International Journal of Education and Humanities
ISSN: 2770-6702 | Vol. 24, No. 2, 2026

Research on the Evolution of Double Support Practice and the Formation of Military-Civilian Coordination Pattern in Taihang Base Area during the Anti-Japanese War

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Abstract: During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Taihang Base Area, as the core area of the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region, carried out systematic Double Support work under the leadership of the Eighth Route Army Headquarters. This article reviews the evolution of military-government-civilian relations in the Taihang region from 1937 to 1945, and restores the complete process of the Double Support practice from spontaneous mutual assistance to institutional construction. Historical records indicate that the Taihang Double Support Work roughly went through three stages: in the initial stage, it won the support of the masses through reasonable burden, rent and interest reduction; the difficult stage focused on policy adjustments to resolve military-government-civilian tensions; after 1943, a standardized preferential treatment system was formed. According to authoritative historical records, in 1944, the Taihang Military Region opened up 120042 acres of land, with a production income equivalent to 9,709,276 jin (≈4,854,638 kg) of millet, achieving self-sufficiency in all office expenses. From October 1937 to October 1944, the main force of the 129th Division fought 19777 times, killing and injuring 120241 Japanese and puppet soldiers; the militia self-defense forces fought 33716 times, killing, injuring, and capturing 11409 people. This mutual commitment between the military, government, and civilians has established a stable pattern of military-civilian coordination, making the Taihang region a strategic pivot for the resistance against Japan in North China. This historical record shows that military-government-civilian unity was essential to sustaining the behind-enemy-line Anti-Japanese War, and offers practical insights for Double Support work in the present day.

Keywords: Taihang Base Area, Double Support Movement, Military-Civilian Collaboration, War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region.

1. Introduction

Located where the borders of Shanxi, Hebei, and Henan meet, the Taihang Base Area's challenging topography made it the principal operational center for the Eighth Route Army headquarters and the 129th Division to manage Anti-Japanese resistance throughout North China. After the fall of Taiyuan in November 1937, Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping led their troops to enter the Taihang Mountains and initiated the construction of Anti-Japanese War base areas behind enemy lines. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, this region took on the important task of national liberation, and the inseparable bond between the military, government, and civilians became the core support for persisting in guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines. Existing scholarship on the Taihang Base Area centers largely on military history and political construction, with few systematic analyses of the Double Support Movement, particularly its gradual formation.

Scholars such as Yue Qianhou have noticed that there is an inseparable internal connection between the practice of supporting the military and the mass line in the Taihang region, and believe that the consensus of "the military, government, and the people are one family" reflects the superior political wisdom of the Communist Party of China. Wang Longfei's series of research on the military district system in base areas explains the institutional support for the formation of the "all-people-as-soldiers" situation, but it has not yet delved into the specific operation and implementation of the Double Support work. The integration of military, political, and civilian affairs in the Taihang Base Area is not a short-term achievement. It improved through anti-sweeping measures and years of disasters, completing a key transformation from emotional identification to institutional construction.

Examining the full trajectory of the Taihang Double Support Practice enriches the research dimensions of the history of the Anti-Japanese War, and reveals the logic of the emergence of a new type of military-civilian relationship under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. The experience of unity and resistance accumulated by the military and civilians in the harsh environment of Taihang illustrates the effectiveness of the people's war ideology [1]. According to publicly available historical materials from the People's Daily and the Ministry of Education, during the Anti-Japanese War, more than 13000 soldiers and officers from the Taihang and Taiyue districts sacrificed their lives, and millions of people participated in supporting the front line and fighting in the war. The above data show that the military, the government and the people are closely linked, and they have fought and suffered together for a long time. This paper will introduce the entire course of the Taihang Double Support Practice, examine the institutional system, its daily operation and long-term effects on this specific type of military-civilian collaboration, etc. Thus, we will learn more about the foundation of the Chinese Revolution and present this history in three stages.

