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HOW THE CPC TAIWAN WORKING COMMITTEE CAME TO BE DESTROYED

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[One wonders if perhaps the main point of this interesting study of Communist activities on Taiwan in the years following the Second World War isn't to reveal discreditable things about Lee Teng-hui (Li Denghui), the successor of Chiang Ching-kuo as president of the ROC and sometimes considered the father of Taiwanese democracy. But there are certainly other points worth registering. The main impression left is the of the general weakness and incompetence of the CPC organization on Taiwan—perhaps an instance of “seeking truth from facts.” Much of the material, however, seems to have been taken from published sources on Taiwan itself, more than from the CPC's own archives; and this may account to some degree for the rather flattering picture of the KMT's competence in countering revolutionary influences. Or, again, this may be a matter of simple respect from one set of professionals for another. According to this essay, the reason for the failure of the communist movement on Taiwan, in addition to capable counterrevolutionary work by KMT agents, was the incompetence and corruption of the Taiwanese communists themselves. Some of the matter may require further research. Thus, the author stresses the affiliation of the Taiwan comrades with the CPC from the very beginning, although for reasons of Comintern policy the official affiliation was with the Communist Party of Japan. One wonders whether the author, for the sake of the “one China” position, exaggerates the degree of Chinese Communist influence in the early days. The author also claims the Chinese Communists had gained (apparently very loose) control of the Taiwan party by early 1946, which seems to be when Lee Teng-hui joined.]

But other sources imply that Lee was never a member of the CPC proper, but belonged to a “Communist Party of Taiwan,” the earlier apanage of the CPJ. The actual organizational relationships may in practice have been both murky and sloppy.]

As the War of Liberation was reaching its crest in 1949, the liberation of Taiwan was the last remaining strategic task. In July of that year Mao Zedong said, “We must make preparations for an attack on Taiwan. In addition to infantry we must rely mainly on internal forces and the air force.” The so-called “internal forces” at that time were the underground CPC Party organization on the island. Unfortunately, a few months afterward that organization was completely destroyed.

When the Communist Party of China was leading the democratic revolution, some revolutionaries on Taiwan established and developed a Communist Party organization, but it was destroyed because of the special situation on the island. When the Liberation Army began to make preparations to invade Taiwan in early 1950, the CPC Working Committee on Taiwan had been damaged beyond recovery. Weak organizational base, muddled guiding thought, and corrupt leadership were the main factors behind this.

After the Failure of the “Old Commies,” the CPC Established a Working Committee on Taiwan in 1945

When Taiwan was occupied by the Japanese in 1895, the people of the island maintained close linkages with the mainland. A few progressive youths returned to the mainland to study and were influenced by Communist thought. In 1925 the female revolutionary Xie Xuehong participated in the May 30 demonstrations in Shanghai¹ and joined the CPC that same year. At the end of the year she went to Moscow to enroll in

¹ Anti-imperialist and labor protests set off when the Shanghai police fired into a crowd of student demonstrators, killing nine persons and injuring others.

Eastern University.² In April 1928 Taiwanese revolutionary youths staying in Shanghai formed the backbone of a Taiwan Communist Party, established on the second floor of a photography studio in the Concession area. These later came to be nicknamed the Old Taiwan Commies. Lin Ligu, Cai Qian, and Xie Xuehong constituted the Central Committee of the Taiwan Communists.

The Taiwan Communist Party was established with the help and guidance of the CPC. However, in accord with organizational leadership principles of the Comintern concerning Party organizations in colonial areas, at that time it took the name, “Taiwan Branch of the Communist Party of Japan,” coming under the leadership of the Japanese communists.³ The Taiwan Communists returned to the island to arouse the masses. In 1929 there was a small-scale uprising in central-south Taiwan led by the “Peasants’ Association.” The Japanese police subsequently carried out the first “Great Cleansing of Taiwan Communists” and arrested many of its backbone leaders. After the destruction of the Japanese Communist organization on Taiwan, in 1931 the police carried out the second “Great Cleansing,” arresting Xie Xuehong and other leaders and condemning them to heavy punishment. The organization was weakened and many leaders hid themselves among the people or escaped to the mainland. For example, Cai Qian returned to Fujian and then entered the Central Soviet region, participating in the second National Soviet Congress as the representative of Taiwan. He later moved to Shaanxi with the Red Army on its Long March. During the War of Resistance he served as head of the Enemy Work section of the Eighth Route Army.

