

Zhongshan Warship Incident

by Ah Xiang

Excerpts from "Tragedy of Chinese Revolution" at <http://www.republicanchina.org/tragedy.html> For updates and related articles, check <http://www.republicanchina.org/RepublicanChina-pdf.htm>

On March 20th of 1926, Wang Jingwei's left-wing suffered a setback when Chiang Kai-shek fought back by having his crony, Wang Boling, organize a coup. This would be the 'Zhongshan Warship Incident' where 'zhongshan' was a pen name that Sun Yat-sen adopted possibly after a Japanese royal noble name. Conflicting stories exist as to the cause of this incident. The captain of Zhongshan Warship, Li Zhilong, was a CCP member who used to serve Chiang Kai-shek on the trip between Canton and Huangpu (Whampoa). Li Zhilong, after throwing himself into Wang Jingwei's camp, was promoted from KMT party commissar to the captain of the warship and then promoted to the bureau chief for Navy Department consecutively. On basis of communist account, before March 18th of 1926, Li Zhilong obtained the approval of Wang Jingwei to have some warship soldiers replaced when rumors spread that Chiang Kai-shek planned to have his crony take over the ship. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek heard the rumor that Li Zhilong planned to abduct Chiang during the next ride and send Chiang to Vladivostok in Russian Far East. Xu Zhen stated that Chiang was alerted by repeated phonecalls by Deng Yanda in regards to the time of Chiang Kai-shek's return to Whampoa Academy from Canton. After Chiang said he was not to return to Whampoa, Li Zhilong called Chiang and answered that he was under Deng Yanda's order to have sailed warship back and forth between Whampoa and Canton. Li Dongfang claimed that Chiang never disclosed the name of the person who made repeated calls on March 19th but it was thought to be Wang Jingwei. Chen Jieru claimed that Chen Bijun [i.e., Wang Jingwei's wife] called her five times on March 18th to check out the itinerary of Chiang Kai-shek, and that it would be Chen Jieru's warning that Chiang Kai-shek called Whampoa Academy's education section chief to check out a conspiracy against him.

At the dawn of March 20th, Chen Zhaoying, Chen Ce and Ouyang Ge arrested Li Zhilong from the bedroom and sent soldiers onto Zhongshan Warship; Jiang Dingwen took over Navy Bureau; Wu Tiecheng surrounded Wang Jingwei's residence; Hui Dongsheng blockaded Russian advisers' residencies and HK-Guangdong strike office (i.e., Canton-Hongkong Strike Committee), and dismantled garrisons at two places; and Liu Zhi arrested communists inside 2nd Division. Ouyang Ge, i.e., deputy navy academy schoolmaster, was put in charge of Navy. [The wording Canton-Hongkong or Guangdong-HK was paraphrased from "sheng [provincial capital] gang [hongkong]".] Deng Yanda, the political director of the Whampoa Military Academy, was detained. Chiang Kai-shek, as Canton garrison commander, declared martial law in Canton, and cut off phone communications. All communist members within 1st Corps were arrested and later expelled. All communists in 1st Corps and Whampoa, beginning from Zhou Enlai, were detained, and would have to go through "Three People's Principles" training course

per Li Dongfang. Further, Kissanga, was expelled from Canton on 24th per Li Dongfang. (Xu Zhen stated that Li Zhilong had disclosed that Russian advisers and communists had planned to abduct Chiang Kai-shek for Vladivostok. Li Zhilong, later in 1927, at Wuhan city, wrote an article entitled "The Resignation of Chairman Wang Ching-wei".)

