

FEMININITY IN MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF CHINESE FEMALE SOLDIERS

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ABSTRACT

This is a work dedicated to finding the disparities between Chinese media sources pertaining to the description of Chinese female soldiers. The major disparity found is in regard to femininity in Chinese female soldiers. My research is dedicated to understanding the implications of being feminine in a male-dominated career field, if femininity is a factor in Chinese military women's situation, the current situation of Chinese female soldiers, and the future of what it means to be a woman in the People's Liberation Army.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to women who are afraid to be their natural selves for fear of backlash.

We are women, tough and strong, and femininity does not have to be lost in order to gain
respect.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, a healthy woman can readily join the military without backlash and restrictions. Women's rights in the United States, in comparison to other countries, has a better foundation that provides women with the same opportunities as men. As a military woman myself, I wonder what perceptions military women regard themselves in. A study focusing on women in Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) conducted in the United States finds women "defined themselves as *feminine*, and because they viewed femininity as natural, they struggled to embody it, even though they knew this trait was explicitly incompatible with the military" (Silvia, 2008)

They attempt to gloss over the contradiction of being female in a male (or gender-blind) institution through the expansion or re-affirmation of a "natural" identity as a woman, rather than exposing or challenging the implicit gendered foundation of their military and civilian lives. Through this process, women's understandings of their own identities, their relationships to men, and their position in the system of gender are reproduced – even while they undertake cultural work defining themselves as self-determined and empowered (Silvia, 2008).

This finding prompted my interest in Chinese military women and in how their society views them. Chinese women's rights are given through a government-driven society; women are dependent on the government to grant them their rights. It is important to study Chinese military women because they are few, perform strenuous tasks for their country, and may be redefining what it means to be a woman in China.

I began to research this topic not only because of my own interest, but because I wanted to know the implications of being a military woman in China. In the beginning of my research, I analyze how Chinese media sources portray military women. In the first two sources I analyzed, China Daily and All-China Women's Federation, there is little to no emphasis on women's femininity playing a role in their military service. However, my last three sources, China Military Online, the National Defense of the People's Republic of China, and Zhihu, all place an emphasis on military women's femininity. Chinese military women are the definition of a strong workingwoman; therefore, the portrayal military women are given can become the role model for all women in Chinese society. China constantly reports on female soldiers: evaluating their achievements, describing their training, and giving military women a voice. Vivian Wang writes in her article "Five ways China's women are closing the gender gap" that women's "ultimate goal is not to achieve equality by numbers. Nor do women need to behave like men to be successful. We just need the freedom of choice to live a life on our own terms" (2017). In my research, I find evidence to support this claim of military wanting to serve on their terms.

Women's rights in China are a fairly new concept, and because of this, they face an uphill battle. However, through Communism and global women's rights movements women are at an all-time high of enjoying their rights. In the past sixty years, China has implemented several women's rights policies, from banning foot binding and child marriages down to maternity rights. As women's rights become a more established custom in China, more and more women want and are expected to work.

After the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the Communist Party became the sole party of China. In order to instill devotion, discipline, and order, the party creates the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) to revamp Chinese society. The goal of the Revolution is to rid China of its old

feudalistic ways, and to instill a pure Communist ideology within the people. However, that came with a large cost. Thousands are displaced, starved, and murdered by the disarray the party causes the country. The purge of intellectuals, old party leaders, and landowners hurt the country after the revolution and results in a rewrite of policies after Mao Zedong's death. In 1981 party officials declare the Cultural Revolution as, "responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the country, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic" (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press 1981:32).

Nevertheless, at least one positive development comes out of the Revolution: women's rights. Women's status prior to the Cultural Revolution is not nearly as advanced as it is today. After the Communist Revolution, women's status starts to become a regulated issue--the first Chinese law under communist rule is the Marriage Law in 1950. However, before 1950, women's husbands and families dictate their lives, and they have no choices of their own. However, Mao Zedong's policies during the Cultural Revolution change everything for women. Women acquire rights and are treated as equals to men. The old feudalistic rituals are banned and shamed; people following that lifestyle are severely punished. Women's education level is at an all-time high (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press 1981:38). But at the same time, the Women's Federation is suspended during this time to ensure the Party's agenda is still pushed over the woman's agenda (Li 2000). The belief that "Whatever men can do, women can do too" (Li 2000:33) shows that women are measured on the man's scale, and not their own. During that time women become technically "equal" to men but not in the terms we believe in today. The Revolution actually hurts women because it creates the perception that to be masculine is to be strong, tough, and respected, but to be feminine is to be weak, gentle, and inferior to men.

An economic boom in China follows the Revolution and focus is shifted towards the economy--not women. Still, during that time, women's studies organizations are founded and women's rights are taken more seriously but on the individual level (Li 2000:33). The party does not dictate how women should be viewed but put forth laws to protect women from hardships in the society. Protecting women, however, does not equal changing perceptions on women. Therefore, a feudalistic outlook of women still resides within the society, and is prevalent today (Li 2000:34).

Two implications come from the Cultural Revolution: first, women are honored for their hard work without focusing on their femininity. Second, modern day Chinese military is now showing women in a more feminine light to prove strong is still beautiful. The gain of a military job does not have to mean the loss of femininity or the assumption of masculinity. These two themes are prevalent throughout my research. While certain sources focus on the acts and achievements of women based off their merit, other sources focus on the same acts and achievements, but also describe women's femininity as a part of it.

The Revolution is relevant to my research because it gives the background of women soldiers and societal perceptions of them. Today, media outlets differ on how they view military women. My research focuses on how media portrayals of military women differ from one source to another. Do certain media outlets still compare women to men? Are women judged by their physical appearances? In my research I analyze five sources to find the answers to these questions, the implications of what it means to be a woman soldier, and the future implications of military women.

Analyzing the differences between contemporary Chinese media sources portraying Chinese female soldiers has not been thoroughly researched. Secondary sources on the matter are

few, while there is an abundance of Chinese articles focusing on Chinese military women's service. This research is not devoted to the statistics of women in the People's Liberation Army or the laws in place to promote women's status; that information can be found in multiple secondary sources. This research is devoted to figuring out how contemporary Chinese media sources describe their female soldiers. It is concentrated on finding how women's roles in China are changing and if that can lead to broader implications of what it means to be a female soldier in China and what it means to be a strong, feminine woman.

Research Question

How are Chinese Female Soldiers' Femininity Portrayed In Modern Media?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Even with different jobs and lifestyles, women share sameness.

1. Military women can be wives and mothers who have the same general expectations and rights that other women have.

The general consensus in China is that mothers should work but at the same time they should give their children the exact amount of attention as if they are stay at home mothers. The inability to do so creates a sense of failure in Chinese women (Blurton 2012).

China has protective policies put in place for women created by world culture and communism. (Li 2000:34) These policies are created to give women a chance to succeed in a male-dominated culture, but at the same time, protect their “weaknesses” brought on by womanhood. For example, women are not allowed to work in dangerous conditions in China, because it can cause harm to their uteruses, therefore damaging a fetus (Lau 2012:28).

The global woman’s movement in China is especially helpful in two regards: reproductive rights and domestic violence (Kaufman 2012). China’s top down reform has protected women in several regards, pregnant women are not allowed to work in cold or elevated conditions; all women are granted maternity leave regardless of their job; and marriage rights, i.e. the banning of child brides, selling daughters to make money for the family, etc. According to this theory, I expect media sources to present military women as sharing the burden of expectations for marriage, children, and being entitled to women’s rights.

2. Women share stress due to the ideals of a two-income household and lingering ideas of Confucianism.

A gender and job mobility study in China found that educated men are more likely to be hired for a job over an educated woman. Researchers Cao Yang and Hu Chiung-Yin believe wider gender gaps are caused by lack of state's effort in promoting women's rights, the labor market's emergence, family dynamics in regards to gender roles all play a part in job mobility gaps (Yang, Cao and Hu Chiung-Yin 2007). This causes women to be stressed for multiple reasons. One is the lingering idea that women still only belong in the home. Another study found that rural Chinese women lack self-confidence; half the people surveyed (54.4% women and 61.6% men) believe women's work is in the home, and men's work is in the public (Benxiang 2014). This societal view stems from a long history of Confucianism. In Confucius's teachings, women are portrayed as obedient, serving helpers. They first must serve their fathers, then serve their husbands, and after their husbands die; they must serve their sons. The new societal belief of a two-income household directly opposes old gender roles; creating confusion of gender roles in the household.

