

The Homecoming Practice of Youth Mainlander Soldiers in Taiwan: Silence, Protests, and Homecoming in the 1980s

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Abstract

In 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT, Chinese Nationalist Party) army suffered a major defeat in the third Chinese Civil War (from 1946 to 1949). Consequently, approximately 1.2 million mainlanders moved to Taiwan with the KMT authorities, known as “the Great Retreat.” Among those mainlanders, approximately 600,000 were KMT service members. This study takes as its subject the “youth mainlander soldiers” (“youth soldiers”), aged 20 to 25 at the time of the Great Retreat, and aims to clarify their life process in the 1980s by analyzing the homecoming practice of “youth soldiers” in Taiwan. In the early 1980s, due to the interplay of factors such as the authoritarian regime, the lack of understanding towards the mainlander veterans in Taiwanese society, and the life stage and self-awareness of “youth soldiers,” “youth soldiers” did not launch a homecoming movement, but kept silent. On March 18, 1987, several mainlander veterans (mostly “youth soldiers”), along with their supporters, formed the “Homecoming Promotion Association of Mainlander Taiwanese,” and launched the homecoming movement. As a result, On October 14, Taiwanese authorities announced its decision to allow Taiwan residents to go to the Chinese mainland for homecoming, starting from December 1, 1987.

Introduction

In 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT, Chinese Nationalist Party) army suffered a major defeat in the third Chinese Civil War (from 1946 to 1949), and approximately 1.2 million mainlanders moved to Taiwan with KMT authorities, which is known as “the Great Retreat.” Among those mainlanders, 582,086 were KMT servicemen⁽¹⁾, of which the army accounted for about 83.13%⁽²⁾. According to military rank, KMT servicemen were roughly divided into officers and “non-commissioned officers and soldiers,” among which “non-commissioned officers and soldiers” were equivalent to ordinary soldiers (hereinafter referred to as “soldiers”). By December 1949, the average age of soldiers was 23 years old for the army, 21 years old for the navy and 23 years old for the air force⁽³⁾, so it can be inferred that the majority of soldiers were at the ages of 20 to 25 when they moved to Taiwan. The ratio of officers to soldiers at the time of the Great Retreat is not clear, but the overall average of servicemen at that time was 25 years old⁽⁴⁾, so it can be seen that many officers and soldiers were similar in age. However, in terms of salary, personal freedom, reputation, and the scope of interpersonal communication, officers were obviously superior to soldiers. This study takes as its subject the soldiers who were between 20 and 25 years old at the time of the Great Retreat, and aims to clarify their life process in the 1980s.

Review of previous studies

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

(1) Hu (1990).

(2) Chen (2020: 107).

(3) Chen (2020: 173).

(4) Chen (2020: 173), Hu (1990: 111).

dents' villages. Since 2000, there have been numerous studies on the preservation of the military dependents' villages and their cultural heritage⁽⁵⁾. However, compared with the research on the space of military dependents' villages, there are very few studies on the life of servicemen. Hu (1990) is regarded as the first work on the life experiences of mainlander veterans. The study focused on veterans living in Hualien, Taiwan, and analyzed their living conditions in the late 1980s. Respondents were living at the bottom of Taiwan's social ladder, and 67% of them were unmarried. Even if they were married, their wives were usually prostitutes, aborigines or physically disabled. For them, marriage and family were not perfect.

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

Li (ed.) (2010) collected seven master's theses which respectively described the living conditions of mainlander Taiwanese⁽⁶⁾ at the bottom of the social ladder from the perspectives of migration, elderly life, marriage, religious choices, image in novels and literary works. In particular, Wu (2010), Chang (2010) and Lin (2010) took as their subject mainlander veterans and pointed out that veterans had suffered from decades of separation and loneliness after moving to Taiwan. These three studies clarified the lasting negative impact of the Great Retreat on the lives of KMT servicemen.

Li (2019b) analyzed the formation and transformation of the mainlander Taiwanese ethnic group in the second half of the 20th century. In the early days after the Great Retreat, mainlanders had no intention of settling in Taiwan. Because mainlanders moved to Taiwan together with the KMT authorities, they were relatively superior to the native Taiwanese⁽⁷⁾ in social status. The mainlander Taiwanese ethnic group gradually formed. However, with the social and economic development, the socioeconomic status gap between mainlander Taiwanese and native Taiwanese was gradually narrowing. Especially after the 1980s, mainlander Taiwanese lost their advantages in social status. At the same time, they faced an identity crisis.

Research themes and survey

Correcting deficiencies in previous studies' viewpoints

Li (2019b) emphasized that before the 1980s, mainlander Taiwanese belonged to the minority with dominant political, cultural, and economic status. However, in fact, not all mainlander Taiwanese had social advantages. According to social status, mainlander Taiwanese could be roughly divided into upper and lower classes. The upper class referred to the leadership of the Taiwanese authorities and the staff of various public institutions, namely the so-called "military officers, civil servants and educators." The lower class was composed of numerous soldiers whose fate was directly controlled by the upper class, especially by the Taiwanese authorities. The social context and institutional changes related to soldiers before the 1980s can be summarized as follows.

In May 1949, *the Declaration of Martial Law* was enacted throughout Taiwan. In April 1950, the Taiwanese authorities rebuilt the political work system in the military. In July 1951, an act of marriage for military personnel was formulated, which clearly stipulated that soldiers in service were not allowed to marry except officers, military civilians and technical sergeants. The act came into force in January 1952, which was the beginning of the "marriage ban." As early as 1959, the Taiwanese authorities promulgated regulations on military services, and a system speci-

(5) Yang (2009), Li (2015, 2016, 2019a).