² Probably the University of the Toilers of the East—later Sun Yat-sen University.

³ Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895, remaining so until 1945.

Japan surrendered in August 1945. The Nationalist Party's army, making use of American transport, recovered control over Taiwan. The CPC Center also decided to establish an organization in that recovered province. At that time Cai Qian was the only experienced Red Army Taiwanese cadre in Yan'an. Although he had been guilty of certain errors of life-style, the Party Center took into consideration his familiarity with conditions on Taiwan and his experience on the Long March and appointed him Secretary of the Taiwan Work Committee. Cai Qian left Yan'an in September, arriving in Huaian in Jiangsu in December. He met up with Zhang Zhizhong and other Taiwanese cadres working in the Central China Bureau. They transferred to Shanghai and then shipped over to Taiwan. In April 1946 Zhang Zhizhong, deputy secretary of the Work Committee, arrived in Taipei. Cai Qian arrived in July and linked up with Xie Xuehong and others on the island to set up a secret organization. Because Taiwan had been under Japanese rule for half a century, the revolutionary tide on the mainland had little influence on the island and the masses lacked understanding of the CPC. In one year the Work Committee was able to mobilize only about 100 persons.

When the National Government first took control over Taiwan, most of the Taiwanese intellectuals were enthusiastic about the return to the motherland. Later many lost hope because of the KMT's policy of "great confiscations"⁴ and applied to join the CPC. However, some among these were simply acting according to what was in fashion; their revolutionary will was not firm and they fled as soon as the storms arose. Li Denghui [Lee Teng-hui] was one of these.

⁴ The general complaint was that the incoming KMT officials were simply taking over the property, positions, and privileges of the vacated Japanese colonial officials.

In September 1946 the 23-year old Li Denghui, who had just returned from Japan to study in the Agricultural Institute of Taiwan University, applied for admission to the Communist Party. But he very soon became the object of criticism. With the 2-28 uprising at the end of February 1947,⁵ Li Denghui joined in some propaganda, but soon went into hiding once the KMT military police began their bloody suppression activities. By the summer of 1948 he had graduated and was an instructor at Taiwan University. He sought out the Student Workers Committee of the CPC and asked to withdraw from the Party. He declared that he still believed in Marxist theory but no longer wished to participate in organizational life or to be bound by Party discipline. According to the organizational analysis at that time, Li Denghui withdrew from the Party for fear of danger, but it was thought that there would be no point in trying to retain him and so agreed to his request. That fellow did, however, say that he would keep the Party's secrets.

According to the reminiscences decades later of a special agent on Taiwan, after the destruction of the Taiwan Work Committee the KMT authorities became aware of that episode in Li Denghui's history. He was placed under investigation and detained for seven days, and after he was released was required for a long time to make periodic reports; and he would be tailed whenever he went out. Toward the beginning of the 1970s Chiang Ching-kuo began pushing the "promotion of young Taiwanese." That is when Li

⁵ KMT military forces occupied Taiwan in the wake of the Japanese surrender. On 28 February 1947 resentment against Nationalist misrule came to a head, leading to demonstrations and riots throughout the island. The military governor negotiated a stand-down, but then had new forces from the mainland brought in. The result was a massive slaughter of Taiwanese suspected of participating in the discontent and even of those (particularly the educated) who were thought to be potential trouble-makers. The more conservative estimation of the number of fatalities is around 8000-10,000.

Denghui began his rise. It was then explained to him: “The materials on you are already known and there has been nothing against you since then. Just do a good job.” It was not strange that Chiang Ching-kuo should express himself this way, since he himself had joined the Communist Party while in the Soviet Union⁶ and he liked to make use of renegades against the CPC and those who had left the Party.

