

1 Soldiering, war and gender in China

Women soldiers and wartime spies challenge foundational gender norms in their daring deeds and dramatic actions – so it is little wonder that stories about women’s involvement in wartime action attract instant popular interest all around the world. The vision of a woman killing another human being affronts long-held views about women as life-givers rather than harbingers of death. Envisioning female bodies in military uniforms challenges normative ideas about feminine beauty and grace. Contemplating women risking their lives undermines the notion that such courage is primarily a manly attribute. Imagining the adventures of the beautiful and sexy undercover agent thrills audiences as they see conventional sexual morays crumble in the face of service to the nation. How can a woman kill? How can she lead in battle? Will she have the courage to fight? How can she sacrifice her virtue to trade sex for secrets?

In China the popular fascination with women who go to war has existed for centuries. They filled the pages of classical novels, frequently appeared in operas and plays, and in our current-era poplute movies, television series, propaganda posters, computer games and schoolbooks. Interest in women warriors and wartime spies shows no sign of abating in the twenty-first century despite the dramatic changes in gender norms that have occurred during the last 100 years. All around the world, including China, women have become politicians, bankers, lawyers, teachers, landowners and scientists – roles previously prohibited to them. But none of these roles generates as much fascination as women’s participation in warfare and espionage. In many countries, the armed forces remain one of the few professions where biological sex can still determine the nature of duties assigned – women are frequently prohibited from front-line combat. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is one such nation that limits women’s combat roles – despite the extensive promotion of women as active war fighters in public narratives. This phenomenon tells us that war fighting continues to be intimately linked to notions of maleness and masculinity in ways that teaching, banking or administering are not. The symbolic power of the woman war fighter reveals that war and militarised violence

continues to be structured around gender norms – indeed war *needs* gender norms to continue its logic.¹ Conventional, some would say outdated, gender norms help governments and armed groups present war as an attractive option for conflict resolution to ordinary citizens.

This book reveals the ways that women and men, femininity and masculinity have been used to advocate for war, to promote militarised violence and to perpetuate the seeming logic of the inevitability of war through the public commemoration of woman warriors and wartime spies. Such thought structures are integral to militarisation. Jacklyn Cock explains that ‘Militarization is a social process that involves the mobilization of resources for war on political, economic and ideological levels.’² Anuradha Chenoy’s work on South Asia shows that ‘militarization is a larger phenomenon than war’ that needs to be challenged at an ideological level in order to promote peace.³ And, as Cynthia Enloe has argued, militarisation continues during peacetime because governments argue that it maintains military preparedness and enhances national security.⁴ Militarisation is more than the expenditure of money on weapons; it involves creation of a militarised consciousness among citizens and a culture of war throughout society – in schools and workplaces and through all forms of media.⁵ The militarisation of society requires rituals, memorials, movies and school texts to give war legitimacy – despite its evident and well-documented horror and futility. Enloe explains its pervasive nature – ‘Militarization is never simply about joining a military. It is a far more subtle process. And it sprawls over far more of the gendered social landscape than merely those peaks clearly painted a telltale khaki.’⁶ She warns us against only seeing militarisation in the men and women of the armed forces and to recognise its form in food, fashion and film stars.⁷ But the stories told about the men and women in the armed forces are among the most evident and sustained forms of militarisation because they popularise war by personalising it. Accordingly, this book explores the narratives of women warriors and wartime spies and reveals their significant role in the militarisation of Chinese society. Women war fighters become powerful icons to proclaim the urgency of war, of its demands that *all* patriots make some sort of sacrifice. They help hide its dirty, calculated nastiness beneath a deceit of eroticised glamour, or a promise of the ‘opportunity’ to break free of ordinary-life restrictions. The continued promotion of women warriors and wartime spies across all forms of media reveals their centrality to the militarisation of peacetime societies as well as their utility during wartime battles.

All the women featured in this book are household names in the PRC, yet few, with the exception of Hua Mulan (Chapter 2) and perhaps Qiu Jin (Chapter 3), are known beyond China’s borders. Most studies of women war fighters ignore the Chinese instances or give them cursory attention.⁸ Scholars of China have provided us with important studies of some key women and their

