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THE FORMATION OF THE GUOMINDANG YOUTH CORPS : AN ANALYSIS OF ITS ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES

史 Huang Jianli 黃堅立

Introduction

In 1938, amidst clashes between Chinese troops and the Japanese imperial army, the Guomindang (GMD, the Nationalist Party) launched the Three People's Principles Youth Corps (*Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan* 三民主義青年團), which was to serve as the youth wing of the party until its disbandment in 1947. This article aims to seek a better understanding of the Youth Corps by exploring its objectives at the time of its formation.

The Three People's Principles Youth Corps has been relatively neglected in investigations into Republican Chinese history, receiving at most only fleeting mention in wider discussions. Jeffrey Wasserstrom recently registered his dissatisfaction with this omission, although his own work is not directed at filling the gap.¹ The marginal treatment accorded this subject has resulted in an inaccurate overall picture in which two particular aspects of the Youth Corps have been over-emphasized. First, it has often been held that the Corps was specifically designed by the GMD as an instrument to tackle the problem of student political activism. By indoctrinating students with GMD ideology and commandeering leadership positions in student organizations and activities, the Youth Corps is perceived as having performed a custodial function in regulating student involvement in active politics, especially that directed against the party.² The second feature frequently highlighted is that the Corps became enmeshed in bitter factional rivalry with the GMD to the point where it had to be dissolved and its members absorbed into the parent party in 1947.³

Hitherto, the only extended study of the Youth Corps is a chapter by Lloyd Eastman in which he provides an overall institutional history of the organization.⁴ His treatment is certainly more thorough, as he examines the

¹ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student protests in twentieth-century China: the view from Shanghai* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1991), p.169.

² Suzanne Pepper, *Civil war in China: the political struggle, 1945–1949* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1978), pp.43, 60. Jeffrey Wasserstrom's discussion of the youth corps gives similar emphasis. On p.169, for example, he portrays the corps as essentially indulging in "staging loyalist rallies, disrupting radical gatherings, organizing anti-radical student associations, running for election to school councils." See also pp.243–4, 249–52, 256, 260–3.

³ See, for example, Chi Hsi-sheng, *Nationalist China at war: military defeats and political collapse, 1937–45* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1982), pp.210–11.

⁴ Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of destruction: Nationalist China in war and revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1984).

⁵ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, for instance, observes that Eastman “has little to say about what the members of the corps actually did.” See Wasserstrom, *Student protests*, p.169.

Corps’ goals, activities and membership, as well as its conflict and merger with the GMD, and his broad sketches and insights have provided inspiration and the starting point for this present work. There are, however, still several gaps to be filled and depth to be added, including making a closer examination of the original objectives of the Youth Corps at the time of its formation.⁵

This article will concentrate attention on the objectives that underlay the foundation of the Youth Corps, complementing previous studies on the subject so as to provide a more accurate and balanced overall picture. It will demonstrate that the use of the Corps to manage student political activism was not a consideration for the GMD at this early stage; the Corps’ emphasis on the recruitment of students and its efforts to direct them away from politics towards socio-educational pursuits were only subsequent developments. As to the acrimonious factional rivalry which eventually poisoned the relationship between the Corps and the parent party, it will argue that, ironically, the Corps was in fact conceived out of a desire to reform and strengthen the GMD, partly by way of subduing intra-party factional conflicts.

It should be said at once that a youth wing was not a new idea for the GMD when it first launched the Corps in 1938. Proposals for such a body had been under consideration by the party leadership for almost a decade prior to the Second Sino-Japanese War. The issue had in fact been raised before on no less than five different occasions.

Pre-War Proposals and Wartime Formation

⁶ “Outline of a mass movement plan,” in *Zhongyang dangwu yuekan* 1 (Aug. 1928): 1–9.

⁷ “The principle and system of organizing youth,” in *Zhongguo Guomindang Zhongyang Zhixing Weiyuanhui* (hereafter GMD-ZZW) (Mishuchu), ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang dierjie zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui diwuci quanti buiyi jilu* [Minutes of meetings of the Fifth Plenum of the Second Central Executive Committee of the Guomindang] (n.p., Aug. 1928), pp.137–9.

The first indication of interest in forming a national youth organization appears inconspicuously as a single clause inserted among others in a preliminary action plan drawn up on 4 June 1928 by the Committee for the Training of the Masses (CTM) (*Minzhong xunlian weiyuanhui* 民众训练委员会), then a key department within the party headquarters dealing with the interests of young workers, peasants, merchants, and students. As one of its proposed tasks, the CTM called vaguely for the “unification of the nation’s youth organizations.”⁶ The structure and function intended for this organization remains obscure because the proposal was dropped before further details could be worked out. By August of that year, the CTM had changed its mind and begun to argue that instead of forming an all-embracing youth organization, the party should concentrate on guiding the student movement by creating a national student union.⁷ A few months later, however, when the CTM itself was first reorganized and then disbanded as a result of party restructuring, this suggestion, too, was dropped.

Interest resurfaced at the third National Congress of the GMD in March 1929, on which occasion Chiang Kai-shek was attempting to shake up the party organization and tighten his grip. Threatened by political opponents within the GMD, Chiang manoeuvred to dominate the congress by a skilful selection of delegates. As part of this consolidation of power, an attempt was also made to revamp the party constitution, including changing the rules on

party membership and recruitment. Several proposals were submitted at the Congress for the introduction of age limits for party membership, which had hitherto been open to all. After screening various proposals on the subject of constitutional amendment, a congressional sub-committee put to the vote a consolidated plan on the matter recommending party membership on three levels: 'regular' for members aged twenty or over, 'probationary' for recruits of a minimum age of nineteen, and 'elementary' for those aged between sixteen and eighteen through participation in a 'party youth corps' (*dang qingnian tuan*).⁸ Records of the debate itself are not available, but the Congress finally settled for two levels—probationary and regular, the former for those of a minimum age of sixteen and the latter for those at least twenty years old. Probationers were promised regular party membership after they had undergone a year of training and passed a screening test.⁹ The idea of a 'party youth corps' was not pursued.

