

Chen Lifu and Characteristics of Wartime Higher Education in China (1937-1944)

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Abstract: The development and change of wartime higher education significantly impacted China's modern history, and its evolution was closely related to the advocacies and ideas of Chen Lifu, who served as the Minister of Education from 1938 to 1944. This paper first analyzes the merger and relocation of universities with examples such as the Southwest United Nations University and the National Central University, arguing that relocations ensured the continuity and development of higher education in China and nurtured many professional talents. The paper also focuses on the loan and publicly-funded student system, which Chen Lifu adopted mainly to compete for the youth with the Communist Party and the Japanese forces. The system helped a large number of economically disadvantaged students to complete their studies, enhanced young students' sense of responsibility towards the country, stabilized society, and increased the public's trust in the government. Besides, the paper analyzes the military recruitment of young people, briefly describes the recruitment of medical, engineering, and translation students, the peak of military recruitment, and the participation of young expeditionary force in the war, as well as the critical role of these recruitments in the victory of the war.

Keywords: Chinese History, Wartime Education, Higher Education, Chen Lifu

1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, the Japanese army had been attacking the North China plain almost effortlessly. By the end of 1938, the lower Yangtze River basin and most of China's ports and significant railway lines were under Japanese control. The massive offensive lasted 18 months from the beginning of the war, while the whole war lasted until 1945 [1]. During the war, education was one of the most affected areas. Wartime education developed its characteristics for reasons including continuing students' studies, preserving cultural resources like a collection of books, and serving the needs of the war effort. These presented features included relocating and merging colleges and universities, implementing the loan system, recruiting young people for military service, and establishing and developing national secondary schools. This thesis will explore and analyze these characteristics.

2. Reallocation and merger of colleges and universities

During the war, the priority jobs of the central education administration focused on universities, independent colleges, and specialist education [2] because the division of work in the national education administration at that time was that the Ministry of Education directly administrated the national higher education. The localities were now in charge of the secondary education [3]. According to the Ministry of Education statistics, in 1939, there were 108 colleges and universities above the specialist level before the war, and 52 of them were moved to the rear because of the expansion of the war [2]. The relocation and merger of these colleges and universities were mainly in the following two aspects: firstly, the relocation of colleges and universities from the fallen areas of Beiping, Tianjin (North China), and the coastal regions along the river to the rear [2]; secondly, the relocation of colleges and universities at the end of the city to the countryside due to the damage caused by the bombing of the Japanese warplanes [2]. Among the higher education institutions moved from the fallen areas to the rear were Zhejiang University, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangdong College of Arts and Sciences, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Nankai University, and so on [3].

Tsinghua University, Peking University, and Nankai University moved the furthest. The president of Tsinghua University, Mei Yi-qi, had been preparing for Tsinghua's move to Changsha for more than two years and had made appropriate arrangements for the personnel of the three merged universities, and moved to Kunming in February 1938 after the situation became severe along Tangze River [3]. In Kunming, it was renamed the National Southwest United University [4]. Although the accommodation and living conditions declined, it still gathered the best scholars in literature, history, philosophy, science, and technology in the Chinese academic world, making Southwest United University one of the world's leading universities at that time [5].

The National Central University (NCU), located in Nanjing, was the quickest and most complete to relocate; with the outbreak of the Battle of Song and Shanghai in August 1937, the situation in Nanjing was critical, and fortunately, President Luo Jialun had decided to start the relocation arrangement after returning to Nanjing from the Lushan Dialogue in July. The university was relocated in September by the Ministry of Education's order. Although Mr. Luo Jialun thought that the westward relocation of NCU, which he presided over, was "a merit or a sin," it was difficult to tell [6], the relocation was undoubtedly invaluable to the continuation of wartime higher education and academic and cultural undertakings in the light of the aftermath of the incident, which was an essential part of the westward relocation of the cultural, educational and scientific research institutes of the eastern coastal region, and NCU was thus preserved and developed, and under tough conditions it cultivated a large number of much-needed specialized professions for the country. The Central University has thus been preserved and developed and has trained many much-needed specialists for the country under harsh conditions [7].

Although the Ministry of Education could not achieve perfection in the relocation and reconstruction of universities due to wartime conditions and funding constraints, it provided support to the best of its ability, including financial assistance, the decision on the location of the site, contingency planning, administrative reforms, repairing and replenishing the school buildings and library facilities of the schools that were bombarded in the rear, and setting up new schools to meet the needs of the community [2].