experiences of war – usually within a rubric of women’s increasing penetration of the male-dominated public sphere or in a narrative celebrating ‘exceptional women of China’s past’.⁹ My purpose here is to address Nicole Dombrowski’s challenge to consider the complicity of women in the ‘atrocities or war crimes committed in part in their name’.¹⁰ Through this study of the woman warrior and wartime spy as iconic phenomena created and mobilised in twentieth-century China, I explore how womanhood, femininity and masculinity are useful as militarisation strategies. The real women, their actual stories and their motivations are significant but even more powerful are the ways that their stories are used in political and social contexts through their many subsequent renditions and remakings. Where other scholars have focused on the lives and social roles of the woman warrior or spy, I delve deeper to explore the many uses to which they have been put in public narratives. Some of the women included in this book have become more important in their commemorative afterlife than they were during their lifetimes because of the immense volume of materials discussing them in the public realm and the considerable investment by governments in promoting particular versions of their histories. For many of the women, their ‘reality’ has been entirely eclipsed by the narratives constructed around them. Even the two fictional women included in the book, Hua Mulan (Chapter 2) and Zhenzhen (Chapter 8), are frequently debated *as if they were real* and narratives of both play important roles in gendering militarisation and perpetuating the war system, even when recognised as fiction.¹¹

The stories we tell and are told about war, regardless of our actual experience, are central to the promotion of war as a necessary or even desirable option for conflict resolution. We are frequently told that our nations were forged through the mass violence of war, and the *way* that these events are commemorated reveals a great deal about the society that emerges from those wars. During the twentieth century, China faced a series of militarised conflicts that drew artists, writers, filmmakers and journalists into close cooperation with governments and military leaders in their joint efforts to secure victory or legitimise control over territory. As we will see throughout this book, they produced material replete with information about the gendered nature of war through their frequently romanticised invocations of women’s particular roles. Marketing war to the masses could not be achieved without the invocation of long-held ideas about gender or the symbolic functions ‘women’ perform within societies.

War fighting is among the most gendered arenas of human activity – its conceptualisation, promotion, execution and retreat. Effective rehabilitation of affected societies often relies heavily on gender norms. So intimate are war’s links with gender that Joshua Goldstein alerts us to the ‘mutuality of gender and war’, declaring that ‘Causality runs both ways between war and gender. Gender roles adapt individuals for war roles, and war roles provide the context within

which individuals are socialised into gender roles'.¹² Stories of war, combat films, memorial sites, news reports, school history curricula and war art depend upon the mutuality of gender roles and war roles for their efficacy – consumers of these products are socialised into the war system regardless of the presence or absence of actual militarised violence and are trained in their appropriate gender roles simultaneously. The materials explored in this book reveal how this process of militarisation operates in China today and the way that it was built from sophisticated patterns of earlier war systems. In this respect, my project is not about the detailed operations of war or espionage as they occurred in China but, rather, about how they are narrated and specifically how they narrate the connection between gender and the war system.¹³

By the mid-twentieth century, the establishment of the PRC meant that all cultural production came under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who recognised the power of cultural products to deliver ideological messages and took direct interest in managing their nature, form and style. Women warriors and wartime spies would be harnessed by the CCP as the party consolidated its rule of the country, and almost all chapters of this book address the CCP's preferred perspectives on the contributions and significance of the women. Dead and martyred women warriors are the preferred objects of commemoration – they cannot contradict the messages the state seeks to deliver. All forms of state-controlled media herald the heroism and sacrificial glory of the woman warrior as she fought for her country (e.g. mother-guerrilla Zhao Yiman of Chapter 6 and girl-guerrilla Liu Hulan of Chapter 9). The book also reveals the CCP's post-conflict anxiety about what to do with women who challenged ideals about the sexual virtue of women patriots (e.g. the Shanghai cover girl Zheng Pingru of Chapter 7 and the fictional peasant 'comfort woman' Zhenzhen of Chapter 8). It reveals the CCP's sometime difficulty in managing the outliers such as women of competing national and ideological loyalties (e.g. the Taiwan and American-based writer-soldier, Xie Bingying of Chapter 4 and the Manchu Princess Aisin Gioro Xianyu of Chapter 5). The current book, then, is a discussion of the ways women warriors and wartime spies have been put to work by those who would recreate them for their own purposes. It reveals the ideology of those who recreated them as much as it does the women's own motivations for joining up to fight.

Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China is organised largely chronologically. This structure enables readers to trace the changing nature of these iconic women as they are mobilised by various types of governments and respond to different types of media and consumer demand. The major conflicts of the twentieth century are represented as well as their continued significances as active, cultivated historical memories in the twenty-first century. However, the next chapter narrates the ideological journey of the grandmother of all women war fighters, Hua Mulan. If she existed, her war was centuries before

the twentieth century but her relevance to this book and to all later women warriors cannot be underestimated. Mulan's evolution sets the template from which all others are judged and in exploring her changing story over centuries we see the ideological power of the Chinese woman warrior in the marketing of war and the selling of militarised violence to generations of Chinese people. Chapter 3 discusses Qiu Jin, a member of Sun Yat-sen's underground group that prompted the 1911 revolution and established Asia's first, albeit shaky, republic. Soldier-journalist Xie Bingying appears in Chapter 4 as a major commentator on the 1926–1928 Northern Expedition in which the CCP and the Nationalist Party joined together for a time to unify the country under one government. Her *War Diaries* are some of the few extant personal documents written by a serving soldier from that time. The Japanese invasion of North East China in 1931 and their establishment of a new nation state, Manchukuo, provide the backdrop for the colourful Manchu Princess Aisin Gioro Xianyu. Fighting against the Chinese and in defence of her ethnic homeland, Xianyu was tried and (perhaps) executed at the end of the eight-year-long War of Resistance against Japan. Communist guerrilla fighter Zhao Yiman was among the 'red' forces that plagued Xianyu's short-lived nation. Zheng Pingru, the cover girl, honey-trap spy, also operated at this time but in Japanese-occupied Shanghai – working against the security and espionage forces of a collaborationist Chinese government. The latter half of the Sino–Japanese war dovetailed with the Second European 'World' War of 1939–1945. Ding Ling's fictional 'comfort woman' spy, Zhenzhen, was created during this struggle against the Japanese invasion, although her afterlife in post-1949 peacetime PRC would generate her more fame than she won during the war. The conflicting ambitions of the CCP and the Nationalist Party saw China descend into civil war in 1946, providing a platform for the girl underground fighter, Liu Hulan. Captured and executed by a guillotine-like hay-cutter, Liu Hulan was a loyal communist child whose story would appear in children's textbooks for decades as the CCP promoted patriotism and sacrifice among youngsters in the PRC.

The following sections of this introduction explain the core challenges that women warriors and wartime spies pose for the war system in its traditional-gendered form and the ways that they are co-opted and tamed by it. I turn first to explore how they disrupt the logic in which enemies are feminised in official and popular stories. I then move to examine how women's presence outside the space of 'hearth and home' as warriors and spies upsets the idealised vision of men's protection of women's virtue. From here I discuss the ways that women's fighting skills intersected with feminist aspirations for new roles for women citizens in China. I close the introduction with a discussion of the role that women warriors played in elevating the social status of the soldier generally in the modernisation of China's military during the first half of the twentieth

century. These themes reappear in different parts of the book as they manifest in the particular women warriors or wartime spies themselves.

Disrupting the logic of feminised enemies

The use of gender in militarised thinking is often horrifically explicit – as in the statement below explaining why Japan needed to take over China in the 1930s. Business leader Ishihara Koichiro, President of the Ishihara Trading and Navigation Company, explained his position in 1935 as follows: ‘An old saying has it that there is nothing more uncontrollable than a woman. China is like an unchaste woman. She is a sycophant before the stronger, and a braggart before the weaker. In dealing with such a nation, it is necessary for Japan to strike her first, and then caress and coddle her.’¹⁴ Such comments are found the world over during war and point to the commonplace feminisation of the enemy in propaganda or media reports. Goldstein points out that this feminisation of the enemy frequently involves ‘enacting rape symbolically (and sometimes literally), thereby using gender to symbolise domination’.¹⁵ Ideals of manhood, martial prowess and the right to discipline a feminised China were central to Japan’s projection of the war that Japan waged against China. Ishihara’s images of paired beatings and caresses of a cringing female China presaged the systematic rape and sexual enslavement of real women that would emerge as the most brutal manifestations of this gendered logic of war. How then do women warriors and wartime spies, as icons, work within this rubric?

Part of the ongoing popular fascination with their form emerges because women warriors and wartime spies intersect with the logic that feminises the enemy and presumes a link between femininity and weakness. Women warriors are frequently heralded for their exceptional courage and strength – and while this is sometimes explained as manifesting their ‘unfeminine’ behaviour or ‘masculine tendencies’ it nonetheless exposes the fraudulence of the long-held ‘truth’ that positions women as essentially vulnerable. The presence of strong and effective women war fighters disrupts this logic of a feminine and, thereby, weaker ‘enemy other’ that can be easily overcome and even sexually dominated as part of the spoils of victory. Some of the women discussed in this book explicitly present themselves as directly fighting against male dominance over women through their participation in warfare, for example Qiu Jin (Chapter 3) and Xie Bingying (Chapter 4). They undermine, by their deeds and words, the gendered logic of Ishihara’s war system by refusing to be the cringing feminine form waiting to be beaten and then caressed. They destabilise this taken-for-granted pattern that presents femininity as weak and women, the presumed ‘more feminine’ sex, as victims. Women warriors and wartime spies make the normal gendering of militarisation a ‘problem’ to be picked over.