The Taiwan Work Committee had not been prepared for the island-wide uprising of all anti-KMT people in the 2-28 incident of 1947. Xie Xuehong and Zhang Zhizhong were the only ones to organize a part of the masses to participate in the struggle. Later the KMT authorities carried out the white terror, causing even more difficulties for the secret activities of the Work Committee. But the growing discontent of the population also made for favorable conditions for the development of the underground party.

Haste and Recklessness, Along With Betrayals by Responsible Persons, Led to Great Destruction

By the end of 1948 KMT rule faced collapse on the mainland. The KMT party, governmental, and military organizations, along with their special work organizations, one by one moved to Taiwan. Control over the island was further strengthened. The Work Committee perceived the unease and confusion among the KMT military men who were escaping to Taiwan and also the perception of many of the masses that Liberation was at hand, and therefore chose a course marked by haste and recklessness.

Shanghai was liberated in May 1949 and Chiang Kai-shek landed on Taiwan. At that time the Work Committee reported to the Center that underground Party members had grown to 1300 persons and that there were 2000 masses who sympathized with the Party

⁶ Chiang Ching-kuo had also been a student at the Eastern University in Moscow.

and participated in underground activities. Given that the island had a population of more than seven million, this was a very weak force. At this time the Committee began to establish armed bases in the mountain areas and printed and distributed the *Guangming Daily* in Taipei city. It put great effort into developing Party members. In a “Letter of Opinion Concerning an Attack on Taiwan,” it proposed that “there must be attention to seasonal conditions in making an attack on Taiwan; the most propitious time would be April of next year.” According to that plan, the Committee had only a few short months to prepare for a landing by the People’s Liberation Army. In July 1949 the Protection of Secrets Bureau, headed by Mao Renfeng, discovered copies of the *Guangming Daily* in high schools, and was able completely to destroy the printing factory. It was also able to get a line on the high-ranking leader “Old Zheng” (aka Cai Qian). An experienced special agent was able to penetrate the Kaohsiung organization of the Work Committee, and in October the Bureau captured its top man, Li Fen. After this responsible person who lacked sufficient awareness had been arrested, he implicated Chen Zemin, the deputy secretary of the Work Committee. The special agents had him meet with Chen, and so Chen was arrested. After being exposed to harsh treatment after his arrest, Chen Zemin remained unwilling to say who “Old Zheng” was, but he did give his address. The agents hurried to that place, but it had already been abandoned. By the end of December the agents were able, from the confessions of those who had been arrested, to discover how the armed bases communicated with the outside. Zhang Zhizhong, the deputy secretary of the Work Committee in charge of military work, was arrested on the street.

On 29 January 1950 agents who had been staking out the address of Old Zheng for a long time captured a 40-some year-old male who was returning home. That person gave a

false name and identification and demanded to be supplied with fancy food. Gu Zhengwen, the head agent, said later that he could see that this person had a weakness for the pleasures of life and had his people buy him dumplings every day. After a week, that person said: "I'm going crazy thinking about the taste of a steak." So they took him to the fanciest western restaurant in Taipei and treated him to a meal. After he had eaten he said he would show his gratitude by taking them to a communist base. Thinking to win merit, the three little agents had him lead the way. When they arrived at a dark, unlit factory, that fellow escaped them and ran away.

After "Old Zheng" had escaped, Gu Zhengwen discovered that he was in fact Cai Qian, the highest-ranking underground communist leader. He searched his living quarters and discovered a slip of paper with the words "Deputy Wu" written on it. The only one named Wu among the Deputy Chiefs of Staff was one Wu Shi. Based on this Gu Zhengwen concluded that Major General Wu was providing intelligence to the communists and got the consent of higher authorities to have that important "mole" arrested. Several months later Chiang Kai-shek ordered him killed.⁷ To use the actual name of someone you are in contact with in written notes is an impermissible mistake in underground work, and the general sloppiness of Cai Qian's working style can be seen from this. A couple of months later Gu Zhengwen discovered that Cai Qian had relations with several "old Taiwan Commies." Further investigation revealed that he had gone to ground in a village in Chiayi and several agents were sent to arrest him. To avoid being discovered the agents dressed up as farmers. When they got to the place and stopped to ask directions, they saw in the distance someone dressed in western clothes. This was

