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## Civilians Go into Battle:

### Hired Militias in the White Lotus War, 1796–1805

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) was faced with a serious challenge: a sectarian revolt in central China, commonly known as the “White Lotus Rebellion,” quickly developed into a sizable war, engulfing parts of Hubei, Sichuan, Shaanxi, and several other provinces.<sup>1</sup> In the prolonged campaign from 1796 to 1805 to put down this rebellion, the Qing military used large numbers of temporarily recruited civilians, *xiangyong* 鄉勇, as designated by Qing officials, to aid the regular standing armies in their operations. The term *xiangyong* literally means “local braves,” with its closest equivalent in English being “militias.” However, *xiangyong* were not the same as local militias that were organized by the local elite, for example, gentry members or rich merchants, for the purpose of defending their neighborhoods in times of emergency; these were usually referred to as *tuanlian* 團練. Hired by the military or the local authorities, and paid by the state, the *xiangyong* were organized as auxiliary forces attached to the regular army units, either joining in battles or guarding strategic locations and checkpoints, many being in service for years. Below, to distinguish the *xiangyong* from the local militias, *xiangyong* will be referred to as “hired militias.”

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<sup>1</sup> Although many scholars agree that it is not accurate to use “White Lotus” to label all sectarian schools in late-imperial China (e.g., B. J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992]; Ma Xisha 馬西沙, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao jianshi* 中國民間宗教簡史 [Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005] pp. 60–65), the name “White Lotus” had been used by the Qing state as an umbrella term for all popular religious sects. Because the term has been commonly used in academia and there has not been an accepted alternative, this article continues to use it.

In the existing scholarship on the White Lotus Rebellion some attention has been paid to either the sectarian origins of the rebellion or the societal responses to the upheaval initiated by the local elite,<sup>2</sup> but little effort has been made to reconstruct the Qing suppression campaign, which leaves the phenomenon of hired militias largely unexamined.<sup>3</sup> Admitting that there was only scattered information about the hired militias in the official records that he accessed, the scholar Wei Yuan 魏源 (1796–1853) only portrayed a couple of the most well-known militiamen in his writing on the major wars of the Qing titled *Shengwuji* 聖武記: it is far from a complete picture of this massive and complex phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> In twentieth-century scholarship, the adoption of hired militias has been attributed to the decline of the Qing military, which was no longer capable of battling domestic rebels on its own.<sup>5</sup> Using both the Qing archives from the time of the war and the official documents compiled after the war, this article argues that using hired civilians in war was not necessitated by the fact that the Qing standing armies had lost their fighting capacities, but resulted mainly from the tension between the central government's attempt to rein in wartime spending and the military's endeavors to perpetuate their economic gains in war. Although some of those hired militiamen turned out to be outstanding soldiers and the mass hiring of civilians in the war zone helped reduce the pool of candidates for the rebels, the enormous financial cost and other detrimental repercussions of the hired militias outweighed its usefulness, ultimately persuading the Qing state to discontinue this short-lived practice in future wars.

<sup>2</sup> The most important studies on the sectarian aspect of the White Lotus Rebellion include Suzuki Chūsei 鈴木中正, *Chūgoku shi ni okeru kakumei to shūkyō* 中國史における革命と宗教 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1974), pp. 167–77; ter Haar, *White Lotus*; and Blaine Campbell Gaustad, “Religious Sectarianism and the State in Mid-Qing China: Background to the White Lotus Uprising of 1796–1804,” Ph.D. diss. (Berkeley: University of California, 1994). For a study of the local militias during the White Lotus Rebellion, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796–1864* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1970), pp. 37–49. For the political and social backgrounds of the rebellion, see Suzuki, *Kakumei to shūkyō*, pp. 152–66; and Susan Mann Jones and Philip A. Kuhn, “Dynastic Decline and Roots of Rebellion,” in Denis Twitchett and John Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 10, Part One, Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1978), pp. 107–62.

<sup>3</sup> Given that his main theme is local militias, Kuhn only discusses the *xiangyong* question briefly. Kuhn, *Rebellion*, pp. 49–50. Suzuki's succinct account of the Qing suppression campaign against the rebellion gives some highlights of the hired militias in the campaign, but it is far from a thorough study of the campaign; *Kakumei to shūkyō*, pp. 178–89.

<sup>4</sup> Wei Yuan, *Shengwuji* 聖武記 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), j. 10 (each *juan* of this work covers one war).

<sup>5</sup> Suzuki, *Kakumei to shūkyō*, p. 186; Jones and Kuhn “Dynastic Decline and Roots of Rebellion,” p. 143.

The first section, below, examines the origins of hired militias in the late-eighteenth century. The second section delineates the mechanism and dynamics of the short-lived practice, and probes many loopholes in the undertaking. The third section traces the relevant debates within the Qing bureaucracy, the efforts on the part of the military to safeguard the scheme, and the change in the position of the throne – from ambivalence to adamant repudiation. The last section discusses the impact of the episode on the Qing military system, arguing that the real downturn of the Qing military started in the wake of the White Lotus War, when the state turned its back on its previously-held policy of giving the military generous financial support.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE HIRED MILITIAS IN THE LATE-QIANLONG PERIOD

The Qing dynasty, fully conscious of the great advantage provided by its military prowess, displayed a wholly different attitude from that of the fallen Ming in managing its military system. On guard against undermining military professionalism, the Qing dynasty had refrained from using temporarily-hired and untrained civilians as a combatant force in wars prior to the late-eighteenth century. The two armies of the Qing, the Banners and the Green Standard Army,<sup>6</sup> had been always deployed and served as the main combatant force, mostly in wars on the frontiers, though the military usually hired large numbers of civilian laborers for logistical functions. Convinced that the failure in giving its military sufficient funding was one of the chief causes of the collapse of the Ming dynasty, the founding fathers of the Qing dynasty paid tremendous attention to guaranteeing financial support. While the regular stipends to both officers and soldiers were not set particularly high and had not been increased over time, the state often supplemented these by various and generous *ad hoc* awards and subsidies, which was especially the case in wartime.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Banners were the Manchu military system that had been set up before the Manchu conquest of China proper (later, Mongol and Chinese Banners were organized). The Green Standard Army was founded during the Manchu conquest of China to mitigate the insufficient size of the Banners. The Green Standard Army, of which rank-and-filers and lower officers consisted of only Chinese recruits, was stationed all over the country and shouldered the task of policing local areas, whereas bannermen were only stationed in the capital, Manchuria, and certain major cities and strategic points.

<sup>7</sup> The most comprehensive study of the Qing military financial system is Chen Feng's 陳鋒, *Qingdai junfei yanjiu* 清代軍費研究 (Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1992). For a brief introduction to the Qing military financial systems in both peace and wartime, see Yingcong Dai, "Military Finance in the High Qing Period: An Overview," in Nicola Di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2009), pp. 296–316, 380–82.

This position of the Qing state, however, tempted the military officials to press for higher and higher war budgets simply by citing emergent needs, which were not difficult to find in a war environment, to justify unplanned and unregulated usages of funds. Over the expansion era from the late-seventeenth to the late-eighteenth century, there was a tendency for the costs of war to climb. While both the Kangxi emperor (r. 1622–1722) and the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735) had managed to keep war expenses within a reasonable scope, they escalated during the reign of the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736–1796). In the middle 1770s, the Qianlong administration was especially alarmed by the high cost of two wars: the campaign to suppress a sectarian uprising led by Wang Lun 王倫 in Linqing 臨清, Shandong, in 1774, and the second Jinchuan 金川 war in western Sichuan, 1771–1776.<sup>8</sup> In Shandong, the Qing authorities swiftly recaptured the city of Linqing from the rebels, but this one-month campaign cost the Qing one million taels. In the second Jinchuan war, massive Qing forces fought for more than five years before they crushed the last stronghold in the Jinchuan area. Claiming 61 million taels from the state budget, this war became the most expensive of the dynasty thus far. Compared with the 30 million for the campaigns far in Chinese Turkistan in 1755–1759, first in order to eliminate the Zunghar Mongols and then to subjugate Muslim tribes, the cost of both the Linqing campaign and the second Jinchuan war was disturbing for the Qing central government.<sup>9</sup>

Qianlong believed that it was his commanders' mishandling of these two campaigns and extensive abuses of the war funds, including excessive awards to soldiers, highly-inflated pay to a massive military labor force, and honorific titles being lavished on lower-ranking officials who worked for the logistical system, that caused the high costs.<sup>10</sup> Attributing all the abuses and wrongdoings of the military and civil of-

<sup>8</sup> For the Wang Lun uprising, see Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1981). The most important material on the second Jinchuan war includes *Pingding liang Jinchuan fanglüe*, 平定兩金川方略 (rpt. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 1991–1992); Wei, *Shengwuji*, j. 7; and Zhuang Jifa 莊吉發, *Qing Gaozong shiquan wugong yanjiu* 清高宗十全武功研究 (Taipei: National Palace Museum 1982), pp. 129–81. Also see Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 55–57.

<sup>9</sup> For the Qing campaigns in Chinese Turkistan, see Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2005), pp. 270–89.

<sup>10</sup> Qianlong's edict, QL 41/04/06, *Qinding Hubu, Bingbu, Gongbu junxu zeli* 欽定戶部兵部工部軍需則例 (rpt. Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2000), pp. 1a–b. The Qing state had in fact tried to regulate wartime expenditures in 1760, after the Qing conquest of Eastern Turkistan: the Board of Revenue set up regulations with regard to the auditing process following each military operation. But apparently it was not enough; *ibid.*, pp. 3b–4a.

ficials to the fact that there were no comprehensive rules guiding and limiting wartime expenditures, Qianlong felt an urgent need to regulate such spending more strictly. Immediately after the dust of the second Jinchuan war had settled, the emperor set up an *ad hoc* committee consisting of more than a hundred top court officials to standardize the criteria, hoping an all-inclusive code in this regard would root out abuses and corruption. It took the committee eight years to produce a set of detailed regulations, called “Qinding Hubu, Bingbu, Gongbu junxu zeli” 欽定戶部兵部工部軍需則例 (“Imperial-sanctioned regulations of wartime expenditures concerning the Boards of Revenue, War and Works,” referred to as *Junxu zeli*, below), promulgated in 1785.<sup>11</sup> Although the document tolerated some grey areas in wartime expenditures and sanctioned some unofficial practices and expedients from previous wars, it did, however, outlaw some of the most abusive practices, and scrupulously stipulated wartime payments to military personnel, laborers, and other hired professionals such as medical doctors. As a result, it empowered the civil bureaucracy to tighten its surveillance of wartime spending, thus standing as a huge obstacle to the commanders’ quest for funds.

