

航空

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C H I N A A E R O S P A C E
S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

Understanding the “People” of the People’s Liberation Army

A Study of Marriage, Family, Housing, and Benefits



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Printed in the United States of America
by the China Aerospace Studies Institute

ISBN-13: 978-1724626929

ISBN-10: 1724626922

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CASI would like to acknowledge the work and effort of Marcus Clay for this work.

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Preface

As the People's Liberation Army PLA continues to undergo a wide range of institutional and equipment changes, it garners much attention from think tanks, academics, and other militaries from around the world. While the organizational and technological changes of the PLA are certainly important and merit study, one aspect that often is overlooked is the 'softer' side, the people who actually operate that equipment, and occupy the positions that make up the organizations.

This study focuses on the People of the People's Liberation Army. Without people, there is no army, and without highly trained people, there is no modern army. This is true not just for China, but for nations all over the world, the United States included. U.S. military periodicals and journals often feature articles and exposes detailing a myriad of 'people problems' facing the Department of Defense today. Obesity of potential recruits, low levels of civilian unemployment, and massive pilot shortage, are just a few of the challenges that the U.S. facing with recruiting, training, and retaining the best and brightest for the U.S. military. China's Communist Party faces many of the same challenges in trying to fill and maintain the ranks of the PLA; however, some are uniquely Chinese, and may come as a surprise to those not familiar with certain aspects of Chinese culture. For example:

"Military spouses are no longer private citizens once they marry an active duty military member, and the stability of their marriage becomes a matter of national security (by law)."

Certainly, a housing regulation here and a leave policy change there does not merit the same amount of research resources as does the newest fighter jet or missile technology; however, in order to ensure that leaders, policymakers, and practitioners at all levels get a holistic view of the PLA, the “People” can not be overlooked entirely. “Understanding the “People” of the People’s Liberation Army” seeks to lay the foundation to better understand some of the key personnel issues that the PLA faces, and openly discusses in its own newspapers and journals.

Dr. Brendan S. Mulvaney
Director, China Aerospace Studies Institute

Introduction

Understanding personnel issues of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is crucial for making objective evaluations of the key strengths and weaknesses of China's growing military. Ultimately, military power relies on its people, as a recent RAND commentary correctly suggested.¹ Although many researchers focus on the potential capabilities of new equipment entering the force, it is important to consider that the PLA is learning from its ongoing interactions with Chinese society and concentrating on improving its force structure and the quality of personnel.² One key aspect pertaining to the recruitment/conscriptionⁱ and retention of qualified personnel for the PLA is its quality of life arrangements, especially its marriage, family, housing, and benefits policies.

The current literature on the content and implications of China's military reform mainly focuses on three areas: 1) major organizational reform including establishing a new joint command and control structure with nodes at the Central Military Commission (CMC) and theater levels and the 300,000-man downsizing³; 2) the rapid upgrade and the accelerated research and development of more advanced weapon systems and equipment⁴; and 3) CMC Chairman Xi Jinping's control over the PLA and plan to reinvigorate Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organs within the military. However, an important yet overlooked aspect of the current military reform, potentially the weakest link pertaining to the sustainability of the reform, remains the military's force building and personnel

i In the PLA, all officers/cadre are recruited, while the enlisted force is a combination of recruitment and conscription.

issues. The rapid reform measures being forcefully carried out at various levels of the Chinese military have inadvertently created a significant amount of pressure and anxiety not only for the military personnel but also their family members. As the reform intensifies, frequent family separations, long work hours and uncertainty surrounding the reorganization and troop reduction may negatively affect active duty personnel's stress level, put a strain on their personal relationships with wives, husbands, children and other family members and friends, and cause them to rethink their intention to stay in the armed forces in the long term.

Indeed, in the eyes of Chinese law, military spouses are no longer private citizens once they marry an active duty military member, and the stability of their marriage becomes a matter of national security.ⁱⁱ The PLA seems to be closely monitoring the emotional status of its personnel⁵ and taking active measures to revise existing or establish new measures to address pressing concerns of the military families. Stress-related mental health issues have prompted the PLA, in particular the political work departments, to increase implementation of mental health oversight at the unit level.ⁱⁱⁱ It is no surprise that in his report given at the 19th National People's Congress (NPC) in October 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasized the importance of better treatment for military personnel while pledging that the PLA "will protect the legitimate rights and interests of military personnel and their families" and "will make military service an occupation that enjoys public respect," including "establishing an administration for veterans."⁶ As such, on 13 March 2018, China officially announced the establishment of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs (退伍军人事物部) under the State Council.⁷

To be sure, the Chinese government is keenly aware of such challenges and has openly pledged to actively address these issues. In 2016, Dou Yupei (窦玉沛),

ii "Considering the fact that the military is the foundation of the political power and national stability, the stability of military marriage is directly related to the stability of the military morale; and the protections of military marriage and family relationships is important for the overall national affairs." "Protecting military marriage is a legal instrument (保护军婚是我国的一项法律制度)," Renmin wang, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/junshi/20010225/403037.html>

iii In 2017, there were approximately 45 references to mental health-related issues in the *Air Force News* alone. A closer look at such issues revealed that the sources of the high stress PLA personnel endure are mainly the higher intensity of actual-combat training and dealing with family issues during the ongoing military reform period. For instance, one article, published on 29 August 2017 KJB page 2, noted that every summer, thanks to the busy training schedule and the sensitive selection and demobilization work, all personnel face a lot of pressure from work and life and they tend to be more active in their thoughts and experiencing more emotional ups and downs. As a result, an Eastern TCAF brigade established a mental health intervention small group that was composed of professional psychologists, as well as battalion and company cadres and backbone soldiers. This group regularly conducted evaluations of the mental health status of its personnel.

Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (民政部),^{iv} wrote in the *People's Daily* (人民日报),

“With the adjustment of social interest relationships (社会利益关系调整), change of people's value systems (人们价值取向变化), the reform of social labor system (社会用工制度改革) and the impact of the long-term and relatively peaceful environment (长期相对和平环境), series of conflicts and problems of force building and military and civil personnel have been accentuated, especially regarding difficulties in arrangements for military members who have been separated from the military (退役军人安置), difficulties in employment arrangements for family members who accompany the active-duty military members (家属随军就业), implementation of the preferential compensation policies for disabled military members and their families (优抚政策),^v and difficulties in high-quality military personnel recruitment/conscription (高素质兵员征集), which have a direct impact over the attractiveness of pursuing a military career (军事职业吸引力) and the sense of glory and pride for members of the armed forces (军人荣誉感自豪感).”⁸

Also in 2016, while meeting with representatives from “Double Support” Model City (county) and “Double Support” model organizations and individuals in Beijing,⁹ President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of “Double Support” work during the military reforms followed by Premier Li Keqiang pointing out, more specifically,

“First, we need to expand their [military members]’ “way out [options] (后路),” establish special measures and preferential policies and provide full support for the arrangements for military members who separate from the military. Various levels of party and political organizations and SOEs and administrative organizations, especially the central government directly-owned enterprises (央企) should accept

iv A more important and higher position Dou held at the time (he was later dismissed from the position due to violations of Communist Party Disciplines in late 2016) was Director and Deputy Group Leader of the National “Double Support” Working Leading Small Group (全国双拥工作领导小组副组长兼办公室主任). “Double Support (双拥)” was a shorthand for “Support the military members and treat their family members with priorities and Support the Political policies and love the people (拥军优属, 拥政爱民).” On the roles of Leading Small Groups (LSGs) in the Chinese political structure, see: Chris Johnson, Scott Kennedy, “Xi’s Signature Governance Innovation: The Rise of Leading Small Groups,” <https://www.csis.org/analysis/xis-signature-governance-innovation-rise-leading-small-groups>, October 17, 2017, accessed on 2 February 2018. Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor*, Hoover Institute, Fall 2008, Issue 26.

v The prioritized compensation policies for disabled military members and their families(优抚政策) is issued by the PRC Ministry of Civil Affairs, and covers a variety of support policies for military members and their families over special treatment, compensations, pensions, employment assistance. For a detailed overview of the policies, see: in Chinese, <http://www.chashebao.com/shebaotiaoli/17992.html>.

more former military members. Also, entrepreneurship of former military personnel should also be encouraged and supported. Second, we need to consolidate the “back yard (后院),” and perfect the prioritized compensation policy system (完善抚恤优待政策体系), gradually increase the compensation level and thoroughly enforce political privilege and living support for those retired or separated from the military cadres (离退休干部). Take good care of those family members who relocated with their military spouses and assist them with finding employment opportunities or create favorable policies to support them to start their own businesses. Third, we need to support their “offspring (后代),” the government, society and schools need to focus on military children’s education and implement the special support policies (优待政策). Allocating solid-quality educational resources, and support military children to enroll in nearby schools and transfer to schools following the relocation of the military families, while special arrangements should be made for families of military members who are stationed at border and remote regions.”¹⁰

Despite the dramatic transformations of the Chinese socio-economic status over the past three decades and the rapid advancement of its weapon systems and equipment, the PLA’s marriage, family and benefit policies, more importantly, the cultural norms such policies were built upon, largely remain legacies from China’s revolutionary era. Is the PLA capable of reinventing itself through updating its personnel policies to keep up with the rapid changes of the Chinese society? Does the Chinese military have a functioning support system to manage its quality of life policies to satisfy the mounting expectations of its increasingly younger, more urban and better-educated members who were born in China’s post-reform and opening up era?

This report seeks to shed light on the past, present, and future of this complex and important topic, while at the same time, it provides a preliminary analysis on the implications of marriage, family, housing and benefit policies over the PLA’s recruitment/conscription and retention of its key source of strength - its people. More specifically, the report addresses the following issues, among others:

- Marriage
- Families accompanying the military member
- Employment Assistance
- Childcare
- Housing
- Military Leave, Pay, and Benefits

Key Findings

- Family and personnel issues are a major concern of the PLA during this period of military reform, as seen in the numerous discussions of such matters in official PLA Chinese language publications both online and in print.
- PLA military members continue to need approval from their units to get married, and restrictions still exist disallowing a civilian female partner in a military marriage to file for divorce. Until 2011, with a few exceptions, enlisted personnel were not allowed to marry someone from their unit's vicinity or to marry someone from within his/her unit.
- The political departments at various levels of the military play a large role in assisting its male personnel to find potential life partners through organized matchmaking events, usually held on military bases. Such service provided seems to be only open to male military officers and NCOs based on their age – between 25-28.
- The PLA continues to use a qualification system to determine whether married military members are allowed to live together with their families. Generally speaking, the PLA does not allow its new officers and NCOs to live together with their new wives and families until they meet a general minimum time-in-service ranging from 10-12 years. The current policy stipulates that officers stationed in regular locations need to reach the company leader-grade level (正连职) and NCOs who are Master Sergeant Class Four and above (served 10 or more years) to be qualified to have families “accompanying” them.