Yet within the same gendered logic of militarisation, women warriors and wartime spies present contradictory possibilities about the capabilities of 'our side'. On the one hand, they intimate that *even* our women are capable of manifesting (masculine) strength – presenting the whole national population as possessing increased strength. On the other, they risk trivialising the armed forces they join, diminishing its masculinity with the contamination of woman's (feminine) weakness. Lu Xun, China's greatest twentieth-century writer, exposed this latter aspect of the woman warrior in his satirical piece 'New "women generals"' from 1931. The scare quotes around the noun mark his doubts about the generals' efficacy. He argues that women soldiers are merely the wartime manifestation of a common, colourful diversionary role that women have long performed in popular theatre. He describes Shanghai newspapers' enthusiasm for including pictures of beautiful women – variously called Madam A, Madam B, Madam C – depicting their fashion choices as the seasons progressed. In spring they wore tight-fitting clothes, while in the summer heat their sleeves and trousers shortened as they engaged in that ever-so diverting pastime of 'sea-bathing'. Lu Xun caustically continues, 'As we entered the autumn and the temperatures dropped the Japanese unexpectedly invaded the North Eastern provinces, so the pictorials immediately featured nurses in long white medical gowns, or young educated women dressed in military uniforms carrying guns. These images elicit readers' approval since they are rich with drama.' He then makes a direct comparison between the Chinese enthusiasm for diverting visions of women's wartime participation and the absence of these in the Japanese enemy. 'Let's look at some facts for evidence: (1) Nobody has ever seen pictures of nurses from the Japanese "Punish China Troops"; (2) There are no women generals in the Japanese army. But they are the ones that attacked. This is because when the Japanese take action they really take action and when they are playacting they really playact. They don't muddle the two together.'¹⁶ No doubt Lu Xun was not alone in his view that the presence of women soldiers, and even women nurses, revealed China's vulnerability rather than its strength. But, within the gendered logic of war women warriors tweak a central point – the state's desire to mobilise *everyone* for the war effort. The challenge is to make women useful when the logic of the war system depends so much on femininity being equated with weakness (and women being construed as its corporeal form) and masculinity as strength (and men being construed as its corporeal form).

Protecting our girls' virtue

Dombrowski and Goldstein, among many others, have identified the gendered coding of the hearth and home that is to be protected in militarisation narratives. Men are encouraged to go to war to protect the feminine domestic space. In this

logic, women wave men off to war from the doorstep of the family home, wait in chaste quietude and welcome them back once victory is secured. Protecting women and their sexual virtue is central to the masculinity of the war project soldiers are invited to join. The location of women in the 'to-be-defended home' isolates femininity in a discreet social space and therein increases the masculine world of the soldiers' barracks. Women warriors and wartime spies confound this neat dichotomy because they trouble the boundary between war space (masculine and morally ambiguous) and home space (feminine and virtuous). Women's participation in war fighting demonstrates that some women do not perceive of themselves as passive or potential victims to be rescued. Their active roles in non-domestic space destabilises the gendered principle that war enhances the masculine power of men by granting them, by dint of their sex, the role of protector of women and their virtue.

Women warriors and wartime spies reject the system that would reduce them to symbols of sexual integrity by wilfully disregarding its value to patriarchal lineages and honour when they go to war. Men are encouraged to go to war to prevent the contamination of 'our' women's sexual virtue. Women going to war risk that very same feminine virtue. The challenge women warriors pose to men's masculine roles as protectors of a sexually chaste, feminine space is managed within the war system through the narratives that present 'our side' of the war terrain as largely asexual. Not only do 'our men' *not* rape and pillage, neither do they harass or abuse 'our female comrades-in-arms' – that kind of immoral behaviour is always credited to 'the enemy'. Xie Bingying (Chapter 4) devotes considerable time explaining to readers of her newspaper diaries the importance, for her peer women recruits, of suppressing romantic notions about male recruits. Zhao Yiman (Chapter 6) is depicted in early post-1949 propaganda as living the life of communist guerrilla alongside male troops without the slightest hint of sexual attraction. Her connections with men are comradely and professional as are theirs with her. Through stories of the high moral standards and asexual environment of 'our troops', women soldiers facilitate the glorification of the virtue of 'our boys'. This de-sexualisation of the 'our side' front lines is also achieved by constructing a hypersexual 'enemy side' space – and sex spies are central to establishing this vision.¹⁷