The central government’s effort backfired. The military started looking for new ways to bypass the scrutiny of the central fiscal apparatus in the auditing process. In the remaining years of the Qianlong reign, the Qing was engaged in several campaigns to put down domestic rebellions. Given that cutting costs became a resounding issue in the late-eighteenth century, Qianlong insisted that a war against internal revolt was different from a frontier war, so that a domestic war against a rebellion should not justify the deployment of the elite bannermen. It was against this backdrop that the use of hired civilians in war came onto the stage. One year before *Junxu zeli* was promulgated, a campaign was waged in Shifengpu 石峰堡, Gansu province, to suppress the New-Sect Muslim rebellion.<sup>12</sup> Fukang’an 福康安, one of the chief commanders of this campaign and a military upstart late in the Qianlong reign, recruited numerous civilians in more than twenty counties to aid in military operations.<sup>13</sup> Labeled “*minfu* 民佚” meaning “civilian

<sup>11</sup> This document comprises three parts for the three ministries, the Boards of Revenue, War, and Works, respectively, and has 119 clauses.

<sup>12</sup> On this Muslim rebellion and the Qing campaign to suppress it, see *Qinding Shifengpu jilüe* 欽定石峰堡紀略 (rpt. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu chubanshe, 1986), Wei, *Shengwuji*, j. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Fukang’an was the eldest son of Fuheng, the chief grand councilor in 1749–70, and the nephew of Qianlong’s first empress. Fukang’an made his debut as a military official in the second Jinchuan war. The Shifengpu campaign was the first war that he commanded (the other chief commanders include Agüi 阿桂); see Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944) pp. 253–55.

laborers,” these hired civilians performed only military duties such as guarding towns and strategic points. To pay these hired civilians, Fukang’an perhaps spent more than 100,000 taels per month, which constituted the lion’s share of all the expenses in a campaign that ran counter to what had just been laid down in *Junxu zeli*.<sup>14</sup> Having often been overlooked by the Qing authorities when it came to the origins of the hired militias, the Shifengpu campaign was, in fact, the first precedent in Qing times in which civilians were enlisted on a large scale to perform military duties, showing that there was always room in war for new precedents that were not included in *Junxu zeli*, so long as the generals dared to probe the limits of the state’s tolerance.

After this first trial, the same Fukang’an reapplied this scheme in two other campaigns that he commanded. At first, he used civilians to aid in the campaign to suppress the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion in Taiwan in 1787–1788.<sup>15</sup> Upon the start of the uprising, some local residents in Taiwan, most of whom were migrants from Guangdong and Quanzhou 泉州, Fujian, organized militias spontaneously to fight against the rebels, the mainstay of which consisted of migrants from Zhangzhou 漳州 (also Fujian), who had feuded with the Guangdong and Quanzhou groups prior to the incident.<sup>16</sup> Those militiamen were called “*yiyong* 義勇” or “*yimin* 義民,” meaning “righteous braves” or “righteous civilians.” Although they had joined the Qing forces in battles and been paid by the Qing military when Fukang’an arrived in Taiwan in the end of 1787, it was Fukang’an who coopted some of those militiamen to follow his expedition around the island and fight with the regulars shoulder to shoulder. The central government did not frown on it this time, either, being convinced that it was more cost-effective than dispatching more regular troops from the mainland to the island. The Jiaqing 嘉慶 emperor (r. 1796–1820) later regarded the Taiwan campaign as the first case in which civilians were hired to join in military actions.<sup>17</sup> In 1795–1796, when Fukang’an took charge of the campaign

<sup>14</sup> These hired civilians numbering from 800–900 to 5,000–6,000 in each county, depending on its size, and they were paid 60–80 *wen* 文 of coins each day (which gave the monthly pay to these hired civilians roughly equal to the monthly stipend of most Green Standard soldiers), depending on whether their area was close to the battlegrounds. Fukang’an, QL 49/07/22, *Junjidang* 軍機檔 (housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei), No. 037669. (These are unbundled copies of the memorials, *Gongzhongdang*, by the Grand Council.) Sitting on the committee to compile *Junxu zeli* himself, Fukang’an pledged that he would limit the size of the militiamen; *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> The most detailed study of this campaign is Paul Lococo, Jr., “The Military Campaign to Suppress the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion, 1787–1788,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Hawaii, 1998). Also see Zhuang, *Qing Gaozong*, pp. 183–267.

<sup>16</sup> Zhuang, *Qing Gaozong*, p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Edict, JQ 09/01/25, *Neigedaku dang’an* 內閣大庫檔案 (housed in the Institute of His-

to suppress the Miao Rebellion in northeastern Guizhou and western Hunan, he readily reapplied this scheme of hiring civilians, but on a much larger scale.<sup>18</sup> Referred to as *xiangyong* 鄉勇 this time, the method provided commanders with an excuse for demanding huge amounts of funds from the state.<sup>19</sup> Although it is not entirely clear how many militiamen they enlisted in this war, which did not end until 1797, the scale of hiring must have been much bigger than in the two previous incidents, one example of which is that militia casualties in Guizhou alone were claimed to be more than 12,000.<sup>20</sup>

In all three campaigns, the Qing state was inclined not to deploy large numbers of bannermen, but to allow the military to go beyond the standing armies to enlist combat forces.<sup>21</sup> Although using civilians in battle had occurred in past dynasties, the Qing military did not turn to this scheme until the 1780s, when the enactment of *Junxu zeli* rendered it more difficult to use old pretexts for requesting funds in wartime. In the many campaigns to suppress the uprisings of the ethnic communities in the southwest who were resisting the reform of the local chieftain system during the Yongzheng period, the Qing did not turn to civilians for help, though the mechanism of those operations was not dissimilar from that of the campaign to put down the Miao Rebellion in 1795–1797.<sup>22</sup> It was not a coincidence, either, that the

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tory and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei; hereafter *NGDK*), No. 125650. This is a large archive containing reports to and among the Six Boards.

<sup>18</sup> On this Miao rebellion, see Donald S. Sutton, “Ethnic Revolt in the Qing Empire: The ‘Miao Uprising’ of 1795–1797 Reexamined,” *AM* 3d ser. 16.2 (2003), pp. 105–52. Also see Daniel McMahon, “Identity and Conflict on a Chinese Borderland: Yan Ruyi and the Recruitment of the Gelao During the 1795–97 Miao Revolt,” *Late Imperial China* 23.2 (2002), pp. 53–86.

<sup>19</sup> In a few months, they had used up 800,000 taels, and requested an additional 1 million taels from the state. Fukang’an, QL 60/07/17, *Junjidang*, No. 047104.

<sup>20</sup> *Da Qing Renzong rui huangdi shilu* 大清仁宗睿皇帝實錄 (rpt. Tokyo: Okura shuppan kabushiki kaisha, 1937–38; hereafter cited *QSLJQ*) 70, pp. 29a–30a. (The number before “pages,” here, e.g., “70,” refers to the *juan*, which are through-numbered.)

<sup>21</sup> In two of these campaigns, the Qing also used the ethnic soldiers of local chieftains, the so-called “*tubing* 土兵,” or “*fanbing* 番兵,” and sometimes “*tulian* 土練,” all meaning “native soldiers.” In the Taiwan campaign, the native soldiers from Jinchuan were sent to Taiwan and fought against the rebels. In the Miao campaign, the Gelao people were used to fight the rebels. McMahon, “Identity and Conflict.” In general, the native soldiers received much lower pay than regular Green Standard soldiers did. Although the use of native soldiers had long been present in Qing times, this practice certainly became more institutionalized after the promulgation of *Junxu zeli*.

<sup>22</sup> Although there are many works that study Yongzheng’s reform of the local chieftain system, few of them look into the dynamics of the military campaigns against the uprisings of the ethnic peoples. One of the few works that cover some of those campaigns is Kent Clarke Smith, “Ch’ing Policy and the Development of Southwest China: Aspects of Ortai’s Governor-Generalship, 1726–1731,” Ph.D. diss. (Yale University), 1970.

central figure in all three cases was Fukang'an, who had been known for his "unscrupulousness" in pursuit of wealth and his extravagance in spending state funds, and who was later condemned, harshly and repeatedly, by the Jiaqing emperor as the chief culprit in the rampant corruption in the military system.<sup>23</sup> Even though wartime corruption was more a structural problem, Fukang'an was indeed instrumental in initiating and developing this new practice.

After Fukang'an died during the Miao campaign in 1796, the scheme of hired militias that he inaugurated was to cost the Qing dearly in the decade-long campaign to suppress the White Lotus Rebellion, in which use of such militias was practiced on an unprecedentedly extensive scale. When it soon became clear that this practice had apparently been abused by commanders and officials in charge of the war coffers on the front, criticism of and debate concerning the hired militias was constant and, at some points, heated. Nevertheless, the Qing throne adopted a position that can be best characterized as ambivalent. Not until near the end of the war did the Jiaqing emperor make up his mind to discontinue the hiring of civilians.

#### THE HIRED MILITIAS IN THE WHITE LOTUS WAR

As has been suggested previously, the eruption of the sectarian uprisings in western Hubei in February of 1796 and eastern Sichuan in October of the same year resulted from a combination of the spreading of White Lotus sectarianism and the serious social crises in those affected areas.<sup>24</sup> Its direct fuse was the Qing state's massive arrests and manhunts of the sectarian ringleaders in the last few years of the Qianlong reign. After the main rebel force of Hubei led by Yao Zhifu 姚之富 and Wang Conger 王聰兒 was eliminated in mid-1798, the center of the rebellion moved to eastern Sichuan. Decentralized and strategically vague, the rebel forces in Sichuan were soon deprived of the ability to attack major cities and hold any big stretch of territory. By the end of 1800, the war entered its final stage when the Qing forces tried to clear all rebels in eastern Sichuan, western Hubei, southern Shaanxi, and, occasionally, Gansu. However, the finale lasted much longer than had been hoped for by the throne: not until the October of 1804 was it

<sup>23</sup> Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, p. 255; Zhaolian 昭槿, *Xiaoting zalu* 嘯亭雜錄 (rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 351; Cai Guanluo 蔡冠洛, *Qingshi liezhuan* 清史列傳 (Taipei: Qiming shuju, 1965), p. 328.