Discussion was revived at the party's next National Congress held in November 1931. As in the previous one, the matter was brought up in the context of constitutional amendment; the probationary party membership system introduced two and a half years earlier had proved unsatisfactory and suggestions were made to terminate it. As a replacement, it was suggested that a 'youth corps' (*qingnian tuan*) be organized instead for the recruitment and training of those young people between the ages of thirteen and twenty who could demonstrate a belief in the Three People's Principles and were "rich in revolutionary spirit."¹⁰ It is uncertain whether the Japanese invasion of Manchuria two months before had any influence on this matter. It again came to nought, however, the Congress resolving to keep the constitution intact and maintain the system of probationary membership.¹¹

A further attempt to form a youth corps was made in December 1932 at the third plenum of the fourth GMD Central Executive Committee (CEC—the *Zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui* 中央执行委员会). At this plenum a group of party leaders led by Sun Ke 孙科, the son of Sun Yat-sen 孙中山, put forward a motion to reorganize the GMD.¹² Expressing deep disappointment at the friction within the party and the inability of the party machinery as a whole to meet the needs of ordinary people and fulfil the GMD vision, they recommended several reforms. One of these was aimed at building up a pool of new talent by establishing a "Chinese Army of Revolutionary Juveniles" (*Zhongguo gemingshaonian jun* 中国革命少年军) and a "Three People's Principles Youth Corps" (*Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan*) which would be "outside the party structure" but serve as feeder organizations for the recruitment of young party members. Only those with a minimum educational level of upper primary school and aged between twelve and seventeen years, it was suggested, should be recruited into this army. On completion of their training (details of which were yet to be finalized), the best trainees would be selected to join the youth corps, of which three years' membership would then be a prerequisite for admission into the GMD.¹³ This suggestion again met with a cool reception; the plenum ruled that such an army was unnecessary because it would too closely

⁸ GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang disanci quanguo daibiao dabui buiyi jilu* [Minutes of meetings of the Third National Congress of the Guomindang] (n.p., Apr. 1929), pp.146–8.

⁹ Ibid. See the amendment of the GMD party constitution at the Third National Congress, in GMD-ZZW (Dangshihui), ed., *Geming wenxian* [Documents on revolution] (Taipei: Zhongyang Wenwu Gongyingshe, 1953–) (hereafter *GW*), vol.70, pp.93–4.

¹⁰ See the resolution on not amending the party constitution at the Fourth National Congress, *GW*, vol.76, pp.135–7.

¹¹ Ibid. For the continued practice of the probationary membership system, see GMD-ZZW (Zuzhibu), ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang yubei dangyuan xunlian fang'an* [Training programme for probationary party members of the Guomindang] (n.p., Feb. 1933), p.75.

¹² Sun Ke and another twenty-six unidentified plenary members, "Proposal on the implementation of the reorganization of our party," discussed on 20 Dec. 1932, *GW*, vol.79, pp.285–91. Also available in Sun Ke, *Sun Ke wenji* [Collected works of Sun Ke] (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1970), pp. 1185–9.

¹³ Ibid. The version as printed in Sun Ke's book has corps membership required for two years instead of three before admission to the party. The original document being inaccessible, it has not been possible to determine which version is correct.

¹⁴ "Proposal to train the party's youth," in GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), *Zhongguo Guomindang diwujie zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui diyici quanti huiyi jilu* [Minutes of meetings of the First Plenum of the Fifth Central Executive Committee of the Guomindang] (n.p., Dec. 1935), p.52.

¹⁵ "Outline on the future tasks of the party," *ibid.*, pp.37, 40-1, 45-6.

duplicate the function of existing organizations such as the Scouts, while the idea of forming a youth corps was also effectively buried by a resolution that passed it on to the Standing Committee of the CEC for further consideration.

The last pre-war attempt to form a youth corps was made in connection with the training of the party's younger members, and was related to the tide of interest in fascism which had begun to sweep through the GMD leadership in the early 1930s. In December 1935, at the first plenum of the fifth GMD CEC, six members jointly called on the party to emulate the successful examples of party youth-training in Communist Russia, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. As well as recommending the appointment of a three-man committee to take charge of the training of party youth and assume control over the Scouts and the military training of students, they called for the organization of a "Guomintang Youth Corps" (*Guomintang qingnian tuan* 国民党青年团). Only through these measures, they argued, could "a new life for the Guomintang" be assured.¹⁴ The full plenum neither discussed nor voted on this submission, however, because the sub-committee which screened all proposals on party affairs had chosen to ignore it. In the consolidated plan for future party work drawn up by this sub-committee and approved by the plenum, the section on "Youth Movement Methods" made no mention of the call for a youth corps, and merely repeated the old rhetoric with the usual stress on the danger of the youth movement being misdirected and the need to cultivate a spirit of nationalism, scientific knowledge, and moral values.¹⁵

Figure 1

Chiang Kai-shek reiterating his determination to fight to the end (18 January 1938) (Source: Hsu Long-bsuen and Chang Ming-kai, comp., History of the Sino-Japanese war, 1937-1945, trans. Wen Ha-hsiung (Taipei: Chungwu Chubanshe, 1971))



Of these five early attempts to form a youth corps, therefore, only the first was directly focussed on setting up an organization for students and working youth; the rest were related to the issue of party reform, for the purposes either of political manoeuvring or of addressing technical inadequacies in the recruitment and training of party members. Each of these pre-war attempts had been either rejected outright or simply ignored by the GMD leadership. It was not until after China found herself at war with Japan that a GMD youth corps materialized.

The outbreak of hostilities saw Japanese forces sweeping rapidly into North China and the principal coastal cities. The GMD fought a number of major battles in an attempt to stem the Japanese advance, but its overall strategy was to trade territory for time while pulling back its armed forces, party personnel, government departments and industrial machinery, deep into the Sichuan basin in the south-west. In March 1938, amidst fierce fighting between Chinese and Japanese troops, the GMD publicly announced its intention to form the Three People's Principles Youth Corps, and three months later the Corps was officially launched with a considerable fanfare.

The initial conception must have occurred, and the preliminary stage of planning this youth corps have commenced, some months before the public announcement of March 1938. To date, a single sentence in the official draft history of the Corps stands as the only documentary evidence that the GMD leadership had begun to consider the idea seriously as early as May 1937, some two months before the outbreak of war.¹⁶ While Lloyd Eastman accepts this, several other accounts put the conception of the Corps some time after the commencement of hostilities.¹⁷ In an early wartime speech, one-time acting Corps secretary-general Zhu Jiahua 朱家驊 suggested that the idea originated in the “autumn” of 1937,¹⁸ while Kang Ze 康澤, a prominent Corps leader who played an important role in the early planning as well as the later organization of the Corps, recalled that it was in the middle of September that GMD leaders began discussion on the matter,¹⁹ and Bao Zunpeng 包遵彭, a middle-level Corps leader, stated that planning started as late as November 1937.²⁰ Considering these varying accounts, and the fact that there had been at least five previous failures to push the idea through, the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps is most likely to have been conceived in the early months *after* the first military clash at Marco Polo Bridge in July 1937.

Objectives Underlying the Corps’ Formation

The link between the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the formation of the GMD Youth Corps was more than chronological. The eruption of war was in fact the single decisive factor which convinced the GMD leadership of the need for a such a corps and pushed it into launching one. To begin with, the threat posed by the rapidly advancing Japanese army and the massive retreat inland of Chinese military forces and party and government officials, as well as civilian refugees, had triggered the demand for an efficient national command centre. By virtue of its premier political position, the GMD was the logical choice to play this leading role in the war of resistance. Doubts were, however, raised as to whether the party in its present shape would be able to coordinate the war effort effectively.