The notoriety of the Manchu spy, Princess Aisin Gioro Xianyu (Chapter 5), reveals the fascination with unbridled enemy-side sexual desire. Xianyu's story is infused with inferences of multiple sexual deviance that confirm the Japanese military's immorality. The princess used sexual identities throughout her life – masquerading as a taxi dancer and socialite she was linked to a series of Japanese officers while also dressing as a man, commanding an army and operating a nightclub. Similarly, Ding Mocun, the collaborator whose failed assassination led to the execution of the Nationalist spy Zheng Pingru (Chapter 7), is routinely described in the popular press and later histories as a

sex-fiend. His weakness for alluring young women enabled Zheng to penetrate his security apparatus. Debates about her actions as a spy revolve around her 'sacrifice' (i.e. of her feminine virtue) or her 'purity'. Zheng Pingru is no longer discussed as suffering from warped or excessive sexual desires – her work was all sacrifice. Ding Ling's fictional spy, Zhenzhen (Chapter 8), is described as a victim of unbridled Japanese sexual appetites as she provides sexual services in Japanese barracks while gathering intelligence. In the story Ding Ling reveals the prejudices women spies face from their home communities because of their inability to meet chastity norms. This discomfort continued in the divisive and politicised responses to the story published in the communist press during the 1950s, when Zhenzhen and Ding Ling were both accused of sexual deviance as the CCP sought to present itself as hyper-moral. How could the noble CCP ever be described as using sex spies? As the chapters to follow reveal, the post-war rehabilitation of women with compromised virtue is not a smooth process – even if they were 'sacrificing' themselves for the patriotic cause. Our-side stories must be morally clean (or cleansed) and women's virtue (or lack of it) is central to creating that 'reality'. Women who break norms of sexual virtue in wartime service are perfect sites for this ideological work.

Popular culture assists in the process of confirming 'our side' wartime virtue. The romance and danger of the beautiful honey-trap spy makes superb fiction and film fantasy – audiences in both peacetime and wartime have a sustained appetite for stories of sexual virtue given up to the service of victory. But, even more significantly, the sex spy can further society's militarisation by eroticising and glamorising war. Stories of sexy spies and images of seductive agents abound. They make war sexy; they help sell war to populations. The pondering of relatively free sexual liaisons, the moral stain of which is tempered by the 'sacrifice' that is being made for the country, appeals to many people. War looks like more fun if there is some sex, dancing, pearls and cocktails mixed in with the danger. Shortages of basic life necessities, disruptions in transportation and uncertainty in housing and schooling are the mundane realities for even those safe from the front lines, but these grim facts are glossed over in the entertainment replay of war and replaced with smart, savvy, sexy young women who are never short of lipstick. The depictions of women wartime spies and, to a lesser extent, those of the women warriors eroticise war for consumers of popular culture products.

Women's liberation and women's war fighting

For many people women's equal access to participate in warfare is framed within an 'equal opportunity' rubric. Women soldiers are often heralded as feminist forerunners, carving new territory in a male-dominated world. Yet, in the Chinese cultural sphere women warriors have featured as fantastic and

bizarre exceptions and for centuries have consolidated, rather than challenged the Confucian patriarchal social order. In the aforementioned satirical piece, Lu Xun alerts readers to the particular Chinese proclivity for regarding women warriors as objects of diversion and entertainment – rather than agents in actual warfare. Commencing with the phrase ‘China has long loved its magic tricks’ Lu Xun makes the point that in the operas played all over the countryside women soldiers appeared highly decorated with pheasant feathers in their heads and large swords in their hands. ‘As soon as they appear on the stage, the audience’s elation reaches new heights. They know full well that it is no more than an act but they still watch with great enthusiasm.’ The problem, he writes, is that too many soldiers and scholars have waxed lyrical about the stock literary forms that include unlikely figures performing heroic deeds for the greater good – such as ‘beggars who rise up and kill the enemy’, ‘ruthless leaders who suddenly sacrifice themselves for noble causes’ or ‘remarkable women who save the nation’. When the country faces a real threat and magazines are filled with these romantic stories many people take these make-believe characters for real. He explains: ‘I am not saying that young women should all be locked up in their boudoirs. I am just saying that it is rather theatrical when the crack troops retire and the “missies” carry the guns.’ Lu Xun alerts us to the fact that while some regarded the military action of Qiu Jin (Chapter 3), Xie Bingying (Chapter 4) and Zhao Yiman (Chapter 6) as forging new ground for women in public space and demonstrating women’s physical strength and courage,¹⁸ others understood their actions within a long tradition of make-believe and fantasy.