<sup>24</sup> Suzuki, *Kakumei to shūkyō*, pp. 152-77; Jones and Kuhn, "Dynastic Decline and Roots of Rebellion," pp. 136-40.

able to call off the war officially, and not until the spring of 1805 did all fighting actually end.<sup>25</sup>

In the first year of the rebellion, many Qing local garrison troops in western Hubei had been sent to Hunan and Guizhou to fight the Miao, leaving only scores of soldiers in each of several counties that bore the brunt of the first uprisings.<sup>26</sup> The hastily assembled Qing forces from neighboring areas were spread thin to battle the rebels and secure the safety of local communities. Nevertheless, the state, that had just entered a prolonged transition from the Qianlong reign to the Jiaqing reign (Qianlong abdicated his throne to his son Yongyan 顥琰, known as the Jiaqing emperor, on Chinese New Year's day of 1796, but continued to exercise power on critical political and military affairs until he died in the beginning of 1799), still adhered to the principle that Qianlong had set forth in the latter part of his reign, that is, internal rebellions, if not life-threatening, did not warrant the deployment of massive numbers of elite bannermen, unlike the case of frontier wars, and deferred deploying large numbers of bannermen from afar.<sup>27</sup> Even after Qianlong died, Jiaqing did not attempt to divert from this position during the latter part of the campaign, 1799–1804. Throughout the entire campaign, only several thousands of bannermen were sent from the north to join the campaign in central China. Even combined with the bannermen from the three Banner garrisons in Xi'an (Shaanxi), Jingzhou (Hubei), and Chengdu (Sichuan) in the battleground provinces, the Banner force was still a minority among the total of more than 117,000 troops deployed.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The Qing military did not fight the rebels wholeheartedly throughout the long campaign. The commanders delayed, time and again, wrapping up the war for their personal gains. Yingcong Dai, "The White Lotus War: A War Fought on the Terms of the Qing Military," paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> *Qinding jiaoping sansheng xiefei fanglüe* 欽定剿平三省邪匪方略 (rpt. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970; hereafter cited as *XFFL*) 1, pp. 1a, 3a, 20a. (I cite the original *juan* and page numbers; this photoprnt. edn. also carries modern through-numbered folios.)

<sup>27</sup> In 1798, in an edict (JQ 03/08/08) sent to the field commanders, the throne reiterated its position that the Manchu elite forces were not meant to be used in suppressing internal rebellions, which should not be handled in the same manner as frontier wars. In the event that they had to be deployed, they should not stay outside of their garrisons for too long. Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan, ed., *Qing zhongqi wusheng Bailianjiao qiye ziliao* 清中期五省白蓮教起義資料 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1981–1982; hereafter cited as *BLJZL*), vol. 2, p. 263.

<sup>28</sup> Among the more than 117,000 regular troops deployed, more than 7,600 were bannermen from Manchuria, and 2,000 Chinese bannermen from Beijing. *XFFL* 8 (sect. "juanshou 卷首"), p. 50a. However, many of them were called back early. In early 1796, 2,000 Manchu soldiers from Xi'an were sent to western Hubei to respond to the eruption of several uprisings; *QSLJQ* 2, p. 15a. In the summer of 1797, 3,000 Bannermen were sent from Manchuria to Hubei (1,000 from Jilin and 2,000 from Heilongjiang); *XFFL* 44, p. 11a. But there were between 15,000 and 30,000 Green Standard soldiers in both Hubei and Sichuan at the early stage of the war. *Jiaobudang* 剿捕檔 (housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei); JQ 02/08, pp.

Complaining loudly and frequently about the shortage of military forces, the provincial authorities in the war zone had to find a remedy. Almost immediately after the first uprising started in the beginning of 1796, the Hubei provincial officials started hiring civilians to help fight the rebels.<sup>29</sup> In Henan, the southern borders of which were frequently harassed and infiltrated by the rebels from Hubei in the first years of the campaign, provincial officials also recruited militias, though they had never been as numerous as in other provinces.<sup>30</sup> In Sichuan, hiring militiamen started also in 1796 when the uprisings in Hubei sent numerous refugees to Sichuan, causing disturbances in society.<sup>31</sup> Within approximately one year, the ranks of the militiamen had swelled dramatically in the provinces affected by the rebellion. In Hubei, all counties, including the ones that were far away from the sites of the rebellion, had reportedly recruited militiamen numbering from several hundreds to several thousands in each county.<sup>32</sup> By 1798, the total number had allegedly reached 366,700.<sup>33</sup> In Sichuan, the total number of militiamen allegedly exceeded 340,000 by 1797.<sup>34</sup> Although the number went down in subsequent years, it is quite possible that no fewer than 100,000 were constantly on the payroll in Sichuan throughout most of the war.<sup>35</sup> In Shaanxi, in the fall of 1797, there were 10,000–20,000 militiamen.<sup>36</sup> However, the number soon increased to

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135–38. This archive of 338 extant volumes contains bundled documents on the campaigns to suppress uprisings and revolts, 1796–1874.

<sup>29</sup> Huiling, JQ 01/01/15, *BLJZL*, vol. 1, pp. 56–60; *XFFL* 1, p. 11a; 3, pp. 17a–b; 4, pp. 9b–10a; 5, pp. 14b–15a; 6, pp. 3b–4a; 6, pp. 5a–6a; 10, pp. 16a–b; 13, pp. 21a–b; 13, pp. 50a–b.

<sup>30</sup> *XFFL* 10, pp. 16a–b; 18, pp. 11a–12a; 18, pp. 33a–34a.

<sup>31</sup> Lebao, JQ 06/09/16 *Ming Qing dang'an* 明清檔案, ed. Zhang Weiren (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1986–1995; hereafter cited as *MQDA*) A306–75.

<sup>32</sup> *Jiaobudang*, JQ 02/08, pp. 135–138; Bi Yuan, JQ 01/03/06, *BLJZL* vol. 1, pp. 72–75.

<sup>33</sup> This number was revealed by the Jiaqing emperor in early 1807; *QSLJQ* 172, pp. 17b–19a.

<sup>34</sup> Lebao, JQ 06/09/23, *Gongzhongdang* 宮中檔 (housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei; hereafter cited as *GZD*) No. 404006208; Lebao, JQ 13/02/25, *ibid.* No. 404010082. (This archive of unbundled documents contains memorials, often with the emperor's comments on them.) But another source suggests that the number could be as high as between 400,000 and 500,000 in Sichuan; *Daxian zhi* 達縣志, 1933 edn. (rpt. 1971, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1971) 1, pp. 31–32.

<sup>35</sup> Lebao claimed that he tried to cut down the size of the militias in Sichuan to 110,000 by early 1798, and further cut them down to more than 40,000 by 1799. However, the size of the militiamen swelled back to 100,000 in early 1800 (Lebao, JQ 13/02/25, *GZD* No. 404010082). Another source reveals that there were more than 100,000 militiamen in early 1798; *XFFL* 79, pp. 9b–10a. In Hubei, it was reported that the hired militias had been cut by 60–70% in some places by 1798 when the province was largely pacified; *XFFL* 2 (sect. “*Juanshou* 卷首”), pp. 22b–23a. Even if this was the case, the total number of the militiamen in Hubei should still be larger than 100,000.

<sup>36</sup> *QSLJQ* 22, p. 3b.

40,000–50,000.<sup>37</sup> To be sure, these numbers do not include the local militias that were organized by the local elite members and not paid through the war coffers. The size of the hired militias, however, went down largely in the last two years of the war when the state urged their total demobilization.<sup>38</sup>

The recruitment of militiamen was a joint undertaking of local officials and the military. During Qing times, provincial authorities were routinely involved in wars as an important component of *ad hoc* “war authorities.” The governor-general was often appointed as one of the chief commanders if hostilities occurred in or near his jurisdiction.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, other provincial officials would be assigned logistical tasks at different levels. During the White Lotus War, hiring militiamen was often left to the local officials involved in the logistical function. But sometimes military officials were also sent to aid their civilian counterparts. The recruited militiamen could choose either to be expeditionary militiamen to follow the army units or to be guardsman militiamen to guard strategic points.<sup>40</sup> Once employed, those militiamen’s names were reported to the Board of Revenue for records. To distinguish themselves from the regular troops and among different groups of militiamen, they bore insignias at first and later wore their own uniforms, and had assorted banners; for example, the Hubei militias used red banners and the Sichuan militias used banners showing the Eight Trigrams, and the like.

Such hired militiamen fell into two main categories. One was called “*suizheng xiangyong* 隨征鄉勇,” meaning “militiamen who follow the army,” or “expeditionary militia,” who were attached to the regular military units and moved around with them. They were often assigned to engage rebels first, and suffered far more casualties than the regular troops. Another group was dubbed “*fangshou xiangyong* 防守鄉勇” or “*fangka xiangyong* 防卡鄉勇,” meaning “militiamen who defend [villages, towns and checkpoints],” or “guardsman militia.” Together, they were sometimes referred to as “*zheng fang xiangyong* 征防鄉勇” (expedition-

<sup>37</sup> *Chuan Shaan Chu shanhou shiyi dang* 川陝楚善後事宜檔 (Housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei; hereafter cited as *SHD*) edict, JQ 08/05/no date, p. 99; *QSLJQ* 113, p. 26b. This archive of bundled documents pertains to the last phase of the White Lotus War.

<sup>38</sup> Suzuki estimates there were about 37,000 of them in 1802. Suzuki, *Kakumei to shūkyō*, p. 186. But it seems that the real size should be bigger.

<sup>39</sup> A typical example of this scenario in the White Lotus War was Lebao’s position. He was concurrently the governor-general of Sichuan in the most parts of the war and one of the chief commanders of the war. It also happened that military commanders were assigned to join the logistical task force as a demotion when they did not meet the expectations of the throne in the battlefield.

<sup>40</sup> Bi Yuan, JQ 01/03/06; *BLJZL*, vol. 1, p. 74.

ary and guardsman militias), or simply “*xiangyong* 鄉勇.” To distinguish those hired militias from those locally-based volunteer militias, the latter were usually referred to as “*tuanlian xiangyong* 團練鄉勇” or simply “*tuanyong* 團勇” in the Qing records. A longer way to call the volunteer militias was “*minjian zixing tuanlian zhi yong* 民間自行團練之勇,” meaning “militias that are organized spontaneously by local residents.”

In general, the words “*tuan*” or “*tuanlian*” had never been associated with hired militiamen, but “*xiangyong*” was an ambiguous word, which could mean either hired or voluntary militias, although it meant in most cases the former. To be sure, there was not always a clearly-drawn boundary between the hired militias and the local ones. There were cases in which local militiamen voluntarily took part in the actions along with the regular army, and they were afterwards recruited as hired militiamen.<sup>41</sup> Or, some local militiamen were coopted by the military when manpower became scarce at the front. Once they started to be paid by the military, they were no longer local militiamen, but were transformed into hired militiamen.

Who were those people who were hired by the military? Were they forced to join? The majority of the hired militiamen came from a huge pool of lower to marginal classes, and most militiamen joined for the pay. In Sichuan where there were numerous unemployed people due to incessant migrations to the province since the late seventeenth century, it is probably true that most enlistees were jobless drifters, including bandits, salt smugglers, illegal coin minters, and so forth.<sup>42</sup> According to the records on death pension issuance, most Hubei militiamen who had been killed in action had families to receive the money, whereas an overwhelming majority of the killed militiamen of Sichuan had no listed families, which could serve as an indication of their being new migrants to the province.<sup>43</sup> In addition, most militiamen in Shaanxi province actually came from Sichuan, which further confirms that the

<sup>41</sup> In 1797, 800 local militiamen, led by several *shengyuan* degree holders in Shangzhou 商州, Shaanxi, asked to join the regular army and fight with the rebels. 600 of them were accepted to follow the army; *XFFL* 36, pp.14b-15a.