- Housing shortage remains a major concern of the military and various measures have been taken to build new and renovate existing housing to accommodate the needs of military families who qualify for provided housing. The housing shortage was partially due to senior military officers abusing the provided housing policies, eviction work has been intensified under Xi Jinping's military reform. On 1 August 2015, the PLA began to implement its Housing Provident Fund (HPF) Loans to allow military members to borrow up to ¥400,000 (roughly \$63,000) from their HPF with maximum 20-year term to purchase commercial properties.
- The PLA has significantly improved its leave and pay policies as it seeks to use monetary incentives to attract and retain its qualified personnel. As more active-duty military members belong to China's single-child generation, the leave policy has changed from allowing the military members to visit their parents staying in their hometowns once every four years to once every two years and eventually to once a year for a period of 40-45 days. In 2006, PLA officers and NCOs reportedly received pay increases ranging between 80 and 100 percent. Again in 2017, they received another 40% increase. In 2018, a division-leader grade PLA officer, roughly equivalent to a U.S. O-7, makes roughly ¥264,000 (\$41,969) annually in total compensation.

Contribution and Methodology

This report provides a new angle to examine the PLA's strengths and weaknesses through studying the evolution of PLA's personnel policies in several key areas. It also uses primary Chinese language resources to summarize and analyze this important issue. It traces the origin of the principles pertaining to military marriages in Chinese marriage laws and studies the official documents guiding the PLA's marriage and family policies, such as the *Regulations on Issues Regarding How The Military Implements The Marriage Law* (军队贯彻实施〈婚姻法〉若干问题的规定), *Measures on Employment Arrangements for Military Family Members Accompanying the Military Personnel* (军人随军家属就业安置办法), the *People's Republic of China PLA Regulations on Active Duty Officers' Leave and Family Visits* (中国人民解放军现役军官休假探亲规定), the *PLA Regulations on NCO Management* (中国人民解放军士官管理规定) and *On Further Improving and Standardizing Grassroots Work and Order Management* (关于进一步规范基层工作指导和管

理秩序若干规定), and *Regulations on Standardizing and Completing Military Personnel Benefits and Treatment* (关于规范完善军队人员有关福利待遇的若干规定). It also analyzes a collection of open-source primary Chinese language materials, including military newspapers, periodicals, and websites, such as *PLA Daily* (解放军报), *Air Force News* (空军报), *China Air Force Journal* (中国空军), *PLA Pictorial Journal* (解放军画报), Chinese Ministry of National Defense website (www.mod.gov.cn) and PLA website (中国军网) (www.81.cn), followed by comparing such official discourse with the Chinese military spouses' online discussion threads on Zhihu (知乎)^{vi} and other major Chinese-language social media platforms.

Key Terms and Concepts

The PLA is fundamentally different from the U.S. armed forces. Whereas the U.S. military supports and defends the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, as demonstrated in the oaths of enlistment,¹¹ the PLA, as Chinese President and CMC Chairman Xi Jinping put it, “must be up to shouldering the missions and tasks of the new era entrusted to them by the [Chinese Communist] Party and the people.”¹² It is the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party. Compounded by the nuances of the Chinese culture, largely a hybrid system influenced and shaped by Chinese tradition, the recent revolutionary past, the Communist Party rule and Western influence, Chinese military terms and jargon, particularly those pertaining to the domestic sphere of force building and personnel issues and policies, can be confusing to people conducting research on the Chinese military. The following is a list of terms related to this issue, and provides basic explanations based on translations and definitions from the PLA's official dictionary, identified simply as the *Junyü* (军语),¹³ as well as their extended meanings in the policy context. The terms are organized in English alphabetical order.

- *Fuyuan* (复员): PLA members to be separated from the military and resume civilian positions.
- *Hukou* (户口): translated as household registration system. *Hukou* assigns citizens into “rural” or “urban” status based on parents' place of origin. The *hukou* system is used to actively limit where a person is allowed to live, receive education, and work. If one is born into a rural

vi Zhihu.com is one of the most popular Chinese language online platforms to ask questions and connect with people who contribute unique insights and quality answers. The number of registered users of Zhihu had reached 17 million as of May 2015 with 250 million monthly page views.

hukou attempting to change to a more attractive residence or to an urban *hukou* can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. In this way the *hukou* system institutionalizes inequality and consolidates the government's administrative control over China's population. But marriage still remains a possible route to gaining urban *hukou*, for both civilian and military members alike. When they marry an urban *hukou* holder, rural Chinese are allowed to convert their rural *hukou* into urban *hukou*. Still, there is a considerable qualifying period after marriage registration before this conversion can take place and the waiting time can range from two years in cities such as Guangzhou to 10 years in Shanghai and Beijing.¹⁴

- *Jiashu sui jun* (家属随军): family subordinates/dependents accompanying the military members at their stationed location living on/off base. Unlike the U.S. military, not all PLA family members are allowed to receive housing, either on-base or off-base, offered or subsidized by the military so that they could “accompany” their military members. Due to the shortage of on-base housing and the huge gap of standards of living at different locations in China, the PLA established grade and time in service requirements to guide its family policies. *Jiashu sui jun* remains the core issue of the PLA personnel policies and will be discussed extensively in this report.
- *Jiti hunli* (集体婚礼): group weddings; usually managed by the Political Departments of a military unit and takes place on military bases.
- *Junhun* (军婚): military marriage, which enjoys special protections according to Chinese laws.
- *Junsao* (军嫂): military wives, the Character *sao* often conveys a respectful connotation while addressing someone who is older in age. Interestingly, there is not an equivalent term to address military husbands in Chinese.
- *Tigan* (提干): refers to an enlisted person being selected to go through further military-sponsored education or certain training programs to become an officer due to outstanding performance at his/her current billet.
- *Tuiyi / Tuichu xianyi* (退役/退出现役): applies to all military personnel when they leave active duty, regardless of whether they are demobilized or retired. This term is also used when ship/aircraft/weapons and equipment are decommissioned/retired from service. Military personnel who separated from the military regardless of their status were generally known in Chinese as *Tuiwu junren* (退伍军人).

- *Xiangqin* (相亲): organized matchmaking or blind dates. In the PLA context, it refers to blind dates either set up by military members' families or relevant political departments/officers of the military unit.
- *Zhuanye* (转业): Military members who *zhuanye* are transferred to government departments or institutions (政府机关和事业单位) and maintain their cadre status. *Zhuanye* applies to Intermediate Grade and above NCOs (中级士官以上) and officers. See Appendix A for officer grades and ranks and Appendix B for NCO Grades and Ranks. Also known as *Jihua anzhi* (计划安置), or planned arrangements. Most cities implement a system consisting of an evaluation process and a written test to place these cadres.
- *Zizhu zeye* (自主择业): literally means to look for jobs by oneself and it applies to PLA cadres who have served for more than 18 years. It is unclear as to how many military members who choose this option voluntarily “resign” from the military or have been forced out due to structural adjustment of the military. Those who choose to *zizhu zeye* do not receive assistance in finding jobs but will receive a one-time separation fee from the military.

Marriage

A Brief History of The Legal Foundations

Protecting military marriages has been a consistent policy of the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹⁵ Even before the establishment of the PRC, to ensure that the combat capabilities of the military men, the *Marriage Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic* (中华苏维埃共和国婚姻法), promulgated on 8th April 1934, stipulated that:

*Article 11. "Wives of soldiers of the Red Army when claiming a divorce must obtain the consent of their husbands (红军战士之妻要求离婚, 需得其夫同意), but in areas where communication by letter is easy and where the husband has not returned home nor communicated by letter for two years, the wife may approach the local government and request registration of the divorce. In areas where communication by letter is difficult, and four years have elapsed since the husband last communicated by letter or since he last returned home, the wife may approach the local government and request registration of the divorce."*¹⁶

During the Sino-Japanese War, the *Marriage Regulations of the Shanxi, Ch'ahar, and Hebei Border Area* (晋察冀边区婚姻条例) also stipulated that:

*Article 16. Spouses of military personnel on active service in the war against Japan shall not request divorce, unless it has been uncertain for a period of more than four years whether the spouse is still living. ("抗日军人之配偶, 非于抗日军人生死不明逾4年后, 不得为离婚之请求")*¹⁷

The so-called *New Marriage Law of the PRC* promulgated in 1950 and the revised marriage law in 1980 continued to use such clauses to provide special protection for PLA personnel's rights in divorce, for instance, Article 19 of the *Marriage Law* promulgated on 1st May 1950 immediately after the establishment of PRC, stipulated:

*Article 19. In the case of a member of the revolutionary army on active service who maintains correspondence with his or her family, that army member's consent must be obtained before his or her spouse can apply for divorce.*¹⁸

On the 28th of April, 2001, the Standing Committee of the NPC passed a revision of the *Marriage Law* (adopted in 1980) to reflect the social changes occurring in China in the areas of marriage and family. According to Article 33 of the *Marriage Law*,

*"If the spouse of a soldier in active service desires a divorce, the matter shall be subject to the soldier's consent, unless the soldier has made grave errors."*¹⁹

According to *PRC Criminal Law* Article 259, "Those who live together with or marry someone whom they know is the spouse of an active duty service member are to be sentenced to three years or fewer in prison or put under criminal detention."²⁰ To resolve disputes of divorce, the courts can also use Article 9 of the Supreme People's Court's *Opinions on Several Issues concerning the Implementation of the General Principles of the Civil Law of the People's Republic of China* (关于贯彻执行民事政策法律若干问题的意见) to mediate while the political unit of the military personnel, at the regiment grade and above, could also work with the military personnel and approve the divorce.

In 2017, a former PLA member who spoke on condition of anonymity explained that the law dates from wartime, when it was intended to protect military marriages so servicemen could focus their minds on battle. Now he believes, however, the fact that the two parties in a military marriage do not have equal rights is problematic, because if a member of the military cheats, it is difficult for a civilian spouse to gather evidence, as they are not permitted on army bases without their partner's permission.²¹

Marriage Regulations

The PLA generally upholds the principle of encouraging its personnel to marry late (晚婚). Males must be at least 25 years old and females 23.

Unmarried personnel are not allowed to live together.²² Although married men may enlist in China's military, two-year conscripts/ enlistees are not allowed to marry until they return to civilian life, because, according to a Peking University sociologist, the "group living arrangements and intensive military training are believed to interfere with servicemen's ability to invest the time and energy that married life requires."²³ Military academic institution cadets are not allowed to get married while they are enrolled in military academic institutions. In reality, no married men or women could have been admitted to the military institutions in the first place, because the Chinese military institutions require its candidates to be less than 20 years old,²⁴ while the Chinese *Marriage Law* currently enforces one of the world's highest minimum marriage ages, allowing only men over 22 and women over 20 to wed.²⁵ Hence no married men/women could have been admitted into such military institutions either.

Until 2011, enlisted personnel were not allowed to marry someone from their unit's vicinity or to marry someone from within his/her unit.^{vii} It was unclear as to why exactly the PLA imposed this restriction, but most likely it was out of the concern for better control of its enlisted forces. It may be speculated that once the enlisted personnel, mostly from the rural areas, marry someone from their unit's vicinity, particularly at an urban location, they may be more prone to leaving the military to pursue the relative comfort of a civilian life.