Another stress would be the fear of workplace gender discrimination. "In a survey of 55,000 working women released on Monday by recruiters "Zhaopin.com," over 80 percent of respondents said they had encountered gender discrimination in their work, or in their search for a job" (Chinadaily.com.cn 2017). This discrimination can range from not being hired to the job because of her gender to being sexually harassed for being a woman. A study done in Hong Kong in 1984 found that of the 169 college-educated women employees, two-thirds of encountered sexual harassment at the workplace (Dolecheck 1984). Hong Kong Coalition Against Sexual Abuse (1992) conducted a questionnaire survey on sexual harassment in the

workplace. It finds that of the 455 women interviewed, over 80% of them faced some form of sexual harassment since 1990 (Chan, So-Kum, and Chan 1999). According to this theory, I foresee military women facing the same issues workingwomen encounter.

B. Although Chinese female soldiers share similarities with civilian women, their media portrayals can also be different.

1. The media portrays higher expectations for women in the military.

a. Military: it is an honor and privilege to serve in the People's Liberation Army as a woman.

Joining the PLA as a woman requires going through a rigorous selection process. Therefore, officials evaluate women on the basis of their previous schooling, physical fitness abilities, their allegiance to the communist party, and their interview skills. It is important to note that the interview skills are not a requirement for men (Allen, Kania 2016). According to this theory, I expect newspapers to present military women as extremely high performing, prideful, and respectable.

b. The military being too bloody led to specialized jobs for military women. The researcher of "Chinese Women in the People's Liberation Army: Professionals or Quasi-Professionals?" finds that women in the military are trained the same as men. However the majority of the jobs women do are medical, translations, behind the scenes work, etc. The author samples 61 women to see where they fell in the military. 22 women are medical workers, 16 are scientists/engineers, 12 are cultural workers, 5 are commanders with 3 staff, and the last 3 women are pilots. The author notes that if there are only three million people in the PLA, then women account for 4.5 percent (Li 1993). Since 1993, progression has been made. PLA enlisted women and officers are only prohibited from serving in submarines (Allen, Kania 2016). Only a

few units do not have women serving in them. It was also found that most women serve in all women subunits, with little progression to integration training (Allen, Kania 2016). According to this theory, I believe newspapers will present military women as highly specialized workingwomen.

2. Mulan was a story of masculinity for military women, however the opposite is true for today.

The classical Chinese version of Mulan has a young woman dressing as a man to take her father's place in war. She fights in the war for 12 years and no one knows she is not a man. This is significant to my thesis because, now, femininity plays a large role in the PLA (Huang 2014).

From a contemporary standpoint, according to *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* by Susan Brownell, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, and Thomas Laquer, the Cultural Revolution is a time of intense masculinity and the oppression of femininity. Women are tied to the male standard of success--specifically by male standards of grooming; women wanting to pursue a feminine look are criticized for not following protocol (2001:25). Women and men wore "Mao suits": women are required to dress like male soldiers to promote equality between the sexes and have short hair (2001:251).

3. Military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them.

The new PLA recruitment video featuring woman soldiers dancing did not portray the actual roles of military women, but beautiful women dancing (Huang 2017). China Daily states that these women's first honor guard lesson is nothing but a beauty class (Huang 2017). China Daily reports that women have to take part in a talent show to test artistic ability to become part of the Chinese Army. "Wang Qian, a vice battalion commander in the Second Artillery Force . . . believed it was extremely necessary to include the talent shows, and told METRO: 'Female

soldiers are a special element of the army.’ She said the army did not only want someone who is intelligent” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2009). The South China Morning post writes an article on China’s all female color guard welcoming team for Turkmenistan’s president. There, it describes women in short skirts carrying guns marching right behind the men. The Chinese military states that the “addition of women to parade unit a step in the right direction” (Huang 2014).

The theories and research provided show that women are perceived differently in Chinese media and scholarly articles, but they do not give further insight into *why*. I will study the *way* these media outlets present military women, what specific words are constantly used to describe them, while considering the relationship between the words and the women. According to this theory, I expect newspapers to present military women as commodities not leaders.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

By using a comparative historical method, I compare different media portrayals of military women. “**Comparative historical research** is a method of social science that examines historical events in order to create explanations that are valid beyond a particular time and place, either by direct comparison to other historical events, theory building, or reference to the present day” (Just the Facts 101. Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Research, n.d.). Comparative historical method is the most beneficial research method for my project because my access to Chinese sources is limited; therefore the Internet provides all of the resources. Comparing modern day military women to the military women of the Cultural Revolution provides the framework of my findings and aids in the discussion of the implications of what it means to be a modern-day Chinese female soldier.

Observing mass media gives me a better insight into the into women’s social position change in China, and the societal attitudes towards it. Analyzing mass media over researching secondary sources allowed my research to be raw and untouched by biases. I am analyzing five sources: two propaganda sources, two military sources, and one social media source. I chose contemporary sources from the early 2000s-2017 because the information is readily available, and the women’s military movement, specifically women in combat, is happening *now*.

However, in analyzing literature that pertains to my theories, the time period is expanded to the Cultural Revolution (1960s). This time period provides background information to the theories and helps create a better understanding of Chinese military women’s situation. It is

important to analyze the differences between the modern military woman and those of the past because there are stark differences in how the media treats these women.

Analyzing the language media sources use provides a better guide into women's progression in China. There have been women in the military in the past. However, in the past 15 years, women have become fighter pilots, have been allowed to fight in combat roles, and have been given higher leadership positions. These changes are new and recent, so it is important to evaluate the media on how it has reacted to women's advancement in society.

By using Chinese media sources and other studies, I observe if and how Chinese media outlets portray military women differently. I use previous research on women's rights in China to get background information on theory. I also use five contemporary sources to find the answer of why these women are portrayed differently in the media. The sources I analyze are:

- a. China Daily
- b. China Military Online
- c. Ministry of Defense of the People's Republic of China
- d. All-China Woman's Federation
- e. Zhihu

China Daily, a source ran by the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party, has been useful in my research. According to its website China Daily is, "Published in both Chinese and English, and subject to 5.2 million page views a day, with more than 60 percent from overseas, the website serves as an online bridge between China and the rest of the world." (Chinadaily.com.cn 2005). Founded as the first major online news source in 1995, its long history and large following made it a respectable news source with the most "accurate" information on the web. Because China is censored in the news it can share, China Daily is one

of the only outlets to get a glimpse inside China. The importance of selecting China Daily as one of my five sources is that this English language website is what the Chinese government *wants* foreigners to read. Research on government-approved articles can equal research on what the Chinese government's position on female soldiers is. Because China Daily is a propaganda website, I conclude it reflects the Chinese Communist Party's opinions on female soldiers.

Chinese Military Online, a news source written only in Chinese, offers a different insight into military operations in China by providing a deeper look into the world of the People's Liberation Army that the English websites do not offer. Navigating China Military Online proves to be a challenge, because the sub tabs do not promote articles on female soldiers. Instead, I have to enter “女兵,” woman soldier, into its search bar. Multiple articles appear, yet they are all covering the same story. Finding relevant and up-to-date articles is difficult, but the articles I did find and translate prove to be extremely important in my research. China Military Online is chosen because it portrays how the military treats its female soldiers. Consequently, in my research I assume China Military Online's opinion regarding women's soldiers reflects the PLA's stance on female soldiers.

The Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China is similar to China Military Online. According to its website its mission is “to support the overall mission of the Chinese Armed Forces by providing timely, official and accurate information about defense policies, organizations, functions, operations and activities.” In my research, I analyze the Chinese version of the website which “make up the Chinese Armed Forces' online presence” (eng.mod.gov.cn). This source proves useful by its articles on Chinese female soldiers, but the information it provides is different than the rest. This source describes the women as beautiful like China Military Online does; however, it also goes more deeply into the women's

accomplishments than China Daily or All-China Women's Federation does. Therefore, this source is a fine mix between all news-based sources. Similar to China Military Online, I assume the stances provided on this website concur with the Chinese Military stances on female soldiers.