By the time war broke out the GMD had been in power for ten years, and it had slowly degenerated into a corrupt and ineffectual organization with low morale. Since its seizure of power, supposedly in accordance with Sun Yat-sen’s ideals as expressed in his *Outline of National Reconstruction* (“Jian-guo dagang” of April 1924), the GMD had proclaimed a period of ‘party rule’ or political tutelage over China. The underlying rationale was that since the Chinese people had had the opportunity for only limited political experience after centuries of absolute monarchical rule, an interval of close political guidance was needed before constitutional and democratic government could be successfully implemented. In theory, the party was to be the supreme force in the country, temporarily exercising sovereignty over the people on their behalf. In reality, however, the effective influence of the GMD went no further than the doorstep of its party headquarters; below that

¹⁶ Sanmin zhuyi qingniantuan—zhongyang tuanbu (hereafter SZQ-ZT), ed., *Sanmin zhuyi qingniantuan tuanshi zhibiao diyiji chugao* [The first draft of volume one of Historical Materials on the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps], pt.1 (Nanjing, 1946) (hereafter SZQZDC), p.1 (reprinted in *GW*, vol.62, p.1).

¹⁷ Eastman, *Seeds of destruction*, p.91. See also idem, “New insights into the nature of the Nationalist regime,” in *Republican China* 9.2 (Feb. 1984): 15; Wasserstrom is equally wrong in claiming that the corps “was founded in 1939” (*Student protests*, p.169). The public announcement was made in March 1938 and the official launching took place three months later.

¹⁸ Zhu Jiahua, *Qingnian tuanwuzhi jinzhuan* [The development of Youth Corps affairs] (n.p., May 1939), p.12.

¹⁹ Kang Ze, “Sanmin zhuyi qingniantuan chengli de jingguo” [The process of forming the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps], *Wenshi ziliao* (hereafter WZ) 40 (Nov. 1963): 197; Chen Shaoxiao, *Hei wanglu* [Record of the black net], reprint ed. (Hong Kong: Zhicheng Chubanshe, 1980), p.60, has a very similar account. This is not surprising as this work was largely based on confessions of GMD cadres captured during the civil war of 1945–49, including that of Kang Ze.

²⁰ Bao Zunpeng, *Zhongguo qingnian yundong shi* [History of the Chinese youth movement], reprint ed. (Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1974), p.168.

²¹ See the various proposals and resolutions in GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), *Zhongguo Guomindang dierjie zhongyang zhibing weiyuanhui diwuci quanti buiyi jilu*, pp.56–7, 78, 159–63; *GW*, vol.79, pp.97–8.

²² Patrick Cavendish, "The 'New China' of the Kuomintang," in *Modern China's search for a political form*, ed. Jack Grey (London: Oxford University Press [under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs], 1969), pp.158–64.

²³ Another 43.44% were reported to have involved themselves merely in propaganda work. The remaining small proportion of party members was spread over important party tasks like organization, training, and mass movements. See GMD-ZZW, ed., *Dangyuan tongji* [Statistics on Party members] (n.p., May 1930), no pagination.

²⁴ *The Amerasia papers: a clue to the catastrophe of China*, vol.1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), p.236. The estimate here has been attributed to Chen Lifu.

²⁵ Quoted in Eastman, *Seeds of destruction*, p.89.

²⁶ Lloyd Eastman, *The abortive revolution: China under Nationalist rule, 1927–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), passim; and idem, "Nationalist China during the Nanking decade, 1927–1937," in *The Cambridge history of China*, ed. D. Twitchett and J. K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978–), vol.13, *Republican China, 1912–1949*, pt 2, ed. J. K. Fairbank and A. Feuerwerker, pp.134–41.

²⁷ Joseph Fewsmith, *Party, state, and local elites in Republican China: merchant organizations and politics in Shanghai, 1890–1930* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), ch.7, "The Nanking regime as a case of authoritarian rule," and conclusion, "Nationalist China and the problem of public authority."

²⁸ See the long exchanges of views between Lloyd Eastman, Joseph Fewsmith and Bradley Geisert in *Republican China* 9.2 (Feb. 1984): 8–39.

level, 'party rule' was only rhetorical. Chiang Kai-shek himself was partly responsible for this situation. At the beginning of his regime, various proposals were made for local party branches to exercise direct political control over local government at their respective levels. Chiang himself, however, came out strongly in favour of protecting the government administration from party interference.²¹ In a study of this downgrading of 'party rule', Patrick Cavendish concluded that "the more partisan approach to party-state relations was rejected [and] the party's role below the Centre was henceforth to be restricted to propaganda' in the widest sense of the term."²²

One natural effect of denying any real political function to the body of the GMD instead concentrating power at its head was a degeneration in the party machinery. Illustrative of this was the fact that taking up party membership soon became merely a symbolic gesture or a way of enhancing personal status and influence, rather than an act of positive political commitment. A survey of GMD party membership in October 1929 noted that as many as 45.37% of party members had never participated in party work.²³ By 1937, as much as 90% of the total of two million party members were reported to be inactive.²⁴ GMD leaders themselves were concerned about the situation, and on the eve of the war, Chiang Kai-shek bluntly warned that the GMD "has already become virtually an empty shell, without any real substance; the form of the party persists, but its spirit has almost completely died out."²⁵

Yet when war broke out, Chiang had little choice but to resort to the party organization for leadership in the war effort. The downgrading of party rule during the Nanjing decade was followed by some efforts at building state institutions, but the end results were generally disappointing. Government and state organs expanded in number and function but inefficiency, nepotism, and corruption paralysed the Nationalist administration. Moreover, the distinction between party and state remained blurred and fluid as there was a great deal of overlap among staff at the middle and higher levels of office. As a result, scholars like Eastman still at times uses the terms 'GMD party' and 'GMD government' interchangeably, and the phrase 'Nationalist regime' to cover the two tangled components.²⁶ A recent study by Joseph Fewsmith also hints at the lack of success in state-building and even suggests that the outgrowths from the decline in the party organization were instead: first, the "erection of non-functioning corporatist structures" (comprising interest associations like the ineffectual Shanghai Chamber of Commerce); second, the rise of "factional structure" in politics and business which cut across all sectors of the party-state; and third, the enhanced importance of Chiang as the supreme and indispensable arbiter of power.²⁷ Fewsmith's views, however, are not widely accepted and the extent of state-building remains an inconclusive issue within the larger debate on the nature of the Guomindang.²⁸

However that may be, the downgrading of party rule should not be exaggerated. Cavendish's landmark article refers only to levels below the 'Centre'. At the national level of policy-making and pronouncement, party

and state were never divorced. In Cavendish's own words, "the more partisan approach to party-state relations was therefore rejected on every count *except at the Centre itself*."²⁹ Party tutelage remained a centrepiece of GMD ideology. The authority of party plenary and executive organs at the top level of party headquarters remained sacrosanct in Nationalist rule, and when the unprecedented crisis of a full-scale invasion threatened to destroy the GMD's control over the modernized eastern seaboard of China, it was therefore not surprising that Chiang should have turned to the party organization rather than to the state administration to lead the war effort. To ensure that the GMD would now perform, he resolved to revitalize its authority and organization with a re-emphasis on party rule, a new membership drive, and a restructuring of the party machinery. Among the many rejuvenating measures was the launching of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps. The intention was for this newly established Youth Corps to assist with political reformation in two ways: first, by providing a new instrument to integrate the diverse intra-party factions, and second, through the infusion of fresh blood into the party.