In 2012, however, this restriction was partially lifted. The Ministry of Civil Affairs and the PLA's General Political Department (GPD) jointly issued a policy in 2012 in which it stated that, upon approval by his/her brigade's, or higher, Political Department, NCOs are allowed to marry someone from the unit's location or within the same unit, if one of the criteria is met: 1) he/she is an intermediate-level NCO; 2) male NCOs above 28 years old and female NCOs above 26 years old; or 3) children of martyrs,^{viii} orphans or NCOs

vii Exceptions: if the military member was an orphan, disabled or reached age 30 yet had tremendous difficulty finding a spouse from his hometowns. Such personnel were allowed to marry someone from its unit's location upon approval from a corps level and above political headquarters. Female NCO nurses, if having difficulty finding spouses from her hometown, were allowed to marry within the same unit or marry someone from the unit's vicinity. P.251. (军队贯彻中华人民共和国婚姻法若干问题的规定) and this is mostly due to the *Hukou* (household registration) system in China which restricts the free mobility of people moving from rural to urban areas.

viii This is a legal distinction in China. "The government has certified and recorded about 2 million heroes and martyrs. The government runs a martyrs database online that shows names from the past century or so. The government laid out requirements for martyrdom in 2011—stipulating that deaths must have occurred in the course of public service" "China Guards Its Historical Heroes With New Law", Chun Han Wong, *Wall Street Journal*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-moves-to-police-its-history-with-new-law-1524758002>

with disabilities due to combat, public cause or illness.²⁶ After an enlisted personnel who married at the unit's location is demobilized, he/she is now allowed to settle down at his/her spouse's (as well as spouse's parents) *hukou* registration location, if the military spouse has an urban *hukou*, as long as the couple had been married for two years, they are allowed to gain permanent residency status in the urban area.²⁷

To be sure, marriage and family housing issues remain to be a concerning factor for the PLA. This generally reflects the mainland Chinese society at large. Launched in 1980, China's one-child policy has resulted in a hugely imbalanced population with more than 30 million surplus males, which is "about the size of Canada."²⁸ A report by the All-China Woman's Federation in 2015 showed that the marriage age for Chinese was 26 on average, which is older in developed areas.²⁹ And in 2015, the number of single people at or around that age in China reached nearly 200 million. The proportion of the population made up by unmarried people more than doubled from 6 percent in 1990 to 14.6 percent in 2013.³⁰

The CCP Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued the *Medium and Long-term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025)* in 2017, listing marriage as one of the Top Ten youth issues.³¹ The Chinese Communist Youth League even pledged to help more Chinese singles to tie the knots through organizing more dating activities and matchmaking services.³² Given its male-majority nature, marriage-ability related issues within the PLA loom even larger than in the civilian world. Whereas marriage issues may impact the social structures as a whole, the PLA is particularly concerned about its negative impact on the overall morale and combat capability of its troops. The official Chinese Ministry of National Defense (MND)'s website even contains a designated page featuring military marriage issues titled, "If you ever want to get married, marry a PLA member (嫁人就嫁解放军)."³³ Indeed, articles and stories about relationships, marriage and family life have become a fixture of almost all of the key PLA newspapers, periodicals and websites. For example, *Air Force News* (空军报), which is the PLA Air Force's official newspaper published five times a week, had approximately 90 and 70 articles in 2016 and 2017, respectively, touching upon this matter. In recent years, group weddings (集体婚礼) have also been organized by the political work departments or Party Committee branches at the grassroots organizations (i.e., below the regiment level) with an increasingly high-profile publicity.

The public perception about marriage in the Chinese society seems to be drastically different from the U.S. Whereas in the U.S., most parents of young adults who reach the age of 18 would most likely expect their children to live independently if they have enough monthly income to cover the major living cost, the Chinese parents of young adults in their 20s or even early 30s generally exert larger influence. In some cases, they exert direct control over their children's life and they tend to take a more hands-on approach to help arrange their children's adult life, a most important component of which is, getting married. In major urban areas, it is not unusual to see parents gather at public parks or community centers to exchange information on their children's behalf about finding potential life partners.³⁴

It is against this background that the PLA matchmaking arrangements should be understood. Similar to civilians, historically, unmarried PLA personnel are usually introduced to potential life partners through friends from their same hometown or their own family members who remain at their home location. This is partially because of the Chinese *hukou* system, which constrains the free mobility of labor from rural to urban areas. However, these traditional mechanisms have proven ineffective in responding to the increasing demands of active-duty military members, because most active-duty military personnel only had limited annual leave time that they could use to meet and get to know their potential life partners off-base. The various restrictions imposed on military members' lifestyle, particularly the fact that most enlisted PLA members are required to live in barracks, was also a major concern of civilian females who worry about the long-separations upon marrying military personnel.

The PLA matchmaking work is often led by the Political Work Department of the PLA; they have actively worked with civilian media in recent years to organize large-scale "blind dates" (相亲) for their marriage-age military members. Usually a large number of selected young females who are also in the love and marriage market would register online and participate in a mass "blind-date" on military bases, jointly held by the military and local government departments that are in charge of civilian affairs. Sometimes such "blind-dates" are also accompanied by group weddings of military personnel, including officers and NCOs, who were previously introduced to each other through the same series of matchmaking events. Young military members and the female participants of such "blind dates" are also invited to become the audience of the gala-style weddings.



Figure 1: "Let's marry PLA members: an inside look at PLA matchmaking
(嫁人就嫁解放军, 看兵哥哥如何相亲)!" 2017-10-26 08:00 http://www.sohu.com/a/200284373_612863



Figure 2: "Let's marry PLA members: an inside look at PLA matchmaking
(嫁人就嫁解放军, 看兵哥哥如何相亲)!"
2017-10-26 08:00 http://www.sohu.com/a/200284373_612863



Figure 3: A Scene from a PLA Matchmaking Event (解放军相亲大会抱美女赛跑)
2015.11.04 14:56:47 http://slide.news.sina.com.cn/s/slide_1_2841_90885.html/d/8#p=8



Figure 4: A Scene from a PLA Matchmaking Event (解放军相亲大会抱美女赛跑)
2015.11.04 14:56:47 http://slide.news.sina.com.cn/s/slide_1_2841_90885.html/d/8#p=1

Such “matchmaking” programs are often organized at the service level. For the Air Force, a “Military Matchmaking Gathering (军旅姻缘会)” program was created in 2006 and it has been held consecutively for 11 years. By 2016, a total of more than 430 marriage-age civilian females and military males “fell in love” through this program and a total of 93 couples eventually registered

to marry.³⁵ For the Army and Navy, matchmaking seems to be less organized and there was only sporadic reporting on occasional matchmaking events or group weddings, but the content and format seems to be similar to the Air Force events.³⁶ One point of interest, however, is that matchmaking service provided by the military seems to be only open to male military officers and NCOs^{ix} based on their age, between 25-28, as shown in one matchmaking event held in Beijing.³⁷

In October 2017, a Central Theater Command Air Force military base held the 11th “Military Matchmaking Gathering (军旅姻缘会),” which gathered 123 single civilian females and 120 military personnel and it was reported that 30 military men were able to find their future spouse (心仪的另一半) through this event.³⁸ Among these successes, one female participant named Li Ting (李婷) fell in love with a military member named Li Hongbing (李红兵) and she was quoted as saying “*I am willing to stand by your left side, because I know that your right hand is reserved for saluting the motherland!*”³⁹ Chinese Central Television (CCTV) also participated in organizing a simultaneous “perfect wedding (完美婚礼)” for the military members and chauffeured four newly-married military couples to the “blind date” site in military vehicles to “receive well wishes from their families and fellow military friends.”⁴⁰ According to the organizer, the 2017 “matchmaking” was under huge pressure and was particularly difficult compared with the past events, because this unidentified Air Force department (空军某部) underwent reorganization in the 2016-2017 military reform and it now included more units that had been reassigned to be under its organization, so the number of unmarried military personnel had significantly increased. However, leaders of the Party Committee and Headquarters Department were determined to resolve the difficulties of its military personnel and they saw such “matchmaking” activities as conducive to creating an environment that could help retain its personnel.⁴¹ Such matchmaking gathering and group weddings “strengthens the unity of our officers and soldiers, and boosts our belief in cherishing our current positions and being responsible.”⁴²

In 2016, the 10th “Military Matchmaking Gathering” was jointly organized by the Central Theater Command Air Force Wuhan Command Post^x and *Wuhan Evening News* (武汉晚报) and was held in Wuhan, Hubei Province. A

ix A survey of multiple websites recruiting civilian female participants of such organized matchmaking events seem to suggest that both officers and NCOs meeting the age requirement are participants of such events. Junior enlisted soldiers, however, are not included in such events, as stated earlier, the PLA does not allow enlisted soldiers to get married during their enlistment. See, for example, <http://www.lyd.com.cn/n/774028>.

x This became the Wuhan Base in 2017

group wedding of 10 couples was held simultaneously with the “matchmaking gathering,” which had more than 170 civilian females and 150 military officers and NCOs participate.⁴³ The photos from this event showed that family members including the children of married military members, parents, and friends were also present at the gathering. The big screen on the stage of the auditorium where the weddings and gathering was held also showed photos of military families. The gala even included military children’s performance.⁴⁴



Figure 5: Li Ming (李明), “嫁人就嫁解放军”军旅姻缘会是个好活动!

来源：中国军网作者：李明、吴稀责任编辑：杜海丰

2016-10-24 11:19:11 http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/n2014/tp/content_7320082_3.htm



Figure 6: Li Ming (李明), “嫁人就嫁解放军”军旅姻缘会是个好活动!
来源：中国军网作者：李明、吴稀责任编辑：杜海丰
2016-10-24 11:191 http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/n2014/tp/content_7320082_18.htm



Figure 7: 嫁人就嫁解放军！军歌嘹亮中的浪漫婚礼军嫂都想要
2017-12-23 21:11:27 <https://xw.qq.com/cmsid/20171223A0OG5T00>



Figure 8: “共和国礼炮部队的集体婚礼，这个婚礼有点高大上”
2016-10-13 08:47文字：王博、尹博、万偲伟摄影：李光印http://www.sohu.com/a/116007476_350277

One key question is, “Why group weddings?” An *Air Force News* article written by a PLAAF grassroots political instructor might have reflected some of the thoughts.⁴⁵ According to Shi Zhiguang (石志广), the Party Committee of his unit accepted his request to help organize a group wedding around August 1st, aka “Army Day”, celebrating the founding of the PLA. Shi was “touched by” this decision and noted that there were three reasons why he liked the group wedding idea. First, there were six enlisted personnel under his tutelage registered to get married this year and, if he allowed them to hold weddings respectively, it would almost certainly mean that each of them would be holding banquets. “That would be such a waste of resources and, if they start drinking, that would cause unnecessary challenge to the strict ‘alcohol ban’ in the military.” “Also, competitions among these soldiers would also become the source of tension among them.” Second, Shi believed that offering group weddings is also a great way to offer rewards to the six enlisted personnel who had become the backbone personnel in their unit. To make the wedding work, Shi also revealed that the regiment’s Political Division (政治处) even held a coordinated meeting with the political commissar, who personally drafted the text for the wedding speech.⁴⁶

Indeed, most of the highly-scripted PLA group weddings were held on military bases around the “August 1” celebrations and were loaded with political symbolisms. Weddings of larger scale would almost always receive publicity from local and national media. Take another example, on 1 August 2017, an unspecified brigade of the PLA’s 75th Group Army that was stationed in Yunnan Province held a group wedding for its 22 officers and soldiers. It was because “due to the military reform and multiple major missions, almost all of them had to postpone their individual weddings. Hence the military decided to help them organize it together around the August 1st (Ba-yi) holiday.”⁴⁷

Tell Great “Love Stories” and Select the “Most Beautiful Military Wife (最美军嫂)”

A survey of all the official “love stories” published by Air Force News between 2016 and 2017 revealed a few patterns of how the Air Force, or the PLA at large, perceives marriage. Love and marriage within the military remain to be seen as a service to the national interest despite the dramatic modernization and westernization of the Chinese society as a whole. Great emphasis has been put on sacrifices of the female spouse of the military members in support of the career advancement of the latter and the overall enhancement of the Chinese military power. “Giving up the small family [individual family], and support the big family [the country] (舍小家顾大家)” remains the guiding principle of all military marriages.