⁷ For more on Wu Shi's story, see Mark O'Neill, "China's Mata Hari," *Asia Sentinel*, 11 March 2011.

unusual, and the agents were immediately able to capture “Old Zheng.” In his interrogation he said that he had had a hard time putting up with his two months in the countryside. He thought he’d go into town to get a meal at a western restaurant and didn’t pay any attention to how he was dressed. After his second arrest Cai Qian immediately changed sides and was willing to do underground work in the place of detention. He had only one condition: his girlfriend, with whom he had been living, should be allowed to share the cell with him. Hearing this Gu Zhengwen laughed heartily and immediately sent over that 16 year-old girl.

Cai Qian’s betrayal led to the total collapse of the Taiwan Work Committee’s underground organization. According to KMT statistics, more than 1800 persons were arrested and those who were not willing to cooperate were executed. Hong Youjiao, the head of the Committee’s Propaganda division, had arranged to escape to the mainland by boat. But Cai Qian had revealed his itinerary and he was arrested on the docks at Keelung. The agents also found clues to the locations of the Committee’s military training bases in the mountain areas. In March of 1950 the “Bamboo Armed Resistance Base” was destroyed. The “Kneeling Deer Armed Base” was able to keep going secretly until 1952, until it was destroyed in a joint attack by Bureau agents and the military police. This bitter history was declassified by Taiwan in the 1990s, and both those who had come to grief and the special agents involved cooperated to publish reminiscences for all to read. From these we can get a more detailed idea of how the underground organization of those days was destroyed.

The Source of the Disaster Was Disregard for the Principles of Secret Work and the Corruption of the Leadership

There were various objective factors behind the destruction of the Chinese Communist Taiwan Work Committee, including overly optimistic estimates about the time when the PLA would invade the island and the small size of the island itself. But the main factor was a subjective one, the poor quality of the leadership at that time. After the capture of Secretary Cai Qian and Deputy Secretaries Chen Zemin, Zhang Zhizhong, and others, the boss special agents Mao Renfeng and Gu Zhengwen, in order better to understand how these people themselves would summarize their experience, had them placed in the same cell and listened in on their conversations.

According to the memoirs of Gu Zhengwen, every day Zhang Zhizhong would organize a “criticism struggle” of Cai Qian, pointing him in the face and screaming: “You seduce a 14 year-old girl; you embezzle 10,000 US dollars of the Organization’s funds; every day you eat breakfast in a high-class western restaurant: and you still have the audacity to boast yourself a leader of the Taiwan Work Committee!” Gu Zhengwen himself was a renegade who later became a special agent; he had previously served in the 115th Division of the Eighth Route Army, under Luo Ronghuan.⁸ He was very familiar with the internal affairs of the CPC. In his memoirs published in the 1990s he summarized this case thusly: “I believe the reason that the Communist underground organization on Taiwan failed, apart from an overly optimistic attitude by members of the organization and carelessness about exposing themselves, was the shallow character of Cai Qian. This was the really fatal defect. . . . If there had been a few people with the character and ability of Zhou Enlai or Luo Ronghuan and the like, I’m afraid that the

⁸ Luo Ronghuan (1902-1963) was a communist soldier. After 1945 he was chief political officer in Lin Biao’s Fourth Field Army and in 1955 was among the 10 PLA leaders elevated to the rank of marshal.

history of the secret struggle between the CPC and KMT on the island would have to be rewritten.”