According to its website, All-China Women's Federation, "offers comprehensive information on the way China's women live today, showcasing their views on the rapidly changing world around them, the challenges they face and the achievements that have been made in the field of women's development." This source proves most useful in finding articles on the success of female soldiers. Its articles are progressive in nature, focuses on the achievements of the women and not their physical attributes (like other sources). The Women's Federation is a social organization ran by the Communist Party. Therefore I conclude this source reflects the views of female cadre.

Zhihu, a Chinese question and answer website, is selected to get a better understanding to the reasons behind women's media portrayals. This website reflects the views of the common people, their concerns about women in the military, advice for joining the military, and even how to date women in the military. By looking at blog posts not written by government officials and propaganda writers, I am able to see how the people viewed women in the military. Hence, I assume that Zhihu blog posts reflect urban, young, educated views on female soldiers.

I identify fourteen articles from China Daily, eleven articles from China Military Online, twenty-three articles from the Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, twelve articles from All-China Women's Federation, and sixteen articles from Zhihu. It is important to note that China Military Online, the Ministry of National Defense, and Zhihu are in Chinese; therefore, I have to translate the articles into English to conduct my research. China

Daily and Women's federation have English versions of their China-based websites, which I use for my analyses.

My research method starts with collecting articles from these five sources. After obtaining multiple articles focused on military women from each source, I convert the articles into word documents and save them in the Rich Text Format. This format allows me to analyze the articles using the Text Analysis Markup System (TAMS). TAMS is a "free qualitative data analysis software tool for use on Mac OSX." (Hart, 2011). Researchers can use TAMS for sorting through data and selecting coded data, code data, recode data, running searches, and generating reports on the codes and data (Hart, 2011). TAMS allows me to code specific words, led me to recognize patterns and relationships, and identify common concepts found in my sources. In total, I have 82 codes within my five sources. For example:

"{soldiers} {China_Daily} {2017} {physical_training} {training} {educated}" "After training for three months, more than 80 percent could complete a 3-km run in 14 minutes," she said. In addition to their outstanding physical condition, more than 75 percent of the team are college graduates.{/training} {/physical_training} {/educated}" (Yang, 2017). This code is an excerpt from a China Daily article titled "All-Female Fighting Force Wins all-around Respect." The article describes the daily life of a female soldier in the PLA and what training they underwent to achieve success.

Each code helps me understand the articles and get a better understanding of the biases in the media. "Soldiers" in this case is coded to keep record of how many times the sources mentioned female soldiers. I use the code "China Daily" to keep track of the number of China Daily articles I had in my research. 2017 was coded to see disparities between the years. Educated, training, physical training were common codes in my research that help show the

larger themes within my work. My theory of “wars being too bloody led to specialized jobs for military women” focuses heavily on the codes training, physical training, combat, etc. Through TAMS I am able to generate reports code-by-code. The implication of this allows me to run a test using only the code “physical training,” then all articles pertaining to the code “physical training” appeared in an orderly fashion for me to analyze. This is specifically helpful in my findings section because each theory pulls from all five sources. Being able to easily find evidence for my theories by running tests on specific codes made my research more concise and easier to manage.

Coding is important for my research to create an unbiased grasp of the articles I analyzed. The comparative historical method paired with coding creates a qualitative research project. Because of the coding, my methods can be trusted and my results are considered factual. Qualitative research exposes societal biases in the media without hard numerical data. Observing small disparities between words and phrases paired with the correct code created trusted insights into the portrayal of women’s rights evolution in Chinese society and in the military in particular. This makes it more likely to find co-occurrences of themes and disparities between sources.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

A. Even with different jobs and lifestyles, women share sameness.

Military women can be wives and mothers who have the same general expectations and rights that other women have.

Marriage

Marriage is not a highly publicized issue in my sources. In my research only one article strictly focuses on the “love life” of female soldiers. A Zhihu post asks the question of how to “Catch a Female Soldier.” An informative male gives the answer on how to catch the affections of military women. It is important to note from the article not the overall question of how to pursue a female soldier but the level of possibility for female soldiers to interact with males, especially ones looking for serious relationships.

In fact, the little female soldiers chase well, before our troops is like this: you think we are almost all men, female soldiers are so few, naturally, they will become the focus of the collective, so . . . female soldiers have very strict management. Female soldiers are also women, but also lonely, they cannot communicate normally with the men around, even the management of mobile phones is strict . . .they are eager to be able to communicate with men. Since they are in such a state, it is not hard to imagine them . . . They are really passionate, theirs mouths are very sweet . . . There are few opportunities to meet them, go out together or can not go out (usually when female soldiers are out the male soldiers cannot go out) . . . If you are not in the army, just know female soldiers in the army, then chat with her every day through the network, do not write letters, send postcards, send things to her, etc. . . .Wait until her vacation leave then play out to enhance feelings or something (Zhihu.com n.d.).

This post suggests that female soldiers are mostly single, that they might want relationships but know these are hard to obtain. The author believes that non-military men have a harder chance of meeting military women, which can insinuate that military to military

relationships are most common. However, women and men are held in separate squadrons, therefore mingling with other cadre is also hard to achieve.

Mom

According to *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, “the vast majority of women in China marry . . . and more than 90 percent of these have their first child within their first year of marriage” (Brownell et al 2001:348). Through my research I code the word “mom” two times, both in texts produced by the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China. According to the ministry’s website, mom soldiers are on the rise. “According to the leaders of the group army, in recent years, "mom soldiers" have been gradually increasing in the barracks . . . In their respective posts, these female technicians are technical pioneers and masters, but due to their positions and tasks, they [can engage in] limited family and children's care.” (Mod.gov.cn 2017)

From the female soldier to the ‘mom soldier,’ the ladies and servants have changed not only their identities but also their shoulders with more responsibility and responsibility. The leader of a certain division said that in the face of the group of "mom soldiers," the division and party committees actively and enthusiastically guarantee: provide them with servants' apartments, configure washing machines, water heaters and other living facilities, give priority to their vacations, and adjust the positions of pregnant women officers away from radiation to ensure their health. Warmhearted protection for the "mother soldiers" family worry-free, work harder (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

Mother soldiers are a new phenomenon, but they still deserve the same rights as regular working mothers. The laws that China has in place to protect pregnant women still apply to military women, regardless of their position. However, the articles note that military mothers bear more burdens than civilian mothers. It appears that although the military will keep pregnant women safe, returning to work is still a burden. Military mothers are expected to perform as well as they did before having children, which creates more stress for the mother. The second article tries to

prove that military motherhood is possible, and that the military will help women obtain family care while returning to work. It is important to note the tone of this article; the military “actively and enthusiastically guarantee” multiple amenities for pregnant women and new mothers. Further, the article’s source is the ministry, not the Women’s Federation. Normally, this type of article would fall into the Women’s Federation category because they specialize in protecting women’s rights. However, they post no articles on the matter. The military promotion of motherhood is interesting in two regards. First, the military is projecting the ideals of the nation: motherhood as dedication to the state, which is an ideal that stems from the Cultural Revolution (Brownwell et al 2001:). Second, women are expected to still stay at work after having the children. However the article takes pity of military mothers by noticing that these mothers can face more struggles because they lack a support system.

Under 25

While “military women can be wives and mothers who have the same general expectations and rights that other women have” suggests that all women will share the same general expectations; I find that this is not the case with military women. Although mom soldiers are on the rise, they are still small in number. The majority of military women are young, unmarried, and childless, so I assume that these women are under the age of 25.

I code “under 25” eleven times, five times from China Daily, two times from China Military Online, two times from All-China Women’s Federation, and twice from Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China. For example,

In this group of paratroopers, there are a few special figures, their average age of less than 22 years old, they are the pioneer parachute, near enemy reconnaissance battlefield; they are sky rainbow, thousands of meters high altitude dancing youth - they are airborne woman Reconnaissance guide team! (81.cn 2017)

“The female combatants, with an average age of 20, made their debut appearance in the parade at Zhurihe military training base in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region” (Womenofchina.cn 2017).