Below is a typical “love story” promoted by the official PLA media:

Kong Tingting is the wife of staff officer Liu Yanchao who belongs to the 93023 Unit. She is 30 years old and she and her husband Liu Yanchao were high school sweethearts and now they have a 4.5 years old son. According to Kong, her husband’s national college entrance exam (高考) score was high enough for him to attend one of the top civilian universities yet he chose to study at National University of Defense and Technology (国防科技大学) [in Changsha (长沙), Hunan Province]. They maintained a long-distance relationship throughout the 4-year undergraduate studies while she took the economy class train (硬座) and traveled 18 hours each way, from Shijiazhuang (石家庄) [in Hebei Province] to Changsha to visit him during holidays. Upon graduation, Kong gave up taking the civil service exam (公务员考试) and withdrew her employment letter from a bank and settled down in Mudanjiang (牡丹江) [in Heilongjiang Province] to accompany her husband (then still a boyfriend) despite that he could only leave his barrack and come home to visit her over the weekend. They married a year later.

The young couple were both from the countryside while their parents remained in rural area and were barely living off farming on their land (靠一亩三分地养家). As their life in Mudanjiang began to stabilize, however, Kong's husband was ordered to transfer to Hulunbuir (呼伦贝尔) [in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region]. Kong, three month pregnant at the time, decided to support her husband and quit her job and began her life as a military wife accompanying her deployed husband (随军生活).

After they arrived in Hailar (海拉尔), [the largest metropolitan area in Inner Mongolia], they moved four times and stayed at a temporary apartment [likely shared it with someone else] loaned by Liu's unit, then a flat without independent bathroom by themselves, followed by living in an NCO apartment (士官公寓), and finally settled in a permanent apartment. During the following four years before their son began kindergarten (幼儿园) [however, this is roughly equivalent of a preschool/pre-K in the US and it usually starts when kids are 3 years old] Kong became a stayed-at-home mom despite that she had an undergraduate degree. She then went back to work full-time. With the steady increase of military pay and benefits, the young couple bought their first car and began to dream of buying their own apartment/condo that they would decorate it together one day.⁴⁸

The purpose of such widely publicized “love stories,” almost always in first-person narration formats, is perhaps mostly for domestic consumption. They promote positive energy among PLA personnel and families through glorifying the spirit of making “sacrifices” for the country. Almost all of the stories discuss the hardship of maintaining long distance relationships and the long separations in military marriages. And these stories almost always end up with the authors, or the military spouses, pledging that she is committed to supporting the great career choice of her spouse and she firmly understood that her spouse loves the “bigger family” or his country, more than the “small family” of his own. On Chinese social media, a group of official CCP organization accounts also actively promote such messages by organizing discussions and interviews with military spouses.^{xi} Catering to a younger crowd, the social media stories use screenshots, emojis, and even cartoons to garner attention yet the messages being promoted convey almost exactly the same logic of “national interest trumps individual happiness.” Nevertheless, all of intensive promotions of military marriages reflect concerns of the

xi There were multiple military spouse groups on Chinese social media including one that was clearly promoted by the CCP Youth Central Committee's (共青团中央) official Sina weibo account.

military over such quality of life issues for its personnel during the reform, particularly “below the neck (脖子以下) (corps level and below)” reform which will negatively impact the morale of its troops. Marriage-ability and family-related concerns, such as housing and military children’s school enrollment, may challenge the PLA’s ability to attract and especially retain capable and qualified personnel.

With the tight control of Chinese-language media and strict censorship, it is extremely difficult to evaluate, sometimes even to discover, credible discontent about any official policies. However, open-source research of Chinese language information on this topic still provides a glimpse of bubbling discontent of younger-generation military spouses (mostly born in the 1980s and 1990s) over military marriages as one military spouse put it explicitly “our Motherland is my love rival (祖国是我的情敌).”⁴⁹

In Chinese public perception, military wives are strong and self-sacrificing. *Jun sao* (军嫂) are seen as model patriots who put the nation’s interests ahead of their private desires, as they sustain their lives and families on their own while their husbands are stationed at distant, high-security bases. The confidentiality of military assignments means that the couple’s communication is limited, and sometimes unpredictable.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as more and more “post 1980s” (80后) and “post 1990s” (90后) generation females become military spouses, the identity and cultural image of traditional military wives is going through transitions, which may pose new challenges for the personnel management work of the PLA. The Chinese “millennials,” particularly those who were born and raised in urban areas, are generally more open-minded, independent, tech-savvy and social media-obsessed. They brag about their military husbands’ buying them gifts via online shopping sites and even quibble with the criteria used by “the Most Beautiful Military wife (最美军嫂)” award competition held at the military husband’s unit.⁵¹ According to a wife who is in her twenties, “Must all the military wives be having bitter attitudes towards life and complain about their miserable conditions (苦大仇深)? What is wrong with my pursuit of personal growth and better quality of life? I do not think it contradicts my husband’s working hard to establish his career in the military! Military wife is an identity, not a job (军嫂是身份, 不是职业).”⁵² Yet another young military wife, while visiting her NCO husband working at a grassroots company during the Chinese New Year, complained about her being called “family subordinate (jiashu, 家属).” She said, “in a modern society and modern marriage, I am not a subordinate to my husband. We are equal partners in the marriage!”⁵³

In another 2017 article, a 33-year-old young mother named Wang Jing wrote, “We owe our son too much.” Wang works in the northwestern province of Gansu, while her husband’s military base is in neighboring Qinghai province.⁵⁴ Though she was able to visit somewhat frequently because of the proximity, she felt upset about the fact that their little boy had so little time with his father. Their son started kindergarten nearly a year ago, but his father has only been able to pick him up twice. The boy is especially disappointed when he is sick and his dad isn’t there. “I used to tell him these things about protecting people and defending the country, but he can’t understand that,” Wang explains. “I never said those words again. I just told him that some of the young uncles who work with his dad can’t go home at all, but at least your dad can come back to see you sometimes.”

Furthermore, in the discussions about military marriage and family lives, female military members were rarely mentioned. It was assumed that considering the rather small number of female PLA members, most of them would marry fellow male military members.⁵⁵ Such marriages sometimes even entail longer separations. For instance, an article in December 2017 *Air Force News* revealed that a couple of transport aircraft pilots assigned to different units have been living separately for 11 years.⁵⁶

Families Accompanying the Military Member (家属随军)⁵⁷

Unlike the U.S. military where military families are provided with a wide range of options in terms of on-base or off-base housing with basic allowance for housing (BAH) so that the military member can choose either way to maintain its work-life balance,⁵⁸ most of the PLA military members were faced with immediate separations from his/her families upon getting married. Generally speaking, the PLA does not allow its new officers and NCOs to live together with their new wives and families until they meet a general minimum time-in-service ranging from 10-12 years.⁵⁹ Many PLA military families have been negatively affected by such restrictions. For instance, according to a widely reported story in China documenting a military wife's "long march" to visit her husband on his base, her husband, a company commander was stationed at a remote area near the China-Inner Mongolia border. Four months out of a year the roads were cutoff due to the excessive amount of snow. Many years ago, she decided to take their then five-year-old daughter to visit her husband in the winter. It took them half a month to get to the headquarters of this company at the edge of an aboriginal forests which was 600 *li* (300 miles) away from his station. As the snow blocked the road into the station, the communications were cut off. In the end the couple was not able to meet and was only able to talk over the phone instead as her husband only had a one-month- long leave.⁶⁰ Before military members were "qualified" to live with their families, leave time and family visit time was the only window when they were able to spend time with their families. And for

those who are stationed in remote areas, such as the company commander noted in the story quoted above, even family visits may not go smoothly.

The PLA's regulations for allowing families to accompany military members have changed several times since the 1950s:

In July 1953, the Central People's Government People's Revolutionary Military Committee allowed military officers who were platoon grade and above and served in the military for more than five years to have their families live together with them and receive limited benefits; and, in January 1955, after the military salary reform, military spouses (wives) of officers were allowed to live with the military members and supported solely by the latter's salary; however, in November 1957, the GPD issued a new directive and encouraged all of the military family members to return to their original villages or towns to help with "socialist construction".⁶¹

In July 1961, according to the new notice issued by the GPD, officers' families were again allowed to live on-base, with the approval of the political organs of its regiment or division; in April 1963, the "Regulations on Appropriate Arrangement for Military Officer's families (关于妥善安置军官家属的规定)," stated that battalion-deputy grade or deputy political instructor and above positions, officers with the rank of senior captain (大尉)^{xii} and above, older than 35 years, served in the military for more than 15 years or were pilots were allowed to live on-base.

In October 1986, political departments at the brigade level were allowed to give approvals to those families that had met the requirements and applied to live with the military member. In February 1989, family members of military personnel who were stationed at border regions or on remote islands, were allowed to convert their rural *hukou*, (农村户口) to urban *hukou* (城镇户口) at their original hometown location, and employment would also be arranged for them.

In July 1991, there was a major clarification for the regulations regarding the qualifications of military families that were allowed to accompany the military members. For the purpose of comparisons Table 1 below shows the most recent regulations, published in 2011, with the 1991 regulations:

xii From 1955-1965, the PLA had a senior captain rank between captain and major.