Factionalism had been one of the most severe problems plaguing the GMD during its first decade in power.³⁰ The death in 1925 of its leader Sun Yat-sen had left the party with no clear-cut successor and led to the diffusion of authority among several competing personalities. Hence, leaders like Chiang Kai-shek, Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 and Hu Hanmin 胡汉民 all had their own groups of loyal followers. The problem was compounded by the fact that numerous warlords who had submitted to GMD authority in 1926–28 retained much of their territorial and politico-military influences, and they often offered Chiang's factional opponents a safe haven for retreat or even alliances of convenience. Over the years Chiang's faction grew stronger, and by 1932 had become the dominant group. However, Chiang's camp was far from homogeneous and was itself subdivided into at least three major factions.

Of these, the Political Study Clique was the least organized. It comprised a diverse range of individuals who were experienced bureaucrats, militarists, bankers and industrialists, who, while influential in their respective fields, made no effort to set up a formal organization and recruit followers. The other two factions, the CC Clique and the Blue Shirts, were better organized and were the major players in intra-GMD factional fightings. The CC Clique, through its control of the GMD's Central Organization Department, came to exert a strong influence over civilian party members and in areas such as provincial and city administration, as well as banking, education, and journalism. The Blue Shirts were essentially led by military officers who had earlier been taught by, or had associated with, Chiang as commandant of the Whampoa Military Academy. Its strength of its membership lay in its control of the military and police forces, and it later achieved a measure of influence in the world of arts and literature.

Based on particular uniting factors such as local affinity, family links, 'school ties', sworn brotherhoods and patron-client relations, these various

²⁹ Cavendish, "'New China' of the Kuomintang," p.163 (emphasis added).

³⁰ The following discussion is essentially based on Tien Hung-mao, "Factional politics in Kuomintang China, 1928–1937: an interpretation," in *China at the crossroads: Nationalists and Communists, 1927–1949*, ed. F. Gilbert Chan (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1980), pp.19–35; Eastman, *Abortive revolution*, pp.303–6; Chi Hsi-sheng, *Nationalist China at war*, pp.199–205.

³¹ Hu Menghua, "Guomintang CC pai de qianqian houhou" [The whole story of the Guomintang CC Clique], in Tianjin WZ (a local version of the main journal *Wenshi ziliao*) 6 (Dec. 1979): 202–3, and "CC waiwei zuzhi Chengshe shimo" [The whole story of Chengshe, a front organization of the CCL], WZ 14 (Apr. 1961): 163–5; Chen Shaoxiao, *Heiwanglu*, p.296; my interview with Chen Lifu on 6 Aug. 1983.

³² Chen Dunzheng, *Dongluan de huiyi* [Memoir of a turbulent era] (Taipei: Yuanxia Shushe, 1979), p.61; Deng Wenyi, *Maoxian jannan ji* [A record of braving dangers and enduring difficulties] (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1973), pp.109–10.

³³ GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), *Zhongguo Guomintang diwuji zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui disici quanti huiyi jilu* [Minutes of meetings of the Fourth Plenum of the Fifth Central Executive Committee of the Guomintang] (n.p., Apr. 1938), p.5. Wang subsequently defected and went on to help the Japanese invaders set up a puppet government in the occupied areas of China.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See the constitution of the youth corps first announced on 17 July 1938, in Ye Suzhong et al., *Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan* [The Three People's Principles Youth Corps] (Chongqing, Feb. 1939), pp.47–54.

factions were concerned little with differences over ideology or policy, but rather with a bitter rivalry over positions and influence in government and business. Bidding for power became an end in itself. In the process, nepotism and corruption became widespread and both the party and state organs of the GMD failed to develop into institutionalized, effective decision-making bodies, instead becoming paralyzed. If Chiang had not directly encouraged such factionalism in order to maintain his premier position through playing the role of arbiter or mediator, he had certainly tolerated it before the war.

Given the outbreak of war and the pressing need to revamp the party apparatus, however, Chiang decided to take a stand against this paralyzing factionalism. At the very time the formation of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps was announced, an unexpected attempt to put an end to factionalism was simultaneously made, beginning with the dissolution of the two most prominent and well-organized factions. In April 1938, Chen Guofu 陈果夫, his younger brother Chen Lifu 陈立夫, and other principal leaders of the CC Clique convened a gathering of about four to five hundred followers in Wuhan, the temporary wartime capital, and made the shock announcement of the dissolution of their clique's organizations. There were heated arguments and objections from some of the members in attendance, but Chen Guofu insisted that the decision made by the top party leadership to disband was final and not open to debate.³¹ Two months later, members of the Blue Shirts gathered in a Wuchang secondary school and resolved to dissolve their faction's subsidiary organizations.³²

Moreover, concurrently with the setting up of the Youth Corps, the party's deputy leader Wang Jingwei co-sponsored a party resolution prohibiting the establishment of sub-organizations within the GMD.³³ Together with Chiang Kai-shek, Wang also pushed through a party resolution laying down six basic principles for the structure of the Youth Corps, one of which insisted that the Corps must be an "open" organization.³⁴ The explicit rejection of a secret mode of operation was an additional safety measure designed to prevent the Corps from degenerating into a tool of behind-the-scenes factional politics. Disciplinary rules against factionalism were also clearly spelled out in the Corps' constitution. Corps members were constitutionally prohibited from participating in other political parties and factions, with the exception of the parent party, the GMD. They were also forbidden to form "sub-organizations" within the Corps, and any members caught "discriminating, slandering or framing" their fellows or "engaging in internal strife" were to face stern disciplinary sanctions.³⁵ Although things turned out differently, it is apparent from these various developments and measures that the Youth Corps was initially conceived partly as a body which could integrate the various intra-party factions.

Apart from the elimination of factionalism, the induction of youth through the formation of the GMD Youth Corps would, it was hoped, serve as another means of reforming the party. From its inception to its end, the Corps was perceived in varying degrees by many GMD leaders as a new driving force and a means of injecting fresh blood. The term 'new cor-

puscles' (*xin xibao* 新细胞) to describe youth was first used by Chiang Kai-shek in his nation-wide message launching the Youth Corps. It was not then used in the context of a relationship with the Guomindang,³⁶ but Chiang himself made it clear in his later speeches and writings that he had organized the Corps to “give a new life to the Guomindang,” and had even likened the GMD to the nation’s main artery and members of the Corps to fresh corpuscles within that artery.³⁷

An indication that this injection of fresh blood was more than rhetorical was the amendment of the party constitution—only the third since its promulgation in 1924—at the emergency Congress of March 1938, which abolished in a single stroke the two-tier party membership structure introduced in 1929. Under that structure, probationary membership had been granted to new recruits of a minimum age of sixteen, with ordinary membership only being conferred after the elapse of at least a year. Earlier attempts had already been made to change this system, which had not been working well. The 1938 constitutional amendment saw the insertion of a clause on the establishment of the Youth Corps in place of the section on two-tier membership, and pointed to the important role the Corps would henceforth be expected to play in inducting and training a new pool of talent from which the party might later recruit new members.³⁸