They came from the women's airborne reconnaissance and guidance team, with an average age of less than 25 years. However, they dared to climb up to the heavens with the same strength as the men and women, shouldering the task of conducting new scientific research trials and special enemy reconnaissance missions (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

The importance of the “under 25” code is that it shows these women are career driven and are already highly successful. They have not been in the force for long, but their impact is quite large. They appear to be unmarried, childless, and career focused. South China Morning Post describes when women come close to 30 years old they start to feel the pressure of marriage (Southchinamorningpost.com.cn 2014). “A 2010 survey by the All China Women's Federation found that more than 90 per cent of male respondents believed women should marry before the age of 27, whereas more than half the women polled said the best time for men to tie the knot was between 28 and 30” (Southchinamorningpost.com.cn 2014). Women under the age of 25 do not yet feel this pressure; therefore, the stresses that other women endure are not yet an issue for military women.

Conclusion

While I expect media sources will present military women sharing the burden of expectations for marriage and children and also share the same women's rights, I find that this is not necessarily the case. There are mom soldiers, but they are few. However, they do share the same rights as other women. I believe this theory is proven true and false. The theory is true in the sense women do share the same rights and share the same general expectations of getting married right out of college. However, I believe the theory lacks in evidence because military

women do not follow the guidelines set before them. Even if the military is also promoting motherhood, the consensus is that motherhood is not common within the young female branch.

B. Although Chinese female soldiers share similarities with civilian women, their media portrayals can also be different.

1. The media portrays higher expectations for women in the military.

a. Military: it is an honor and privilege to serve in the People's Liberation Army as a woman.

Throughout my research, I coded "pride" twice in my articles. One article is from China Military Online and the other from Zhihu. The China Military Online article focuses on women giving up their previous possessions and girlhood to join the force. The Zhihu article focuses on women giving up their social lives, but they can "defend the country" which is something to be proudful about. Along with pride I also coded "honor," which is coded nine times: five times from China Military Online, once from Women's Federation, and three times from Zhihu.

Honor

Pride and honor mainly have codes in the two sources that focus on women's physical traits and femininity, China Military Online and Zhihu; this finding will be discussed further down in the "Mulan was a story of masculinity for military women, however the opposite is true for today" theory. The "honor" articles focus on tough training with satisfactory outcomes, marching in the PLA honor guard, and serving in the military in general. The China Military Online article is a recount of a woman's personal story of serving in the PLA, and its effects on her character.

Although my military career was not as shocking as in "SWAT" "Soldier Assault" and "I am in Special Forces," when I received the blessing from my family, when I shared my joy with my comrades and friends, when I was in training, time and time again beyond my limit, when I was absorbed in the meticulous execution of the task, when I bravely

took the lead in meritorious prizes ... I have no regrets in my choice! If you do not join the army, I may not be able to comprehend all my life, what is the real soldier, and I will not know that I am down-to-earth due diligence in ordinary jobs and what the military looks like. I will never realize what is meant by "serving" and what is called "Sword"! (Army.81.cn 2017).

Meanwhile, a Zhihu post writes on the importance of honoring service members. "Please allow people to show off the honor of the past two years, which deserves all, especially the outstanding soldier, all passed without reservation!" (Zhihu.com n.d.).

The Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China and Zhihu both show the importance of the females honoring themselves and others honoring them through their service.

They charge into the ocean, they gallop the ocean, they asked the sky, they dare to rule the sword, they guard the life, they command in the army armor if they, in the field of training tempered quality, their talent in the field of scientific research ...In the great journey of reform and strengthening the armed forces, they demonstrated a soft and strong style in every position, interpreted the contents of responsibility and dedication, and wrote poems on loyalty and sacrifice. (Mod.gov.cn 2017)

Inspire

Inspire is coded four times—twice in China Daily, once in China Military online, and once in women's federation. The China Daily inspire code is about the deceased fighter pilot Yu Xu, and how she inspires the nation and is a role model for women chasing their dreams. China Military Online is a personal account of a woman in the military and her experience in it. It is coded under inspire because she talks about the hardships she endured during training, yet she still pressed on and her time is not regrettable. She wants to inspire others to do the same. The women's federation "inspire" article is on two female pilots who "received the attention of the public because of their excellence, accuracy and bravery" (Womenofchina.cn 2016).

Conclusion

In line with my theory, there is significant amount of support for “military: it is an honor and privilege to serve in the People’s Liberation Army as a woman.” The vigorous selection process tied with the hard training creates a sense of pride and honor within Chinese military women, and the media cannot help but to also honor them.

b. The military being too bloody led to specialized jobs for military women.

Strong

While this theory says military jobs are too bloody for women, I find evidence that disproves this assumption. Throughout my research, I repeatedly read articles describing the strengths of military women and what trials they endure. The early 2000s to present day is a remarkable time in China; women in combat are more common and encouraged. All-China Women’s Federation specifically disproves the military being too bloody for women with an article on a remarkable female sniper.

A female soldier from a mainland troop stationed in Hong Kong, has gone from being a novice sniper to an expert marksman over the past few years. Huang Min, deputy leader of her squad, was the first in her brigade to pass the army's special sniper-class examination . . . Over time, Huang's shooting skills improved but she still found a gap between herself and expert snipers. Pondering long and deeply, the quick-witted woman came up with an idea – asking her coach to record her shooting on camera. Watching her target practice video carefully, Huang finally found that her tiny shrugs had changed the route of bullets, causing diversions. To overcome the small movements, Huang has since put a coin on the silencer, at the far front of the barrel during her training. If her shoulder moves, the coin will fall off. Huang reduced the size of the coin gradually and finally broke the bottleneck. Her shooting accuracy saw a sharp rise. In September 2014, when Huang and her fellow soldiers attended a training mission for special-forces in Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province, Huang's chosen hiding place was less than five meters away from where an assessment panel walked by. At such a short distance, even a shell case can be easily detected, let alone a person. Yet Huang fulfilled her task successfully nonetheless. How? The sniper stitched fishing net onto her camouflage suit, tied similar-colored strips of clothes to the net, and disguised herself with trees and weeds nearby. Though in sweltering heat, Huang remained motionless for two hours until she received the order to fire. Within six seconds, the target 300 meters away was hit down, quite to the astonishment of the examiners. This March, during the final test for sniper training organized by Huang's brigade, the intelligent woman ranked first place as usual among 55 outstanding soldiers (Womenofchina.cn 2016).

Pilot

The courage and strength of military women is a very common theme for China Daily and for All-China Women's Federation articles. "Fighter_pilot" is coded eleven times in my research, with seven times in China Daily articles and four times in All-China Women's Federation articles. Although combat-focused articles are few, they have high media attention. Non-combat jobs are highlighted, but not as much as fighter pilots, female snipers, special operation soldiers, etc. The main focus of the articles is on female pilots, because female fighter pilots are a relatively new development in China. "China enrolled its first female pilots in 1951 and since then about 580 belonging to 10 generations have joined the Air Force. The first seven generations of female pilots flew only transport planes." (Zhao 2017) China Daily also reports

The PLA Air Force will begin recruiting this year for a new generation of female pilots, the official PLA Daily reported on Wednesday. Sources with the Air Force's pilot recruitment bureau quoted by the paper said 35 candidates will be selected from high school graduates in 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. The recruits who pass years of stringent training will go on to become the People's Liberation Army planned 11th generation of female pilots. Applicants need to have been born between Aug 31, 1997, and Aug 31, 2000, and be between 165 and 185 centimeters tall. Acceptable weight is between 85 and 120 percent of the Chinese people's standard weight, which varies in accordance with age and height. There are also vision requirements, according to the report. The last time the Air Force recruited female pilots was in 2013. The most notable differences between this year's recruitment and the one in 2013 are that the height ceiling has been raised from 175 cm to 185 cm, and the area where candidates are being drawn from has expanded to 31 provincial-level regions instead of 20 (Zhao 2017).

China Daily reports women and men have to undergo an entrance exam and the scores must meet the requirements. Fu Qianshao, PLA Air Force aircraft expert says, "The courses and training for female pilot candidates are the same as those for male candidates. They will learn from textbooks, take part in flight training on basic and advanced trainer aircraft and will graduate after at least six years at the Air Force Aviation University and flight academies" (Zhao 2017).