Table 1: Policies on Family Members Accompanying the Military Member

Issue	July 1991 ⁶² “Regulations on Appropriate Arrangement for Military Officer’s families (关于妥善安置军官家属的规定)”	March 2011 ⁶³ “Notice Pertaining the Adjustment of policies for military families accompanying the military member (关于调整军人家属随军政策的意见)”
Stationed in regular locations	Officers and civilian cadre at the battalion deputy leader-grade level (副营职) or with 15 years of active duty; Master Sergeant Class Three NCOs and above (i.e., those with 12 or more years of service)	Officers in most locations who are at the company leader-grade level (正连职); Master Sergeant Class Four NCOs and above (served 10 or more years)
Stationed on specially designated as remote areas (an island or along the border)	Officers and civilian cadre at the company leader-grade level (正连职) who have served for at least three years; Officers and civilian cadre at the company deputy leader-grade level (副连职) who have served for at least 10 years; Master sergeant class three NCOs (i.e., those with 8 years of service) who live in specified designated as remote areas	No restrictions for officers and civilian cadres; For NCOs, Master Sergeant Class Four and above
Served on a vessel	Officers at the company deputy leader-grade level(副连职) who have served on a vessel for at least three years	No restrictions
Special designated billets	All officers who serve as aircrew members and on a nuclear submarine, or those with a college degree, and specialized technical officers and civilian cadres who have worked within a top-grade science and technology department for at least 5 years can have their families accompany them as soon as they get married	No restrictions
Stationed in Beijing	Officers in Beijing who are at the battalion leader-grade level (正营职) or at the battalion deputy leader-grade level (副营职) who have served for at least 15 years	Officers in Beijing who are at the battalion deputy-leader grade level (副营职)

According to the policies revised in 2011, the PLA allows its military member and his/her family to decide whether or not they would like to accompany the military personnel and different policies are in place to support such family decisions:

- Those family members who choose to accompany the military member, upon approval, will be able to transfer their *hukou* (registration) from rural to urban at the stationed location if stationed in an urban area;

- The military would entrust the civilian government at the stationed location to provide employment assistance for the military spouses who relocate with the military member; those who choose to start his/her own business would receive preferential tax benefits such as discount or waiver of the business tax;
- The military children who relocate with the family would be allowed to use either local civilian or military-run schools/kindergartens;
- Family members who remain unemployed would receive a monthly basic living stipend of ¥500-700 (roughly \$80-110) and the military will provide standard medical insurance and social security insurance (in the Chinese context, this is called endowment insurance) (养老保险);
- Officers and NCOs whose family choose to accompany them will receive supportive apartment housing based on their ranks and grades;
- Cadres (officers) at the company level and NCOs whose family accompany them are allowed to take turns (轮流) to stay at home on weekends and holidays;
- Families of officers and NCOs that qualify for “accompanying requirements” yet choose not to relocate to the military member’s stationed location will receive a monthly couple’s separation stipend (夫妻分居补助) of ¥100 (roughly \$16); starting on 1 January 2013, the amount of monthly stipend was again increased to ¥300 (roughly \$47).⁶⁴ The military units will be providing this stipend to its personnel and if both husband and wife are military members, upon verification, the stipend will be provided by the military unit of the member who qualifies for the “accompanying conditions” or the husband’s unit if both qualify.
- Military spouse and minors, either accompanying the military member or not, will receive preferential medical treatment (医疗待遇).

Employment Assistance for Spouses Accompanying the Military Members

Since the 2011 “Notice Pertaining To The Adjustment of Policies for Military Families Accompanying The Military Member (关于调整军人家属随军政策的意见)” was published, there were a total number of roughly 340,000 military family members accompanying the military members out of the entire PLA. However, only 170,000 family members, or close to 50% of the total families, according to the official account, had successfully resolved their employment-related problems by 2016.⁶⁵

From the founding of the PRC up until 2011 there had not been an official document put in place to address this issue. There were only regulations guiding the practice of providing social insurance for military cadres' unemployed family members while they accompany the military person.⁶⁶ In 2013, accompanying the change of the general criteria for families joining the military members, the PLA, for the first time, issued a systematic guideline "Measures for Employment Arrangements for Family Members Who Accompany the Military Personnel (军人随军家属就业安置办法)" to standardized the procedures, services and support it would offer in terms of employment assistance for military family members.⁶⁷

The policy document highlighted that the employment assistance will be guided by the principle of "private sector as the main channel, internal [within the PLA] employment (内部安置) as supplement, actively encouraging and subsidizing self- directed job search or starting own businesses (鼓励扶持自主择业创业)."⁶⁸ Furthermore, "it is the responsibility of government agencies, people's organizations (人民团体) and state-owned enterprises and public institutions (事业单位) to accept and assist in arranging jobs for military family spouses." Local governments of various levels will be shouldering the responsibility of supervising relevant agencies or institutions to implement employment assistance policies while the military will provide the information of military spouse to local government and relevant departments, organize vocational training programs and help with identifying appropriate jobs within the military. The provincial military districts (省军区) and garrisons (卫戍区/警备区) system will be the leading unit for military family employment at the location of the military member and it needs to become a bridge to facilitate coordination and devise and follow through specific measures for arrangements:

- Those who are public servants (公务员) will be directly transferred to an equivalent position within the government at the location of the military member (随军家属对口安置身份);
- Those who work with a public institution (事业编) will be organized to attend group selection exams based on their professional background (身份随军家属划岗定向招聘); Local governments will be supervising local public institutions to set aside a certain number of positions and organize targeted recruitment (定向招聘)⁶⁹

By 2014, it was reported that 22 provinces and municipalities including Inner Mongolia, Shandong and Guizhou, had issued its policies accompanying the “national measures.”⁷⁰ Changchun City, in Jilin Province, arranged more than 100 jobs for military spouses all at one time, while Beijing set up close to 350 positions at the community level (社区岗位), and the Lanzhou city government designated more than 30 positions within its public service sector and other public institutions for military spouses accompanying the military member. Nevertheless, by late 2017, there still existed numerous problems in terms of implementation in this policy area.⁷¹ In 2017, Beijing officially kicked off a “pilot project for assisting military family employment (助力随军家属就业工程).” In February 2018, 75 military spouses accompanying their military members in the border region found jobs.^{xiii}

xiii 北部战区陆军某边防旅75名随军家属落户驻地, 2018年02月20日 08:31:30 来源: 解放军报. According to this report, although unemployed family members who accompany military members were supposed to receive “hardship pay (困难补助)” and certain insurances, due to the limited capacity of the local government and the large amount of newly transferred military personnel and their family members, many military families’ needs were not met. After working tirelessly with local government, this brigade was finally able to resolve these issues and even allowing those without permanent housing to settle down. (无房也可随军落户). 然而, 旅队新调整组建, 一些由异地转隶过来的官兵家属的随军补助无法申领. “驻地政府也有难处, 驻地人口少, 部队多, 财政压力大.” The report also revealed that a border defense 2nd battalion instructor was among those who benefited from the latest development. Zhang, had been living in the Gobi Desert and separated from his family for 19 years.

Childcare

Since the founding of the PRC, units at the division grade and above, as well as regiment grade airfield stations and hospitals, were allowed to establish their own daycares to serve military families. Bases that were located in remote border areas, on remote islands and places that were far away from civilian residential regions, were also allowed to establish schools for cadre's children or, depending on the city, the military unit could establish food and boarding stations (干部子女食宿站). These military daycares and schools were supposed to be guided by state and local educational administrations. The GPD and GLD provided funds to such educational institutions. In 2004, a joint document issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Department of Education, and GPD also dictated that children of military officers would receive preferential treatment while applying to enroll in civilian K-12 educations and high-education institutions.⁷² However, concerns about the care and education of military children remain a major issue frequently discussed in Chinese language military publications. Some military members stationed at remote areas are sometimes pressured by his family to *zhuan ye* (转业) so as to transfer to civilian positions in the public sector, out of concerns for a lack of better-quality educational resources for their children at the stationed locations.⁷³

Housing

The PLA requires all two-year conscripts/enlistees to live in on-base military barracks. NCOs who were below Master Sergeant Class Four (less than 10 years of service) are also required to live in barracks. Senior Grade NCOs, upon approval for his family to be accompanying the military member (家属经批准可以随军), will be provided housing (apartment 公寓房) with the military member paying a monthly rent.^{xiv 74} Active-duty NCOs also receive rent allowance (房租补贴), HPF (住房公积金) and housing allowance (住房补贴). In order to withdraw HPFs and housing allowances in a lump sum, one has to move out of the on-base or off-base military housing.

Historically, the PLA's housing policy has been a combination of subsidized military housing and allowing the military members to purchase housing on their own (租用公寓住房与购买自有住房相结合的保障制度). The housing size is determined by officers' grades and the military members are also required to pay rent for on-base housing based on the housing size. When it comes to purchasing one's own accommodations, officers can either choose to purchase the military housing they are currently renting at a discounted rate (依房改成本价购买) or choose to purchase subsidized housing built by his unit or commercial housing. Those who purchase subsidized housing either built by the military or the civilians would receive housing allowance (住房补贴), which was composed of basic allowance (基本补贴) and locality allowance (地

xiv In August 2008, the rent was increased from ¥1.2/square meter to \$2.6/square meter. At the same time, it also increased the housing allowance (房租补贴). The rent remains significantly lower than the monthly salary of the NCOs. See: <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-08-06/0601515021.htm>

区补贴). The basic allowance, calculated based on certain percentage of basic salaries, is included in the monthly paychecks while the locality allowance applied to military members who were stationed in regions with high real estate prices.⁷⁵ More specifically, as of 2000, military officers and NCOs are all eligible for receiving housing allowance, and the amount of allowance was calculated based on four factors: grade and rank, service time, salary, and the allowed housing size assigned for each grade and rank.⁷⁶

The “Notice Pertaining the Adjustment of Policies for Military Families Accompanying The Military Member (关于调整军人家属随军政策的意见)”⁷⁷ issued in 2011 by then President Hu Jintao also announced the establishment of new housing projects for the military families who would accompany the military members. The housing projects were supposed to be completed within three years. In 2010, an online process titled “My House, My Decision (我的住房我做主)” was open to all PLA military members to vote for the most liked layout of military apartments.⁷⁸ The plan stated that, between 2010 and 2013, the military would be combining adjusting existing housing, renovating and rebuild old housing and build new housing to gradually resolve the housing issues for the military families. Grassroots level units^{xv} were supposed to receive preference in this project and the focus of 2010 would be on the comprehensive construction of modern logistics trial site (现代化后勤试点), and push for the entire staff and organizations for corps and division level and brigade and regiment units and organizations and units that were stationed at designated remote regions; in 2012, the focus would be on more stabilized brigade and regiment level units and make arrangements for those organizations that had large amount of personnel and more responsibilities. By 2013, the housing project should be completed. According to the new standard for military apartment buildings, newly-built or rebuilt housing should guarantee 60 square meters per household and for those that were renovated from old housing would guarantee 72 square meters per household. In 2017, an *Air Force News* article reported that the construction of new barracks was wrapped up and 72 new apartments were handed over to the Air Force Xi’an Flight College’s 2nd brigade (西安飞行学院二旅).⁷⁹ Although it was delivered more than three years later than the timeline suggested in Hu Jintao’s plan, details revealed in this article proved to be in accordance with the general policy guidelines.

xv In the PLA context, it usually refers to battalion and company level units that are at the lowest level of the military hierarchy.