2. The Foundation of Military-Civilian Relations in the Early Establishment of Taihang Base Area (1937-1940)

In late autumn 1937, the main force of the 129th Division was advancing along the Taihang Mountains. Things were falling apart in North China quickly, and the old order was collapsing. Anyone who wishes to establish a base area here must first win the hearts of the people. The previous armies had done nothing but take the grain and pull away the men for battle, so the locals naturally kept a distance from the new force. Liu Bocheng and Deng Xiaoping were fully aware that one could not lift these mountains through military power alone; political organisation was required, and above all, the support of the people. Go to any village, and the first thing the soldiers do is, with their packs still on, put up anti-Japanese slogans, fetch water and sweep yards for the villagers, and gather the local young and middle-aged men for organisation.

If the army were to win the people's hearts and minds, it would need to offer them tangible benefits. "The rich give to help others, and the powerful support the weak" was a new system of social responsibility. The Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region introduced a reasonable burden system, and wealthy households with abundant land and grain contributed more to the Anti-Japanese War grain fund; poor households were relieved of this burden. This immediately drew a clear line between the Eighth Route Army and the old army that levied excessive taxes and levies. By the winter of 1939, more than thirty counties in the Taihang Mountains had established Anti-Japanese War democratic governments, and the number of militia self-defense members armed with red-tasselled spears had grown to 150000.

Once the policy of reducing rent and interest was implemented, the bond between the military and civilians became even stronger. Starting from 1940, the "25% rent reduction" (rent capped at 37.5% of harvest) and interest capped at 1.5% per month were fully implemented in the Taihang region. The original 50% rent was capped at 37.5%, and the high interest rate was reduced to 1.5%. According to survey data from the Taihang District Party Committee, the average increase in farmers' actual income was 25% -30%. With more food in their hands, local residents clearly recognized who was working in their interest. Women in the village took the initiative to make military shoes for the troops, while young men competed to lead the Eighth Route Army and deliver letters. Scenes of mothers sending their sons and wives sending their husbands to join the army often appeared at the entrance of the village [2].

What truly impressed the people from the bottom of their hearts was the discipline of the Eighth Route Army, which kept its promises. There was an unwritten rule for troops entering the village, called the "Five Don'ts": do not leave until the water tank is filled, do not leave until the yard is cleaned, do not leave until borrowed items are returned, do not leave until damaged items are compensated, and do not leave until the discipline of the masses is checked. In Wuxiang's Zhuanbi Village, Peng Dehuai harshly reprimanded the soldiers who had fought with the villagers over elm seeds, stating that "the Eighth Route Army and the people are like fish and water—we must never compete with the people for food". Little moments such as this were what enabled the army to take root in the Taihang Mountains, bit by bit. By the end of 1940, the Taihang Base was taking shape, and the first bonds of trust among the military, the government and the people had been formed. The years ahead would put that trust to the test, and then some [3].

3. The Emergence of Military-Government-Civilian Contradictions and Policy Adjustment during Difficult Times (1941-1942)

1941 to 1942 marked the toughest period for the Taihang Base Area throughout the eight-year Anti-Japanese War. The Japanese army waged its "Security Enhancement Movement" across North China, carrying out repeated "sweeps" and imposing strict economic blockades. The Kuomintang suspended military pay for the Eighth Route Army and enforced military encirclement and economic containment on the borders. Two consecutive years of drought and locust plagues added to the crisis, shrinking the base area drastically, cutting the population sharply, and triggering a total financial and economic collapse [4]. Under growing survival pressures, the previously cooperative military-government-civilian relations began to break down, with various tensions emerging.

Food shortages quickly became a critical problem for the army, and clashes with locals over resources were all but unavoidable. To solve the food problem, the army had to increase grain requisitions from local areas, and the burden on some village residents was clearly too heavy. In 1941, the collection of public grain accounted for a relatively high proportion of the total agricultural output in the Taihang region, and alongside various support measures such as village payments and military logistics, the actual burden on farmers was heavy [5]. Grassroots officers and soldiers who served in prolonged frontline combat sometimes found it difficult to fully understand the suffering of the masses, and problems such as infringing on the interests of the masses and disrespecting local cadres occurred occasionally. In some units, there were even incidents of forcibly conscripting laborers and arbitrarily imposing labor corvée, which had caused dissatisfaction among the masses.