China Daily also reports “In 2005, the Air Force began to open the post of fighter jet pilot to applicants and more than 200,000 female graduates from high schools around the country applied. A total of 35 were selected and sent to the PLA Air Force No 3 Flight Academy and 16 of them graduated and became fighter jet pilots” (Zhao 2017). All-China Women’s Federation also reports on female pilots. Qu Jiang, a senior officer at the training academy said, “These pilots are of the highest quality and have solid technique” (Womenofchina.cn 2013).

Women are also taking part in military parades. They are now showing off their skills as accomplished pilots, proving to all of China that they are just as impressive as men in their aerobic techniques, air efficiency, and confidence, and should not be seen as inferior, treated unequally, or lesser than their male counterparts.

The 81st Aerobatics Team of the People's Liberation Army of China, founded in 1962, has amazed the world with their expert flying of the J-10 fighter aircraft in the China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition (Airshow China) held in Zhuhai city, east China's Guangdong Province on November 1, 2016.

Among the pilots, two female pilots have received the attention of the public because of their excellence, accuracy and bravery. Women in the 81st Aerobatics Team receive no special treatment as the training in the team is equally strict for both genders. Yu Xu, Captain of China's Air Force and one of the female pilots said: "Basically, we have no difference from male pilots." The unit has over the years performed more than 500 times for delegations from 166 countries and regions. All women pilots in the 81st Aerobatics Team are capable of flying independently (Usa.chinadaily.cn 2016).

Training

All women, not just pilots, must undergo training to be a part of the People’s Liberation Army. I code “training” 53 times within my research, with nineteen times being from China Daily, nine times from China Military Online, seven times from All-China Women’s Federation, and twelve times from Zhihu, six times from Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China. A Zhihu post described training as different for each unit, but difficult for all.

Each unit is different, we in the beginning of the morning have training, three kilometers in the afternoon, holidays are without rest; there will be a single tactical action, low-lying

prostrate, high-profile creeping . . . There will be firearms training, bomb training, from time to time there will be a variety of assessment (Zhihu.com n.d.).

The significance of this article is found in the language this woman used to describe her training. This article is posted as an advice column to other women looking to join the PLA. The author gives straightforward advice on what to expect while undergoing training. She describes a high-passed lifestyle with no rest, the physical training aspect of it, and arms training. After training, her job will be on the special operations sector, however she still underwent vigorous training to be a part of the military.

Another training article is focused on the combat side of military training. China Daily reports on a woman in special operations training and how she physically and mentally got stronger throughout the course of her training. The article focuses on the physical aspects of training, the weight of the equipment, the miles the women have to run, etc. “After training for three months, more than 80 percent could complete a 3-km run in 14 minutes,” she says. In addition to their outstanding physical condition, more than 75 percent of the team are college graduates” (Yang 2017).

A China Daily article that is also posted on China Military Online focuses on the Naval Air Force selecting the first women to serve as combat-service personnel.

They, who focus on communication and electronics, were selected from the Beihai Fleet through recommendations, written, oral and psychological tests. After undergoing a short training at military schools, the candidates will learn flight courses and receive ground simulator training as well as carry out missions on planes under guidance of trainers (Chinadaily.com.cn 2017).

The article goes into how this involvement in women’s service is due in part to the new “information-based battlefield” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2017). “Yu Zenglei, a commander of the naval air force, said the first batch of female combat-service personnel is big help to the frontline

units, and the females come with their own skills in operating the information-based equipment.” (Chinadaily.com.cn 2017).

The Ministry of Defense for the People’s Republic of China posts several articles praising female soldiers on International Women’s Day in 2017. In the posts, the Ministry describes the hardships the women undergo, and the reward they feel afterwards. The language to describe the training is less informative and more imaginative (the next theory addresses the meaning behind poetic language used to describe female soldiers in more depth) of the women’s missions. However, the articles still relay the point of women working hard and achieving desirable end goals.

In 2015, for the first time in our country, an infantry battalion was deployed to carry out international peacekeeping missions. Strikingly, a 13-man girl's infantry squad was assigned to the infantry battalion. These female soldiers from the professional qualities, military qualities, physical fitness, ideological qualities to the ability to carry out their tasks are the best in the military, can be described as gifted (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

Another article focuses on one captain’s perspective of women in training. “Captain Zhang Jingjing believes hard gas [Chinese saying for perseverance] from the stamina, strength comes from efforts. Training program on paper, the standard is in the hearts of her and team members. In her words, "Our goal is to be the best special forces!"” (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

The Ministry also reports on a female reconnaissance team and their personal mission, “Airborne is dancing at the tip of the knife, after the test of life and death, we will be more strong and brave, but also understand the meaning of the word soldiers. ‘These words, you can represent the voices of all team members’” (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

The Ministry also displays how the women are just as tough as men and even confident enough to beat them. “A new generation of female number hand has become the company's "protagonist", for the company's combat effectiveness has injected new vitality. "Afraid of

suffering?" "Not afraid!" "Dare to challenge the men?" "Dare! Dare!" (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

The female soldiers worked overtime to study majors, drill theories and practice exercises. Corporal Zhang Jinna admitted frankly that when it first started training meteorological equipment erection courses, it was necessary to carry 20 kilograms of heavy equipment. To exercise her strength, she and men and men rushed push pallets. Today, unloading from the instrument to preempt positions, and then to expand rapidly, Zhang Jinna can be completed within a specified time (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

Conclusion

I find evidence that does not support the theory of “war is too bloody for women.” Even though the more “dangerous” jobs are few, military women still go through tough training in order to become soldiers. As one female soldier said, "We are women, but strong and tough" (Yang 2017).

2. Mulan was a story of masculinity for military women, however the opposite is true for today.

Beautiful

According to Baidu, a Chinese media website that carries common definitions. The definition of “model” women (白富美, bai fu mei, white, rich, and beautiful) “refers to the first face beautiful, the second figure is good, the third temperament is good” (Baidu.com 2017).

The China Military Online articles support this theory by over-exaggerating women’s femininity in combative roles. China Military Online refers to female soldiers as girls, beautiful, young, etc. Further, it describes female combat reconnaissance teams in objectifying terms by describing their military service as beautiful and pleasant to look at and depicts training scenarios by using poetic language. “The most beautiful is their attitude - always keep charge, ready to fight, gorgeous youth, struggle is their best life poems” (81.cn 2017). “The most beautiful is their smile - ups and downs without frustration, difficulties do not bow, the weak appearance, experience let them be fearless in the foreground” (81.cn 2017).

My research on China Military Online finds articles on men or other missions does not use such language to describe what is going on; the language describing men in missions is straightforward, and does not focus on human characteristics. However, when covering a women's success story, the website focuses on the success only a few times. Most of the time, it focuses on way the women looked. One article tells the story of two women in an intense training exercise. Multiple paragraphs focus on the women's struggle during the exercise and how difficult it is to overcome the obstacles.

Two female soldiers ran the finish line with a score of 3 hours and 52 minutes, and each of the Devil Week training sessions was successfully completed in the following three days. As a result of participating in devil week training all year round and achieving all the results, Luisining [one of the women] won the "Extreme Training Warrior Medal" issued by Armed Police Headquarters in March 2017. Xiao Ming Dan [the other woman] because of physical reasons absent from the devil weeks training and regrets losing election. However, these honors do not seem to have become the focus of attention of officers and men. Impressed in everyone's mind the deepest scene is a muddy two female soldiers biting their teeth, laughing, hand in hand to run to the finish line. At that moment, they were so embarrassed, but they looked so beautiful (Jz.chinamil.com.cn 2017).

Focusing on women's beauty is an occurring theme for China Military Online. I code "beautiful" nineteen times within my five sources, ten times are from China Military Online articles, and seven from Ministry of Nation Defense for the People's Republic of China. Other femininity driven codes associated with China Military Online are girls, mentioned seven out of the ten times coded. One "girls" quote about an honor guard member is "gestures exudes the attractiveness of the military soldier girl" (Feng, 2017). Sweet is mentioned three times, twice being from China Military Online. A caption from an online photo on its website is "A group of photos tell you why female soldiers laugh so sweet!" The article then goes on to describe the requirements to become a female soldier: physical requirements, mental capabilities, and test scores.