It was relatively easy to build new housing; however, the “adjusting” of existing housing proved to be a major challenge. Although, theoretically speaking, all the apartments and condominiums military members and families were assigned to live in belong to the military and are managed by the respective Logistics Department, in reality this system has been abused by a large number of military officers who treated these properties as their own; this has in turn contributed, to a certain degree, to the housing shortage.⁸⁰ At some relative wealthy places with pleasant weather, some military families, who’s military members have already retired or have been transferred to a different location but retained their housing based on their grade (corps and above), rent out their “military housing” to pocket profits during holiday seasons.⁸¹ According to Chen Xianyi (陈先义), a former Director of the Cultural Department of the *PLA Daily* (原《解放军报》(JFJB) 文化部主任), a lot of active-duty officers with relatively high grades own multiple housing units, largely because of the multiple relocations they had during their career. “For instance, when a higher-level officer relocated to Shanghai from Guangzhou, concerned about “face” (迫于颜面), the Guangzhou unit would not take back his old housing. It all adds up to the problem of one officer with multiple housing in various locations.”⁸²

Indeed, violations and abuse of the PLA’s housing policies was a widespread problem with serious consequences. It led to housing shortages for many officers and NCOs who were qualified for military housing. They were forced to purchase or rent on their own housing.⁸³ For example, in August 2006, JFJB reported that 91 personnel from the former Lanzhou Military Region Headquarters were sued by the military “eviction team” because these former headquarters staff and cadres who already left the military and gained housing from his/her civilian government departments continued to occupy military barracks; it led to a housing shortage for more than 80 active-duty cadres who qualified for housing. The Shaanxi Xi’an Yanta District People’s Court (陕西西安市雁塔区人民法院) eventually ruled in favor of the Eviction Team.⁸⁴

In May 2014, the PLA’s four General Departments^{xvi} and the CMC jointly issued an order to require units of all levels to carry out a so-called “three cleanups (三清)”. This included “clean up the houses (清房), clean up the use of military vehicles (清车), and clean up the people (who were abusing such policies) (清人).”⁸⁵ In July 2014, an official document titled “Notice on

xvi General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD)

Further Resolving The Violations of Military Housing And Use of Military Vehicles of Retired Cadres Or Those Who Have Separated From The Military (关于进一步做好离退休干部违规住房用车问题清理工作的通知)” was issued for the entire PLA to implement. According to *PLA Daily’s* official Weibo account, the Notice stated that:

- Rent, which is calculated based on the highest market price of commercial houses, will be directly withheld from one’s monthly pay to account for the extra housing one occupies;
- Houses that were originally built to be offered as subsidized housing but were purchased in violation of relevant regulations will be unconditionally bought back at its original sales price by the unit which profited from the sales (违规购买的房改房由售房单位无条件原价收回);
- Individuals who objected to turning in extra house(s) that he/she occupies will be suspended to receive military benefits or receiving military services and support (拒不退交的个人暂停各种服务保障 中止福利发放);
- Those military members’ widowers and children who refused to move out of the houses that were in violation of the relevant regulations will be reported to their work unit/company/offices, and will be evicted abided by legal measures if needed. (对拒不腾退住房的遗孀和子女, 向当事人所在单位通报情况, 必要时采取行政或法律手段予以清退)⁸⁶

At the time, it was reported that some older generation cadres and their families were cooperative in the process. According to JFJB, during the “three cleanups,” for instance, Niu Xiuzhen (牛秀珍) and Zhou Yueqian (周月茜), two widowers of nation-founding generals (开国将军), volunteered to move from their homes of almost half a century inside an Air Force designated residential area in Beijing to a retirement facility for retired cadres (干休所) in Beijing.⁸⁷ However, given the complex nature and extensiveness of housing policy violations, the implementation of such policies did not go smoothly as originally expected. Some units even had to establish designated offices named the “Eviction Office (清房办).”⁸⁸ In one military base which successfully “cleaned up” more than 200 houses that were identified as taken in violation of regulations, measures taken to ensure results of the “cleaning up” process also included exposing the names of those who repetitively refused to move and cutting off their water and electricity supplies... the discipline inspection department, security guards and military service departments also jointly made recordings guaranteed by joint signatures to carry out forced evictions (强制清退).⁸⁹

Overseas Chinese language media reported in 2016 that more detailed standards were revealed by the CMC which laid out harsh measures taken to ensure that “all military members who retired at corps deputy leader grade and above (副军职以上退休人员) should move out of the independent buildings they were occupying and move into apartments with appropriate size of apartment in accordance with their grades and service time.”⁹⁰ The mainland China-based *Southern Weekend* even counted that between 1990 to 2014, there were a total of 11 regulations and policy documents pertaining to military housing that had been issued.⁹¹ As recent as in January 2018, however, the implementation of such policies seems to be still ongoing.⁹²

To address the housing shortage for those families who qualify for accompanying the military member or those who pay temporary visit to their military member, in 2015, Xi Jinping issued the “Regulations on Standardizing Benefits and Preferential Treatment of Military Personnel (关于规范完善军队人员有关福利待遇的若干规定),” which allows the military member to receive certain amount of housing allowance based on the standard market rate. It also allows the military unit to provide ground transportation assistance for those temporary visitors of the military member and assistance for their receiving medical care during their visit.⁹³

On 1 August 2015, “Administrative Measures for HPF Loans of Military Members (军人住房公积金贷款管理办法)” also took effect.⁹⁴ JFJB reported that the interest accrual of the military housing provident fund officially started on January 1st 2017. According to the Ministry of Defense, HPF “aims to enrich and perfect the policy of the military housing currency treatment and is a concrete measure to safeguard the legitimate interests of the officers and soldiers and to ensure that the officers and soldiers can enjoy the related treatment and policy over the housing provident fund as regulated by the state.”⁹⁵ More specifically:⁹⁶

- All military officers, civilian cadres^{xvii} (*wenzhi ganbu* / 文职干部), NCOs and retired officers under the military’s management are eligible to apply to HPF loans with priorities given to those who purchase commercial properties, are based in remote regions, or those who live at different locations from their spouses combined with grades and service time;

xvii In November 2017, the PLA issued the new “PLA Civilian Contractor Regulations (中国人民解放军文职人员条例) which stated that the current civilian cadres would be gradually converted into the Civilian Contractor system. See: “Decipher the Civilian Contractors regulations (军队权威部门详解 (中国人民解放军文职人员条例)), ” http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-11/10/c_129738060.htm

- The house to be purchased shall be the first house and the applicants and their spouses should not have used any other local HPFs offered by civilian government offices;
- Currently, the general upper limit of the HPF loans is set at ¥400,000 yuan (roughly \$63,000) with maximum 20-year term for all military officers and NCOs. When exceeding the set limit of the amount, local government's HPF policies are to be followed. The total loan's term should not exceed 65 years while combined with the applicant's age (贷款期限与本人年龄之和不超过65年)

Military Leave, Pay and Benefits

Leave

The military leave policies have gone through significant changes since the PRC was founded. In 1952, the Central People's Government People's Revolutionary Military Commission (中央人民政府人民革命军事委员会) decided that only division-grade and above military officers, aviation crew and college instructors were allowed to take an annual leave once a year. By 1954, it was expanded to include all of the unmarried officers who live separately from their parents and married officers who live separately from their spouses. In 1964, the leave system was abolished, although some cadres were allowed to visit their families upon approval. In 1978, a new leave policy was put in place for officers who served in plateau region, border areas, and remote islands, who were above 45 years old and served more than 15 years. In the 1980s, two important documents – “Regulations on Family Visits for Active Duty Military Cadres (关于军队现役干部探亲待遇的规定)” and “Notice on Issues Related to Military Cadre's Leave (关于军队干部休假问题的通知)” were issued in 1981 and 1987, respectively, and further elaborated on the policies.⁹⁷

A major overhaul of the leave and family visit policies took place in 2003, which was implemented around the time when the PLA was going through its 200,000-man downsizing under President and CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin.⁹⁸ The GPD issued the “Regulations on Military Leave And Family Visits For PLA Active-Duty Military Officers (中国人民解放军现役军官休

假探亲规定” which took effect on 1 January 2004. The new “Regulations” were a direct response to the changing demographics of the PLA recruits, and the PLA realized that the leave policies that had been in place for almost 20 years were “neither systematic nor formalized (不够系统规范)” and lacked “support implementation mechanisms (保障落实机制).”⁹⁹ As a direct response to concerns of “the increasing number of single-child military officers (独生子女军官)”, the new “Regulations” updated its policies regarding the frequency allowed for family visits, from once every four years to once every two years, so that “military officers can feel more relaxed while serving in the military (安心部队工作).”¹⁰⁰

During Xi Jinping’s current round of military reform and 300,000-man downsizing, which officially kicked off in 2016, military family visit and leave policies were again revisited. To further increase the benefits of active-duty military personnel and ensure that the “legitimate rights and welfare (合法权益)” of enlisted military members were protected, in April 2017, the CMC, CMC Political Work Department and Logistic Support Department issued a “Notice on Relevant Issues of Active Duty Military Members’ Leave And Family Visit (关于现役军人休假探亲有关问题的通知)” accompanied by “Regulations on Standardizing Benefits And Status For Military Personnel (关于规范完善军队人员有关福利待遇的若干规定).”¹⁰¹ The latter specifically clarifies that, for officers and soldiers who could not use up their leave due to work, the “Regulations” would guarantee financial compensations. Such measures were touted as “heart-warming measures” to ensure the improvement and sustainable development of the generation of combat capabilities (战斗力生成提高与持续发展).¹⁰² The highlights of the new changes included:

- Married military officers can now visit parents (including in-laws) once a year (up from once every two years);
- For those who live separately from their spouses or family members, the family can now pay on-base visit twice a year (which also used to be once a year)
- The military member are allowed to visit his family (年度探亲) twice a year (previously once a year)

Perhaps aiming to transform the PLA’s “leave culture,” the new notice also emphasized that the leaders of each unit were encouraged to take full leave so that the enlisted personnel would feel “comfortable and relaxed (平

和愉悦)” to take their leave and not worry about “looking bad.” (领导没休假，自己想休又不好意思休). The new regulations also emphasized the importance of allowing military members to use up their leave days with specific targeted objectives: “Military officers were required to use up at least 60% of the annual leave days; officers who live separately from their families were required to use up at least 70% of the annual leave days, while the NCOs were required to hit the 70% mark.

To ensure the implementation of offering monetary compensation to military members for unused leave days, instead of having each unit manage the funding, the CMC is now providing funding for the entire PLA’s unused leave compensations. Also added was the regulation that the higher one’s grade and rank, the less compensation per unused leave day will one receive. This was to ensure the policy was put in place to favor grassroots organizations and personnel.¹⁰³

The highlights for PLA leave policies for military officers and NCOs are shown in Tables 2 and 3, respectively, below:

Table 2: 2017 PLA Leave Policies for Military Officers¹⁰⁴

Time-in-Service	Marriage Status	Leave Days (休假)	Family Visit Days (探亲)
Those who serve under 20 years	Single (divorced and widowed)	parents at the same location: 20 days parents at different location: 20 days	parents at the same location: 0 days parents at different location: 30 days
	Married (spouse at the same location)	parents at the same location: 20 days parents at different location: 20 days	parents at the same location: 0 days parents at different location: 20 days
	Married (spouse not at the same location)	parents at the same location: 20 days spouse and parents at the same location: 20 days spouse and parents at different location: 20 days	parents at the same location: 40 days parents at different location: 40 days spouse and parents at different location: 45 days
Those who serve more than 20 years	Single (divorced and widowed)	parents at the same location: 30 days parents at different location: 30 days	parents at the same location: 0 days parents at different location: 30 days
	Married (spouse at the same location)	parents at the same location: 30 days parents at different location: 30 days	parents at the same location: 0 days parents at different location: 20 days

	Married (spouse at different location)	parents at the same location: 30 days spouse and parents at the same location: 30 days spouse and parents at different location: 30 days	parents at the same location: 40 days parents at different location: 40 days spouse and parents at different location: 45 days
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Table 3: 2017 PLA Leave Policies for NCOs¹⁰⁵

NCOs	Marriage Status	Leave Days	Family Visit Days
	Single (divorced and widowed)	N/A	parents at different location: 20 days (corporal and below); 30 days (sergeant and above)
	Married (parents at the same location)	N/A	spouse at different location: spousal visit 40 days/year.
	Married (parents at different location)	N/A	20 days for parents visit every two years; if spouse and parents at same location: only spousal visit applies, 40 days/year; if spouse and parents both at different locations, 45 days

Pay and Benefits

In the discussions of the steady increase of China's national defense budget, the increasing cost of PLA personnel had not been given enough attention. Although it remains unclear exactly how many resources the PLA had dedicated to the pay and various types of allowances to its personnel, the PLA understood the importance of using monetary incentives to boost the retention rate of its service members and had provided significant increases in its military pay and benefits in recent years.