(6) Specifically refers to the 1.2 million mainlanders who moved to Taiwan in 1949, including servicemen. The Chinese expression is "台湾外省人".

(7) The Chinese expression is "台湾本省人".

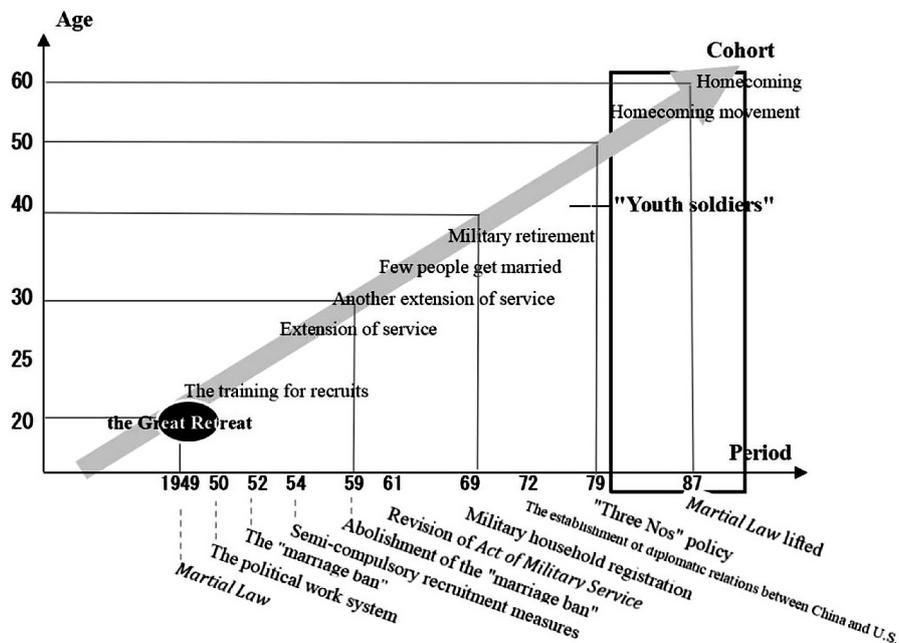
fyng the upper age limit for service, salary and retirement gratuity for military personnel was established⁽⁸⁾. In the same year, the “marriage ban” was abolished. In 1969, the military population was registered to the household registration management system. In January 1979, the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) issued the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan*, while the Taiwanese authorities refused contact with the Chinese mainland (hereinafter referred to as “mainland”) by pursuing the policy of no contact, no negotiation and no compromise, which was the so-called “Three Nos” policy, well-known between the two sides of the Taiwan strait. In July 1987, *Martial Law* was lifted, and mainlander Taiwanese could apply to visit their relatives on the mainland from December of the same year.

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

Cohort setting and main research themes

Based on the review of previous studies and the above analysis, this study sets the army soldiers who were 20 to 25 years old (born from 1924 to 1929) at the time of the Great Retreat as a cohort and names them “youth soldiers.” “Youth soldiers” encountered the Great Retreat during the transition to adulthood. Compared with other mainlander Taiwanese, they suffered a more and longer-term negative impact on their subsequent lives from the authoritarian regime. My academic theme is to put the whole life course of “youth soldiers” into the research range, especially to link the life strategies of “youth soldiers,” their comrades-in-arms, and their families with the development process of the authoritarian regime to clarify the life experiences of “youth soldiers” during the *Martial Law* era (from 1949 to 1987). Figure 1 describes the life course of “youth soldiers.”

As essential parts of the above academic theme, in the No.9 and No.10 of WASEDA RILAS JOURNAL, the life process of “youth soldiers” from the 1950s to 1970s was clarified by linking it with the development of the



Sources: The author made this figure according to interviews.

Figure 1. The life course of “youth soldiers”

(8) Lin (2019: 337).

authoritarian regime. As shown in the figure (inside the box), This article, by analyzing the homecoming practice of “youth soldiers” in Taiwan, aims to discuss their life process in the 1980s. Specifically, it is divided into the following research topics: (1) silence in the early 1980s; (2) protests against the Taiwanese authorities in 1986-1987; and (3) homecoming to the mainland in the late 1980s.

Overview of the surveys

This article takes as its subject the soldiers who are living in Zhongyi military dependents’ village⁽⁹⁾. In 2022, there were fewer than 40 “youth soldiers” living in this village, including those with serious diseases. In order to ensure the representativeness of the subject, the chairman of Zhongyi military dependents’ village introduced to the author three “youth soldiers” with relatively healthy bodies and excellent memory. From August 2019 to December 2022, the author interviewed the three “youth soldiers” more than 30 times about their life history. Table 1 shows the profiles of the three interviewees. In 1949, they experienced the Great Retreat at the age of about 21, married (or remarried) around the 1960s, and retired from the army in the late 1960s or early 1970s. In 1988, all of them went back to the mainland for homecoming.

Table 1. The profiles of three interviewees (December 2022)

No.	Before 1949		In 1949		After 1949				
	Birth year	Occupation before joining the army	Year of joining the army (age)	Marital status	Age	Marriage (remarriage) year (age)	Retirement year (age)	Homecoming year (age)	
1	1927	None	Farming	1947 (20)	Married	22	1961 (34)	1968 (41)	1988 (61)
2	1928	Private school ⁽¹⁰⁾	Vehicle repair	1949 (21)	Engaged	21	1961 (33)	1973 (45)	1988 (60)
3	1929	Primary school	Unemployed	1948 (19)	Unmarried	20	1959 (30)	1973 (44)	1988 (59)

Sources: The author made this table according to interviews.

Silence in the early 1980s

Why did they keep silent?