<sup>42</sup> Decades before the uprising, eastern Sichuan had already been plagued with unemployment, crime and banditry owing to the fact that too many newcomers could no longer find either land to till or other reliable livelihoods. For the deterioration of social order in Sichuan in the late-18th c., see Fukang'an's memorial, *QL* 47/05/12, *NGDK* No. 119616.

<sup>43</sup> In a memorial in early 1803, Delengtai 德楞泰 reported that most of the hired militiamen in Badong 巴東 of Hubei, Wushan 巫山 and Daning 大寧 of Sichuan, both counties bordering Hubei, had families and professions, so that it did not result in any serious problems when they were dismissed (cited in Jiaqing's edict, *SHD*JQ 08/02/25, p. 91). In 1807, Lebao reported that among over 9,000 killed militiamen in one place in Sichuan during 1797-1799, only 447 had families (Changming, *JQ* 16/07/20, *NGDK* No. 114654).

population pressure in Sichuan was far more serious than in its neighboring provinces.<sup>44</sup> On the contrary, it seemed that most militiamen in Henan were farmers; they returned to their villages, when demobilized in 1803, making the least trouble among all four provinces that hired large numbers of militiamen.<sup>45</sup>

The militiamen were neither volunteers nor had they been commandeered, as believed by some previously.<sup>46</sup> Rather, they were entitled to fairly favorable financial compensation. In Hubei, they had apparently been paid ever since 1796 when the use of the hired militias first started.<sup>47</sup> In Sichuan, hiring and paying militiamen lasted the longest time, spanning from the autumn of 1796 to the spring of 1805.<sup>48</sup> Because *Junxu zeli* did not provide any rule or precedent with regard to paying the hired militiamen, it was utterly confusing and disorderly when it came down to the pay process. In general, each province set its own rules, but all the rules were subject to frequent change. At times, the war authorities in different provinces used the precedents that had been set in the Shifengpu campaign in 1784 and the war against the Miao Rebellion in 1795–1797 as guidelines, with certain variations. In Shaanxi province, the Shifengpu precedent – 60 *wen* per day to militiamen who were in the area not directly involved in combat and 80 *wen* per day for those in the area attacked by rebels – seems to have been followed for years.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes the imperial sanction of a particular case was taken as the criterion for similar cases in the future. The overall trend was that the pay tended to rise as the war progressed.

When the Jiaqing emperor took the reins of government in 1799, it was no secret to him that the militiamen's stipend had become higher than that of the regular Green Standard soldiers.<sup>50</sup> In other words, that monthly stipend, including cash and food rations, was, on average, more than 2 taels a month, the same as received by most of the Green Stan-

<sup>44</sup> *QSLJQ* 116, p. 41b.

<sup>45</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/01/09, edict, p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Fang Chao-ying holds that those *xiangyong* were volunteers who had been "compelled" to join the army after their farms were destroyed, and were not properly compensated until 1799; Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, p. 446.

<sup>47</sup> *XFFL* 5, pp. 14b–15a; 8, p. 4b; 11, pp. 8a–9a.

<sup>48</sup> Teqing'e, JQ12/02/09, *NGDK* No. 041220.

<sup>49</sup> Lukang, JQ10/05/12, *NGDK* No. 108467.

<sup>50</sup> Jiaqing had mentioned this himself several times according to the records in his "Veritable Records." In 1801, Shulin, the governor-general of Huguang, also commented: "The newly-hired militiamen are not skillful [militarily], so they are not useful. In addition, their stipend is higher than that of the regular troops. [Their capacities] are not sufficient in fighting against the rebels, but are more than adequate when it comes to disturbing people. It would be difficult to dispose of them after the war is finished as there is no land available for them to settle down and no military vacancy to fill" (*QSLJQ* 80, pp. 4a–b).

dard soldiers. In some cases in which the militiamen were deployed to other provinces, they received even higher pay.<sup>51</sup> Although the rates were somehow decreased in the last stage of the war for several thousands of remaining militiamen, most still received about 2 taels.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to their monthly stipend, the militiamen were also entitled to other monetary benefits. For one, they began to be given “*yancai yin* 鹽菜銀,” or the “salt and vegetable allowance,” a wartime allowance paid to both bannermen and Green Standard troops, when they were first used in combat. Once they started receiving it, they would not allow it to be missed. In early 1798, a group of militiamen in Hubei first mutinied and then deserted because they did not receive it on time.<sup>53</sup> Even at the very last stage of the war, the commanders requested to increase the *yancai yin* allowance for the hired militiamen.<sup>54</sup> In addition, the militiamen were also granted awards, including both honorific official titles and material awards including cash, which were given largely at the will of their commanders. Another important step in the hiking of militia-related costs came in early 1797 when the throne agreed to extend death pensions to hired militiamen that had only been given to the regular troops up to this point.<sup>55</sup> The military also allegedly paid laborers to carry the remains of the dead militiamen from the battlefield. In Sichuan, 100 militiamen were customarily given 20 paid laborers who served as carriers and took care of all the daily chores.<sup>56</sup> Finally, most of the militiamen received settlement subsidies when they were dismissed. In the early spring of 1804, the state made a big compromise by increasing the settlement subsidies from 2 taels to 5–15 taels in order to swiftly demobilize the remaining militiamen, who may have numbered several thousands.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> For example, the militiamen of Sichuan and Shaanxi who were sent to Gansu to fight the rebels received their stipend at the rate of 1 *qian* of silver per day, which means that their monthly stipend was more than 3 taels (Lukang et al., JQ 13/06/16, *NGDK* No. 1133812).

<sup>52</sup> At the last stage of the war, hired militiamen in Hubei received a monthly pay of 2 tael and 4 *qian* without food ration. But in Shaanxi, they received 1 tael and 4 *qian* but with a food ration of one *sheng* per day (*SHD* JQ 08/04/11, pp. 61–62). At one point, the stipend for the remaining militiamen declined to 1 tael 3 *qian* and eight *fen* per month, lower than that of the Green Standard soldiers. Commanders asked to add 6 *qian* 2 *fen* to amount to 2 taels a month to which Jiaqing gave his consent (ibid. JQ 09/06/01, pp. 51–55).

<sup>53</sup> *XFFL* 61, p. 15b; pp. 30a–b; *QSLJQ* 26, p. 12a.

<sup>54</sup> But it was turned down by Jiaqing (*SHD* JQ 09/04/25, pp. 201–07).

<sup>55</sup> *QSLJQ* 13, pp. 3a–4a.

<sup>56</sup> Changming, JQ 14/04/20, *NGDK* No. 027561.

<sup>57</sup> What had been recommended by the field commanders was that all militiamen receive 10 taels of settlement subsidies, and the militiamen with merits receive 15 taels. Jiaqing amended it to the following: militiamen from other provinces were given 10 taels, whereas ones of the same province only were given 5 taels; and that the militiamen with merit but from other provinces were given 15 taels, whereas the ones with merit but from the same province were given 10 taels (*SHD* JQ 09/02/09, pp. 69–71). Since there were numerous militiamen who had

While enlistment turned out to be *de facto* employment for hundreds of thousands of civilians, at the same time, numerous loopholes in the system helped military commanders and logistical officials to line their own pockets. The most common ways to embezzle war funds were through over-hiring and false claims. As mentioned earlier, the entire provinces of Hubei and Sichuan hired militiamen in 1796–1797 even though the rebellion only affected parts of these two provinces. The excessive hiring in the places that had not been involved in conflict sparked criticism and calls to reduce the size in those areas.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the war, it was a common phenomenon for the war authorities to hire more militiamen than needed in order to claim more state funds.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the war authorities also claimed more names than they actually hired, or changed the dates on which they were hired, both of which were not difficult to do.<sup>60</sup> In the latter part of the war, some military leaders also tried to mix in the names of local militiamen (*tuanyong*) to the Board of Revenue in order to claim a larger amount of expenses. Another convenient way for the officials to take advantage was to manipulate the payment of death pensions. Although the condition for granting death pensions was that the killed militiamen had made distinguished contributions, this favor was apparently extended to all those killed – across the board. More importantly, the pensions were also offered allegedly to the families of militiamen who had been dead before the policy took effect, which doubtless gave rise to ample opportunities for falsification. Since there was no rule to follow, the death pensions also climbed to a high level. Ultimately, each family of a killed militiaman was allegedly given 25 taels, and the amounts were significantly higher if the militiaman held a title of “*jiansheng* 監生” or a position in the local *yamen* (35 taels for the former, and 100 taels for the latter). Even the killed militiamen without families were given 2 taels, which was called “*zhiji Yin* 致祭銀” or “mourning allowance,” and was issued to the officers to whom the dead militiamen had been subordinated, to offer sacrifices to the dead. There is little doubt that this sum

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been awarded titles or official trappings, it is conceivable that a good portion of the dismissed militiamen could receive 10–15 taels, which was a big increase from the initial 2–5 taels.

<sup>58</sup> In the beginning of 1798, an official petitioned to cut the militias in the eastern part of Henan and Hubei provinces. But it is not known that it was carried out (*XFFL* 59, pp. 19a–b).

<sup>59</sup> When the rebel forces thrust into Gansu in 1801, many counties hired more militiamen than had been allowed and paid all of them at a higher rate of 80 *wen* of coin per day, instead of 60 *wen* per day. Later it was decided that about one fifth of the total cost of 29,734 taels in this matter was deemed unauthorized (Lukang et al., *JQ* 12/11/29, *NGDK* No. 109909).

<sup>60</sup> In one single case, 645 names that were submitted as the militiamen who had been sent from Sichuan to Hubei to help in actions were falsified (Lukang, *JQ* 10/03/10, *NGDK* No. 113312).

of money was a *de facto* extra bonus to those officers, which explains in part the exceedingly large numbers of militia casualties that were reported to the central government. At the same time, it was common for the families of the killed militiamen not to receive the death pensions they deserved.<sup>61</sup> By the same token, it was not unheard of, either, that both regular troops and militiamen were very poorly equipped and supplied, lacking even the basic necessities during the war.