Two-year enlistees and NCOs

NCOs in the PLA receive a monthly salary which is composed of three parts:¹⁰⁶

- Base Salary (*jichu gongzi*; 基础工资)
- Grade and Rank Salary (*junxian jibie gongzi*; 军衔级别工资): This salary is divided into six grades (NCO grades 1-6) and between five and ten steps (*dang*档) for each grade.
- Time in Service Salary (*junling gongzi*; 军龄工资): This is calculated from the time the member joined the PLA.

In July 2006, the PLA increased the wages, living expenses, and pensions for its officers and NCOs. Reportedly, all PLA officers and NCOs received pay increases ranging between 80 and 100 percent.¹⁰⁷ For example, prior to the 2006 salary increase, a PLA colonel earned ¥2,000 (\$256) per month. Following the salary increase, a PLA colonel earned ¥4,200 (\$539) per month.¹⁰⁸ In 2018, the PLA increased NCOs' basic salaries by 40% and increased the monthly allowance for the two-year enlistees to ¥480.¹⁰⁹ Table 4 below shows the estimated 2006 pay standards of the PLA enlisted force.

Table 4: NCO Salaries in 2006

Rank	All Compensation/ Month (RMB)	Salary/Month (RMB)	Annual Total (RMB)
Private 2nd Class (列兵)	200-220		2,400-2,640
Private 1st Class (上等兵)	220-240		2,640-2,880
Corporal (下士) (8 steps)		560-630	6,720-7,560
Sergeant (中士) (8 steps)		700-805	8,400-9,660
Sergeant First Class (上士) (10 steps)		790-970	9,480-11,649
Master Sergeant Class Four (四级军士长) (10 steps)		930-1,200	11,160-14,400
Master Sergeant Class Three (三级军士长) (11 steps)		1,130-1,570	13,560-18,840
Master Sergeant Class Two (二级军士长) (12 steps)		1,480-2,085	17,760-25,020
Master Sergeant Class One (一级军士长) (not applicable in 2006)			

Other than basic salary, a PLA member is also entitled to a variety of stipends and subsidies. One important and rather unique stipend, known as the preferential stipends (家庭优待金) needs to be singled out and explained.¹¹⁰ This was a fund designed to be paid by the local government of military member's home of record (户口所在地) to his family, which originally served as a compensation for the family's loss of labor.¹¹¹ Exact amounts are contingent on whether the member's hometown is in a rural or urban area – and the level of general economic development of the area. For instance, the families of rural youth from Shaanxi province can receive preferential stipends about 1.5 times the average income for other rural families in the previous year.¹¹² In another example, according to an official notice jointly issued by the Hunan Provincial Civil Affairs, Finance and Conscription Office, starting on 1 January 2018, the standard amount of the preferential stipends for the entire Hunan Province, rural and urban families alike,

is ¥12,000 yuan. The funds will continue to be appropriated through province, city and county levels.

Based on its economic development level and necessity of the conscription/recruitment work, each locality is also allowed to increase the amount of the preferential stipend, which should be covered by its own budget.¹¹³ The first payment of the preferential stipends is not made, however, until the enlisted personnel complete the first 12 months of service.¹¹⁴ While serving on active duty, compensation to families cannot be less than 50% of the pay for urban workers. Furthermore, pay cannot be less than 50% of the previous year's average living standard.¹¹⁵ Urban and rural compensation is now unified into a single system.¹¹⁶ The money is apparently deposited in their family's bank account once per year, which they can withdraw using a debit card.¹¹⁷ Additional compensation is included for personnel who receive a First-Class Achievement Award (一等功) (15%), Second-Class Achievement Award (二等功) (20%), and Third-Class Award (三等功) (5%).¹¹⁸ And families of conscripts who serve in Tibet receive an additional ¥12,000 for each year, and families of conscripts who serve in high plateaus receive ¥10,000 for each year.

According to the *Military Member Preferential Treatment Policy* (军人抚恤优待政策), the *PRC Conscription Law* (中华人民共和国兵役法), and the Ministry of Civil Affairs' "Response to the question regarding whether enlisted soldiers should receive family preferential stipend (关于士兵从部队考入军校是否享受优待金问题的答复)," the family preferential stipends were designed for two-year enlistees only and once the two-year enlistee are admitted to military academic institutions (考入军校) or have been promoted to become NCOs, they will automatically be disqualified for this stipend.¹¹⁹ However, before and around the time when the revision of the *Conscription Law* was taking into effect in 1998, the PLA allowed a number of enlisted personnel to serve beyond the original conscripted time (超期服役), who would legally continue to receive the preferential stipend.^{xviii} Many enlisted-soldier-turned cadets were essentially treated the same way and continued to receive the stipend upon entering the military higher education institutions.¹²⁰ The legal explanations of the Regulations of Military Member's Preferential Treatment (军人抚恤优待条例) issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulated that:

xviii Before the 1998 revision of the *Conscription Law*, the PLA allowed enlisted personnel to serve beyond the required three-year term. For the Army, the extra service term had a limit of an additional three years while the Navy and the Air Force had a limit of four years. In the 1998 revision, the clause regarding "serving extra time in the military" had been replaced by enlisted soldiers are supposed to be serving a maximum of two years.

“The family preferential stipend will be distributed in accordance to the term of enlistment that was legally allowed by the law. For personnel who continued to serve in the military after 3 years, regiment and above level headquarters should notify local governments to continue providing the stipends to military members’ families.”^{xix}

This practice may have been carried out for a few more years in the early 2000s but eventually ceased as the number of directly-recruited college-student enlisted personnel from civilian higher educational institutions gradually increased.

Officers

The PLA Officer’s pay is composed of four parts: base salary, allowances, and subsidies including¹²¹:

- Base Salary (*jiben gongzi*; 基本工资). This is determined according to the officer’s grade, rank, billet, and time in service.
- Servicemen’s Professional Allowance (*junren zhiye jintie*; 军人职业津贴). This is an allowance provided to officers who provide certain duties and tasks in addition to their main responsibilities.
- Grassroots Cadre Billet Allowance (*ji ceng ganbu gangwei jintie*; 基层干部岗位津贴). This allowance is provided to all officers posted in battalions, companies, and platoons.
- Regional Allowance (*diqu jintie*, 地区津贴). This is a subsidy provided to officers stationed in hardship areas. The amount varies based on the level of hardship as determined by the PLA.
- Specialty Subsidies (*zhuanye butie*, 专业补贴). This is a subsidy provided to personnel working in high-demand billets that require special skills such as aviation and naval technical positions, as well as national defense scientific research positions. The amount of the subsidy is determined by the degree of specialization that the position requires.

Like the enlisted force, the PLA officers also receive a variety of subsidies and allowances and the actual benefit package one receives may vary tremendously.

xix This report also noted that after the enlisted personnel was admitted to military educational institutions in their second year, in the PLA’s perspective, if their family preferential stipends cease, it would lead to an imbalance with those enlisted personnel still on active duty in their units or who have exceeded their required enlistment term. In order to encourage enlisted personnel to pursue advanced studies, many of these cadets are treated like personnel who have exceeded their required enlistment term and continued to be given the family preferential stipends in accordance with unit notification. But this only creates a new imbalance, as according to regulations military institution cadets who are *directly recruited from non-military sources* are not entitled to the family preferential stipends. However, both the enlisted personnel-turned cadets and civilian-turned cadets would be together at military academic institutions but would be treated differently, which was considered unfair.

For example, subsidies for officers stationed in Tibet can almost triple the amount they would receive if assigned to other areas in China.

In the 2017-18 military benefit reform, a new holiday stipend was created for both the enlisted force and the officer corps. During the five major holidays “New Year’s Day, Spring Festival, Labor Day, PLA Day, and National Day” all military members would receive ¥1000; with military officers who are stationed in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing receiving an extra ¥500 and NCOs stationed at such locations receiving an extra ¥200.¹²² The main adjustments are listed in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Estimated Active-duty Military Officer Salaries and Compensation in 2018
(在职军官干部工资待遇)¹²³

Grade	Monthly Salary + Increases (RMB)	Total (including allowances, and subsidies etc.) (RMB)	Total Annual Compensation (RMB) ^{xx}
Division-leader grade	8,000 + increase of 2,283	22,000	264,000
Division deputy-leader grade	7,129 + increase of 2,123	20,000	240,000
Regiment leader-grade	6,214+ increase of 1,953	18,000	216,000
Regiment deputy leader- grade	5,457+ increase of 1,813	16,000	192,000
Battalion leader-grade	4,857+ increase of 1,658	12,000	144,000
Battalion deputy leader-grade	4,375+ increase of 1,528	10,000	120,000
Company leader-grade	3,974+ increase of 1,398	8,000-9,000	96,000-108,000
Company deputy leader-grade	3,679+ increase of 1,308	8,000	96,000
Platoon leader-grade	3,452+ increase of 1,218	6,000-7,000 (not including Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia's extra subsidies)	72,000-84,000

In the PLA, all money filters down from the government through the Finance Bureau of the CMC Logistic Support Department (former GLD) to the service headquarters’ Logistics Department’s Finance Bureau. It is then filtered to the local unit’s Logistics Department’s Finance Office, which either directly deposits compensation to the military member’s bank account or pays them in cash on a monthly basis. If the money is received in cash, the military member typically deposits the money in a local bank. Based on available information, a high percentage of personnel stationed in rural areas still receive their money in cash and then deposit it in a local bank, so that their families can access the money

xx Including an estimated U.S. dollar amount based on rate in April 2018.

using a debit card in another location.^{xxi} Military members normally receive their pay between the 1st to 5th of the month.¹²⁴

The PLA only began to issue military support cards (保障卡) to its military personnel to use as an integrated way to receive their pay, insurance, and receiving medical benefits in 2011.¹²⁵ In December 2017, it was announced that the 2nd-generation of military support card would be put into use in 2018.¹²⁶ Compared with the 1st-gen support card, which played an important role in supporting military members' benefits, health insurance, and housing allowances, the new card, with better security features, contains isolated dual-chip technology and allows one chip mainly to be used for military use and another for other financial uses such as telephone banking, online banking, and mobile phone banking.¹²⁷ For instance, it supports popular Chinese third-party payment platforms such as Alipay (支付宝) and WeChat pay (微信支付); and the purchase and management of wealth management products offered by Chinese financial institutions.¹²⁸ It can be used for multiple purposes including salary, medical, and clothing with crucial personal identification information pre-loaded in the card to ensure accurate verifications. It also offers military members and families special discounts while making purchases.