From the early 1960s to 1970s, Taiwan witnessed rapid economic growth owing to the ongoing industrialization. But that came with some social problems, such as environmental pollution, human rights for the indigenous peoples, women’s status, consumer rights and interests, and labor rights and interests. These social problems were a decisive factor that triggered the rise of new social movements across Taiwan from the early 1980s⁽¹¹⁾. For example, by 1983, the environmental movement as a whole was of no small scale even though most campaigns were local⁽¹²⁾. For another example, In May 1983, a group of indigenous college students in Taipei published the magazine *Kao Shan Ching*, which called for respecting the indigenous culture and the autonomy of indigenous students. In December 1984, a group of elite intellectuals represented by Hu Defu, a singer of the Paiwan ethnicity, formed the Taiwan Association for the Promotion of Rights for Indigenous Peoples⁽¹³⁾, which emphasized the self-identity of indigenous groups. Since then, voluntary associations of indigenous peoples began to flourish⁽¹⁴⁾. In the meantime, women’s groups mushroomed in 1985-1987 too⁽¹⁵⁾. However, the native Taiwanese were the mainstay of these social movements of the early 1980s while no mainlander Taiwanese, especially mainlander veterans, could be seen. According

(9) Refer to Zhang (2021, 2022) for details on the development history of Zhongyi military dependents’ village and the reasons for choosing it as the research subject.

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

(11) Wang (2015: 81).

(12) Huang (1990: 57).

(13) The Chinese expression is “台湾原权会”.

(14) Xu (1990: 139).

(15) Chou and Chiang (1990: 85).

to interviewees of this article, “everyone hoped the Taiwanese authorities could allow them to visit their families on the mainland as soon as possible, but nobody did anything about it—they all kept silent⁽¹⁶⁾.” This phenomenon can be explained in four aspects—policy, the understanding towards the mainlander veterans in Taiwanese society, and the life stage and self-awareness of “youth soldiers.”

On the policy level. In 1979, the government of the PRC made some efforts to end the cross-Strait confrontation at an early date. On January 1 of that year, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) issued the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan*, which stated, “we hope that at an early date transportation and postal services between both sides will be established to make it easier for compatriots of both sides to have direct contact, write to each other, visit relatives and friends...⁽¹⁷⁾” On the same day, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense issued the *Statement on Halting the Bombardment of Jinmen and Other Islands*, so that “military and civilian compatriots living in Taiwan, Penghu, Jinmen and Matsu are able to visit relatives and friends or make business trips on the mainland, and carry out navigation, production and other activities in the Taiwan Strait⁽¹⁸⁾.” That marked the end of more than 20 years of shelling of Jinmen. When Deng Xiaoping, then Vice Premier of China’s State Council, met with the American press corps to China on January 5, he expressed the wish to talk with Chiang Ching-Kuo, the leader of the Taiwan region, about ending the confrontation across the Taiwan Strait⁽¹⁹⁾. On January 12, when Deng Yingchao, Vice Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, met with a delegation of the Japanese Senate, she also expressed the willingness to talk with relevant Taiwanese authorities, including Chiang Ching-Kuo, to resume exchanges with various circles in Taiwan, and to end the current stalemate⁽²⁰⁾.

However, the Taiwanese authorities refused contact with the mainland by pursuing the “Three Nos” policy. Someone in 1980 suggested the Taiwanese authorities allow trips to the mainland for homecoming, but ended up being sentenced to five-year imprisonment on the charge of “colluding with and propagating for the CPC⁽²¹⁾.” It is clear that under the authoritarian regime of Taiwan, the desire of homecoming movement of the mainlander Taiwanese, including “youth soldiers,” was throttled.

Regarding Taiwanese society’s understanding of mainlander veterans. In the first few years of the 1980s, the native Taiwanese and mainlander Taiwanese were still estranged from each other. In particular, the “youth soldiers” were subject to serious discrimination from Taiwanese society for a prolonged period. They had little contact with the natives and their living conditions were barely known to Taiwanese society. Because of this, when the “youth soldiers” initiated the homecoming movement (to be elaborated later) in 1987, their street speeches, leaflets, and other activities had little compassion or support from the native Taiwanese. Regarding the collective silence of “youth soldiers” in the early 1980s, interviewee No.2 gave the following explanations:

That was the case with the whole Taiwanese society at the time. The voice of the underclass was barely heard, but there was nothing anyone could do. Mainlander veterans were even worse off than the native Taiwanese as we were not only suppressed by the authorities, but also discriminated against by the natives. Living in Taiwan, we had no relatives, no resources, no strings to pull, so we had to be always careful. Therefore, we didn’t make a noise at the time. In fact, we had nothing to say.⁽²²⁾

Regarding the life stage of “youth soldiers.” In the late 1970s and early 1980s, those “youth soldiers” were already in their 50s, a life stage that was supposed to be restful and steady for the mainstream groups of Taiwanese society. But that was not the case for “youth soldiers.” As they had just been retired from military service for a few years, most of them, whether married or not, were busy making ends meet. Even former comrades-in-arms who

(16) Interview with No.2 via zoom on November 29, 2020.

(17) *People’s Daily*, January 1, 1979.

(18) *People’s Daily*, January 1, 1979.

(19) *People’s Daily*, January 6, 1979.

(20) *People’s Daily*, January 13, 1979.

(21) Sun (2019: 111).

(22) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

lived in the same military dependents' village had little communication⁽²³⁾. That is why the “youth soldiers” had no time for the homecoming movement in the early 1980s.

Last but not least, regarding the self-awareness of “youth soldiers.” As Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers at one time, they all vowed loyalty to the KMT regime, and thought that initiating a movement would mean the betrayal of it.