Given all those loopholes in hiring and compensating, misuse and misappropriation of military funds became widespread and extremely serious in this campaign. In 1805, it was found that about 700,000 taels had been illicitly spent in Shaanxi in the name of compensating the militias, of which most occurred in the first three years of the campaign.<sup>62</sup> Starting from 1799, the fourth year of the war, the central government tried to place war expenditures under stricter surveillance. Yet, the expenses in hiring militias remained staggering. Between 1799 and the end of the war, Shaanxi claimed more than 1.7 million taels in hiring “expeditionary militiamen,” of which 793,396 taels were paid to the commanders in Shaanxi (see the table below), and 922,205 taels were paid to the provincial officials who also recruited expeditionary militiamen to fight the rebels in Shaanxi. Eledengbao 額勒登保, one of the chief commanders of the campaign, alone received more than 402,188 taels for this purpose.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the expeditionary militiamen, each prefecture and county in Shaanxi also hired “guards-militiamen” for manning checkpoints and strategic points. One prefecture, Xing’an 興安, in the south tip of the province and bordering both Hubei and Sichuan, claimed 249,248 taels for this purpose between 1800 and the end of the war when the overall size of the rebel force had shrunk to thousands or even hundreds and fights were sporadic.<sup>64</sup>

To be sure, when compared to Sichuan, Shaanxi was not the worst case. Since the beginning of the campaign, Sichuan had exacted the lion’s share of the war expenditures among all the battleground provinces.<sup>65</sup> The expenses of two counties (Taiping 太平 and Kaixian 開縣, both located in the northeastern tip of Sichuan) in militia-hiring dur-

<sup>61</sup> By 1811, pensions to over 3,000 militiamen who had been either killed or wounded in Sichuan during 1797–1799 had not reached their families or themselves in the case of being wounded (Changming, JQ 16/07/20, *NGDK* No. 114654).

<sup>62</sup> Lukang, JQ 10/05/12, *NGDK* No. 108467.

<sup>63</sup> Fang Weidian, JQ 12/04/08, *NGDK* No. 004724; Fang Weidian, JQ 12/04/08, *NGDK* No. 064114.

<sup>64</sup> Fang Weidian, JQ 12/04/08, *NGDK* No. 056736.

<sup>65</sup> Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽, *Qingshigao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), pp. 11174–75.

ing the first three years of the war alone reached 795,319 taels.<sup>66</sup> From 1803 to the end of war, Lebao 勒保, the governor-general of Sichuan and one of the chief commanders of the war, claimed 250,000 taels for hiring militias to guard Dazhou 達州, a major town in northeastern Sichuan, where the Qing headquarters had been located since 1797, but had not been under any real threat in that period.<sup>67</sup> Bowing to its commanders, the state continued to send them several million taels a year in 1803–1804 for a campaign to clear only a few hundred, at maximum a few thousand, rebels.<sup>68</sup>

*Table of Amounts Paid to Commanders in Shaanxi to Hire Expeditionary Militiamen, 1800–1805*

NAMES	TITLES	AMOUNT GRANTED (TAELS)
Eledengbao 額勒登保	Commander-in-chief of the campaign in Shaanxi	402,188
Qingcheng 慶成	Chengdu General	79,765
Liu Zhiren 劉之仁, Yang Fang 楊芳	Regional Commanders of the Ningshaan 寧陝 command	123,896
Hu Dingtai 胡定泰	Regional Commander of the Hezhou 河州 command	43,179
Mukedengbu 穆克登布	Regional Commander of the Taiyuan 太原 command	144,368
Total		793,396

Source: Fang Weidian 方維甸, JQ 12/04/08, *Neigedaku dang'an*, No. 004724.

As acknowledged by the officials of the Board of Revenue several years after the war ended when they were able to piece together all the expense claims, the single largest cost of the war was militia-related expenses.<sup>69</sup> In fact, a considerable portion of those claims had been fraudulent, for the expenditures in hiring militiamen were the least regulated category when it came to auditing. In the wake of the

<sup>66</sup> Teqing'e, JQ 12/02/09, *NGDK* No. 041220.

<sup>67</sup> Lebao, JQ 11/02/25, *MQDA* A318–34.

<sup>68</sup> In 1803, the state was still spending at least 340,000–350,000 taels every month in the three provinces, Sichuan, Hubei and Shaanxi (*SHD* JQ 08/03, pp. 57–58). But it seems that the real amount should be even larger, because Shaanxi province alone claimed 250,000 taels of military funds each month in 1803 (*ibid.* JQ 08/04/06, pp. 37–38). Sichuan should have needed no less than this amount.

<sup>69</sup> Lukang et al., JQ 13/06/16, *NGDK* No. 113812.

war, the Jiaqing emperor poignantly denounced the practice as being “full of evils” (*baibicongsheng* 百弊叢生), decrying the logistical officials’ forging of rosters.<sup>70</sup> On another occasion, he again bluntly stated: “All expenses that had been used unreasonably or excessively and could not pass the audit have been claimed to be spent in hiring militiamen...”<sup>71</sup> Although most logistical officials were civil officials, it was the military officials who often made unreasonable financial requests, which the logistical officials dared not resist and moreover offered compliance.<sup>72</sup> What became ironic is that while the commanders lined their pockets with money and gifts sent by the logistical officials, but were not at risk to be indicted for corruption, the logistical officials resorted to the pretext of hiring militiamen to bridge the resultant gaps in their accounts.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, some of the logistical officials had to serve as scapegoats, being accused of the misappropriation of hundreds of thousands of taels of war funds; but of course not all of them were completely free of guilt.<sup>74</sup>

After the war ended, the infuriated emperor refused to endorse all the expenses allegedly spent in hiring militiamen. Instead, he enjoined the logistical officials to pay back 10 percent of the expenses incurred in paying the expeditionary militiamen, 20 percent of the expenses in paying the guards-militiamen stationed at places that had been involved in action, and 30 percent of the expenses in paying those who had guarded places that were uninvolved.<sup>75</sup> In Sichuan, this royal protest resulted in refund obligations by logistical officials that amounted to more than 1,717,000 taels and the value of about 80,000 *shi* of grain.<sup>76</sup> Even though the percentages set by the emperor cannot

<sup>70</sup> *QSLJQ* 172, pp. 17b–19a.

<sup>71</sup> Jiaqing’s edict without dates cited in Lukang’s report, JQ 11/03/06, *MQDA* A318–83.

<sup>72</sup> Jiaqing pointed out in 1799: “Commanders request funds at their will, but the ones who are in charge [of the funds] dare not to check 至領兵大員, 任意支用; 承辦者不敢過問”; *QSLJQ* 39, p. 18b. In the early period of the war, Delengtai, one of the chief commanders, had requested 40,000 tael per month for unaccountable usages; *QSLJQ* 35, pp. 2b–3a.

<sup>73</sup> *QSLJQ* 183, pp. 23b–25a; 172, pp. 17b–19a.

<sup>74</sup> The most cited case is that of Shi Zuorui 石作瑞, a prefectural official who was one of the heads of the general logistical bureau in Dazhou, was charged with having misappropriated 500,000 taels of military funds. At the same time, however, he was said to have spent freely on fine banquets and gifts for commanders. In the end, Shi did not have much money in his own pocket, so that his savings could hardly pay for his own funeral when he died; *Daxian zhi* 1, pp. 31–32; Zhaolian, *Xiaoting zalu* pp. 258–259. A similar case is that of Hu Qilun 胡齊命, a civil official working for the logistical bureau in Xiangyang 襄陽, Hubei. He was accused of misspending more than 4 million taels including giving numerous gifts to commanders for unjustified reasons; *XFFL* 8 (sect. “*juanshou* 卷首”), pp. 61a–b. But the Jiaqing emperor expressed his disbelief that Hu was the only one guilty; he ordered the commanders to pay back thousands, even tens of thousands of taels, received from Hu; *SHD* JQ 09/08/03, edict, pp. 59–62.

<sup>75</sup> Lebao, JQ 13/02/25, *GZD* No. 404010082.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

serve as precise yardsticks to measure how much of the funds had been spent illicitly or appropriated, they are still indicative of the fact that a not insignificant portion of the total war expenses, namely, 120 million taels, might have been squandered in the name of hiring hundreds of thousands of militiamen.

The widespread and severe corruption in this war poses a challenge to historians. If falsified rosters were commonly used to disguise misappropriated funds, caution has to be applied to those staggering figures of hired militiamen in the records. By the same token, one has also to use discretion when it comes to where the money that was allegedly paid to the militiamen really went. Nevertheless, three generalizations can still be made even taking into consideration the factor of corruption. First, the hiring of militiamen was indeed enormous in its scope, especially in the first few years of the war, which brought both quality soldiers and men unfit for military service into the ranks of the militias.<sup>77</sup> Absorbing tens of thousands of males into the militias temporarily relieved pressure of overpopulation in the war zone. In previous wars during the eighteenth century the military's massive hiring of military laborers who were mainly assigned task of transporting provisions had the similar effect in relieving unemployment.<sup>78</sup> But the hiring of civilians for military action in the White Lotus War largely outweighed the hiring of military labor. In some places, recruitment for militias left no able-bodied men to be hired as military laborers.<sup>79</sup> More importantly, the hiring of militiamen effectively sterilized the feeding ground of the rebellion, as the same crowd could also have provided the rebel forces with new blood. Second, the enlisted militiamen were in general well compensated; this was truer regarding their stipends, subsidies, and awards than regarding the death pensions, which were relatively more prone to misappropriation. Many of the hired militiamen refused to be enlisted as regular soldiers when the opportunity was offered to them, as will be discussed below. This shows that there were real incentives for being hired as a militiaman. Third, some militiamen proved to be excellent soldiers, who fought for years with the regular armies and were instrumental in winning battles. The fact that there were far more militia casualties than regular ones corroborates

<sup>77</sup> As Suzuki has pointed out, physically unfit men and scoundrels were also absorbed into the militias. Suzuki, *Kakumei to shūkyō*, pp. 184–5.

<sup>78</sup> For the massive hire and use of military labor force in the Jinchuan wars, see Yingcong Dai “The Qing State, Merchants, and Military Labor Force in the Jinchuan Campaigns,” *Late Imperial China* 22.2 (2001), pp. 35–90.

<sup>79</sup> *XFFL* 41, p. 37a.

observations in the records that the militiamen were always positioned at the head of battle charges.

This being said, it is important to emphasize that using large numbers of hired militias in this campaign was not a necessary factor in the Qing victory. In other words, there are no grounds for believing that the Qing standing armies could not have won this campaign without the help of the hired militias. If it made sense to hire militias as an expedient in the beginning of the rebellion when the Qing campaign in Hunan and Guizhou against the Miao had kept most of the garrison troops of Hubei and Sichuan from returning, it did not hold true after the Miao campaign ended in 1707, and most troops were redeployed to Hubei and Sichuan. Even before the Qing state redeployed massive military forces to the war zone from the Miao campaign, however, some Qing generals demonstrated their effectiveness in fighting and eliminating rebel groups. In most cases, they did so without militia help.<sup>80</sup> The scenario in which we see the military's continuing use of hired civilians throughout the campaign can only be understood in the context of the search for sufficient pretexts to gain more funds from the central government. This is discussed in greater detail, below. Apparently, for most of the duration of the campaign, the Qing throne had played into the hands of the commanders, allowing them to continue their scheme at the cost of the central government.