China Military Online is not alone in focusing on the physical aspects of women. The Ministry of National Defense for the People's Republic of China also played a large role of describing women based on their femininity. However, the paradox lies in the fact the Ministry also heavily concentrated on mission success.

This is a collective with intense fighting spirit, without losing the delicateness of women. In the Liaoning ship, they broke through the traditional limitations of the female military mainly engaged in the communications and medical professions and firmly took root in the professional positions of almost all combat units in the fields of navigation, weapons, electromechanical, combat, aviation and so on. The towering island, Flight deck, the roar of the cabin, can see the carrier female staff to keep the battle position figure. They use the military's bloody and woman-specific detail, portrayal of the Chinese aircraft carrier combat capability ambitious plan (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

In the ranks of the Armed Police Forces in China, there is such a powerful team of prestigious names who dedicate their beautiful life to tempered training grounds and engrave fire-breathing youth on the war winners. They are well trained and tenacious in style . . . interprets the rich connotation of heroic bloodiness; they have repeatedly built outstanding achievements in the anti-terrorist battlefield and successfully completed major special missions more than 20 times (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

In mid-February of this year, reporters took the women's SWAT team officers and soldiers onto the battlefield and unmasked the 'mysterious' veils of these female 'Falcons' . . . Today's special police SWAT team aiming at the forefront of the construction of the world's counter-terrorism forces, and strive to create a new special operations force to adapt to future anti-terrorist operations. They are like a support arrow and are ready to go, waiting for the call of the motherland. In their blissful smile, reflect the power of faith, faithful feelings and win the faith." (Mod.gov.cn 2017). "Training gap, team members showed a brilliant smile on her face.

The Ministry of National Defense's collection of phrases and narratives describe women in a delicate language, but also reinforce resilient women. The language in these selections describes military women as brave but still feminine. The first selection takes notice of women breaking "through the traditional limitations of the female military mainly engaged in the communications and medical professions and firmly took root in the professional positions of almost all combat units in the fields of navigation, weapons, electromechanical, combat, aviation and so on"

(Mod.gov.cn 2017). This finding also gives evidence to my previous theory of “the military being too bloody for women” being disproven.

Sacrifice

Media outlets warn female soldier prospects that they would have to get rid of their beauty products and sacrifice their femininity for the country; i.e. cutting their hair short, giving up makeup, etc. China Military Online writes, “Cut off long hair, throw away long skirts, comparable to men and women, women and soldiers can dance martial arts, armed with uniforms and troops held to give up the girls should have too many things, military uniforms are their pride, camouflage with the favorite taste” (81.cn 2017). China Military Online also advocates throwing away the physical aspects of femininity. Still, through their service, military women have become more beautiful. Nonetheless, I find the main source of sacrificing femininity for the country to be Zhihu and China Daily. Women’s Federation does not focus on upholding or sacrificing femininity in its articles.

China Daily focuses on “sacrificing” beauty products in order to serve. The code “makeup” appears four times, three from China Daily and once from Zhihu. I generally code makeup with the codes possessions, training, and sacrifice. The China Daily articles focus on women in training; the women say they cannot use makeup because it would be of no use; it will just sweat off. A reporter makes the comment that the makeup in their possession boxes looked untouched. When they do get to leave the camp (once every 2 months) they go out and buy snacks and cosmetics. The Zhihu article is an advice column on what training for women is like. A woman interested in training asks if she could bring her face creams and facemasks—the answer is no.

The code “sacrifice” appears ten times, seven from Zhihu, once from China Military Online, and twice from Ministry of Defense for the People’s Republic of China. One Zhihu blog post writes, “Women soldiers will sacrifice a lot of things, such as they can not have long hair, can not wear make-up, can not play on mobile phones, and must obey orders” (Zhihu.com n.d.). The post also states, “You can no longer go singing to KTV with friends of the same age, wearing nice clothes and nail polish. But you can defend the country” (Zhihu.com n.d.). A China Military Online article describes a female soldier with a remarkable record and awards. She is noted to say, “Before leaving, I saw the big stone in front of the camp area office building inscribed with eight powerful red words: "loyalty! Fearless! Mighty! Win!" I heard someone singing: "eighteen Girl, eighteen dreams; do not love red makeup, love armed; cut hair, polished steel gun, strong with the wind” (Lu 2017).

Referring back to the bai fu mei (white, rich, and beautiful) concept of beautiful white skin equaling high societal status, these women sacrifice this notion in order to serve.

Every summer season, after working hard at sea for 3 months, the female soldiers are dark-skinned and their teeth are white. While girls of the same age are using Meitu software to repair their photos more beautifully, these female soldiers are desperate to practice themselves more black” (Mod.gov.cn 2017).

This article criticizes civilian women for editing their photos on the picture app Meitu, while military women are sacrificing their looks for their country. The line “desperate to practice themselves more black” shows these women are dedicated to the cause and do not care for what society believe a model woman should be. Another article describes the physical changes of women’s bodies during their service but depicted military women as beautiful because they are nonconforming to societal-standards. “In approaching the ultimate training mode, the female soldiers tanned their faces, legs running thick, but more strength, faster, more accurate

gun. Today, all of them have extraordinary skills, proficient shooting, climbing, diving blasting, parachute down more than ten special combat skills.” (Mod.gov.cn 2017)

Conclusion

While the Mulan theory of masculinity being important in the past but femininity being important in the present claims that femininity is an important aspect of a female soldier, I also find evidence that strength, wit, and devotion are just, if not more important. *However*, those attributes do not cause this theory to be discredited.

China Military Online and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China demonstrates this theory to be true, while China Daily and Zhihu also explains it to be false; Women’s Federation did not have articles focusing on femininity.

While China Daily and Zhihu focus on sacrificing femininity in order to serve, the articles are far and few in between on this issue. Yet, the main focus of China Military Online and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China are to highlight women’s femininity on and off the field.

3. Military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them.

Honor Guard

“Honor” is coded nine times, five from China Military Online, one from All-China Women’s Federation, and three times from Zhihu. This is the same “honor” code as in my “military: it is an honor and privilege to serve in the People’s Liberation Army as a woman” theory. However, the honor selections in this section only focus on women participating in the honor guard. China Military Online describe the first honor guard female participants and how their presence affects the crowd:

In February 2014, for the first time, a Chinese honor guard representing the national image appeared on the female honor guard. They appeared in the ceremony where the

heads of state of foreign countries welcomed the steel square of the parade for the victory of the Anti-Japanese War . . . As a bearer, is the dream of every guardian woman in her heart (Feng 2017).

While the “Military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them” theory expects women who perform in military parades to be overtly sexualized propaganda, I find evidence that suggests this might not be the case. However, it is important to note that this evidence comes from All-China Women’s Federation, a website that is very progressive in women’s rights and image. The following article depicts combative female soldiers in a military parade performing alongside their male counterparts with pride.

Female soldiers marched proudly along with their male colleagues at China's latest military parade on July 30 to mark the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The female combatants, with an average age of 20, made their debut appearance in the parade at Zhurihe military training base in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The soldiers have a strict daily training schedule including practices with up to 500 repetitions. Exercises include sit-ups, squats, punching, kicking, and hitting sand bags. They also need to complete a 400-meter hurdle course five times, running and crawling over muddy puddles . . . Many soldiers get cold fingers when they practice shooting during outdoors training in winter; they also experience feet blisters or sprained ankles during long-distance running, the soldier added. At their first day in the army, an officer said that they were told: "To win or to lose, there is no gender difference on the battlefield."

After many years' practice, they have mastered various fighting skills with swords, guns, knives, and long sticks. Parachutists are also able to conduct comprehensive military tasks in the air. For example, they can complete a fast landing from a height of 800 meters out of a helicopter. Female soldiers said they never regret experiencing hardships during trainings. (Womenofchina.cn 2017)

All-China Women’s Federation describes these women in a professional light, only focusing on the women’s achievements and diligence, not focusing on their beauty or on their role as propaganda to other states.

Conclusion

In line with the theory of military women used as propaganda led the media to over sexualizing them I find evidence contradicting my expectations and evidence supporting them.