3. Implementation of the Loan System and Public-funded Student System

The loan system was one of the reforms to education undertaken by the then Minister of Education, Chen Lifu, between 1937 and 1945, when both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China made higher education one of the main areas to be controlled and fought for [8]. One of the reasons

Chen pushed for this system was to prevent young students from going to Yen-an, led by the Communist Party, which believed that "the government will find a way". Those young students had no one to care for them, thinking "it would be too late for them to seek redress" [2]. In addition to the Communists, the Nationalist government had to compete for young people from Japan and the Japanese forces in the enemy-occupied areas. Chen Lifu believed that if the government could care for these young people's education, the Japanese would never use their families and the hypocrites [9], another reason for implementing the loan system.

Before the outbreak of the war, some colleges and universities also provided loans, scholarships, and other subsidies and incentives for students. Still, they were not fully implemented as a fixed educational system [10]. The release of the Ministry of Education's "Provisional Measures for the Provision of Loans to Students in War Zones in Public Specialised Schools and Above" in February 1938 was the first time the loan system was formally and systematically implemented [11]. It was stated in the Measures that the purpose of the loan system was to "provide relief for students in war zones in schools above the junior college level", including both state and private schools, and that the loans provided to students were divided into two categories: full-rate and half-rate, which were determined according to the cost of living in the local area, the price of meals, and the actual needs of the students [12], and the coverage of the loan system included meals and daily expenses for clothing [2].

Since its implementation in 1938, the loan system has undergone several adjustments and changes in response to changing circumstances. Generally speaking, there were the following two trends: firstly, the target of payment was gradually increased, from those who fled from the war zone to the southwestern rear area to take refuge, so that their financial sources were cut off, or their families could not afford their studies, "those whose families were in the war zone, whose sources of expenses were cut off, and who was proved to need relief" could only apply for the loans, and it was finally changed to "those whose families were in poor condition" after several revisions [10]. Secondly, the repayment period was gradually relaxed: in 1938, students were required to repay their loans within three years after the end of the war, but in 1940, the repayment period was changed to within three years after graduation, and repayment could be deferred if they were overburdened with family expenses, and in 1943, the French currency depreciated so much due to the rapid rise of inflation in the backwaters that it became meaningless to repay the loans with the current amount. Therefore, the Ministry of Education abolished the loan system in 1943 and replaced it with a system of publicly funded students [13].

The system of publicly funded students has been implemented since the promulgation of the Law on Publicly-Funded Students. It has entirely replaced the loan system since the beginning of the school year. There are two types of publicly-funded students: Type A publicly-funded students are exempted from meal fees and are subsidized for other expenses separately; Type B publicly-funded students are exempted from meal fees only [12]. Compared with the previous loan system, this public-funded system attached more importance to the redistribution of limited relief resources by the policy of the Ministry of Education: new students of national and provincial colleges or above who belonged to the faculties and departments of teachers' colleges, medical colleges, and engineering colleges, were all A-type public-funded students. The students of science faculties were 80 percent publicly-funded students of type B [12]. The students of agricultural colleges were 60 percent publicly-funded students. The students of the College of Agriculture were 60% of the students of Type B public-funded students [12]. Students from the Faculty of Arts, Law and Commerce, and other faculties will be given 40% of the total number of publicly-funded students as Type B students [12]. For the new students of private colleges and universities, 70% of the medical, pharmaceutical, and engineering faculties and 50% of the science and agriculture faculties students are publicly-funded students of Type B [12]. The initially approved Type B public-funded students are not eligible to apply for the

scholarship [12]. The actual approved subsidies for self-financed students were canceled and replaced by self-financed students [12].

In planning the public funding system, Chen Lifu combined the concept of the graduation system with the idea of distribution, i.e., students receiving public funding were subject to government recruitment after graduation [14]. They were not allowed to take up employment, and "the recruitment period for Type A public-funded students would be longer, while that for Type B public-funded students would be shorter, to equalize rights and obligations" [14].

The expenditure on loans exceeded almost one-half of the total education and culture expenditure, a financial burden that could not be ignored [2]. Despite its meager amount and the problems of corruption and deduction on the part of the school authorities, the achievements of this system were still very remarkable. According to statistics, the number of students who graduated from secondary schools to tertiary institutions during wartime and relied on state loans or public funds to complete their studies was around 50,000 to 70,000 per year [15], totaling more than 128,000 students [2].

The loan system enabled many students who would otherwise have missed out on education due to financial difficulties to complete their studies. It also played an essential role in maintaining and promoting the development of wartime higher education. Its significance was not only in education but also had a political and social impact [16]. This kind of assistance to students could stabilize the youth group and create a sense of responsibility for them to contribute more to the country amid the crisis. Although students lived in poor conditions at that time, some gave their own relief money to the victims or donated blood for the military soldiers, demonstrating a high sense of social responsibility [16]. In addition, such a system was also helpful in stabilizing society under high-pressure wartime conditions, recruiting people's support, and increasing their trust in the government [16].