#### FROM AMBIVALENCE TO REPUDIATION

The dilemma of the hired militias – useful but liable to create financial tolls and political risk – may help to explain the ambivalent attitude that the Qing state took. Before 1709, the Qing state, of which the helmsman was still the retired Qianlong emperor, had been resistant to the fact that large numbers of untrained civilians were made to fight the rebels in place of standing soldiers.<sup>81</sup> Qianlong tried to downplay this inglorious device by not discussing it too much in official correspondence. At the same time, however, he seemed to believe that it was an inexpensive expedient in comparison with deploying a large number of bannermen. Thus, he directed the commanders in Hubei and Sichuan on several occasions to hire more militiamen in lieu of sending reinforcements. Meanwhile, he was not parsimonious

<sup>80</sup> However, those generals were prone to be victimized in the keen factional conflict; some of them were removed from leading positions in the latter part of the campaign. I will give a full account of this development in a book manuscript on the White Lotus War.

<sup>81</sup> *XFFL* 39, p. 33a.

in meeting the demands of militia compensation. Not only did he endorse extending the *yancaiyin* allowance, he also on occasion granted extra awards to militiamen. More importantly, his extension of pensions to killed militiamen's families in early 1797 inevitably led to a hike in militia-related expenses.

Dissent over hiring militias on such an extensive scale had been voiced from the beginning. In the summer of 1796, Mingliang 明亮, a veteran Manchu general and one of the few chief commanders who fought conscientiously and competently against the rebels, complained about the militiamen's unruly manner, worried that they might have personal connections with the rebels, and would be trouble-makers after the end of the campaign. But Qianlong instructed: "Mingliang's opinions are good. But now we're relying on those militiamen to put down the rebels. If we reveal a hint of our doubt of them, they would be suspicious and fearful, which would be a serious matter... Let's try to deal with [the militiamen] when we win the campaign completely."<sup>82</sup> Apparently envisaging a speedy victory, Qianlong might have reasoned that the problems were only temporary and would be easily solved after the rebellion.

When the war entered its second year, the indiscipline of the militiamen prompted more discussion within the bureaucracy.<sup>83</sup> In the fall of 1797, two provincial officials in the war zone proposed alternatives to the hired militias. While he turned down the proposal of Jiang Cheng 姜晟, the acting governor-general of Huguang, to expand the ranks of the Green Standard Army,<sup>84</sup> Qianlong approved the second proposal, by Yimian 宜綿, the governor-general of Shaanxi and Gansu, which suggested recruiting 30,000 reserve troops (*beizhanbing* 備戰兵) in the provinces involved in the campaign (10,000 in Sichuan, 10,000 in Shaanxi and Gansu, 5,000 in Hubei and 5,000 in Henan). According to Yimian, those reserve soldiers, after undergoing a couple of months of training, could behave better than unfettered militiamen who, as Yimian put it, "became too arrogant when rewarded, and deserted when disciplined 賞過則驕, 威過則散."<sup>85</sup> In endorsing the second proposal, Qianlong made it clear that reserve soldiers should be recruited from among those hired militiamen, which was not explicitly stated in

<sup>82</sup> *QSLJQ* 7, pp. 5b-6a; *XFFL* 13, pp. 31a-32a.

<sup>83</sup> The fact that militiamen were often implicated in looting, raping, and indiscriminate killing is not a secret, but is seen in the archives.

<sup>84</sup> *Jiaobudang*, JQ 02/08, pp. 135-38.

<sup>85</sup> Yimian, JQ 02/09/13, *GZD* No. 404003022. Also in *XFFL* 51, pp. 13a-21a.

Yimian's proposal.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, this measure failed to bear fruit: not only were the officials half-hearted in converting the militiamen into regular soldiers, but many militiamen were not willing to join the army; rather, they enjoyed better compensation and freedom as militiamen.<sup>87</sup> In Henan, only ten per cent of the purported recruitment target was fulfilled in the first year.<sup>88</sup> In retrospect, Jiaqing lamented in 1804 that it would have saved many troubles when it came to demobilizing the hired militiamen at the end of the war had this project been fully implemented then.<sup>89</sup>

Serving his apprenticeship in the first three years of his reign, the Jiaqing emperor perhaps had more insight into the realities of the campaign than his aged and opinionated father. Immediately after Qianlong's death, Jiaqing purged Hešen 和珅 and his associate Fuchang'an 福長安, and harshly reprimanded his commanders for purposely delaying actions and for the misuse of war funds. He pointed out that it had become a much sought-after affair for officials in the capital to be sent to the war zone to take a post, and that when they came back, even the ones who used to have modest property holdings became instantly rich, and many hurried back to their hometowns to purchase real estate with the money they brought back from the front.<sup>90</sup> He criticized the commanders for routinely spending war funds in banqueting and entertainment, mimicking what Fukang'an and Helin 和琳, Hešen's younger brother and the governor-general of Sichuan, did in the campaign against the Miao.<sup>91</sup> He also voiced his displeasure about the hired militias. Instead of worrying about their indiscipline, he looked at the financial aspect: "I'm afraid that the militias are also only for a show in order to claim funds in an excessive way 即鄉勇亦恐有名無實, 不過爲濫銷軍需地步."<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, Jiaqing did not quickly abandon the practice. On the contrary, he openly called for recruiting more militiamen time and again in 1799 and early 1800. In so doing, he came near his fa-

<sup>86</sup> *XFFL* 51, pp. 18a-20a; *QSLJQ* 22, pp. 15a-6a.

<sup>87</sup> The new soldiers were only paid a partial stipend before they formally filled the vacancies of regular soldiers.

<sup>88</sup> But Henan eventually recruited 7,400 new soldiers to strengthen the military in Henan after many of the garrison troops in Henan had been deployed to Hubei. By 1803, only 2,500 were left, for some had filled the vacancies of the regular soldiers, and some were dismissed. About the disposition of the remaining new soldiers, see *SHD* edict, JQ 08/09/08, pp. 91-95.

<sup>89</sup> To reward his judicious suggestion, Jiaqing reinstated Yimian who had been dismissed due to poor execution of the war several years earlier (*QSLJQ* 129, pp. 21a-23a).

<sup>90</sup> *QSLJQ* 37, pp. 16b-19b; *XFFL* 87, pp. 5b-9b.

<sup>91</sup> *QSLJQ* 39, pp. 17b-19a.

<sup>92</sup> *QSLJQ* 37, p. 23a.

ther's approach of simply feeding the military with more manpower in the hope that the surge in military force would bring the protracted campaign to its end. Only when more evidence reached him proving its fallaciousness was Jiaqing determined to reduce the hired militias. His calls for cutting down the size, however, were not welcomed by the commanders. To respond to Jiaqing's pressure, Lebao suggested, in the summer of 1800, gradually reducing the size of hired militias in Sichuan, and incorporating the dismissed militiamen into the local militias, in other words, those *tuanlian xiangyong*, or *tuanyong*. This was perhaps the first time that the emperor was clearly informed that there were two different types of militias. Since it seemed that the emperor himself was often confused by the two, Lebao offered the emperor a mini-lesson about the distinction:

“*Tuanyong* 團勇 [local militia]” is different from “*xiangyong* 鄉勇 [hired militia].” Those who follow the regular army to fight, guard passes and other strategic points, receive stipends and bonuses, and can be deployed anywhere are “*xiangyong*.” When local civilians built fortresses with their own money, those who are stout and strong and are selected to guard those fortresses with the weapons they prepare themselves, and supplied with foodstuffs donated by the local residents, are “*tuanyong*.”<sup>93</sup>

Although they did not often appear in the official records, local militias had been formed in some places in the war zone shortly after the uprisings erupted in 1796. To protect their homes and properties from both sides of the war, relatively wealthy people built fortresses for their families and property. Later, they might also admit neighbors and expand the fortresses into communal settlements. Although those local militiamen received some compensation from the affluent, it was nothing in comparison to the stipends and bonuses militiamen hired by the war authorities received. In the face of the war authorities' recruitment of *xiangyong*, the local militias could no longer draw from the wider pool of potential recruits – those outside the fortress. More importantly, they played a marginal role in combating the rebels. Lebao had stated their role as this: “...in the past years when the bandits [rebels] were numerous, the civilians [local militiamen] could only manage to defend themselves by taking advantage of their fortresses. There were only one to two per cent chances for them to actually fight against the bandits.”<sup>94</sup> In some cases, not only did those local militiamen not fight

<sup>93</sup> Lebao's memorial cited in *QSLJQ* 69, p. 16b. But it seems that Jiaqing was still sometimes confused between the two.

<sup>94</sup> Lebao, JQ 06/12/26, *GZD* No. 404007059.

the rebels, they threw foodstuffs to the rebels who approached their fortresses in order to send them away.<sup>95</sup>

If the local militias did not contribute significantly to the checking of the rebels when the rebellion was at its height, why did Lebao propose to make use of them when the rebellion had largely ebbed? Given that the critical distinction between the two groups of militia lay in the fact that one was paid by the state but the other was not, the most important component in Lebao's proposal was to extend pay to the local militias when their ranks were swelled with the dismissed hired militiamen. According to Lebao, the funds needed could be collected from taxpayers of Sichuan by levying a surcharge, which was called "*minjian bangtie* 民間幫貼" or "subsidies collected from communities." Jiaqing endorsed his suggestion but not without some inkling of suspicion. He was concerned that this undertaking would give another chance for local *yamen* underlings to exact personnel and line their own pockets. So he cautioned Lebao not to count only on this income to pay the local militias.<sup>96</sup> Following Lebao's suit, provincial officials in Hubei also requested to issue stipends to the local militiamen in their province, and to reward further those with distinguished performance.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, the throne urged Shaanxi to follow the example of Sichuan in reorganizing local militias.<sup>98</sup>

Lebao further requested, in the beginning of 1802, to assign civil officials to lead the local militias. In this plan, all local communities would be divided into sections and guarded by the local militiamen led by those officials.<sup>99</sup> Among other things, what lay behind this new scheme was the attempt to reassign a large number of bureaucrats and functionaries working in the ad hoc logistical apparatus to new jobs when the amount of logistical work decreased. As in previous wars, those people, who included many expectant officials, had been recruited to the war zone from nearby counties in Sichuan and other provinces as well as the capital. Working at logistical bureaus could earn quick promotions and generous rewards, but primarily they needed to keep the military commanders happy by satisfying their financial requests. In return, commanders such as Lebao would bargain on their behalf with the central government. Needless to say, this meant another large sum of funds from the central government. A few months later, Lebao made yet another new proposal on behalf of the local militiamen. He argued that they had served in close combat thus deserved more than

<sup>95</sup> *QSLJQ* 69, p. 18a.

<sup>96</sup> *QSLJQ* 69, pp. 16a–18b.

<sup>97</sup> *QSLJQ* 70, pp. 12a–14b.

<sup>98</sup> *QSLJQ* 70, pp. 8b–12a.