All of the articles I find focus on the advancement of women in the military. Yes, China Military Online does focus more on the beauty of the women and the propaganda role they play in the army. However, I believe military women are used as propaganda in contrast of the Cultural Revolution's depiction of female—women are now celebrated for their femininity. In today's society, Chinese military women are gaining their femininity back, so it translates into their roles in the honor guard also showing that femininity. China Daily and Women's Federation are both propaganda sources that show the progress of women's rights and jobs, but without sexualizing them. Therefore, I believe this theory of military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them is based on eye-catching headlines in order to urge Westerners to criticize Chinese soldiers without actually looking into the issue. The femininity shown in the honor guards is not over-sexualizing, but honoring women for being women: strong and tough but also elegant and beautiful.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

1. Military: it is an honor and privilege to serve in the People's Liberation Army as a woman.

I find numerous amounts of evidence in support of this theory. No media sources included in my study curse female soldiers' service or denounce it any way. Being a woman in the People's Liberation Army deserves respect because women's participation is low. As stated in my literature review, in 1993 there were three million people in the PLA, and women account for 4.5 percent (Li 1993). In 2016, "there were approximately 115,000 female enlisted personnel and officers throughout the 1.3 million-member PLA" (Allen, Kania 2016). This averages out to women accounting to about 8 percent of the PLA. Women who wish to apply to the PLA also face a more rigorous selection process than men and have "higher standards for acceptance" (Caixin, 2014). The higher standard women endure in the military, in addition to the more selective application process causes the Chinese society to render the highest praises to military women.

2. Mulan was a story of masculinity for military women, however the opposite is true for today.

Explanation 1: This theory has the most support from the literature I research because of the large volume of articles pertaining to female soldiers' femininity. China Military Online and the Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China hold the bulk of evidence for this theory. However, China Military Online, Zhihu, and China Daily all advocate tossing aside

femininity in order to serve. Further, Zhihu carries firsthand accounts of training and military life, and those women's accounts reiterate that femininity would be sacrificed in order to serve. But the femininity the women refer to is store bought beauty i.e. makeup, facemasks, lotions, etc. The Cultural Revolution creates masculine female soldiers—women who are not allowed to embrace and be proud of being a woman. Their pride came from transforming into masculine versions of themselves, and they are praised for “acting” like men. Now, however, the times have changed, and women are celebrated for being feminine and tough; the two are not opposites anymore.

China Military Online and the Ministry of Defense for the People's Republic of China have seemingly redefined the word beautiful. These two military sources appeal to their female audience and present women soldiers in a feminine light, while showcasing their accomplishments and strengths. This is important because in current Chinese culture, beauty is important. Women bleach their faces white, buy products to create “double eyelids,” etc. in order to appear “beautiful.” However, the two military sources did not focus on that aspect of popular beauty standards; the women's beauty is found in their naturalness, their hard work, and their dedication to their country.

China Military Online and the Ministry of Defense for the People's Republic of China have given beautiful a new meaning. As I state in my findings, China Military Online focuses on the natural beauty of women, and how that beauty can translate into strength “The most beautiful is their attitude - always keep charge, ready to fight, gorgeous youth . . . the most beautiful is their smile - ups and downs without frustration, difficulties do not bow, the weak appearance, experience let them fearless in the foreground” (chinamilitaryonline.com.cn).

Through my research I ask myself, “How did the military change the word? What type of language did they use to make me believe this? How do the other sources advocating throwing away femininity also play into this? What types of femininity are they throwing away? Just physical? Even with physical beauty stripped away from them, muddy, shaved heads and short hair, tanned skin and all, what is making them still being called beautiful? Is it their attitudes?” Over the course of my work I find the answers to a few of those questions. I find that the military can change the word by comparing beauty with strength. By putting those two adjectives in the same paragraph, it slowly starts to alter the word beautiful. The Ministry does this more than China Military Online; it explicitly describes the women’s training environments, but also can refer back to their womanhood through it all. Women joining the force throwaway physical femininity; however, they regain their beauty through their hard work, pride, and honor. They can look at their tan, muscular bodies with pride and not remorse, for they know they have done their country a great deed. The saying of beauty is found within is truly applicable to female soldiers in China.

Explanation 2: China Military Online heavily focuses on military women’s femininity. In a few articles, the main focus is how the women look or how sweet their attitudes are. It can appear that China Military Online does not care for the works the women do, but that pretty women are performing them. The articles appear sexist and give an undermining tone to military women’s achievements. China Military Online does not want to portray strong women because they believe the society does not want to read about it. People want to read about beautiful women in parades, not strong, tan women crawling through the mud. It appears they are appealing to a male audience by describing women’s beauty in detail while diminishing the military mission. In this explanation the finding of “Mulan was a story of masculinity for

military women, however the opposite is true for today” appears to be true. If this explanation is true, it can be perceived China Military Online is still feudalistic in its ways by comparing a woman’s worth to her beauty and nothing more.

3. Military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them.

Explanation 1: I believe this theory to be false based of the information I find through my sources. The Chinese military states that the “addition of women to a parade unit is a step in the right direction” (Huang, 2014). The pictures of the women depict them in an extremely feminine light, but the articles that follow the pictures only tell of the women’s achievements. I believe the women’s images play a part in how the military writes about its female soldiers. The women look beautiful on the outside, but the audience does not know the hardships the women endure to get there. The military wants to prove to its country that women can still be women and serve. They do not have to masculinize themselves in order to obtain respect. They can have a “female” appearance and still render the same respect as men. I believe the articles found in my literature review are hastily written, without much thought into the actual back story of what it means to be part of the female honor guard. Since this position is fairly new for women, the PLA only wants the best of the best to represent them to the rest of the world; an application process is necessary. The job of the honor guard in and of itself is a propaganda job, both for men and women. The job is to instill national pride, and only the top recruits can do that job well. Therefore, I believe the Chinese media does not overly sexualize these women. American media can see these pictures and biasedly base American opinions on how an honor guard should look. But western opinions lack in the knowledge of how much it took for women to represent as women in the honor guard. The Cultural Revolution strips women of their femininity, therefore the military giving it back to

them and letting a female leader represent the country is a step in the right direction for women's rights—to have respect as they are.

Explanation 2: On the basis of videos and pictures, military women do appear to be sexualized propaganda for the PLA. They are dressed in short skirts and knee-high boots, makeup, and have white skin. They have to pass an intense talent show in order to be a part of the honor guard, and their purpose is to make the honor guard appear more attractive. In this explanation, this theory of “military women used as propaganda in the media can lead to over-sexualizing them” is proven true. Women in the honor guard specifically are not there for their brains or their strength, their presence is required to further the image of the PLA of being exclusive and attractive. Their job is to attract foreign heads of state to make their visits to China more pleasurable. If this explanation has a substantial amount of evidence, it can also help corroborate the second explanation in “Mulan was a story of masculinity for military women, however the opposite is true for today” of stating that women still bear the burden of feudalism and sexism because beauty is determining their worth.

4. The military being too bloody led to specialized jobs for military women.

Wars are not as bloody as they used to be; war now is based on information collecting, bombing, and some special operations. Since China is not currently at war, military women only practice in training scenarios. However, this does not mean that war being too aggressive or too bloody can hold back women's roles in the military any longer. One point still remains: even though the military is employing more combative women, the numbers are staggeringly low. The media knows that as well, therefore only reporting on the “successful,” “first,” or “most respectable” women in the military has become the main focus over the years. From a recruiting standpoint, China Daily and All-China Women's Federation are trying to show that the military

has become more inclusive in its ways, and if the woman is strong, smart, and hardworking enough, she has a chance of making it but at a cost. China Daily discloses that women even undergo harder training than men. ‘Hu Chaocheng, 32, the brigade's male commander, said female soldiers are as aggressive and brave as men, even though the conditions are far more challenging for them than for their male peers’ (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2017).

China Daily and All-China Women’s Federation do not use gender specific language to report news on female soldiers. Their articles are to the point, cover the story, and do not objectify the women in any way. China Military Online also has a few outlier articles that strictly focus on women’s training, while Zhihu focuses more on the personal training aspects women went through while preparing for the service. They report on the highlights and successes of combat women, share details of how many women there are, and the requirements and milestones the women have to pass in order to become successful.

The Ministry of Defense for the People’s Republic of China does use poetic language to describe women in training or mission. However, the end result of each article is a note of optimism for women’s progression in the PLA.