4. Youth Military Recruitment

The loan and public funding system provided young students with a guarantee of continued education during wartime. Still, in addition to the standardized distribution of public funding for graduation, there were other wartime obligations that students had to fulfill, most notably military training and requisitioning, one of the unique features of wartime education. This is also one of the unique features of wartime education. This will be explained in the following content.

Military recruitment of young people was also one of the characteristics of wartime education. In this regard, Chen Lifu's central proposition was that school education should be "in wartime as in peacetime" but that "young people graduating from schools at whatever level should be called up by the state at any time when the state needs them" - intellectual talents should be treasured in wartime. They should be allowed to contribute to the country's construction rather than letting the already small number of educated young people go to the battlefield [2]. In times of war, academic talents should be treasured, and rather than letting the already small number of educated young people go to war, they should be allowed to contribute to the construction of the country and also to make more valuable contributions to the military because of their reserves [2]. Students with higher education should at least finish their tertiary studies, undergo military training, and be recruited in the future if necessary [2]. He also stated in his 1938 letter to the nation's youth that "the Ministry of Education shall be responsible for sending young people to school if they think they are not suitable for military service," rather than drawing lots of young people from colleges and universities who had reached the right age to enlist in the army, as had been suggested in the early years of the war.

A few years after the outbreak of World War II, the increasingly urgent military situation made it necessary for the front line to have more intellectual youths join the army to assist in the military work. The time of "the need for conscription" had already come, and the students who were conscripted the most were the students of medicine, engineering, and foreign languages [2].

Medical students were the first to be compulsorily drafted [2]. Since July 1939, all fresh medical graduates have been prepared to serve in military hospitals and state health institutions. From 1941 onwards, 15 to 20 percent of the new graduates were allowed to stay on campus to serve, while the rest were assigned by the Military Medical Department and the Department of Health, respectively [2].

Later, in January 1941, the Ministry of Education recruited fourth-year engineering students to assist in constructing military airfields in Sichuan and Jiangxi Provinces [2]. The same year, the Ministry of Education decided to recruit engineering graduates. The number of students to be recruited was 10 percent of the total number of engineering graduates at all levels, starting from 1943 [2].

In 1942, the U.S. and Chinese armies began a joint war to open up the Indo-China Highway, and the Americans established an infantry school, an artillery school, and various training courses in Kunming to train Chinese soldiers in using U.S. weaponry [17]. There were as many as 19 U.S. military hostels in Kunming alone, and the need for English translators increased dramatically [17]. As a result, the Ministry of Education assigned interpreters to schools such as the Southwest United Nations University, the Central University, the Jiaotong University, Zhejiang University, Wuhan University, and the University of Chongqing [17].

The peak of military recruitment occurred in 1944 when the Ministry of Education ordered all men and women in the senior grades of colleges and universities in Chongqing, Chengdu, Kunming, and Guiyang to be recruited as military interpreters. Three thousand two hundred sixty-seven students were recruited as interpreters during the war, and 3,104 students were recruited as medical engineers, 6,371 students [2]. The Youth Army was also established at the end of the year. After education and training, the first phase recruited more than 100,000 men, who were organized into three armies (Sixth, Thirty-first, and Thirty-seventh), nine divisions (201st to 209th), and several subordinate units. Among them, the 207th Division joined the Yunnan-Burma war and was thus called the "Youth Expeditionary Army", while the new First Army also included many trainees of the Youth Army [18].

The ability of the Nationalist army to launch a full-scale counter-offensive in April of the following year also benefited to some extent from these young intellectuals, who were recruited to replenish the supply of troops on the front line and to help with translations, medical care, and technical skills.

5. Conclusion

The changes and characteristics of wartime higher education discussed in this essay include relocating higher education institutions, the loan and publicly funded student systems, and youth military recruitment. The relocation of higher education institutions ensured the continued development of higher education in wartime. At the same time, the loan system enabled more students to complete their studies and served as a stabilizing influence in society. Both of these measures prevented the cultivation of talents from being interrupted in times of national crisis. At the same time, the recruitment of young students as a military auxiliary force or source of soldiers, such as Chen Lifu's advocacy, "Wartime is like peacetime," also enabled students to make "valuable contributions to the military," which, to a certain extent, helped to win the war.

Wartime higher education is a not-so-cold field of study in modern Chinese history, but many academic papers only focus on one or two aspects. Suppose this topic can be analyzed more holistically and combined with other perspectives, such as the history of modern academics and the advancement and retreat of the Kuomintang in the cultural sector. In that case, it might be possible to enrich and deepen the study of this topic. Moreover, if the use of primary data can be more adequate, the details of the study may also be enriched, and the study's conclusions can also be more objective. Therefore, there are still a lot of issues to be explored in the study of wartime higher education in China.

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