Figure 9: PLA Military Support Cards (2nd-Gen)

In 2017, as a tribute to the National Army's Day on 1 August 2017, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC, 中国工商银行) officially announced its creation of a credit card designated to military members with

xxi A front-page article in the Air Force's newspaper in 2016 showed personnel in a rural area receiving their salary in cash and members from the Bank of China sitting at a table to take their money and deposit it for them.

an emotionally-charged name, “ICBC Credit Card for the Military Soul (军魂卡).” The card offers five different covers matching the five^{xxii} military services.¹²⁹ This was the first time that a commercial bank issued a designated credit card for military members and their families. According to the official website of ICBC, this credit card also offers bonus points and discounts on airfare and train rides and it also advertised that “once a special app matching the card was installed on one’s cellphone, scanning the card would also give the user access to viewing of the images of the newly developed military equipment with special-effect.”¹³⁰

Other than the credit card offerings, ICBC also developed various kinds of wealth management products and credit loan services.¹³¹

Another important aspect of the benefit package for PLA members is retirement benefits and the various compensation packages for those who leave the military, either voluntarily or following the reorganization orders, before they reach the retirement age. There were mainly four channels through which PLA members separate from the military: retirement, pre-determined reassignment(计划分配), which is commonly known as *Zhuanyue*, self-directed job search, or *Zizhu Zeyue*(自主择业) and civilian contractor conversions.¹³² There are a few policy documents addressing this issue including “Provisional Measures Regarding Resettlement of Military Cadres Transferred to Civilian Work (军队转业干部安置暂行办法) issued in 2001, “Measures on Housing Assurance for Military Cadres Transferred to Civilian Work (军队转业干部住房保障办法) which was issued in 2000, and “Suggestions on Resettlement of Military Cadres Transferred to Civilian Work and Who Choose to look for Jobs on their own (关于自主择业的军队转业干部安置管理若干问题的意见)” in 2001.¹³³ Most recently, in November 2017, the PLA updated its “Civilian Contractor, or *wenzhi renyuan* conversion (文职转改)” policies which essentially opened up a new channel for post-service arrangement of military members.¹³⁴

Strictly speaking, *zhuanyue* only applies to Intermediate Grade and above NCOs (中级士官以上) and officers who reach or come close to the maximum age of deputy regiment grade (副团职). NCOs at intermediate level, or who have served in the military for more than 10 years, could also qualify for *zhuanyue* upon approval. Theoretically, military members who *zhuanyue* are transferred to government departments or institutions (政府机关和事业单位) and are able to maintain their cadre status, although in practice, most of military *zhuanyue* personnel had to settle with positions within civilian government that were lower

xxii Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and Strategic Support Force

in status than their military grades and ranks.^{xxiii} Most civilian governments at various levels implement a system consisting of an evaluation process and a written test to place these cadres. The reason why it is a key concept to understand in the context of the PLA's personnel policies is that due to family pressures, many military members choose to *zhuanye* so that they could regain the work-life balance. Over recent years, *zizhu zeye* (自主择业), has become a popular option among military cadres who have served in the military for 20 years and reached the regiment or battalion grade. Upon separation from the military, those who *zizhu zeye* receive a “settlement fee (自主择业补助费)” paid in lump sum based on years of service and grade levels and will continue to receive a monthly stipend (月退役金). For instance, in 2017, a battalion grade cadre who chooses this option receives ¥413,000 roughly \$65,000 in settlement fee and would continue to receive his/her monthly stipend of approximately ¥7,260 (roughly \$1100).¹³⁵ To put it in perspective, with the same grade level, if one chooses to *zhuanye*, or transfer to arranged civilian government jobs, he/she would receive a one-time “job transfer fee (转业费)” of ¥349,000 roughly \$55,000 but will not receive any monthly stipend since a civilian government salary is to be guaranteed.¹³⁶

The announcement of the new “Wenzhi renyuan conversion” in late 2017 as a component of the military reform, known in Chinese as *Zhuanwen* (转文) was most likely established as a supplementary measure to help reduce the pressure for *Zhuanye* throughout the 300,000-man downsizing.¹³⁷ It essentially provided military-established civilian positions, vis-à-vis the public servant positions made available for military personnel through *Zhuanye*, for active-duty military officers (including civilian cadres) to transfer into.

xxiii This is partially due to the incompatibility of the skillset of demobilized military members and those required for civilian government positions; and perhaps, also due to resistance from the career government workers within the organizations that demobilized military members were assigned to.

Conclusions

First, the changes of such personnel policies have reflected the fundamental changes of the Chinese society as a whole. Most notably, the intensive measures that had been put in place to improve the policies of “dependents accompanying military members (家属随军)” and housing in recent years clearly showed that the military is keenly aware of the changing perceptions of the society towards marriage, family life and work-life balance. The changing demographic structure of the Chinese society and marriage-ability issues are also forcing the military to be more involved in the personal lives of its military members and taking into consideration their family needs. Take the changes of military leave and family visit policies as another example. As more active-duty military members belong to China’s single-child generation, the policy has changed from allowing the military members to visit their parents staying in their hometowns once every four years to once every two years and eventually to once a year for a period of 40-45 days.¹³⁸

However, as military reform deepens and more intensive actual-combat training, drills, and exercises are to be carried out as an integral component of Xi Jinping’s pursuit of building a strong army, the challenges facing the PLA’s personnel policies are only intensifying. It remains to be seen if the PLA is capable of following through on its promises. Even when the political will at the top leadership level was ample, as demonstrated in the push for housing reforms within the military, the complex vested interest within the PLA runs deep and the implementation of policy initiatives may, in reality, take much longer than originally expected to be realized.

Second, many of the quality of life issues and policies discussed in this report are interrelated, which means the implementation of one policy has a domino effect on others. Most notably, aside from the strict restrictions for military family members to be “qualified” to accompany military personnel, housing shortages for qualified military families may negatively impact the marriage ability of military members as most Chinese families regard property ownership as a prerequisite for marriage.¹³⁹ Although a rather standard and open grading system based on a calculated score of grade, ranks, service time and marital status assigned to each military member, had been used to calculate one’s eligibility for provided housing since late 1990s, the poor implementation of such policies, or the housing shortage that were to be assigned to qualified personnel, led many military members to seek early separation from the military either through *Zhuanye* or *Zizhu zeye*.¹⁴⁰

Third, the core challenge of the PLA’s personnel policies is whether such policies prove effective in retaining the most talented personnel. Almost all of the policies discussed in this report were supposed to help the PLA attract and retain its people. The PLA’s grassroots political officers have worked tirelessly to organize matchmaking events and group weddings to help military personnel find spouses, because not being able to find wives has become a major concern and has prompted more marriage-age military members to leave the military or not want to join in the first place. Setting up a “hard quota” to ensure all active-duty military personnel use up their leave seems extreme, if not bizarre, but if understood through the lens of boosting the attractiveness of the military as a profession, it shows the length the military is willing to go to ensure the execution of its policies. The issuance of credit cards and embedding a mobile payment function into the military support cards are also clear measures to modernize the image of the military so that the online shopping demands of the younger generation PLA members can be better met and monitored. Beyond the scope of issues discussed in this report, the PLA has also updated its Discipline Regulations (纪律条令) to allow the use of smartphones in 2015 and to allow military members to acquire civilian driver’s licenses and purchase private cars. It is worth noting that such measures might seem normal or nothing of significance in a U.S. military context; nevertheless, compared with the past and the starting point of the PLA’s personnel policies, these policy changes were rather significant.

In conclusion, this report hopes to serve as a preliminary study guide for further research of the personnel policies of the PLA. It is an important yet understudied aspect that should be taken into consideration while conducting evaluations of the overall strength and weakness of the Chinese military power. During the

current military reform and reorganization which officially kicked off in 2016, maintaining the stability of the military and boosting morale has been a top concern of the PLA leadership. Xi Jinping's high talks about making the military an honorable profession, along with the high-profile announcement of establishing a Ministry of Veteran Affairs, the first of its kind in China's modern history, and the drastic increase of benefit packages for active-duty military members have all demonstrated that the PLA is not only focusing on the advancement of weapon systems and equipment, but it has also put in a significant amount of investment in its own personnel, who would be the fundamental driving force for building a truly strong army.

About the Author

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Appendix A: PLA Officer Grades and Ranks

Retirement Age		Grade (Non-Special Technical Officers)	Grade (Special Technical Officers)	Primary Rank	Secondary Rank
Combat Troop	Non-combat				
N/A		CMC Chairman (军委主席) Vice Chairmen (军委副主席)	N/A	N/A GEN/ADM	N/A
See Note Below		CMC Member (军委委员)	Grade 1 (1级)	GEN/ADM	
65	65	TC Leader (正战区职)	Grade 2 (2级)	GEN/ADM	LTG/VADM
63		TC Deputy Leader (副战区职)	Grade 3 (3级)	LTG/VADM	MG/RADM
55	60	Corps Leader (正军职)	Grade 4 (4级)	MG/RADM	LTG/VADM
	58	Corps Deputy Leader (副军职)	Grade 5 (5级)	MG/RADM	SCOL/SCPT
50	55	Division Leader (正师职)	Grade 6 (6级)	SCOL/SCPT	MG/RADM
		Division Deputy Leader (副师职) (Brigade Leader)	Grade 7 (7级)	COL/CPT	SCOL/SCPT
45	50	Regiment Leader (正团职) (Brigade Deputy Leader)	Grade 8 (8级)	COL/CPT	LTC/CDR
	45	Regiment Deputy Leader (副团职)	Grade 9 (9级)	LTC/CDR	MAJ/LCDR
40	40	Battalion Leader (正营职)	Grade 10 (10级)	MAJ/LCDR	LTC/CDR
		Battalion Deputy Leader (副营职)	Grade 11 (11级)	CPT/LT	MAJ/LCDR
35	35	Company Leader (正连职)	Grade 12 (12级)	CPT/LT	1LT/LTJG
		Company Deputy Leader (副连职)	Grade 13 (13级)	1LT/LTJG	CPT/LT
30	30	Platoon Leader (排职)	Grade 14 (14级)	2LT/ENS	1LT/LTJG

Note: Since 2002, CMC members who are 67 or younger at the time of the Party Congress can remain until the next congress (age 72). Members who are 68 at the time of the Party Congress must retire.

Appendix B: PLA Noncommissioned Officer Grades and Ranks since 2009

Grade Level	Service Period	Rank	Time in Rank
Conscript (义务兵)	1 st year	New Soldier (新兵) – basic training (No rank)	About 3 months
		Private 2 nd Class (列兵)	About 9 months
	2 nd year	Private 1 st Class (上等兵)	1 year
Junior Grade NCO (初级士官) (6 years)	3 rd to 8 th years	Corporal (下士)	3 Years
		Sergeant (中士)	3 Years
Intermediate Grade NCO (中级士官) (8 years)	9 th to 16 th years	Sergeant First Class (上士)	4 Years
		Master Sergeant Class Four (四级军士长)	4 Years
Senior Grade NCO (高级士官) (14 years)	17 th to 30 th years	Master Sergeant Class Three (三级军士长)	4 Years
		Master Sergeant Class Two (二级军士长)	4 Years
		Master Sergeant Class One (一级军士长)	6 Years

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