<sup>99</sup> Lebao, JQ 06/12/26, *GZD* No. 404007059.

just the regular stipend. He demanded to grant them awards, bonuses, pensions, and the like, similar to what had been in the package for the hired militiamen.<sup>100</sup> In official documents compiled after the war, Lebao was often praised for making use of local militia in Sichuan, something that was credited as having been a critical measure to secure the final victory over the rebels. What was ignored was Lebao's attempt to use it as an excuse to maintain the scale of war spending. In so doing, the commanders took advantage of a spontaneous self-defense initiative by local residents to serve their own purposes.

While the commanders tried hard to keep both the hired militiamen and logistical officials employed, the throne considered that the campaign had entered its last stage – “*shanhou* 善後” (“mopping-up”) – since only small crowds of rebels totaling several thousands were still at large. For Jiaqing, the most urgent thing in the “mopping-up” phase was to demobilize the hired militiamen and make sure that they were properly settled, as they might be apt to turn themselves into bandits, given their many years' military experience.<sup>101</sup> In the summer of 1802, he expressed his concerns explicitly:

It has been held [as a principle] that the military and civilian sectors are separated. Taking agriculture as their livelihood, civilians have not been allowed to practice military skills, even possessing weapons being banned, so that they would not have chances to turn violent. Now that there are so many *xiangyong* [hired militiamen] in the three provinces, it will ultimately prove to be a bad thing, since it is easy to recruit them but difficult to disperse them, though they give us some help right now. As for those *tuanlian* [local militia] of the local communities who guard their own fortresses, they will not turn into bandits since they all have livelihood and properties. But *xiangyong* are jobless drifters. When they are recruited, their pay is even better than that of the [regular] soldiers. And they have followed the armies for a long while, being used to fighting and killing the bandits [rebels]. Therefore it would be hard to turn them away from their violent and bellicose propensity.<sup>102</sup>

He obliged his commanders to find workable solutions to properly and expeditiously dismiss and settle the hired militiamen. At the same time, he admonished his military to hone their capabilities so that it

<sup>100</sup> Lebao, JQ 07/04/19, GZD No. 404007894. It is not clear whether his suggestion was approved. Jiaqing's comment was only that “there is an edict about this.”

<sup>101</sup> QSLJQ 79, pp. 30a–b.

<sup>102</sup> QSLJQ 99, pp. 24b–25a.

would never become necessary to use militias in the future.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, the leaders of the campaign had their own agenda when it came to “mopping up” the war—it was whispered time and again in and out of the imperial court that those few hundreds or perhaps thousands of rebels had been purposely left at large by the field commanders as a pretext for prolonging the war, since they needed to find justifications for excessive war expenses, which would bring them trouble when they were faced with the auditing after the war ended.<sup>104</sup> From the end of 1802 to the fall of 1804, the throne thrice ordered commanders to end the overly long campaign. But on the first two of those latter occasions he had to bend to his commanders’ will to resume fighting, after there were reports of newly emergent rebels.<sup>105</sup>

Precisely as Mingliang had predicted in 1796, hired militiamen proved to be great obstacles in bringing the campaign to an end. According to the commanders, many of the “new” rebels were in fact dismissed militiamen who were either unhappy with the amount of settlement subsidies that they had received, or had not received any money upon being demobilized, or had spent their money right away and wanted more. Again, it was the former militiamen of Sichuan who made the most trouble.<sup>106</sup> Still in their militia uniforms, some even wearing the trappings 頂戴 granted by the Qing state and waving their militia banners, they constituted, along with local bandits, the mainstay of the rebel force at this time, whereas the original White Lotus followers were only a minority, about 10 or 20 percent.<sup>107</sup> During the last phase of the war, from the fall of 1803 to the spring of 1805, the fights were actually between a few hundreds rebels, mostly former militiamen, former military laborers, and bandits on the one side, and Qing troops and militiamen who had not been dismissed on the other.<sup>108</sup> Sometimes the militiamen on both sides exchanged chats when they met in battle, and the militiamen on the Qing side even refused to fight against their former comrades-in-arms.<sup>109</sup>

To avoid the further dragging-on of the war, the emperor had to make compromises with regard to demobilizing the hired militiamen.

<sup>103</sup> *QSLJQ* 99, pp. 25a–26b.

<sup>104</sup> *SHD* edict, JQ 08/03/10, p. 48.

<sup>105</sup> The first time the throne announced victory was in the beginning of 1803; the second time was in the fall of 1803. About the agonizing way in which the Qing finally ended the war, see Dai, “White Lotus War.”

<sup>106</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/02/18, pp. 55–59; JQ 08/02/22, pp. 77–80; JQ 08/02/25, pp. 89–93; JQ 08/06/05, p. 14; and more.

<sup>107</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/03/27, p. 128.

<sup>108</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/12/16, p. 153.

<sup>109</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/12/26, p. 173.

He first promised not to deprive them of the official trappings they had received when they were dismissed.<sup>110</sup> In addition, he agreed that the militiamen-turned-rebels would not be punished if they surrendered, which contradicted his earlier position of rendering severe punishment to those turncoats.<sup>111</sup> In the early spring of 1804, Jiaqing made a greater compromise by increasing the settlement subsidies to the militiamen upon their dismissal, as mentioned above. A few months later, he finally agreed to absorb the remaining 4,000 militiamen into the Green Standard Army, to which he had also been opposed before, and to hire them as guards in the local official bureaus. For the rest, he approved having them escorted by soldiers to their hometowns in small groups.<sup>112</sup> Only after all those measures had been taken, the Jiaqing emperor was able to announce victory for the third and last time in the autumn of 1804, but fighting did not completely end until 1805.<sup>113</sup>

Shortly before the final termination of the campaign, some court officials suggested, in the beginning of 1804, amending *Junxu zeli* by adding rules for compensating hired militiamen, so that abuses could be avoided in the future. Perhaps aware of Jiaqing's position, the Grand Council and the Boards of War, Revenue, and Works turned down the proposal. They suggested instead that hired militias not be used in the future. In addition to giving his approval to this decision, the emperor issued a harshly-worded edict to chastise the using of hired militiamen in wars:

The reason for a country to have an army is to protect the people. The elite Eight Banners that are stationed in the core areas and the Green Standard Army that is stationed in the provinces are meant to be deployed whenever there are military needs. Our dynasty has clear rules for military institutions. All the past wars on the frontiers, such as the ones to pacify the Zunghars, the Muslim tribes, and the Jinchuan area, and the wars to suppress internal rebellions, such as the ones against Wang Lun, Su Sishisan 蘇四十三, were all fought by the military personnel and won by them. There had never been a single case in which militias were hired. When the Taiwan bandit, Lin Shuangwen, made trouble, some local residents in Taiwan, which is far away from the mainland and separated by the ocean, volunteered to be used in fighting against the rebels as they were inspired by public interest and moral prin-

<sup>110</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/10/02, pp. 1-4; JQ 08/11/06, pp. 65-73.

<sup>111</sup> *SHD* JQ 08/12/16, pp. 153-55.

<sup>112</sup> *SHD* JQ 09/06/10, pp. 79-82; JQ 09/07/18, pp. 17-19.

<sup>113</sup> *QSLJQ* 134, pp. 3b-9b.

ciples. Thus they were allowed to follow the army and aid in the campaign. Nevertheless, in the war against the heretical bandits [the White Lotus rebels], the field commanders and local officials recruited numerous militiamen and made them march together with the regular armies. In the end, there were more and more militiamen, amounting to tens of thousands in number. It would be reasonable for the local residents, out of their sense of duty, to get together to form militias themselves to defend their homes when unrest occurs in their neighborhoods. However, how does it make sense for the government to recruit civilians and use them in battle, and deploy them to other provinces for years? I have never heard of this...How can the military not be able to serve the country but must depend upon the civilians who have never been trained to fight in battlefield? Then what is the point of having the standing armies?<sup>114</sup>

Jiaqing subsequently exhorted his military officials to pay close attention to the training of his armies. For him, the abnormality of using massive numbers of militiamen in this war was caused by the fact that the Green Standard soldiers neglected training, instead being hired by their supervisors as valets or becoming paid craftsmen, so that they could not fulfill their duties once there was a war.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the entire war of nine years, the Qing state was often ambivalent, or even contradictory at times, toward the issue of the hired militias, although it was not unaware of the down-sides and dangers. Even though the Jiaqing emperor showed a determination to put the suppression campaign back on track in the wake of Qianlong's death, he ultimately failed to follow through on his agenda, which left the door open to his generals' continuous playing upon his own inconsistent position.<sup>116</sup> In this statement, however, Jiaqing firmly and explicitly repudiated the unrestricted use of hired civilians for fighting, making it impossible to revive the scheme in the future. This statement by Jiaqing substantiates my argument that the use of hired militias in the White Lotus War did not result from the fact that the Qing state suffered from a shortage

<sup>114</sup> Edict, JQ 09/01/25, *NGDK* No. 125650; it is also in *QSLJQ* 125, pp. 22a–23b. Su Shisan was the leader of the New Sect Muslim uprising in the Qinghai-Gansu border area in 1781. This uprising was put down by Agüi; most rebels, including Su, were killed near Lanzhou. For a Qing account of the incident, see *Qinding Lanzhou jilüe* 欽定蘭州紀略 (rpt. Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu chubanshe, 1983). Also see Wei, *Shengwuji*, j. 7.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Guan Wenfa 關文發 has argued that Jiaqing was not firm enough in efforts to rectify his bureaucracy; Guan, *Jiaqing di* 嘉慶帝 (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 251–65. My book manuscript on the campaign dwells on Jiaqing's capricious manner in directing the war and supervising commanders.

of military personnel; rather, it was the commanders who misled the emperor into believing that such militias were both inexpensive and effective. But in 1804, the throne eventually realized that it was high time to discontinue the scheme.

For those militiamen who had been admitted into the Green Standard Army at the end of the war, the life ahead was not easier than that of a militiamen. Because the Green Standard Army had no ready vacancies to accommodate all of them, most of them were placed in the army as “*yuding* 餘丁” or “expectant soldiers,” and only had the opportunity to be promoted as standing soldiers when vacancies became available.<sup>117</sup> Although this initiative could accommodate all dismissed militiamen who had nowhere to return and no hope of finding other jobs instantly, this was a potentially problematic solution to the militia dilemma. Since the “expectant soldiers” only received a small portion of the stipend that was paid to regular soldiers, and were entirely at the mercy of their immediate superiors when it came to the issue of vacancy-filling, this disposition gave the military officers full power to mistreat the former militiamen. A few years after the war, mutinies by those newly-enlisted former militiamen broke out one after another in Sichuan and Shaanxi, where most of those new soldiers were stationed.<sup>118</sup> The first mutiny erupted in Ningshaan 寧陝 county, Shaanxi, in the fall of 1806. In the beginning of 1807, new soldiers in Suining 遂寧, Sichuan, also held an uprising, which was followed by a mutiny in Washiping 瓦石坪, Shaanxi. These were all sparked by the new soldiers’ outrage at the fact that they had not received their stipends for months. The Qing deployed heavy troops numbering 20,000 at one point to quell mutinies involving merely some hundreds, but shock warnings had been sent to the central government, further enforcing its distrust of, and disgust for, former militiamen. Most of the captured mutineers were executed on the order of the emperor, who sought severe punishment. Meanwhile, the size of the garrisons in which mutinies occurred was reduced, and all former militiamen were dismissed and sent to garrisons in far Eastern Turkistan as hard laborers.<sup>119</sup> Suffice it to say that almost all former militiamen who had been admitted into the Green Standard Army when the war ended were purged in the wake of the mutinies.