Human Agency

All these factors combined to silence the “youth soldiers.” However, after the PRC government issued the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* in 1979, a small group of mainlander Taiwanese took the initiative to contact their families on the mainland. They wrote family letters, and trusted their friends traveling abroad to, after arriving at the destination, post the letters to their families. They might also post the letters to their friends living in Hong Kong, the US or Japan, and asked them to post the letters again to the mainland. That was how a few people got in touch with their families. “The small envelope inside a bigger envelope” was the common memory of those mainlander Taiwanese. In 1982, interviewee No.2 asked a friend in the US to post a letter to his mother on the mainland. Here is what he recalled:

I have a fellow serviceman whose daughter lived in the US. In 1982, I wrote a letter to her and included a smaller envelope inside, asking her to post it to my mother on the mainland. It was a short letter, only telling my mother that I was alive and I would try everything I could to visit her. I dared not say I was in Taiwan in case it would be intercepted by Taiwanese authorities on the way, which would be bad for my wife and children, and for my mother and little brother and sister too if this became known to the PRC government.

I got a reply from my little brother about a month later. He also sent his letter to the US first at the address of the daughter of my fellow serviceman, from where it was posted to me. The letter was equally simple, only telling me that my mother was in good health and would want to see me again one day. He dared not write much either. I did not tell anyone of the letter except my wife for fear of trouble. I felt lucky enough that I knew someone in the US who could transfer the letter to me. As far as I knew, many people wrote family letters that were never sent out.⁽²⁴⁾

Protests against Taiwanese authorities

The Wang Xijue Hijacking Incident

On May 3, 1986, Wang Xijue, captain of China Airlines' flight B198, a Boeing 747 cargo aircraft, operated a forced landing in Guangzhou's Baiyun Airport en route from Thailand's Bangkok to Hong Kong for the purpose of visiting his father living on the mainland. That was known as the *Wang Xijue Hijacking Incident*⁽²⁵⁾. Born in 1929, Wang went to Taiwan in 1949 as a member of the KMT air force, which means he was a “youth soldier,” the subject studied by this article. After graduating from the R.O.C. Air Force Academy in 1951, he was assigned to carry out military reconnaissance missions in the airspace over the Chinese mainland several times, for which he had been cited by Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-Kuo separately. Such a background made his hijacking all the more shocking to the Taiwanese authorities. But they did not reveal the details of the incident to the Taiwanese public lest a homecoming movement of mainlander Taiwanese should surge. As interviewee No.2 said, “Our patience had exhausted and we were waiting for a chance. So the government blocked the information and there was nothing in the news⁽²⁶⁾.”

The homecoming movement of mainlander Taiwanese

In the early 1980s, there were some mainlanders who were able to contact their families on the mainland. In fact,

⁽²³⁾ Interview with No.1 via zoom on January 5, 2021; Interview with No.2 via zoom on November 29, 2020.

⁽²⁴⁾ Interview with No.2 via zoom on November 29, 2020.

⁽²⁵⁾ *People's Daily*, May 4, 1986.

⁽²⁶⁾ Interview with No.2 via zoom on November 29, 2020.

soon after the PRC government issued the *Message to Compatriots in Taiwan* in 1979, KMT established a special mailbox called the Tang Guanghua Mailbox, through which senior KMT officials could correspond with their families on the mainland. The well-off or well-connected mainlander Taiwanese would do the same through various channels, or even travel to the mainland via another country or region⁽²⁷⁾. In comparison, the lower-class mainlander Taiwanese, especially the “youth soldiers,” almost had no way to contact their families. In such a context, He Wende and several other mainlander veterans (mostly “youth soldiers”), along with their supporters, formed the “Homecoming Promotion Association of Mainlander Taiwanese” (hereinafter referred to as the Homecoming Promotion Association) on March 18, 1987, and launched the homecoming movement also known as the “veterans’ homecoming movement”⁽²⁸⁾. According to the leaflet handed out by the Homecoming Promotion Association in April of that year, mainlander Taiwanese and supporters of the Association could all apply to join. With the sole objective of “enabling everyone to visit their families on the mainland freely”, the Homecoming Promotion Association would—as part of its work—plan various protests to urge the authorities to heed the public appeal and allow them to visit the mainland⁽²⁹⁾.

During its existence from March 1987 to February 1988, the Homecoming Promotion Association organized six major events. Given that previous studies only give a brief account of those events, and some articles even provide misinformation, this article will elaborate on the events organized in 1987 in detail. It will cite the leaflets included in the “database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese⁽³⁰⁾,” which is part of the “Taiwan e-Learning and Digital Archives Program” initiated by the Academia Sinica, and also refer to interviews with former members of the Homecoming Promotion Association.

In April 1987, the Homecoming Promotion Association made and spread the first leaflet, titled “We’ve kept silent for 40 years”. When its members handed out the leaflets on the street, at train stations, in the market, in military dependents’ villages, and at veterans’ nursing homes, they were often obstructed by intelligence and security personnel or the police sent by the authorities. At the same time, they had to face public misunderstanding, the pressure of public opinions, and even group beating⁽³¹⁾. The leaflet, whose content is shown below, obviously astonished the Taiwanese authorities and the people living under its authoritarian regime.

We have been living away from home for 40 years. Forty years ago, we were young, but were embroiled in the civil war between the CPC and the KMT, and then forced to come to Taiwan with the KMT, not knowing what was in store for us. Once here, we have devoted our prime years to this island in military positions, at grassroot units, or in some corner of the society—mostly in extremely difficult conditions. In the past 40 years, we’ve suppressed the homesickness at the greatest depth of our hearts because of the stringent homecoming ban across

(27) Wang Peifen, “The Long Way Home: Veterans’ Homecoming Movement,” http://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/pdf/old_sol_dier.pdf, visited on June 18, 2022.