The actual mechanism of GMD party recruitment from its Youth Corps was never explicitly spelled out, however, despite an attempt to do so by Chen Lifu and a few others. In a proposal submitted to the fourth plenum of the fifth GMD CEC they suggested that the Corps be established on the military pattern of platoons, companies, battalions and regiments, and its training divided into three periods, each two years in length—‘preliminary’, ‘intermediate’ and ‘party army’ (*dangjun* 党军). Selection of recruits for the party would only be made in the third training period, considered by them to constitute “the foundation of party membership” and “the best source of party recruits.”³⁹ For some reason the plenary meeting avoided making a decision on this proposal, merely referring it to Chiang, and in the end, no rules on the mechanism by which the party would draw its future recruits from the Youth Corps were laid down in the first year of its existence. The postponement of regulations concerning this important aspect subsequently led to ambiguity, and ultimately resulted in the failure of the whole rejuvenation concept.

With regard to the attracting of fresh young recruits, it is necessary to explain why the connection between the GMD and the Corps was deliberately de-emphasized at the latter’s launching. When GMD leaders such as Chen Cheng 陈诚 were touring the battle zones in the early part of the war, they had often encountered criticisms such as “the GMD has no sacrificial spirit and is no longer revolutionary,” and “it is the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] and not the GMD which is leading the battle against the Japanese,”⁴⁰—a reflection of the poor image of the GMD that had been in circulation for quite a while and had contributed to the decision to reform it. Conscious efforts were thus made to enhance the appeal of the Corps to

³⁶ Message issued on 16 June 1938, *GW*, vol.62, p.19. The absence of reference to the GMD in this entire message is discussed below.

³⁷ See, for example, his speech on “The youth movement and the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps,” at the first National Congress of the Youth Corps, 29 Mar. 1943, in *GW*, vol.62, pp.116–17; Chiang Kai-shek, *China’s destiny* (English editions: Wang Chung-hui, trans. [New York: Macmillan, 1947], pp.214, 220, and Philip Jaffe, notes and commentary [London: Dennis Dobson, 1947], pp. 216, 223).

³⁸ See the third constitutional amendment at the emergency party Congress in March 1938, *GW*, vol.70, pp.117–18, 133–4.

³⁹ “Proposal on the organization of the Youth Corps,” submitted by Chen Lifu, Luo Jialun, Hong Lanyou, Yu Jingtang and Chen Jicheng, in GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), *Zhongguo Guomindang diwujie zhongyang zhi-xing weiyuanhui disici quanti huiyi jilu*, pp.9, 25–6.

⁴⁰ Chen Cheng, *Sanmin zhuyi qingnian-tuan zhi xingzhi ji qi zhanwang* [The nature and outlook of the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps] (n.p., Apr. 1939), pp.35–6.

⁴¹ *GW*, vol.62, pp.16–22. In this message, Chiang merely charged the GMD youth corps with three vaguely-defined objectives: “to ensure the success of reconstruction,” “to facilitate the concentration of new national revolutionary strength,” and “to assist in the concrete realization of the Three People’s Principles.”

⁴² SZQ-ZT, ed., *Dang yu tuan de guanxi* [The relationship between the Party and the Corps] (n.p., May 1940), p.51.

⁴³ Kang Ze, “Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan chengli de jingguo,” pp.197–8; Chen Shaoxiao, *Heiwanglu*, pp.63–4.

⁴⁴ “The rallying of youth during the war of resistance,” *GW*, vol.62, p.2.

⁴⁵ “Proposal on the organization of the Youth Corps,” GMD-ZZW (Minshuchu), *Zhongguo Guomindang diuwujie zhongyang zhibing weiyuanhui disici quanti huiyi jilu*, pp.25–6.

youth by publicly distancing it from its parent party. There was, for example, not a single mention of the GMD throughout Chiang Kai-shek’s lengthy inaugural message of June 1938 which contained over four thousand characters and called upon all patriotic youth to join the Corps.⁴¹

Moreover, despite its organizational link with the GMD, it is no accident that the official title of the Corps remained merely the “Three People’s Principles Youth Corps.” Attempts to prefix it with “Guomindang” were made but deliberately quashed, the official reason given being that omitting the name of the party would broaden the appeal of the Corps to those not necessarily committed to the GMD.⁴² Yet underlying this was surely the concern that the negative image of the party might put potential Corps recruits off.⁴³ There were attempts by some to do away even with the prefix “Three People’s Principles,” the official ideology of the GMD.⁴⁴ Others within the party managed to ward off these attempts, however, by arguing that even the CCP had declared publicly that it too would abide by the Three People’s Principles as the “highest guiding principle in the war of resistance against Japan.” The dropping of the prefix “Guomindang” was considered sufficiently accommodating, and a line was drawn to protect the premier role of the party and its ideology.

Added to this dispute over an appropriate name was the unusual suggestion that, in order to “raise the spirit of youth” and “facilitate its rallying,” the word “revolution” (*geming* 革命) should be included to form the full title of “Three People’s Principles Revolutionary Youth Corps.”⁴⁵ Either through fear of public mockery or through concern over the danger of unnecessarily fanning revolutionary fervour, the GMD leadership eventually refused to endorse that idea.

In summary, it would appear that the GMD’s original objectives in forming the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps in 1938 were to use it as a tool to reform the parent party by providing a forum in which diverse GMD factions could work together and by acting as a medium through which fresh talent could be inducted.

Other Possible Objectives Eliminated

In trying to unravel the tangle of evidence and argument surrounding the establishment of the Youth Corps, however, other possible motives emerge. Certain evidence suggests that the Corps was intended to replace the party in its entirety. Other evidence invites speculation that it was designed as part of a general liberalization of mass political activity. And a third possibility cannot be eliminated—that the Corps was set up for the recruitment and disciplining of the waves of refugee students driven from the towns and cities of northern and coastal China by the Japanese invasion—without at least some consideration of the evidence.

Following the outbreak of war, Chiang himself openly criticized the GMD party machinery on several occasions, the harshness of his criticism and his apparent despair over the ineffectiveness of the party sometimes giving the

Figure 2

Chen Cheng, the first secretary-general of the Three People’s Principles Youth Corps
(Source: Huang Jishu, *Daduikang* [The big power struggle], vol.1 (Hong Kong: Zhongyuan Chubanshe, 1991)



erroneous impression both to his contemporaries and to later historians that he had given up all hope in the party and “actually anticipated, during the first year or so of the Corps’ existence, that it would replace the Kuomintang as the leading Nationalist revolutionary organization.”⁴⁶

Occasional outbursts of criticism by political leaders against their own parties are not unusual in politics, where the image of an honest and hard-hitting leader can be exploited to advantage. Both Chiang and Sun Yat-sen before him habitually spoke out against the shortcomings of the party they led. Indeed, Chiang tended to lay the blame on the party machinery in almost every major political crisis, and faced with a full-scale Japanese invasion, he could be expected to lash out at the GMD.