<sup>117</sup> *SHDJQ* 08/06/25, pp. 75–79.

<sup>118</sup> The most detailed accounts of these mutinies can be found in the last parts of *XFFL*, on which Wei Yuan’s chapter on the incidents in *Shengwuji* were based.

<sup>119</sup> *Sichuan tongzhi* 四川通志 (1816 edn.) 11 (sect. “*juanshou* 卷首”), pp. 53a–4b.

Those mutinies hardened the Qing state's stand on its earlier decision that in the future it would not hire militiamen in battle. In 1807, another medium-size military campaign was launched in southwestern Sichuan to put down revolts by ethnic communities. This time Jiaqing instructed Lebao, who had stayed in the position of governor-general of Sichuan, to follow *Junxu zeli* strictly for all war expenditures, thus leaving little room for Lebao to request recruiting militias, even though this was also a domestic campaign against internal rebels.<sup>120</sup> In 1813, a sectarian uprising, the Eight Trigram uprising, occurred in north China. Jiaqing resolutely rejected the suggestion of hiring militia to help the suppression campaign by citing the disastrous precedent in the White Lotus War. As a result, only one district in Henan sent hired militiamen to fight along with the regular army; the scenario of the massive militia forces outnumbering the regular Qing forces was not repeated this time.<sup>121</sup> Although hired militias were still used at the local level, this practice was no longer an option for the Qing state in wars that commanded the attention of the central government.<sup>122</sup>

#### THE AFTERMATH

This article has argued that the use of the large numbers of hired militiamen in the White Lotus War was more a product of the calculations of commanders who sought to maximize personal gain than of the fact that the Qing armies had become so weak that they required temporarily-hired civilians. Even though the hired militias played some role in subduing the rebels, the practice was soon abused by the Qing military and the logistical apparatus, and turned into a convenient instrument in its bargaining with the central government. The Jiaqing emperor's adamant decision to discontinue this practice in future wars suggests that he himself was eventually convinced, after weighing pros and cons for years, that its harmfulness far outweighed its usefulness, if any. As demonstrated in the Qing suppression of the Eight Trigram uprising in 1813, the Qing dynasty still had the capability to quickly crack down on a revolt when the state took firm control of its generals.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58b–60a; *j.* 12, pp. 5b–7b.

<sup>121</sup> Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale U.P. 1976) pp. 236–37, 353.

<sup>122</sup> The Hunan Army and the Huai Army during the era of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) were not revivals of the short-lived practice of hired militias in the 1780s–1800s. Instead of being attached to the standing armies, they were entirely independent from both the Banners and the Green Standard Army. They had their own hierarchies and systems of promotion, which allowed commanders strict control of their soldiers. I will further elaborate on this point in my book on the White Lotus War.

In early modern Europe, it was a common practice for states to hire mercenaries, and this was one link in Europe's long process of developing national standing armies.<sup>123</sup> The hired militias in the White Lotus War resembled the mercenaries of early-modern Europe in that their sole motive for enlistment was payment, which explains why many joined the rebels once they became dissatisfied with the economic gains of serving the Qing side. In spite of this one similarity, the hired militias in the White Lotus War differed in other aspects from their European counterparts. Unlike the European mercenaries who were well trained soldiers and were dealt with by military entrepreneurs, the militiamen in the White Lotus War were civilians without any military training prior to their hiring through *ad hoc* logistical agencies, and were not subject to the discipline and rules applied to regular soldiers, for they did not enter into contractual agreements with their employers. Most importantly, unlike those European states that had been striving for centralization and for establishing national armies, the Qing state did not suffer from a shortage of servicemen. On the contrary, it possessed one of the largest military forces in the world of that time. It was truly an abnormal phenomenon for the Qing to hire hundreds of thousands of militiamen on top of deploying 117,000 regular troops, who usually stayed behind the hired civilians in fighting against a not-too-fierce enemy.

Yet there is more to be learned from this episode. The reality that some of the militiamen did outperform the regular soldiers and earned recognition and promotions, in spite of the fact that most of the hired militiamen did not make good soldiers – Jiaqing characterized them as “dregs (敗類 *bailei*)”<sup>124</sup> – betrayed an innate problem of the Qing military system. With a virtual military household system in place for both the Banners and the Green Standard Army, serving in the military ranks was a family profession passed down from generation to generation, while other able and fit young men in society seldom had the chance to enlist. When vacancies for regular soldiers occurred, the “expectant soldiers,” who were usually relatives of the regular soldiers, had often to bribe their superiors to fill the vacancies, which let in many unqualified people.<sup>125</sup> Although the Qing state had paid a great

<sup>123</sup> Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2005), pp. 150–51.

<sup>124</sup> In one of his countless poems to document the White Lotus War, Jiaqing wrote: “Indeed there are too numerous militiamen; but more than half of them are dregs 鄉勇實繁多，過半皆敗類。” He explained in the commentary to his verses that many of them had no property and profession, but had criminal records (*Sichuan tongzhi* 20 [sect. “*juanshou* 卷首”], p. 53a).

<sup>125</sup> The quality of soldiers under the military household system had long been a point of

deal of attention to securing the economic well-being of its soldiers, the ever-increasing burden for them to support their entire families was counter-productive to Qing efforts, inevitably leading to soldiers' impoverishment. The fact that so many able-bodied men were willing to be hired as militiamen fighting for years with the standing armies during the White Lotus War proves that there was a huge pool of candidates for professional soldiery beyond the military households, had the Qing state desired to absorb new blood to reinvigorate its Green Standard Army, or even the Banners. In a sense, the hired militiamen in the White Lotus War can be thought of as professional soldiers in an embryonic form. Those militiamen were recruited from society then sent back into society; they were paid by the state and provided with settlement subsidies upon their demobilization, but did not burden the state with the responsibility of feeding their families. In the wake of the campaign against the Miao Rebellion and throughout the White Lotus War, some outstanding militiamen had been admitted into the Green Standard Army.<sup>126</sup> As a result, the Qing military was on the threshold of forming a new system for military recruitment.

This said, Jiaqing's decision to discontinue the use of hired militias in major wars can be viewed as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it was wise for the state not to hire untrained civilians in place of regular soldiers to fight rebels, as it was indeed "an expensive and dangerous expedient,"<sup>127</sup> which had undermined the professionalism of the standing armies and dramatically increased opportunities for wartime corruption. On the other hand, as the distrust of the people outside of the military households ran deep, after the scandalous White Lotus War and the subsequent mutinies, a psychological barrier was built against recruiting new blood from society for military service, dooming the prospects of changing the military household system into a system of a professional army.

In a broader sense, the one-decade campaign against the White Lotus Rebellion can be viewed as the turning point when the Qing

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debate during Qing times. Some advocated the abolition of the military household system; He Changling 賀長齡, ed., *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 (rpt. Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1972) 70, pp. 5b-6a.

<sup>126</sup> For the recruitment of militiamen into the Green Standard Army, see *QSLJQ* 24, pp. 15b-17a. There were several such instances in the White Lotus War. In 1801, several thousands of hired militiamen were recruited in Shaanxi (Changlin et al., JQ 06/03/05, *NGDK*). In Sichuan, more than 350 decorated militiamen (*juncong xiangyong* 軍功鄉勇) were admitted into the Green Standard garrisons in the last phase of the war (Lukang et al., JQ 12/07/28, *NGDK* No. 004479).

<sup>127</sup> Kuhn, *Rebellion*, pp. 49-50.

military passed its pinnacle and entered its definitive downturn. It has been common for historians to point to many decadent practices within the military ranks, especially among the military officials, such as appropriating soldiers' stipends in peacetime, and lavishing war funds on awards, gifts, drinking, and banqueting, as symptoms of decline.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, such behavior mainly stemmed from the fact that the Qing military had been sufficiently, or more than sufficiently, financed by the central government, not from under-funding. Unlike the early modern European states that had to struggle hard to raise funds to support their armies, the Qing state had observed the principle of making the well-being of the military a priority up to the turn of the nineteenth century. In spite of decadent practices, the Qing military machine, lubricated by ample funds, proved its efficacy in the century-long frontier expansion that culminated in a far-flung invasion into Nepal in 1792, a few years before the White Lotus War.<sup>129</sup> Although the Qing state tried to rectify the abuses that had long been present, as discussed at the beginning of this article, it seems that the state lost this battle to its military, which took full advantage of the campaign against the White Lotus rebels to constantly press for additional and large amounts of funds, ultimately nearly depleting the once-abundant state treasury. After this incident, fearing to be misled again by the military personnel that had formed a *de facto* interest group of wartime profiteers, and having no sufficient resources at hand to dispose of, the Qing state retreated to a conservative approach in matters of the maintenance and updating of the military system. No longer willing and able to spend liberally on its military, the Qing state, in the wake of the White Lotus War, unwittingly placed its military in a predicament, making it in just a few decades incapable of responding effectively to foreign and domestic crises.

<sup>128</sup> For a typical discussion along this line, see Xiao Yishan 蕭一山, *Qingdai tongshi* 清代通史 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan 1972) pp. 227–31.

<sup>129</sup> For the Qing invasion of Nepal, the so-called Gurkha war, see Wei, *Shengwuji*, j. 5; Zhuang, *Qing Gaozong*, pp. 417–91. To examine Qing military capacity at the end of the eighteenth century would comprise a separate study. Paul Lococo, Jr., argues in his case study of the Qing campaign to suppress the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion in Taiwan that the Qing armies were still militarily capable in the late-eighteenth century; “Military Campaign to Suppress the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion.”

*LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

- BLJZL*            *Qing zhongqi wusheng Bailianjiao qiyi ziliao* 清中期五省白蓮教起義資料
- GZD*             *Gongzhongdang* 宮中檔
- JQ*               *Jiaqing* 嘉慶 reign (1796–1820), followed by “yr./lunar mo./day as available”
- MQDA*           *Ming Qing dang’an* 明清檔案
- NGDK*           *Neigedaku dang’an* 內閣大庫檔案
- QL*               *Qianlong* reign 乾隆 (1736–95), followed by “yr./lunar mo./day as available”
- QSLJQ*           *Da Qing Renzong rui huangdi shilu* 大清仁宗睿皇帝實錄
- SHD*             *Chuan Shaan Chu shanhou shiyi dang* 川陝楚善後事宜檔
- XFFL*             *Qinding jiaoping sansheng xiefei fanglüe* 欽定剿平三省邪匪方略