(28) He Wende, the president of the Homecoming Promotion Association, was born in 1930 and was in the KMT army at the age of 19 when the Great Retreat happened in 1949. After he retired from the army in 1965, at the age of 35, as captain of the artillery, he was admitted by the National Central University (Meng, 2012: 39-40). Before the Homecoming Promotion Association was founded, its supporters include Chen Chunquan (陳春全), Chen Chunfei (陳春妃), Xu Guotai (許國泰), Yang Zujun (楊祖珺), and so on (Li, 1987: 23-24).

According to the leaflet handed out by the Homecoming Promotion Association, it was founded on March 18, 1987. See leaflet titled “Homesickness (homecoming movement) – You take me here as a soldier; now you send me home” (November, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=189>, visited on December 18, 2022.

(29) Leaflet titled “Homesickness (homecoming movement)—we’ve kept silent for 40 years” (April, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=185#top>, visited on December 18, 2022.

(30) The Chinese expression is “台灣外省人生命記憶與敘事資料庫”. “Homesickness (homecoming movement)” in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/hometown/gohome.html>, visited on December 20, 2022.

(31) “Homesickness (homecoming movement)” in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/hometown/gohome.html>, visited on December 20, 2022.

the Taiwan Strait. The CPC has opened its arms, which should have been a golden opportunity for us—the millions of us who came here from the mainland—to reunite with our families who are still living on the other side of the strait. Yet the KMT leadership is holding on to the ban along with rigorous punishments. Turning a deaf ear to what the public really wants, all the KMT leadership has to say all the time is this: no contact, no negotiation, no compromise; and guarding against being used or penetrated by the CPC.

Don't we have parents too? But we don't even know whether they are still alive. All we are asking is to go back, serve them a cup of tea if they are still there to drink it, or burn joss sticks for them if they are no longer in this world. Isn't that the very minimal that we as children should do? We are the silent masses. We have kept silent for 40 years. Now is time for us to unite, stand up and speak up. Tired birds would go back to their nests. Falling leaves return to the embrace of the earth. You and I—we are the most intelligent of all beings, and we are our parents' sons, our wives' husbands, and our children's fathers. They are waiting for us every day, every minute! My dear friends, it's high time that we went back. If not, how much longer do we have to wait? How much time do they have left?⁽³²⁾

On May 10, members of the Homecoming Promotion Association held an event celebrating Mother's Day in front of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall as a way to express their wish to visit their families on the mainland. They were wearing T-shirts printed with "homesickness," and the placards they were holding were written with expressions to the same effect: "white-haired mother is expecting her son; the wife is waiting for her husband by an empty bed," "my home is by the Songhua River in northeast China," "I miss my mother on Mother's Day," and "let me go home"⁽³³⁾. Compared with the leaflets in April, this celebration was the first public gathering organized by the Homecoming Promotion Association and the first time that mainlander veterans expressed their homesickness to Taiwanese society directly⁽³⁴⁾.

This event captured more attention to the mainlander veterans, but it also got the side-eye from many native Taiwanese. He Wende, president of the Association, recalled that the most difficult part about promoting the movement was changing people's old habits. Because of the sensitivity of the event, they couldn't find people to help hold up the placards and hand out leaflets⁽³⁵⁾, not to mention the frequent objection and humiliation from strangers. For instance, when He Wende was handing out leaflets at the end of May, "he left the site covered with wounds, with his clothes torn, knapsack robbed, and leather shoes lost⁽³⁶⁾." In addition, The Taiwanese authorities were trying to stop the Association from organizing other activities. According to Xia Zixun⁽³⁷⁾, who participated in the Mother's Day celebration, the investigative bureau warned him to stop leading the veterans' homecoming movement and if he did, they would help him handle the necessary formalities to go back home to the mainland and cover his travel expenses⁽³⁸⁾.

⁽³²⁾ Leaflet titled "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—we've kept silent for 40 years" (April, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlanders in Taiwan, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=185#top>, visited on December 18, 2022.

⁽³³⁾ "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—street event in celebration of Mother's Day" in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlanders in Taiwan, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=191>, visited on December 18, 2022.

⁽³⁴⁾ "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—street event in celebration of Mother's Day" in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlanders in Taiwan, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=191>, visited on December 18, 2022.

⁽³⁵⁾ "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—He Wende" in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlanders in Taiwan, Academia Sinica, https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/hometown/homefile_people_h1.html, visited on December 19, 2022.

⁽³⁶⁾ Li (1987: 24).

⁽³⁷⁾ Xia Zixun, a founding member of the Homecoming Promotion Association, was born in 1929 and experienced the Great Retreat as a KMT soldier at the age of 20 in 1949.

⁽³⁸⁾ "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—Xia Zixun" in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlanders in Taiwan, Academia Sinica, https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/hometown/homefile_people_x1.html, visited on December 19, 2022.

At 7:00 pm on June 28, the Homecoming Promotion Association held a seminar themed “What can we do when we want to go home? Opening the Channels of Homecoming Across the Taiwan Strait” at the auditorium of Jinhua Junior High School, and invited some scholars and members of the Democratic Progressive Party to give speeches. The speakers explained why homecoming was important from various perspectives, such as humanity, politics, law, history and culture, and called on the Taiwanese authorities to lift the ban on homecoming to the mainland⁽³⁹⁾. After the speeches, the mainlander veterans came on stage and sang “Mother, Where Are You?” together, striking a chord with the audience.

The Association hoped the seminar could draw attention and gain recognition from people of all circles, which could then help them break the political injunction and return home⁽⁴⁰⁾. As expected, the seminar aroused a sensation across Taiwanese society. As Wang Xiaobo, host of the seminar, and Yang Zujun, a singer, recalled, about 20,000 people participated in the event, including the director of the KMT Cultural Work Committee and senior officials of other intelligence and security agencies⁽⁴¹⁾. The event also stimulated Chiang Ching-Kuo to take faster steps to implement the policy that allowed homecoming across the Taiwan Strait.