It is notable, however, that even at his harshest, as in April 1938 when attacking party members for being “spiritually lax,” “empty and weak,” “undisciplined,” “spiritless,” “practically lost,” and “lacking in training and a sense of duty,” Chiang still believed party reform could be achieved:

Since we know what the shortcomings of the party are, if we could only put aside our errors, offer salutary advice and carry out thoroughgoing reform, we would once again enjoy progress and development when this period of danger and difficulty is over. Success or failure, prosperity or ruin—everything under heaven is purely man-made.⁴⁷

More important than vain hopes was the series of concrete proposals he then prodded party members to accept as measures urgently required for the reform of the party,⁴⁸ of which the launching of the Corps was just one. Others included the revamping of party executive organs from the headquarters downwards. There would be fewer departments and, apart from a few permanent top-level posts, the existing system of salaried positions for the remaining party cadres would be phased out. There would be budget cuts, and party membership fees would be significantly raised and their collection firmly enforced. Instead of relying on party posts for their livelihood, lower-level cadres were to maintain their own independent jobs—such as school teacher or factory worker—outside the party structure, and help the party voluntarily by organizing secret party cells in their work-places. The revival of such cells was deemed by Chiang to be a subtle but important means of forging close ties between the party and the general public, as well as a means of restoring the party members’ sense of duty and voluntary service. He also proposed a tightening of discipline by a more thorough screening of applications for party membership and cadre posting, as well as a revamping of supervisory organs and procedures.

Despite the feeling within the party leadership that the GMD had become ineffective and corrective measures ought to be taken, therefore, there was never any serious attempt to replace the party in its entirety. To judge from Chiang’s optimism and the numerous efforts to improve the party machinery itself, it is clear that the Youth Corps could not have been formed with the object of replacing the GMD.

As for the GMD Youth Corps’ being launched as part of a liberalization of mass political participation, little genuine effort was in fact made by the

⁴⁶ Lloyd Eastman’s views as expressed in “New insights,” p.16. My attention was first drawn to this as a pre-publication paper presented at a conference in Hong Kong on the “Nanking Decade” in August 1983. There is a longer discussion in Eastman’s *Seeds of destruction*, pp.92–4, in which he appears to reverse his previous judgement. An occasional note of uncertainty can, however, still be detected, as on p.94: “Whereas [Chiang] had originally conceived [the Corps] as assuming a leading—if not *the* leading—political role in the Nationalist regime, he now reduced it” (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Speech of 8 Apr. 1938, in GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), *Zhongguo Guomindang diwu jie zhongyang zhibixing weiyuanhui disci quanti huiyi jilu*, pp.39–53.

⁴⁸ The following discussion is based on *ibid.*, pp.17–19, 22–3, 39–53; “Proposal on improving Party affairs and correcting the relationship between the Party and the Government,” GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu), ed., *Dangguo faqiu jiyao* [Abstracts of laws and regulations on Party affairs], reprint ed. (n.p., Apr. 1942), pp.23–9; and *GW*, vol.79, pp.445–7, 449–51.

⁴⁹ "Proposal on *baojia zhidu* and how to use it to train the masses for local self-government and aiding the resistance," passed on 31 Mar. 1938 at the emergency congress. *GW*, vol.76, p.326.

⁵⁰ "The organization and work programme of the Wartime Reinforcement Association" (Oct. 1937), *Zhanshi faqiu buibian* [Collection of wartime laws and regulations], ed. Junshi Weiyuanhui (Zhengzhibu) (n.p., June 1938), pp.279–81.

⁵¹ "Higher education in Fujian province during the previous five years," *GW*, vol.60, pp.387–8. Similar situations existed in Changsha and Hunan; see *Zhongyang ribao*, various issues dating from July 1937 to Dec. 1938.

⁵² "Vertical linkages for mass organizations," passed on 7 Apr. 1938, *GW*, vol.79, pp.447–8. Privately, however, Chen Lifu admitted that the internal debate over this issue was still unsettled in March 1939. See his "Minyun shicha gongzuo de fangfa he taidu" [The method and approach in the supervision of mass movements] in *Zhidao tongxun* 8–9 (Mar. 1939): 1.

GMD to move towards this end. In spite of the need to mobilize support for the war effort, the GMD basically remained apprehensive about mass participation in politics. When hundreds of civil organizations sprang up spontaneously at the beginning of the war to protest against the Japanese invasion and offer support, the GMD initially appeared eager to step out and assume a degree of control over this spontaneous development. It criticized itself for achieving too little in its past mass movement policy,⁴⁹ set up the Resistance Reinforcement Association (*Kangzhan houyuan hui* 抗战后援会),⁵⁰ established countless courses to train cadres for mass-movement activities,⁵¹ and even gave in to the demand to set up 'umbrella' mass organizations right up to the national level.⁵²

Yet beneath these gestures of accommodation, there were signs that the GMD felt sensitive and insecure about this kind of political activism, especially during the early months of the war. On 6 February 1938, for instance, acting on a personal order from Chiang Kai-shek, the Ministry of Education secretly ordered all schools not to allow any speeches to be made or discussions held without first subjecting all those involved to careful screening, regardless of their credentials.⁵³ Similarly, when the Student Federation for the Salvation of China (*Zhongguo xuesheng jiuguo lianbehui* 中国学生救国联合会) wrote to the Ministry of Education seeking permission to hold, and sponsorship of, its second congress on 20 March 1938 to debate the issue of "saving-the-nation-through-study" it received a cool reception, the Ministry replying that such a gathering was unnecessary, and that wartime students had only the narrow option of either continuing their studies or joining the military or para-military services.⁵⁴

A limited commitment to political mobilization was also reflected in the unwillingness of the GMD to endorse the activities of many mass organizations formed spontaneously at the beginning of the war. Numerous wartime laws and regulations were promulgated by the GMD supposedly with the

Figure 3

Chiang Kai-shek inspecting units of the Youth Corps, October 1944
(Source: Hsu and Chang, *History of the Sino-Japanese war*)



intention of rallying and leading these mass organizations. In reality, these laws and regulations were often used to deny them official recognition and, on occasion, to outlaw them. In July 1938, when members of the People's Political Council discussed the need for the GMD to relax its control and maximize its use of mass organizations in the war effort, a heated dispute developed over the legislative aspects of regulating such bodies. It was noted that although many had repeatedly attempted to register with the relevant authorities in accordance with the regulations, permission was seldom granted.⁵⁵ Frustration over this was well-expressed in an appeal to the council by the National Student Union:

Clause 26 of the Programme of Resistance and Reconstruction states that sufficient legal protection will be given to speeches, publications, rallies and organizations during the war Three months have passed since its promulgation, yet we have heard of no patriotic, salvatory mass organization having been formally approved for registration This has not only affected our work and the development of mass movements, but it also makes a mockery [of the Programme].⁵⁶