The most interesting question is why do China Military Online and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China present women’s actions in descriptive language, but the two propaganda sources do not? Dating back to the Cultural Revolution, women are expected to shed their femininity in order to serve. This is expected of all women in order to create an equal status among people. However, somewhere along the way, the creation of an equal balance between the sexes turned into women being measured on a man’s scale. It is not an androgynous meet in the middle of the sexes, but women giving up everything they know in order to be equal with men (Brownell, Wasserstrom, and Laqueur 2001:266). It appears that

China Daily and the Women's Federation still hold that standard for military women, whereas sources closer to the military have challenged it, possibly because they must find recruits willing to embrace a new form of femininity.

5. Women can be mothers and share the same general expectations and rights.

Within the People's Liberation Army, motherhood is an option to women but it is not a quickly spreading phenomenon within the branches. If a woman does decide to have a child, she would be protected under the laws that protect all mothers in China, as the article depicted earlier states.

However, the stress to have children is not apparent in the media. Articles do not talk about how women soldiers need to have children—no critiques on that regard. Since most women are under the age of 25, do not have marriage stress, kept only with other women, etc. they do not have the time to go out and find husbands. The image of these women is highly independent and strictly career focused. The only mention of the women's personal lives was in the Zhihu article about how to obtain a military girlfriend.

Therefore, the expectation that women also bear the burden of expecting to be married mothers does not uphold a substantial amount of evidence. If they do share that burden, it is not apparent in the media sources I analyze.

6. Women share stress due to the ideals of a two-income household and lingering ideas of Confucianism.

I do not find any evidence for or against this claim. If military women are comparable to civilian workingwomen, then this could be true on the basis of my literature review.

Limitations

There are few limitations within my research. The greatest problem I encounter is figuring out which sources would best aid my research. Another problem is that multiple sources are in Chinese; therefore, finding the right “keywords” to search for relevant articles takes up more time than it would for a regular search in English. It is also hard to find articles in the United States because not everything is readily available. For instance, I cannot find PLA Daily, even though I see it referenced in other articles. Another limitation I face is that China censors its articles in what it is willing to present to the public eye. My theory of military women also undergoing harassment did not merit any evidence because of this limitation. It is naïve to believe there are no harassment cases in the military; therefore, no public articles on the matter shows that China heavily censors its media. Another limitation is the lack of scholarly literature on this subject matter. There is barely any previous theory on Chinese female soldiers; most of the material is on the numbers of women in the force but not the perceptions of them. The main source of theory stems from the Cultural Revolution. However, it is based more on the gender perceptions of women but not their perceptions as female soldiers. In regard to limitations on current literature on female soldiers, most sources explain the numbers and quotas for women in the PLA, what jobs they can attain, and their training. Therefore, theories on the matter of why they are presented in certain lights are close to none. Because of this, my research is based purely off analyzing the media sources to develop my conclusions.

Reflexivity

Through my study abroad time in China, I began to ponder what it means to be a female soldier there. Are they praised? How hard is it to become a soldier? How do I find information to learn about female soldiers? It is a well-known fact that Chinese media is heavily restricted, so I would only be able to see what the government approves of sharing to the world. Therefore, it

can be perceivable that media portrayals of Chinese military women could also represent China's governmental ideology. All of these reasons made me extremely interested in my topic.

As an American woman in military training it is hard look at the material objectively and remove myself from my Western state of mind. As mentioned in the introduction, women participating in ROTC carry certain perceptions of themselves. Jennifer Silva's study on ROTC women describes military women as overlooking their female gender in a male dominated career field but not challenging the "implicit gendered foundation" in the institution. Because of this, American military women "undertake the cultural work defining themselves as self-determined and empowered" (2008).

Understanding that I fall into this category of women is important to my research; it pushes me to better understand my own situation and the situation Chinese military women undergo. Through my research, I strive to find if Chinese military women are in the same situation. However, I am aware that my background and their backgrounds are vastly different. Hence, it is important for me to look into the history of female soldiers in China to get a better understanding of their media presence today and figure out what is standard and what is not. Understanding the implications of the Cultural Revolution in regard to female soldiers' service and femininity plays a vital role in military women's media portrayals today. With this understanding, I am able to identify the differences between an American servicewoman verses a Chinese servicewoman. We both have the same end goal in mind—to serve. However, the implications of serving are different. From my experience and the experience of the women analyzed in Silvia's study, American ROTC women perceive themselves as empowered, but without the aspect of femininity with it. From my findings, I believe Chinese military women have redefined what it means to serve. Women no longer have to transform themselves to

appease men or be respected by men. Women can be feminine and respected. They do not have to sacrifice one to obtain the other.

My position as an American woman studying perceptions of Chinese female soldiers in modern media can affect my writing positively and negatively. My Western opinion of femininity, female service, and military operations allows me to look at Chinese media and not place personal feelings on the matter.

I am also a woman in the military I know the lifestyle and the training; I struggle to not put personal feelings on the matter. If the United States media posted about military women in the same way the Chinese media does, there would be an outrage. This factor negatively affected my writing in the beginning of my research before I studied more into the Cultural Revolution. However, the more articles I analyzed, the more I realized that China is currently undergoing a social phenomenon of changing the standard of what it means to be a strong woman.

My position then changes from a negative understanding of the literature to a positive one. I can appreciate the efforts the Chinese military is giving in order to allow women to keep their femininity. In the past, women have to sacrifice their feminine identity in order to be equals to men. Understanding this concept positively affects my writing because it gives me a greater appreciation for the modern Chinese female soldier. They have fought to get their femininity back and at the same time keep their equality with men.

Overall Theme

The overall theme of my research is to see how different media sources present female soldiers. In the beginning of my research, I expected to find female soldiers as sources of propaganda for the country, but I am mistaken. My research focuses more narrowly on the feminine perceptions of women and how those characteristics affect their service. Therefore, my

theme slowly evolves to what is femininity to the female soldier. Is it motherhood? Is it strength? Is it even an element of being a soldier? Can women be perceived as soft and beautiful but still be strong? I find mixed results on the matter: women can be strong, feminine or both.

Future Orientation

I believe female soldiers are at the beginning stages of a social movement. They are able to recreate what it means to be “beautiful” in Chinese society. Currently, to be beautiful is a description of women. The military has been pushing for a different meaning—turning beautiful in an action-- through service, strength, and courage. It all translates into beauty, creating a mix of strength and femininity. Redefining what it means to be beautiful as a military woman takes away the physical part of making yourself beautiful and focuses on the internal beauty that comes through a military woman’s hard work. Also, on the training perspective, women are going to be more and more integrated into the combat force, and trusted more with combat equipment. Women are celebrated for their differences from men. The diversity women bring to the combat force gives China a more well-rounded PLA and a well-integrated force.

My Opinions

My opinion of female soldiers in China at the beginning of my research and my opinion now are two completely different thoughts. I expected them to have specialized jobs, be over-sexualized, and not praised, but I am pleasantly mistaken. When I first start to analyze China Military Online and The Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China I am put off by their focus on female beauty. I begin to research women’s military history in China, and am brought back to the Cultural Revolution being a time of feminine oppression. It then begins to make sense of why the military presents the women in such a light; it is not to belittle them or say their service is less than a man’s, it is actually a form of progression: women are

beautiful and can be soldiers. All-China Women's Federation and China Daily still hold the older propaganda role of women: tough soldiers. There is nothing wrong with this image; women also need to be seen purely based of their work. It is interesting to see the two propaganda sources and the two military sources differ in how they present women. Which one is actually more progressive?

Chinese Women's Military Situation Based Off My Research

I believe Chinese women soldiers are at an all-time high of rights and privileges. They can be celebrated for being feminine, being strong, being good at their job, and are honored for it all. They can be mothers if they choose to be and will not be punished over it. They sacrifice their free time in order to serve and sacrifice physical beauty standards, all in order to work for their country. Silvia's findings on American ROTC women found that female cadets "defined themselves as *feminine*, and because they viewed femininity as natural, they struggled to embody it, even though they knew this trait was explicitly incompatible with the military" (2008). My research provides evidence that femininity may no longer be incompatible with military service, and that this progression should be celebrated.

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