On July 14, Chiang Ching-Kuo announced that the *Martial Law* would be lifted starting from July 15, but the policy on the homecoming of mainlander Taiwanese was not really put into practice. Therefore, the Homecoming Promotion Association organized another seminar themed “Let’s go home!” at Long’an Elementary School in Taipei on September 20, at which the Association’s honorary president Mr. Hu Qiuyuan, Professor Lyu Yali, Professor Liu Fuzeng, Mr. Chen Yingzhen, Professor Wang Xiaobo, and Mr. Fu Zheng all gave speeches. They criticized the policy that was being discussed by Taiwanese authorities, and Fu Zheng in particular called on the authorities to provide assistance to the economically strained mainlander veterans⁽⁴²⁾.

On October 14, Taiwanese authorities announced its decision to allow Taiwan residents to go to the mainland for homecoming, and the Red Cross Society of Taiwan started accepting applications on November 2. However, the authorities continued the “Three Nos” policy regarding exchanges with the mainland, and adopted a very passive attitude toward the homecoming applications—no encouragement, no assistance, no prohibition, the so-called “New Three Nos” policy. Moreover, when the authorities lifted the *Martial Law* on July 15, 1987, they officially implemented the *National Security Law in the Period of Suppressing Chaos* (hereinafter referred to as the *National Security Law*), along with implementing rules, at the same time. This law, by regulating such matters as entry and exit, military control, assembly and association, in a way ensured the Taiwan residents’ right to democracy and freedom. Nevertheless, it was formulated with reluctance—the authorities had to lift the *Martial Law* but dared not go all the way through, and it still restricted free access to the mainland, the arch enemy in the eyes of the Taiwanese authorities⁽⁴³⁾. In response, in November, the Homecoming Promotion Association made and distributed leaflets titled “You take me here as a soldier; now you send me home”, asking the authorities to abolish the restrictive terms in the *Implementing Rules of the National Security Law* and legitimize the mainlander Taiwanese’ homecoming⁽⁴⁴⁾. It also requested the authorities to provide TWD 60,000 for each mainlander veteran as travel expenses. Here is what is printed on the leaflet (part).

(39) Leaflet titled “Homesickness (homecoming movement)—what can we do when we want to go home?” (June, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=187>, visited on December 20, 2022. Fu (1987: 19).

(40) Leaflet titled “Homesickness (homecoming movement)—what can we do when we want to go home?” (June, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=187>, visited on December 20, 2022.

(41) “Homesickness (homecoming movement)—Wang Xiaobo” in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/hometown/homefile_people_w1.html, visited on December 20, 2022. Yang (1992: 166).

(42) Fu (1987: 20).

(43) Xu & Wang (2013: 105).

(44) Leaflet titled “Homesickness (homecoming movement)—You take me here as a soldier; now you send me home” (November, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=189>, visited on December 21, 2022.

Noting that the KMT still imposes numerous restrictions on implementing the homecoming policy it has issued and fails to demonstrate the true humanistic spirit, this Association, out of humanity and based on the express terms of the Constitution that the people have the freedom of migration and relocation, is hereby reaffirming the following requests:

1. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of Article 12 and Paragraph 4 of Article 13 of the *Implementing Rules of the National Security Law* shall be cancelled to legitimize homecoming.
2. The right to visit the mainland shall not be restricted or subject to discrimination based on the rank of relatives.
3. Taiwan compatriots living overseas or on the mainland have the right to come back to Taiwan either for a visit or to live here; Chinese mainland compatriots who have relatives living in Taiwan have the right to come for a visit or to settle down. Their freedom of travel should be granted and should not be rejected for any reason.
4. With the exception of senior officials involved in government secrets, regular civil servants, public opinion representatives, and teachers in public schools should enjoy the legal right to visit their families on the mainland.
5. To fund the mainlander veterans' homecoming trip, the Taiwanese authorities should provide each of them with TWD 60,000 as travel expenses. If veterans, retired civil servants and teachers wish to settle down on the mainland with their families, the Taiwanese authorities should regularly remit them their due retirement pay and benefits. The authorities should also buy back the *Warrior Land Grant Credentials* at a reasonable price to ensure a comfortable life for the veterans and gain public trust.
6. The people shall be allowed to travel from Taiwan to the mainland directly for homecoming rather than via a third country or region.
7. The intelligence and security agencies shall not conduct any illegal investigation or harassment against people going to the mainland for homecoming. The agency or group designated to handle the homecoming applications shall not assist in any way, such as providing relevant information, the intelligence and security agencies in such activity.⁽⁴⁵⁾

On November 22, the Homecoming Promotion Association and the Teachers' Human Rights Promotion Association jointly held a seminar, threatening to not vote for the ruling party at the end of the year if it continued to block their way home. According to the interviewees of this article, some of the requests made by the Homecoming Promotion Association in November were not accepted. For instance, regular servicemembers, civil servants and teachers were not allowed to visit the mainland during their term, mainlander veterans didn't get the TWD 60,000 travel allowances, and Taiwan residents still had to go to the mainland via a third region (Hong Kong) from the end of the 1980s to the early 2000s. On the other hand, the Taiwanese authorities did buy back the *Warrior Land Grant Credentials* at a reasonable price, and the money could be used for homecoming expenses.