This fantastic and diverting world of female derring-do was readily contained by a resilient Chinese patriarchy. Just as Goldstein describes the way that myths of Amazon communities of women warriors ‘reinforced men’s construction of their own patriarchal societies as orderly and natural’,¹⁹ China’s fictional female knights errant and wondrous all-female armies reinforced not only a patriarchal social order but also men’s claim to virtues coded masculine. The lionised women warriors of dynastic China were without exception wives and daughters whose remarkable courage and martial skill were harnessed in the defence of their husbands or fathers. They performed what I have called ‘crisis femininity’ in which exceptional events provide space for a temporary release from the norms of womanly behaviour (passivity, gentleness and frailty) as they lead armies, wage war and defend cities.²⁰ Lu Xun’s identification of these figures in a list of other *unlikely* types explains why audiences found them amusing – they were fantastic and bizarre diversions from mundane life. As we will see in Chapter 2 on Hua Mulan, her centuries-old story cycle reveals a young woman whose military actions confirm the foundational virtue of filial piety – the spirit of obedience and service to one’s parents and seniors that underpins the patriarchal family system. Most women warriors of China’s

historical and cultural past were presented as reinforcing the loyalty of women to a patriarchal family order – they were far from feminist revolutionaries, even if women in the audiences gained courage from watching their adventures.

However, as China modernised, the fundamental structures of Chinese society, including the gender norms informing women's involvement in war, were being reshaped. Qiu Jin's life and death spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chapter 3) mark the point where the cultural weight of the old-style woman warrior is sloughed off and the redaction of her martyrdom in newspapers and poetry facilitates the emergence of a new type of woman warrior inspired by women's rights. For example, Xie Bingying (Chapter 4) and Zhao Yiman (Chapter 6) directly subverted the authority of their senior family members when they joined the Nationalist and communist forces, respectively – they effectively declared their loyalty to their parents secondary to their loyalty to the nation. They argued against old ideas about women's roles and contributions to society and fought for the Nationalist Party and CCP that both promised to deliver equal rights in a new society. In the twentieth-century renditions of Hua Mulan's story (Chapter 2) we also see that the 'nation state' replaces the 'father' as the object of her devotion and loyalty.

In the traditional containment of the woman warrior's feminist potential, women routinely dressed as men and passed as men while performing their martial deeds – resuming their feminine status once the task was achieved. This cross-dressing effectively made women temporary, honorary men in order to explain their manifesting of masculine attributes like courage, camaraderie, loyalty and strength. The operas that Lu Xun discussed include copious incidents of female-to-male cross-dressing. Hua Mulan is the exemplar of the way that this device operates to both entertain and tame any radical challenges to existing gender orders. In contrast, the twentieth-century women warriors do not become *men* to go to war, but rather they become *soldiers*.²¹ The modern nation state that China was in the process of building created a new social category of person – the woman soldier who wore a new-style military uniform and engaged in mechanised warfare. The coding of this new category of person would eventually lose any association with hyper-masculinity via its adoption as daywear for all PRC citizens in the 'Mao suit'.²² While some commentators regarded the universal adoption of the Mao suit in the 1960s and 1970s as 'defeminising' women (by not allowing women to decorate themselves in feminine frills) it is also important to acknowledge the suit's role in making the soldier androgynous. And this process had commenced in the 1920s with the inclusion of women in the armed forces of both the Nationalist Party and the CCP – Xie Bingying notes in 1927 that the only difference between her uniform and the male recruits was the addition of the English letter 'W' for 'Woman' embroidered on her left sleeve (Chapter 4). The use of the Roman alphabet

instead of a Chinese character further emphasised the modernity of this new social role.

The long tradition of containing the disruptive potential of the woman warrior through devices such as cross-dressing and discourses of filial piety and/or patriotism does not mean that the Chinese woman warrior has no capacity to test the boundaries of male privilege and cannot resist being pulled into reinforcing the status quo of family or nation. In the twentieth century, knowledge of women's rights reorients the way traditional women warriors are understood as well as creates new scope for alternative behaviours among new-style women warriors too. To an audience with even a mere passing awareness of feminist politics, women soldiers and spies declare their freedom from patriarchal notions that position them as men's dependents because they assert their own agency and capacity for killing and self-defence. All the women discussed in this book have been read through the lens provided by the women's movement seeking equal rights and status with men. As a result of the dissemination of feminist political ideas that occurred before and during the twentieth century, the formation, shaping and reshaping, of the woman warrior is more able to resist the long tradition in which any exceptional acts by women were co-opted into the patriarchal status quo. Hua Mulan, dutiful daughter in centuries of Confucian teachings, was mobilised by China's new feminist movement at the start of the twentieth century as a model for woman's independence and strength. New perspectives, such as those provided by the global women's movement, changed the ways that old tropes were regarded. Lu Xun's 1931 comment about young women 'locked up in their boudoirs'²³ juxtaposes participation in the world of war with the discredited ultra-conservative sex-segregation practices common in China only a few decades earlier. But, in harnessing women warriors as feminist icons we risk making feminism a tool of militarisation.