Local military support work also became problematic, and many places became formalistic. Some district and village cadres regarded supporting the army as a simple task assignment, and the policy of preferential treatment had not been truly implemented. The implementation of the farming assistance system for military dependents was ineffective, and many families of martyrs suffered from land abandonment due to a lack of labor force; the standard of compensation was relatively low, and the living difficulties of disabled soldiers and martyrs' families could not be effectively resolved. In 1942, a survey conducted by the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region government showed that a considerable proportion of families of Anti-Japanese War soldiers in the Taihang region had a lower standard of living than the general population, and some areas even experienced the phenomenon of families of Anti-Japanese War soldiers fleeing famine. These issues directly dampened the enthusiasm of the masses to join the military and provide support.

The border region leadership was acutely aware of these problems of the Party, government, and military in the border areas. Deng Xiaoping clearly pointed out at the 1942 Senior Cadre Conference: "The victory or defeat of the struggle between us and the enemy depends on the people. Whoever cares about the interests of the people will receive their

support." Under the leadership of the Border Region Government, a series of adjustment measures were introduced. First, the public grain burden on the masses was significantly reduced and collection rates were lowered. Second, the Provisional Regulations on the Compensation of Honorary Soldiers in the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region were promulgated in March 1941 and revised in May 1943 to raise compensation standards. Third, a regular inspection system for military dependent benefits was established to ensure the implementation of contract farming and preferential policies. These policy adjustments laid the foundation for the comprehensive launch of the Double Support Movement in 1943.

4. The Comprehensive Launch and Institutional Construction of the 1943 Double Support Movement

In 1943, the Double Support work in Taihang entered a new phase of development, evolving from ad-hoc mutual assistance to formal institutional arrangements. In January of that year, the Shaanxi Gansu Ningxia Border Region took the lead in launching the Double Support Movement, which soon spread to base areas across North China via Liberation Daily. The Taihang region did not simply copy the experience of Yan'an, but creatively applied it based on the lessons learned from the rift in military-government-civilian relations in the past two years. During the Spring Festival in 1943, the Taihang Military Region and the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region Government jointly issued instructions to designate the period before and after the Spring Festival as the "Double Support Movement Month" and to use the traditional festive atmosphere to carry out military-civilian celebrations. The Taihang Double Support Work thus surpassed the previous scattered policy adjustments and entered a new stage of systematic institutional construction [6].

Military units led the implementation efforts. The Taihang Military Region officially issued the Convention on Supporting the Government and Loving the People, which delineated the behavior boundaries of officers and soldiers with ten disciplines: obeying government laws and regulations, protecting the Anti-Japanese War regime, respecting local cadres, caring for the interests of the masses, repaying borrowed goods, compensating for damaged goods, assisting the masses in production, reducing the burden on the people, participating in social welfare, and strictly abiding by mass discipline. Each military unit not only held democratic life meetings to carry out criticism and self-criticism, but also took the initiative to settle each case of past violations of the interests of the masses and compensate for their losses. The Political Department of the 129th Division also set up a special inspection team to conduct in-depth inspections in key areas such as Shexian and Wuxiang to supervise the implementation of discipline.

The local preferential treatment system was refined in tandem. In terms of the contract farming system, for those who had no labor or lacked labor, the village office would organize a contract farming team to be responsible for farming and harvesting. The coverage of contract farming organizations in the entire district was considerable by the end of the year; in terms of material benefits, each family of Anti-Japanese War soldiers received regular subsidies for grain and cotton, and also received condolences during festivals and holidays; in terms of compensation for honor soldiers, the regulations revised in May 1943 significantly raised the standards to ensure the basic livelihood of disabled soldiers. The "Certificate of Family Members of Anti-Japanese War Soldiers" stored in the archives of each county shows that the preferential treatment policy has been effectively carried out at the grassroots level.