On November 2, the Red Cross Society of Taiwan began to accept homecoming applications and help transfer letters. That was called a "historical day". On December 1, the Taiwanese authorities officially began to implement the *Methods for Taiwan Residents to Visit Their Families on the Mainland*, and more than 300,000 people made homecoming trips in the following year⁽⁴⁶⁾. In February 1988, the Homecoming Promotion Association, having achieved its founding mission of enabling everyone to visit their families on the mainland freely, was dissolved.

It must be emphasized that although the homecoming movement played an irreplaceable role in urging the Taiwanese authorities to allow homecoming at an early date, only a small number of mainlander veterans living in Taipei participated in it because the Homecoming Promotion Association leveraged the force of a party out of power

(45) Leaflet titled "Homesickness (homecoming movement)—You take me here as a soldier; now you send me home" (November, 1987) in the database of life memories and narratives of mainlander Taiwanese, Academia Sinica, <https://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/TWM/Public/content/story/collectable.jsp?pk=189>, visited on December 21, 2022.

(46) *Fujian Daily*, December 2, 1988.

(Democratic Progressive Party) that most mainlander veterans did not support. The interviewees of this article lived in Taichung and did not participate in the movement.

Homecoming 40 years late

Eager applications for homecoming

Interviewees No.1 and No.3 got in touch with their families on the mainland through correspondence at the end of 1987, and both set foot in their motherland in 1988, almost 40 years since they left. When Taiwanese authorities abolished the homecoming ban, interviewee No.2 was a civil servant, who, as per the regulations, was not allowed to go to the mainland. “The first thing I did when I got to the office was reading the newspaper to see when civil servants like me would be allowed to go home too.⁽⁴⁷⁾” His mother was very old then, and he was worried he could never see her again if he didn’t go home soon. After his resignation was rejected in the spring of 1988, No.2 left Taiwan that summer for an alleged overseas vacation, and finally went to the mainland via Hong Kong. Here is how he recalled his first homecoming application:

When the authorities abolished the ban, the policy did not extend to civil servants. But I could not quit my job then, so I handed in a statement to my superior, in which I gave an account of my life experience and how I felt about home, and asked for permission to make a home visit to the mainland. My superior and another official responsible for ideological education were my fellow townsmen. They said, they could let me go, but I had to come back. I said of course. So I went to Hong Kong for an alleged overseas vacation, and then headed to the mainland. I had a very good relationship with my colleagues in Taiwan, so nobody exposed me when I got back — I would be punished if they did. My mother was in her 90s then, and I was afraid she could not wait much longer. I was determined to see her regardless of the consequences.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Homecoming preparations

When the date was set, the “youth soldiers” set about preparing gifts, which usually included money and living necessities. They could exchange their money into US dollars in Taiwan or Hong Kong, which were then exchanged into Chinese currency when they arrived in Guangzhou. The “youth soldiers” would give the money to their parents, wives or children living on the mainland. Almost all of them bought the “three big items and five small items,” the former referring to a fridge, TV set and washing machine, and the latter camera, radio, recording machine, electric cooker, and watch. Some of them would also bring several gold rings and necklaces for their family members. In the words of the interviewees, “We want to bring everything to our families on the mainland⁽⁴⁹⁾” to “make up for what we owe them in the past years⁽⁵⁰⁾,” “pay filial piety⁽⁵¹⁾” or “lessen our compunction for not being there for our children⁽⁵²⁾.”

Most of those “youth soldiers” retired from military service quite late, and had to do lowly jobs as cheap labor force⁽⁵³⁾, so they did not have much money when the authorities allowed them to visit the mainland. According to the surveys of this article, the first homecoming trip cost them most of their savings⁽⁵⁴⁾. If they were already married in Taiwan, they would choose to make the trip alone, so money could be better spent on buying gifts. “When I went back the first time, my wife and daughter didn’t come along because we spent all the money on the ‘three big items and five small items’⁽⁵⁵⁾.” As previously mentioned, the Homecoming Promotion Association in November 1987

(47) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

(48) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

(49) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

(50) Interview with No.3 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

(51) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

(52) Interview with No.1 via zoom on January 5, 2021.

(53) Zhang (2022).

(54) No.3 led six fellow townsmen on a homecoming trip to the mainland in 1988. He recalled that those six “youth soldiers” spent all their savings on the trip.

(55) Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

called on the authorities to buy back the *Warrior Land Grant Credentials* at a reasonable price, which fortunately became a reality, so the money could be used as part of homecoming expenses. Interviewee No.1 recalled how he sold his *Warrior Land Grant Credentials* for money:

You handed in the Warrior Land Grant Credentials, claimed that you did not want the land, and you'd get TWD 100,000. You could also keep it if you thought the price was too low. What was the point of keeping the Warrior Land Grant Credentials as "Recovery" was absolutely impossible by then? We wanted to go back, and we all needed money. Those who received tutoring from the Veterans Affairs Council after military retirement received TWD 100,000 and those who did not received TWD 200,000. Most of us got TWD 100,000.⁽⁵⁶⁾

"Extortion" by travel agencies

From the end of the 1980s to the 1990s, there was no direct flight between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, and mainland Taiwanese, when they went to the mainland, had to fly to Hong Kong first. As a result, almost all formalities, such as passport, Mainland Travel Permit for Taiwan Residents, air ticket, transfer, and money exchange, had to be handled by travel agencies. At that time, most "youth soldiers" were in their 60s and poorly educated, and they had never travelled far, so they followed the travel agency's arrangements without a second thought, which subjected them to deception or rip-off. The three interviewees of this article went to the mainland in 1988, and all of them were "extorted" by the travel agency when transferring in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Let's see what interviewees No.2 and No.3 said:

No.2:

The veterans never travelled far or took a flight. We had to follow the travel agency's arrangements every step of the way. When we were in Hong Kong, the agency began to make a fool of us. It did not handle the transfer formalities right away, but instead kept us there and took us out for sightseeing and fun, while in fact, it had an ax to grind—it could get money from the shops they took us to. Even when we were in Guangzhou, it was in no hurry to let us go, but tried to convince us to go shopping and exchange our US dollars into Chinese currency with them, so they could profit from the difference between the official and private exchange rates. They would not give us the Chinese currency on the spot either, but would wait till we were on the plane, so we had no time to calculate. If we found out the truth when we got home, there was nothing we could do. Those were the tricks played by the travel agencies.⁽⁵⁷⁾

No.3:

I had a comrade-in-arms whose daughter was married to Hong Kong. She told me not to exchange money with the travel agency and would exchange it for me. Later I heard the other veterans exchanged their money at a much lower rate. We waited three days in Hong Kong before getting on a plane to the mainland because the travel agency did not want us to leave, so it lied to us, saying there was no flight. What it was really doing was to have us spend money in Hong Kong. But we did not know that. We had never made such a long trip before.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Reunion at last

When they were finally reunited after 40 long years, both the "youth soldiers" and their families on the mainland burst into tears with joy. All those years of missing, grievance and regret swarmed into their hearts at that moment. When interviewee No.1 left home in 1949, his son was a toddler; when he came back for the first time in 1988, his son was a middle-aged man, and both father and son were speechless crying. Interviewee No.2 said, "I approached my mother on my knees from outside the gate and cried my eyes out"⁽⁵⁹⁾. According to the interviewees, the "youth

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Interview with No.1 via zoom on January 5, 2021.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Zhang (2021: 49).

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Interview with No.3 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Interview with No.2 via zoom on December 6, 2020.

soldiers” had one month of home leave, during which they could have a pretty good idea of how their families had lived and what they had been through in the past 40 years. For instance, No.1 learnt from his son that his own parents and wife all died of hunger during the Great Famine (1959-1961), leaving the boy as an orphan. No.2 learnt that his mother, little brother and sister were all labelled as the “Five Black Categories” and suffered unimaginable discrimination during the Cultural Revolution, all because he was in Taiwan. No.3 learnt that his mother almost lost her mind because of his “disappearance”, and adopted a son from a relative in the end. His elder sister had much trouble in her life too during the Cultural Revolution because he was in Taiwan.

All in all, each family had its own story of misery even though what they experienced was different, which made the “youth soldiers” even more ashamed of themselves after they learnt more about the life history of their families. Therefore, when they went back to Taiwan, they began to regularly remit money to their families on the mainland to make up for the lost years. But those “youth soldiers” were already in their 70s in the 1990s and the 2000s, and the frequent homecoming and remittances drained their life-long savings and lent a heavy blow to their late life.

Conclusion

By analyzing the homecoming practice of “youth soldiers,” this article expounded on their life process in the 1980s. Another contribution made by this article is that it described in detail the homecoming movement launched by “youth soldiers,” which is barely seen in previous studies. The homecoming movement could be interpreted from the point of timing. First of all, in terms of social time, the new social movements led by native Taiwanese emerged in the early 1980s and the authoritarian regime began to loosen its grip. Second, in terms of family time, having been separated for 40 years, the “youth soldiers” did not know whether their parents were still alive. All they knew was that their parents were very old, and they might not have another chance to see them if they did not go home now, and would spend the rest of their lives in regret. Third, in terms of individual time, “youth soldiers” were either old enough to retire or very close to it in the mid-1980s, so they had the time to think about homecoming. All these factors prompted the homecoming movement.

Of all the social movements launched in Taiwan before 1987, when the authorities lifted the *Martial Law*, only the homecoming movement was initiated by mainlander Taiwanese. It was a local (limited to Taipei) and short-lived movement that neither obtained the support of the mainstream circles of Taiwanese society and the upper class of mainlander Taiwanese nor mobilized all the mainlander veterans across the island. Nevertheless, the movement had greater social influence than other movements of the same period. It was significant in at least two ways. One, it dramatically escalated the social movements in Taiwan from moderation to an intense confrontation with the authorities, which eventually forced the authorities to make policies meeting its demand. From this point of view, the homecoming movement was the only successful social movement in Taiwan by the end of the 1980s. Two, it was the fuse that led to the beginning of the rapprochement of cross-Strait relations⁽⁶⁰⁾.

In the preface to the book, *Xiang Guan Chu Chu*⁽⁶¹⁾, compiled by the Association of Mainlander Taiwanese, Chang Maukuei, the president of the Association, described the homecoming movement as follows: at that time, a group of veterans with a special background, who were suspected by the Taiwanese authorities and smeared by the media, took the initiative, at the risk of their lives, to break down a wall in the global political containment of the Cold War era, two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall⁽⁶²⁾. As stated in the preface, the homecoming movement launched by mainlander veterans, mainly the disadvantaged “youth soldiers,” was not understood or supported by the mainstream groups in Taiwanese society. In fact, those involved in the movement were ostracized. Interestingly, it was exactly this movement that expedited the collapse of the authoritarian regime in Taiwan and consequently

(60) Meng Hong, 2019, “Homecoming Movement of Mainlander Veterans in Taiwan: The Fuse to the Lifting of Homecoming Ban,” *Love for China* edited by the United Front Work Department of CPC Zhejiang Provincial Committee, http://www.qxzh.zj.cn/art/2020/7/3/art_1229008803_49738949.html?key, visited on May 14, 2023.

(61) The English translation is *Illustrated Story Book of Homecoming Mainlander Taiwanese*.

(62) Chang (2008: 11). It was “four years before” in the original article, but the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, two years after the homecoming movement, so this article changed it to “two years before”.

benefitted the mainstream groups of Taiwanese society.

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