP party-state crumbled in 1954, in the subsequent decades the Turkish military emerged as guardian of the Kemalist political agenda willing to intervene in national politics and retained the "tradition" of initiating coups to depose disobedient civilian leaders (Cizer 2008).

In short, Japanese military academy graduates considered themselves loyal to the Emperor and the state, but were increasingly disgruntled by the civilian government and obsessed with their own version of militaristic expansion. On the other hand, young Ottoman officers graduated from an imperial military academy, yet they remained loyal to a charismatic leader's political agenda of nationalism and state-building. I will survey whether my tentative arguments still stand in the two cases and, if not, explore other factors that could explain the inapplicability of my arguments.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This chapter recaps the theoretical and empirical findings of the previous chapters. By focusing on meso-level institutions such as military academies in state-building, the dissertation argues that military academy as an institution was both built by the state-building process and aided in the state-building process. The dissertation details how elite bondages were forged in educational institutions and how military elites were indoctrinated and disciplined in academies. The dissertation's empirical studies asked whether military elite bondages facilitated or undermined state-building in early-twentieth-century China, with comparative cases from other states.

The dissertation contributes to social science research of war and state-building. It details how macro-level disciplinary traditions and knowledge from organizing and

staffing the military transmitted to the political project of state-building through meso-level social institutions such as military academies.

The dissertation is also the first to utilize newly published materials and systematically examine trajectories and positions of selected cohorts of Whampoa Military Academies. A large number of historical studies of both academies have been published, and in recent years alumni records have gradually been compiled. However, a systematic, statistical survey of alumni records is still lacking. The dissertation will fill in this void and make a major contribution to studies of modern Chinese history.

Finally, the dissertation lays a solid historical ground for analyses of contemporary events. In recent years military coups have erupted in various states such as Thailand, Egypt, and Zimbabwe. Regardless of final results, in these incidences officer corps trained in exhibited extraordinary solidarity, coherence and loyalty to their causes. Since military academies are the primary cradle of professional military officers, examining their operations could generate better understandings about military officers' loyalty or disobedience to a civilian regime. The dissertation highlights the significance of military academies in comparative historical cases and call for more studies of military academies' role in nurturing military elite solidarity in contemporary politics of civil-military relations.