One of the most representative institutional changes of the Taihang Double Support campaign was the military-civilian oath-taking system. A large group of people from the village gathered, and then soldiers and local residents made a pledge together. Civilians offered to join the army, take part in combat operations, give preferential care to the families of Anti-Japanese War soldiers, and support the front-line effort. In turn, the soldiers promised to support the government, care for the lives of the people, protect the local community, and help with agricultural production. This joint ceremony strengthened the sense of common fate among the military, the government and the people of all walks of life. Local jurisdictions have also recognised model individuals and groups at the level of military support conferences and public celebrations, as well as merit-based evaluations, to foster a positive social environment. By the end of 1943, the relationship among the military, the government and the people in the Taihang area had improved significantly. The Double Support system would soon demonstrate its practical value in the production campaigns and disaster relief efforts that followed [7].

5. Practice of Military-Civilian Collaboration and Formation of a Community of Shared Interests in Production and Disaster Relief

From 1942 through 1944, drought and locust plagues struck the Taihang Base, alongside constant Japanese "sweeps". Together, these brought the base to the brink of collapse. Amid these disasters, the Double Support system was no longer just a set of written rules, but had truly been implemented in every aspect of production and life. The military, government, and civilians forged a community of shared interests over time through joint disaster relief efforts. The Border Region Government put forward the call for "production disaster relief, military-civilian mutual assistance" and mobilized all available resources for self-relief through production.

Assisting villagers with farm work became the most tangible expression of the army’s support for the government and people. During the busy farming season, each unit voluntarily suspended training and fully assisted the masses in harvesting and planting. During the 1943 wheat harvest, the 129th Division and its directly affiliated units invested a large amount of manpower to assist the masses in harvesting wheat. Liu Bocheng, Deng Xiaoping and other leaders personally participated in the labor and worked with the masses to build canals and dams in Chian Village, Shexian County. The army also released a large number of mules and horses to provide free support for the production and transportation of the masses. Such scenes of military personnel and civilians working side by side could be seen everywhere in the Taihang Mountains.

During the Great Production Movement, the military gradually achieved self-sufficiency in production, fundamentally reducing the burden on the masses [8].

According to authoritative historical records, in 1944, the Taihang Military Region opened up 120042 acres of land, and the income from various agricultural and sideline products and handicrafts was equivalent to 9,709,276 jin (≈4,854,638 kg) of millet. All office and miscellaneous expenses were self-sufficient, and the self-sufficiency rate for food expenses reached 70%. This translated to a grain burden reduction of nearly ten million kilograms for local residents each year. The headquarters of the Eighth Route Army established the principle of "not competing with the people for profits", and the troops only cultivated barren mountains and slopes, without occupying the cultivated land of the masses; while developing agricultural and sideline production, surplus meat and vegetables were also supplied to local residents at preferential prices [9].

The people witnessed all this and kept it firmly in mind, and also supported their soldiers in various ways. Farmers actively imparted agricultural techniques and provided seeds and farming tools; Women sewed and washed clothes for soldiers, and organized the production of military shoes. The people of Shexian County proposed that 'if we have a bowl of rice, we won't let the soldiers go hungry', and that even when life was hard, they would prioritize military food supplies. During the most severe famine, the masses would rather eat wild vegetables to make ends meet than meet the food needs of the troops.

The deep interaction in production and disaster relief enabled the military, government, and civilians to go beyond simple mutual aid relationships and form a community of shared destiny. The masses truly felt that the Eighth Route Army was the people's own army, and the officers and soldiers also deeply recognized that the people were the source of strength for the army. This life-and-death bond and shared interests formed the bedrock of military-civilian cooperation. By the autumn of 1944, not only had the Taihang region overcome the famine, but the economy of the base areas had fully recovered, and the military-civilian coordination pattern had also matured in the strategic counterattack.