Ironically, the post-Mao years that saw greater political and media freedoms emerge in China have also produced a return to more traditional management of women warriors and wartime spies. Some of the woman warrior's radical challenges to a patriarchal gender or family order are undermined by dramatic remakings of their stories. Between the 1950s and 1980s the young underground fighter, Liu Hulan (Chapter 9), was depicted as deliberately disobeying her backward, hidebound grandmother who seeks to stop her becoming active in the resistance movement. The grandmother was a symbol of 'feudal thinking' about politics and gender roles. But, in the 2000s, where the CCP trumpets harmonious families and a peaceful society Liu Hulan becomes a filial and obedient granddaughter to a grandmother who encourages her to study and improve herself by engaging with the CCP underground. The more dramatic transformations occur in the case of the wartime spies. For example, Zhenzhen (Chapter 8) is depicted in a 2003 film as blowing herself up in a revenge-suicide

rather than confidently trekking off to join the communists, as she does in the original story. But the historical setting of the movie in the 'bad-old-days' (i.e. before and after the establishment of the PRC) separates this traditional chaste suicide behaviour from the contemporary viewers' modern moral order. Similarly, in the recent decade's 'back to the wok' rollback of revolutionary women's roles, Zhao Yiman, a ferocious guerrilla fighter, is tamed through the promotion of her status as a pining mother yearning for her absent son.²⁴ But, even within this moderated version of her life and deeds, contemporary Chinese readers have ample evidence of women's dual roles as mothers and workers without being required to make the dramatic sacrifice of abandoning a child, as did Zhao Yiman. The peace and prosperity of twenty-first-century China makes this choice a historical relic of the 'bad old days'.

Changing soldiers' social status – impact of women

For centuries in China's dynastic past, military skills connected to war fighting were denigrated. Scholar bureaucrats wrote the histories and established a textual tradition in which they garnered social prestige while their military counterparts did not – despite the latter's centrality in the formation, expansion and defence of empires. The phrase 'Good iron is not used to make nails, and good men do not become soldiers' encapsulates the long-standing prejudice against soldiers.²⁵ Elite men would learn various forms of martial arts for fitness and to cultivate a meditative self-control alongside their calligraphy and poetry but this was not preparation for enlisting in the standing military forces. It was a further marker of their cultivated status. Yet, a change occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a result of the evident European superiority in military technology in the British attacks on China during the Opium Wars of the mid-1800s. Colin Green has revealed the conscious planning undertaken by numerous Chinese governments in their bid to raise the status of the military and notes the fluctuations in its success.²⁶ The importance of science and technology in warfare grew more apparent as time went on. Scholars who were otherwise distant from military matters became increasingly involved in new-style military academies and arsenals that aimed to train a new style of soldier and build a modern military hardware for China. Military matters gained new prestige accrued from the modernity of technological warfare. Modern schools that were also appearing at this time included military drills and strategy in their curricula – even the new women's schools, as we will see in Chapter 3 on Qiu Jin. The modern education system connected the literati preoccupation with textual learning directly with military skill.²⁷

Robert Culp showed that Chinese governments through the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s promoted military training in physical exercise curricula. He

demonstrates that China's leaders regarded the military orientation of schooling as central to the creation of a modern citizenry.²⁸ Modern military training was integral to the formation of a modern nation and it had explicit support from the highest levels in the country. Edmund Fung summarised this trend in the pithy phrase 'To be militaristic was to be modern.'²⁹