Chen Gongbo first arrived in Wang Jingwei's home where Wang Jingwei was having a high fever. Later, Tan Yankai (chief of 2nd Corps), Zhu Peide (chief of 3rd Corps), Li Jishen (chief of 4th Corps), and Song Ziwen (Finance Minister or the Chamberlain) all arrived at Wang Jingwei's home. Wang Jingwei was indignant about the coup, and Tan Yankai/Zhu Peide etc accused Chiang Kai-shek of being a schizoid. On March 22nd, KMT executive committee members convened at Wang Jingwei's home and made a compromising ratification to have Wang Jingwei take a vacation overseas. Wang Jingwei did not return till April of 1927 on which occasion Borodin etc invited Wang Jingwei back to China to act as a KMT generalissimo for countering Chiang Kai-shek's growing military strength. Chen Jieru's memoirs claimed that Wang Jingwei was put under arrest on Mt Guanyinshan and that on March 22nd, Russian consul came to Mt Dongshan to see Chiang Kai-shek.

Harold Isaacs mentioned that Comintern vehemently denied British Reuters' report of the Canton coup. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek was afraid of breaking away with Russians. Chiang Kai-shek, who knew he had no control over the entire national army, compromised by firing some of his cronies who executed the coup. Li Zongren memoirs stated that after Zhongshan-jian Incident, Chiang Kai-shek, for appeasing Russians, would make Wu Tiecheng [17th Div Chief as well as Canton garrison commander] into a scapegoat and sent a public wire denouncing the Western Hill Faction. Harold Isaacs cited Louis Fischer's account stating that "but Chiang, whose distinguishing characteristic was not courage, apparently had been frightened by his own action and sent . . . a humble letter begging Borodin to return south without delay" and that when Borodin returned to Canton, Chiang "overflowed with apologies. . . What, he asked of Borodin, must he do?"

per XZ, Russian consulate official inquired with Chiang Kai-shek whether his actions were targeted at 'person' or at USSR. Per Li Dongfang, Borodin returned to Canton on April 29th, and asked Chiang the above question. Chiang replied, "The actions were targeted at person." Kissanga stealthily left for USSR [March 24th per Li Dongfang], and the rest of Russian lecturer left on April 14th per Li Dongfang. Chen Jieru stated that Chiang Kai-shek replied on March 22nd that he was targeting Wang Jingwei. At the demand of the Russian, Chiang Kai-shek held a 80-member KMT central political commissar committee meeting into which Wang Jingwei was brought. At the meeting, per CJR, Wang Jingwei denied ever ordering Li Zhilong's assignment of the warship, shouting at Chiang Kai-shek as to his absence from the 25 KMT founders, and citing Sun Yat-sen as a spirit in observance of Chiang Kai-shek's treachery from the heaven. Chen Jieru claimed that Wang Jingwei obtained the guarantee of Zhang Jingjiang in relocation to a hospital in April.

The compromise of Borodin (i.e., Stalin) and Chiang Kai-shek would be the continuance of the Russian alliance on the condition that USSR and Borodin would support the Northern Expedition. Humbly, communist party leaders, including Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu) and Kao Yu-han, per Harold Isaacs, vehemently defended their innocence, with Chen writing that "First of all, unless the Communist Party is a party of madmen, certainly it does not want to establish a workers' and peasants' government in Canton. Secondly, Chiang Kai-shek is one of the pillars of the national revolutionary movement. Unless the Communist Party were the tool of the imperialists, it would surely not adopt such a policy of disrupting the unity of the Chinese revolutionary forces! . . . The policy of the Communist Party, contrary to the declarations of the Rights, is not only that the revolutionary forces in Kwangtung should not be split, but that the revolutionary forces of the whole country shall be united. Otherwise one cannot fight the enemy." Harold Isaacs mentioned that "the (CCP) Central Committee in Shanghai and the Kwangtung (CCP) party vigorously opposed" Borodin's concessions to Chiang Kai-shek and that "in Moscow, the Opposition led by Trotsky had already begun to demand the liberation of the Chinese Communists from the strait jacket of the Kuomintang".