6. The Maturity and Historical Achievements of the Military-Civilian Coordination Pattern in the Strategic Counterattack Stage

From 1944 to 1945, the Anti-Japanese War entered the stage of strategic counterattack. After so many years of Double Support work, the military-civilian coordination in Taihang had matured into an integrated Anti-Japanese War system uniting the Party, government, military, and civilians. This collaborative combat capability was fully demonstrated in the counterattack against Japan, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Double Support work. According to authoritative party history records, from October 1937 to October 1944, the main force of the 129th Division fought against the Japanese puppet army 19777 times, resulting in 120241 deaths and injuries; the Taihang District Militia Self Defense Force fought 33716 times, killing, injuring, and capturing 11409 people. None of these achievements would have been possible without close military-government-civilian coordination.

Militia and regular army worked together to form a powerful force. The Taihang region established a three-level armed system: the main force, local forces, and militia self-defense forces. During combat, the regular army fought hard, the militia was responsible for besieging, harassing, reconnaissance, and leading the way, and the masses provided logistical support. In the siege of Qinyuan, the masses implemented a strong defense and cleared the field, cooperating with the troops to besiege the Japanese army occupying Qinyuan for two and a half years, ultimately forcing the enemy to retreat. This battle, described by Yan'an-based Liberation Daily as a "model example of behind-enemy-line Anti-Japanese War," clearly showed the strength of military-civilian coordinated combat.

The enthusiasm of the masses to participate in the war ran high. In the counterattack operation, the Taihang region organized large teams of frontline support laborers. In the Battle of Shangdang, the Taihang and Taiyue districts mobilized a large number of migrant workers, stretchers, and livestock to transport a large amount of food and supplies. The number of laborers supporting the front in Shexian was relatively high compared to the total population of the county. Women formed laundry, care, and condolence teams to take care of the wounded and sew military uniforms in the rear; the Children's Corps stood guard and passed on information. This gave rise to a people's war dynamic in which 'every village is a barracks, and everyone is a soldier'.

A wave of army enlistment swept the region. The deepening of the Double Support work turned "serving in the army is an honor" into a widely accepted social norm [10]. It was common for parents to send their children, wives sending their husbands, and brothers to compete for military service. From the winter of 1944 to the spring of 1945, more than 30000 soldiers joined the army in the Taihang region at one time. A large number of young people enlisted in Wuxiang County within this period. These new recruits headed to the front with the instructions of the masses, fighting with the belief of defending their hometowns, and the combat effectiveness of the troops was enhanced.

The Taihang Double Support Practice proved highly effective. It built the Taihang region into the most stable fortress for the resistance against Japan in North China, paving the way for a successful people's war and yielding valuable insights into military-government-civilian unity [11]. Liu Bocheng once said, "The people of Shexian raised the 129th Division and also raised me." This is precisely the fruitful result of the eight-year Double Support practice between the military and civilians in Taihang.

7. Conclusion

The eight years of Double Support practice that took place in the Taihang Base Area during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression provide a rich, empirically based case study for the Communist Party of China on how to build a new model of military-government-civilian relations. From the foundation of the base area in 1937 to its final victory in 1945, this body of practice did not appear suddenly. Instead, it went through three separate but related stages: first, an early period of experimentation under mass discipline and equal burden sharing; second, a phase of policy correction between 1941 and 1942 to address conflicts among the military, the government and the public; finally, after 1943, a period of formal institutionalisation that included the Double Support Movement Month initiative. Gradually and iteratively, this process led to the construction of an integrated system of coordination among the Party, the government, the military and the civilian population; this result is a strong indication that military-civilian solidarity provided the

necessary support for the behind-enemy-line Anti-Japanese War and helped win the war.

Three Interlocking Mechanisms were responsible for this. Changes in the material situation of the people led to close ties between the military, the government and the people; formal institutional arrangements guaranteed the long-term implementation of policies; and the shared experience of hardship brought these groups closer.

This study has the following deficiencies. There are still some problems with policy implementation in the peripheral counties and districts, as well as an unknown comparison between the Taihang experience and that in other base areas; both need to be studied further. Fundamentally speaking, what the Taihang Double Support practice shows is that any successful attempt to build a constructive military-civilian relationship must be based on the basic interests of the people. Lessons learned during the war period are still applicable to the promotion and development of the Double Support Work today. At its core, solidarity between the military, government, and people endures as our most dependable source of strength in overcoming adversity.

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