This kind of hindrance on a procedural level was only part of the story. At times, existing legislation governing the registration of mass organizations was even used to smoke out and crush leftists and their alleged sympathizers. In late July 1938, for example, the provincial headquarters of the Guiyang GMD ruled that all mass organizations had to register by 1 August. On 28 July, the local communist-led (Guiyang) National Liberation Vanguard (*Minzu jiefang xianfengdui* 民族解放先锋队) submitted an application for registration with a name-list of thirty cadres, but the GMD officials demanded the full membership list. The leader of the Vanguard complied and submitted 160 names. GMD party officials then called for a meeting with all the members of the Vanguard on the afternoon of 13 August. Those who turned up were arrested on the spot and the Vanguard officially outlawed with immediate effect.⁵⁷ This was not an isolated incident, but part of an overall offensive against leftist-oriented mass organizations which had sprung up since the outbreak of war. At Wuhan, the (Wuhan) National Liberation Vanguard, the Youth National Salvation Corps (*Qingnian jiuguotuan* 青年救国团) and the Ant Society (*Yishe* 蚁社) were among those disbanded in August 1938.⁵⁸ To the GMD, the threat of influence and infiltration posed by the CCP was all too real to risk any liberalization of mass political activism, and there is certainly no indication that the Youth Corps was formed to take on such a risk.

The third possible alternative explanation for the formation of the Youth Corps may also be disregarded. Although there was the serious problem of waves of refugee students at the outbreak of fighting, the Corps was not originally intended to be a solution to this problem. During the initial few months of the war, thousands of students were indeed forced out of secondary schools and tertiary institutions as many of these were either closed down or relocated away from the war zones of northern and coastal China. Of the 108 institutions of higher learning, 94 had to be closed or

⁵³ Letter from Chiang Kai-shek to Chen Lifu, 6 Feb. 1938, and circular from the Ministry of Education despatched 12 Feb. 1938, Nanjing Second Historical Archives, file 5-2/1420.

⁵⁴ Letter from Student Federation for the Salvation of China, 15 Mar. 1938, and reply from Ministry official Wu Junsheng, 19 Mar. 1938, Nanjing Second Historical Archives, File 5-2/1501.

⁵⁵ Guomin Canzhenghui Shiliao Bianweihui, ed., *Guomin canzhenghui shiliao* [Historical documents on the People's Political Council] (Taipei, 1962), p.32; Yan'an Shishi Wenti Yanjiuhui, ed., *Kangzhanzhong de zhongguo zhengzhi* [Politics of China during the war] (n.p., Dec. 1940), pp.158-9.

⁵⁶ Yan'an Shishi Wenti Yanjiuhui, *Zhongguo zhengzhi*, pp.151-2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.398.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.292-3; Guo Moruo, *Moruo zizhuan* [Autobiography of Guo Moruo], (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1978), vol.4, pp.116-17.

⁵⁹ "Education in China since 1937," *GW*, vol.58, pp.60–1.

⁶⁰ Letter from the GMD-ZZW (Mishuchu) to the Ministry of Education, 18 May 1939, *Zhongguo Kexueyuan Lishi Sansuo*, ed., "Zhongguo xiandai zhengzhishi ziliao hui-bian" [Collection of documents on the modern political history of China], vol.3, p. 88, (unpublished mimeograph, contents extracted from Ministry of Education Records [5], 1729).

⁶¹ When interviewed by me in August 1983, two prominent GMD leaders, Chen Lifu and Huang Jilu, maintained that this was a major reason for the formation of the Youth Corps.

⁶² "Methods to unify the management of various levels of educational institutions by government agencies," issued on 20 Jan 1938, *Jiaoyubugongbao* 10.1–3 (Mar. 1938): 9; "Methods of the Ministry of Education for the management of students retreating from war zones," Ministry of Education order #660, 25 Feb. 1938, *ibid.*, p.17.

⁶³ Guomin Zhengfu (Jiaoyubu), ed., *Zuijin jiaoyu tongji jianbian* [A concise edition of the latest educational statistics] (Chongqing, 1940), from Table 10, no pagination.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Education telegram #3092, 7 May 1938, *Jiaoyubu gongbao* 10.4–6 (June 1938): 56.

⁶⁵ Chen Lifu, *Zhanshi jiaoyu xingzhen bueyi* [Recollections on wartime educational administration] (Taipei: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1973), pp.55–6.

⁶⁶ *GW*, vol.61, pp.247–8, 250–67, information originating from the *Third educational yearbook of China*.

relocated during the war, some having to shift as many as five times.⁵⁹ The situation for secondary schools was probably worse.

Given their strong patriotic reaction to the Japanese invasion, the great number of dislocated students were naturally seen by the GMD as something of a problem, if not potentially dangerous. Its concern was understandably heightened when a number of them began trekking overland to the stronghold of the CCP in north-western China. Certain documents captured from the communist National Liberation Vanguard alleged that student drifters had already become the mainstay of that organization, comprising as much as 95% of its membership by the middle of 1939.⁶⁰ The question must therefore be asked whether the GMD Youth Corps was launched specifically to tackle the problem of refugee students, and thus check their flow to communist-occupied areas.⁶¹

The Youth Corps was doubtless one of various governmental and party agencies which became involved with this problem, but it was not at the forefront and its involvement came much later. The body principally concerned was the Ministry of Education, which was uncompromising in presenting displaced students with only two legitimate options: either to continue their studies or elect to be sponsored by the Ministry to join the GMD war effort.⁶² Very few appear to have accepted the latter offer; by the end of 1940 only 480 students had joined the military via this route.⁶³ The Ministry's efforts to persuade students to continue their studies were more strenuous. In May 1938, it reprimanded some schools for enrolling fewer students on the excuse of lack of space or funds. "In this period of emergency, assistance to dislocated students should be our first task," explained the Ministry, "[so] we should make things as convenient as possible for those students who are retreating from the war zones, and allow them to study temporarily in any school."⁶⁴ The Minister of Education himself promised to do his best to secure more funding for all schools.⁶⁵

Another measure taken by the Ministry of Education to tackle the problem of refugee students was to exercise its central authority and increasingly take direct control of secondary education, which before the war came under the jurisdiction of city or provincial authorities. From November 1937 on, registration centres were established at key cities to gather in wandering high-school students, and the first of the 'national secondary schools' (*guoli zhongxue* 国立中学) was established in the following month. With the further dislocation of schools and students following the advance of Japan's invading forces, increasing numbers of national secondary schools were either established or converted out of former city or provincial secondary schools. By the end of the war, a total of thirty-four had been created.⁶⁶

Apart from the Ministry of Education, the GMD Military Commission was the other major organ which assumed responsibility for the problem of refugee students during the first year of the war. In October 1937, the Sixth Department of the Military Commission, then headed by Chen Lifu, set up a War Zone Services Corps (*Zhandi fuwutuan* 战地服务团) to absorb such students. This unit was charged with performing administrative tasks for the

military, in addition to reconnaissance and mass mobilization work.⁶⁷ By the end of the following year the unit had been absorbed into the Xi'an Fourth Training Corps for Cadres (*Xi'anganbuxunliantuan disituan* 西安干部训练团第四团); this in turn was later converted into the North-western Youth Labour Camp (*Xibei qingnian laodongying* 西北青年劳动营) which was still under the Military Commission in mid-1939.⁶⁸ It was not until July 1940 that the Youth Corps took over the operation of this labour camp.⁶⁹ By then, the primary objective of the camp had become much more specific: to imprison, interrogate and reform students who were either attempting to make their way northwards to swell the ranks of the communists, or heading south after becoming disillusioned with communism.