Historical facts show that Cai Qian had returned to Taiwan from the Spartan conditions at Yan'an. Taiwan had a managerial base established by the Japanese and its economic level was far above that of the mainland. He longed for a life of luxury and enjoyed the company of high-status industrialists and merchants. After the death of his first wife, a worker from Shanghai, he took up with a 14 year-old girl. And when there was not enough money he made use of the Organization's funds. After 1949 Cai Qian became lost in the enjoyment of the company of his wealthy friends on the island and so lost his class awareness. Such a person was bound to be uncovered by special agents sooner or later. His arrest came about by accident, but the accidental in history is always embedded in the necessary.

After his treason Cai Qian made anti-communist speeches on the radio and urged others to surrender. In order to encourage even more “political transformations,” the KMT authorities appointed him a brigadier general in the Secrets Bureau. This in fact was nothing but a piece of anti-communist propaganda. He died of illness in 1982. Despite four years of “persuasion,” Zhang Zhizhong stood firm. Chiang Ching-kuo even visited him personally twice in prison urging him to change his political position. The only answer he got was, “The best thing you can do for me is to give me a quick death.” In 1954 Zhang Zhizhong was taken to the execution ground. He refused to be tied up. In their memoirs the KMT agents expressed their greatest admiration for him.

Apart from the personal character of the responsible persons, the misestimates of the situation by the Work Committee led to deficiencies in direction and contributed to the

Committee's destruction. During the War of Resistance Mao Zedong once spelled out the methods for the Party's underground work: "Be silent and meticulous, remain underground for long periods of time, accumulate experience, wait for the proper time." In summarizing the lessons in 1942 of the destruction of the Party's Central South Committee, Zhou Enlai explained that an underground party can not at the same time conduct military struggle, because these two guiding directions are contradictory. Accumulated experience proves that armed struggle requires large-scale mobilization of the masses. This means that the organizational leadership cannot be kept secret. But the Taiwan Work Committee ignored the requirement for long-term underground work and was eager to establish armed bases. It did not investigate in depth its worker-students or train them in Party awareness, providing a perfect opportunity for enemy agents to infiltrate the Party.

In 1950, after the complete Liberation of the mainland, Li Kenong, the leader of the CPC intelligence departments, carried out a directive of Zhou Enlai and for several months undertook a general summary of the Party's experience in secret struggle. He concluded that the two crucial principles were the absolute leadership of the Party and a focus on the political base. Facts prove that even during underground work requiring utmost secrecy, the Party organization must strengthen supervision over every single member. The membership must find cohesion in their political faith and must prevent the slightest wavering of belief. The collapse of the Taiwan Work Committee is precisely proof that these principles cannot be violated. That there could be a cadres like Cai Qian, able to persist for so long within the Organization and then fall into such a backward condition was a great surprise to many; but if we analyze things in detail, we see that

people's thinking can change with the changes in their environment. That someone has behaved gloriously in the past is no guarantee that he will continue to do so, especially when there are temptations to corruption and shortcomings in supervision. Cai Qian's use of high-status persons across the seas to carry out the committee's work was difficult to supervise. Every day he grew more corrupt. He pursued the wrong goals in life and so his political standpoint could not be firm.

Some working-class Party members in Taiwan at that time also betrayed the Party after being arrested. The reports by the special agents investigating them showed that they did not understand the basic concepts of a communist party, and they were eager to find new opportunities once conditions had changed. Where there is political faith, naturally there are some people who are unable to remain firm. This lesson shows how important education in ideals and faith actually is!

A cycle of 60 years has gone by.⁹ There has been a tremendous change in the relationship across the Taiwan straits. By the 1990s those who had suffered under the white terror could speak openly of their sacrifices. The remains of some martyrs have been moved to the mainland and reinterred there. When people today think about the sacrifices made at that time, they cannot but go a step further in understanding the significance of the full reunification of the motherland. At the same time that they remember the process by which the Taiwan Work Committee was destroyed they can also perceive certain lessons about the laws of history that will be edifying to cadres and Party members today.

⁹ In addition to the more familiar 12-year animal cycle, the Chinese calendar also combines the zodiac animals with 10 "earthly branches," yielding a 60-year cycle. Completing a cycle is a big deal: a person's 60th birthday, or the lavish celebrations in 2009 for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

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