Consequently, just as women were entering public schools, schooling placed higher prestige than ever before on war strategy and building military skills among the privileged, educated classes. In the biographies of the women below, there is a close link between their struggle to access schooling and their attainment of military skills. In contrast with the majority of male soldiers of the twentieth century, who were still uneducated, poor and frequently conscripted, the women soldiers were from comfortable families and their path to warfare was forged through entering the new girls' schools. Xie Bingying (Chapter 4) and Zhao Yiman (Chapter 6) are both classic examples of this pattern. Qiu Jin (Chapter 3) was a principal of one of these girls' schools and her students learned shooting and strategy alongside foreign languages. In the military academies established in the 1920s to train CCP and Nationalist Party officers women recruits needed to have attained a high level of education to secure a place. Many women were entering at the upper ends of the military hierarchy and were trained to perform propaganda work, medical work and logistics as well as combat. The considerable importance that Chinese forces placed on propaganda and engaging with the ordinary people from the 1920s in both CCP and Nationalist armies meant that the women performing these parts of the military's operations were highly valued – often, as we read in Xie Bingying's recollections, women soldiers made the first contact with villagers in advance of the full body of troops. Nicola Spakowski argues that the importance of winning the 'hearts and minds' of ordinary people in the Chinese war system during the twentieth century presented specific opportunities for improving women's status that did not require them to engage in direct combat.³⁰

The appearance and promotion of women soldiers and officers also performed the function of signifying a changed and improved status for military forces generally in China. Both the Nationalist Party and the CCP were keen to promote the presence of women in their forces as markers of their modernity and revolutionary plans for dramatic change – in particular in their appeal to the mass of Chinese women. In this regard, the twentieth-century Chinese women warrior performs a unique role in militarising the would-be literati class. The presence of educated women challenged the low-class status of soldiering as a profession and had some role in increasing its respectability and modern-ness.

Another function that women warriors in China perform, motivating people to work hard, deserves our attention too since it shows the moral work that women soldiers performed even during peacetime. It is common to read that

women soldiers were used to shame men into action – increasing men's participation was the goal for governments that promoted knowledge about women warriors. For example, Laurie Stoff has shown that in Russia during World War One women had a clear 'motivational value' in which they served as 'inspirational symbols to boost morale among war-weary male troops and to simultaneously shame men into resuming their "patriotic duty" as defenders of the nation'.³¹ In the PRC, the militarisation of Chinese society has expanded to such breadths that women soldiers would serve as models for women's engagement in productive labour more generally even in the absence of war (see for example the 'Liu Hulan Teams' that formed all around the country in communes and factories during the late 1950s and 1960s, discussed in Chapter 9). Sex workers would be exhorted to 'Learn from Liu Hulan' and take up factory work. Soldiering had been elevated to new heights of social prestige in the PRC and women's presence in their ranks continued to build the idea that 'good iron made a good soldier'.

China's journey from the start of the twentieth century has been one of remarkably rapid change – from a feeble hereditary monarchy, through to a troubled democratic republic and on to the present times where a communist party-state, having relinquished its radical revolutionary policies, now drives global economic growth while delivering wealth to millions of its citizens. Over the course of more than a century governments, revolutionary groups and political parties have invoked the crisis of war – real, remembered and imagined – to secure popular support for their myriad policies and actions. Militarisation strategies implemented in China within this overall strategy have necessarily varied as the political goals changed, technology advanced and, from the middle of the twentieth century, wars ended. The chapters below, by analysing the evolving mobilisations of China's key warriors and spies over the course these decades of dramatic twists and turns, show how militarisation is immensely flexible. The militarisation of populations during peacetime heightens the romance of war in commercialised arenas that are both less credible and sometimes impossible to deliver during the progress of war itself. In peacetime, the CCP presented its radical changes to family, factory and farm structures as warlike struggles for survival against hostile foreign enemies, like the USA and UK, who were depicted as plotting China's destruction. Managing the stories of the past, creating new ways of conceptualising traumatic experiences/memories and creating a sense of collective victory against foreign and domestic threats have also been crucial to building popular support for the CCP since the early 1990s. Cultural nationalism, pride in China as a global cultural force, has built steadily among its citizens in part through the propaganda work of the CCP.³² Legitimacy for the CCP's rule is not premised on open

parliamentary elections but rests on its record of delivering staggering economic growth for over four decades and a carefully managed marketing campaign that links national unity and sovereignty to continued CCP control.

By focusing on women warriors and wartime spies, the book demonstrates the centrality of gender to successful militarisation across diverse political systems, in war and peace and during times of dramatic social and technological change. Women make war more appealing – whether that be as heroic poet swordswomen, courageous guerrilla mothers, glamorous intrepid spies, or, as we see in the next chapter on Hua Mulan, self-sacrificing daughters. The militarisation that underpins war needs narratives of manhood and womanhood – gendered discourses of everyday life – to persuade populations of its putative righteousness in communist and capitalist regimes, in wartime and in peacetime.