Paralleling this War Service Corps was a much wider scheme, also administered by the GMD Military Commission, to absorb and train refugee students as cadres for wartime government and party organs. The scheme was alleged to have sprung from Chiang's own idea for the formation of a Student Army (*Xueshengjun* 学生军) in which these young people could be provided with some form of training for national service. Consequently, a Student Army Preparatory Office (*Xueshengjun choubweichu* 学生军筹备处) was established in January 1938. Again allegedly on Chiang's personal instruction, the nomenclature was later changed to Wartime Services Training Corps for Cadres (*Zhanshi gongzuo ganbu xunliantuan* 战时工作干部训练团). On 1 March, twenty-eight days before the first public announcement of the formation of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps, this unit commenced the training of about 6,000 trainees, most of them former students, with some being drawn from the regular army.⁷⁰

Hence, by the time the Youth Corps was launched student drifters had been a matter of concern for nearly a year, and various other measures to harness this force had already been implemented by both the Ministry of Education and the GMD Military Commission. It is significant that no mention was made on the occasion of the launching of any explicit links to be established with these students. It was not until some four months after its launching that the Youth Corps became directly involved when it began to establish a network of youth reception centres (*qingnian zhaodaisuo* 青年招待所) aimed at providing free accommodation for refugee students, recommending them for jobs, and enlisting them for social and wartime services.

⁶⁷ Hu Menghua, "Chengshe shimo" [The whole story of Chengshi], in *WZ* 14 (Apr. 1961): 160–1.

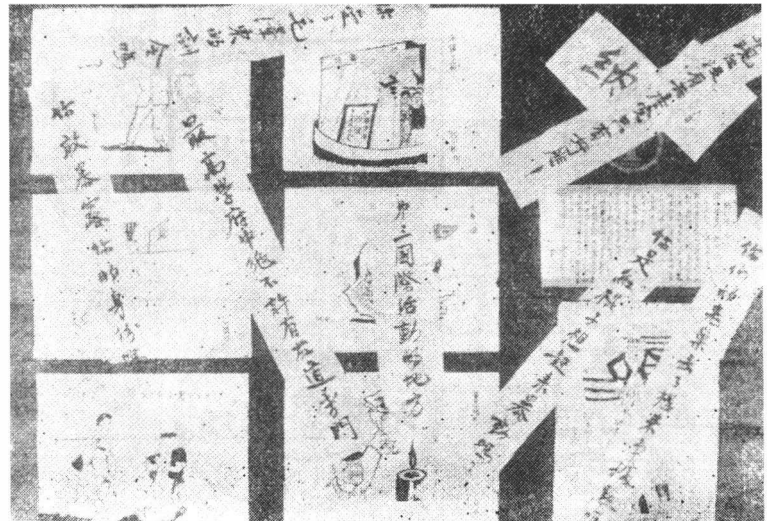
⁶⁸ Ibid.; Qu Yunzhang, "Guomindang junweihui xibei qingnian laodongying de zhengxiang" [The truth about the North-western youth labour camp of the Military Commission of the Guomindang], *WZ* 36 (Dec. 1962): 118.

⁶⁹ SZQ-ZT, ed., *Sanmin zhuyi qingniantuan gongzuo baogao* [Work report of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps] (n.p., Mar. 1943), pp.45–6.

⁷⁰ *Zhengzhi tongxun* 1 (June 1938): 36–9; Junshi Weiyuanhui (Junxunbu), ed., *Junshi jiaoyu huiyi jilu* [Minutes of meetings of the Military Education Conference] (n.p., July 1939), pp.97–100.

Figure 4

A student bulletin board at a tertiary institution defaced by members of the Youth Corps (Source: Beijingshi Dang'anguan, ed., Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi Beijing xuesheng yundong [Beiping student movements during the civil war] [Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 1991])



⁷¹ Sanmin Zhuyi Qingniantuan Zhongyang Ganshi Weiyuanhui, ed., *Sanmin zhu yiqing-niantuan di er jie zhong yang ganshibui gongzuo baogao* [Work report of the Second Central Executive Committee of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps] (n.p., Aug. 1947), pp.90–2.

Indeed, even by the end of 1939, students in general accounted for a mere 8.1% of the membership. It was only in late 1940 that the GMD Youth Corps turned its attention sharply towards students, whose representation in the membership had swelled to as much as 46.59% by 1947,⁷¹ a shift in focus that constitutes another story to be told.

Conclusion

The formation of the Three People's Principles Youth Corps in 1938 was not an unexpected development, the idea of creating such an organization having been raised within the GMD leadership (and turned down) on at least five separate occasions in the previous ten years of its rule. The change of mind was only brought about in 1938 by the outbreak of war between China and Japan, when it became obvious that the GMD party machinery was in a poor shape to lead the war effort. The Three People's Principles Youth Corps was set up to reform and help strengthen the GMD by terminating intra-party factionalism through the provision of a common forum in which the various groups could work together, and by injecting new blood. It was *not* intended to replace the GMD, to serve as part of a liberalization of mass political activity, or to solve the problem of wartime refugee students.

Other studies are needed to trace the detailed development of the GMD Youth Corps—its leadership, recruitment and operations. Only then will a full assessment be possible. This paper has focussed on analyzing the original objectives of its formation. Yet, by way of conclusion, it is useful to bear in mind that the whole idea of using the Three People's Principles Youth Corps to reform the GMD eventually turned out to be a dismal failure. Two years after its launching the Corps was stripped of most of its political roles and became an instrument for student indoctrination and control. Although it remained the official conduit for the introduction of fresh blood into the party, the Youth Corps was soon instructed to avoid politics and direct itself towards socio-educational activities related to students. Such a narrow function could hardly be expected, however, to attract the best kind of young talent needed to rejuvenate the party. Moreover, a reorientation of the recruitment pool and programme was forced upon it by the continuing factional rivalry within the party leadership. Intended to help eliminate factionalism, the Youth Corps ironically became both a player in and a victim of it. Dominated by the Blue Shirts, it became enmeshed in a bitter struggle against the party machinery which had remained firmly under the control of the CC Clique. This rivalry between the Youth Corps and the parent party refused to go away despite repeated attempts to ameliorate the tension, and ultimately led to the disbandment of the Corps in 1947. The initial objectives of the Youth Corps were therefore not only unfulfilled but stood in exact opposition to the final outcome, one of the many mismatches between intention and result that occurred in GMD programmes and that help to explain the party's eventual loss of power in mainland China.

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