Chen Jieru claimed that on May 11th, Wang Jingwei secretly left for France. Tan Yankai succeeded Wang Jingwei. Hence, Chiang Kai-shek ranked No. 1 as KMT paramount leader. Chen Jieru also cited Shanghai's "*Shen Bao*" newspaper commentary about the downfall of Guangdong native KMT leaders as well as Chiang Kai-shek's ascension to power. On May 15th, a plenary session of the KMT Central Executive Committee was convened by Chiang who introduced a special resolution for the "readjustment of party affairs", with following stipulations per Harold Isaacs: i) Communists were required "not to entertain any doubt on or criticize Dr. Sun or his principles"; ii) Communist party was required to hand over ... a list of its membership inside the KMT; iii) Communist members of municipal, provincial, and central party committees were limited to "one-third of the committee membership"; iv) Communists were banned from "serving as heads of any party or government department. Kuomintang members." The May 15 plenary session also put Chiang at the head of the KMT party, Zhang Jingjiang [aka Zhang Renjie] as chairman of the KMT Central Executive Committee, and Chiang Kai-shek as commander-in-chief of all the expeditionary armies. Subsequently a set of special decrees conferred emergency powers upon Chiang for the duration of the campaign. Chen Guofu, i.e., the son of Chen Qimei, took over the organizational department of the KMT party. Per Harold Isaacs, the Military Council, "originally conceived as a civilian check on militarist ambitions, passed entirely into Chiang's hands.. He (Chiang) became arbiter of the government's finances. He controlled the Political Department, the arsenal, the general staff, the military and naval schools. The Canton government was transformed into a military dictatorship." (Harold Isaacs, being a CCP member, certainly overestimated Chiang's power base and extent of dictatorship. Chiang never had full control over China's military establishment such as Guangxi's Li Zongren, Shanxi's Yan Xishan and Shenxi's Feng Yuxiang.)

After Chiang Kai-shek's Zhongshan Warship Incident in March 1926, Zhou Enlai was deprived of the director post and left for Shanghai by the winter time. Zhou Enlai, not in time for Oct 23 1926 workers' uprising, would be responsible for leading Feb 19-22 1927 general strike by 360,000 Shanghai workers, subsequent Feb 22-24 1927 Workers' Uprising, and March 21-22 1927 Workers' Uprising.

At the same time, Chiang Kai-shek began to get close to Kong & Song families by claiming to Chen Jieru that he wanted to be a top guest of renowned families as Sun Yat-sen enjoyed. At a 'dove-meat' banquet organized by Mme Kong Xiangxi, Chen Jieru first met with Soong Mei-ling who did not hesitate to exhibit disparagement against Chen Jieru as playing a role of a 'housewife'. Mme Liao Zhongkai, i.e., Heh Xiangning, warned Chen Jieru in keeping a distance from Soong Mei-ling. Meantime, Chen Jieru, being worried about the welfare of Jiang Jingguo, gave Chen Guofu money for wire to USSR. Later, when Chen Jieru migrated to HK in 1960s, Jiang Jingguo bought a house for Chen Jieru in HK as an appreciation of the care.

Ensuing the warship incident would be the attempted assassination of Chiang Kai-shek by Xu Chu [Hsu Chuv], i.e., Xu Chongzhi's cousin. Xu Chu, after pulling out a pistol from under newspaper, accused Chiang Kai-shek of having stolen his cousin's Yue-jun Army as well as executing two Yue-jun generals [i.e., Zhang Guozhen & Yang Jinlong]. Xu Chu was shot to death by Chiang Kai-shek bodyguards. Deeply disturbed by the assassination attempt, Chiang Kai-shek hence authorized Chen Guofu & Chen Lifu brothers in organizing the "blue jacket league" by mapping Mussolini's scheme. (Later, spy chief Dai Li was authorized to form Fuxing [Resurrection] Society on basis of "secret investigation team" under military commission. 13 Whampoa graduates, including Dai Li & Xiao Zanyue, became the so-called "13 gestapos".) Editor of Chen Jieru's memoirs refuted the existence of "blue jacket league" in 1926. However, Chen Jieru repeatedly mentioned that "blue jacket league" had acted as bodyguards when she went to Shaoguan during the 1927 Northern Expedition as well as assisted in Song Ziwen's defection from Wuhan to Nanking in 1927 by means of arson of finance ministry.