

**THE COMMUNIST RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN
WAR-TORN GUANGDONG, CHINA, 1937-1945**

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation traces the origins of the East River and the Hainan Base Areas, which were established by the Chinese Communist Party in Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45) and explains why they failed to achieve the kind of dramatic expansion as did their northern counterparts. As the case of the East River Base Area demonstrates, the major problem which confronted the Party was the limited scope of Japanese occupation. The absence of widespread political anarchy on the Guangdong mainland did not only trigger much initial debate among Party leaders over the possibility of guerrilla mobilisation but also imposed severe constraints on local attempts to construct Communist bases. In Hainan, although the political-military situation was more favourable, the Party's plan of developing the island into a Communist stronghold in South China still ended up in a merely theoretical construct. Among those important factors which contributed to its frustration were inadequate resources at the Party's disposal, the loss of radio communication between Hainan and the Party Centre in Yan'an, the intense Japanese "mopping-up" campaigns and the island's age-long Li-Han racial conflict. It was not until mid-1944 that the Japanese Ichigo offensive created in Guangdong an environment conducive to the reduplication of the Communist expansion in the north. Unfortunately, this extensive enemy occupation came to the province too late and was too short. Japan's sudden surrender in August 1945 thwarted Mao Zedong's ambitious efforts of combining the Communist bases in Central and South China. By examining the reasons for the underdevelopment of the two southern bases, this study raises some important questions about the Communist wartime movement such as the limits of Mao's model of base construction and the need of a dynamic balance between central supervision and local initiatives for achieving the Communist revolution.

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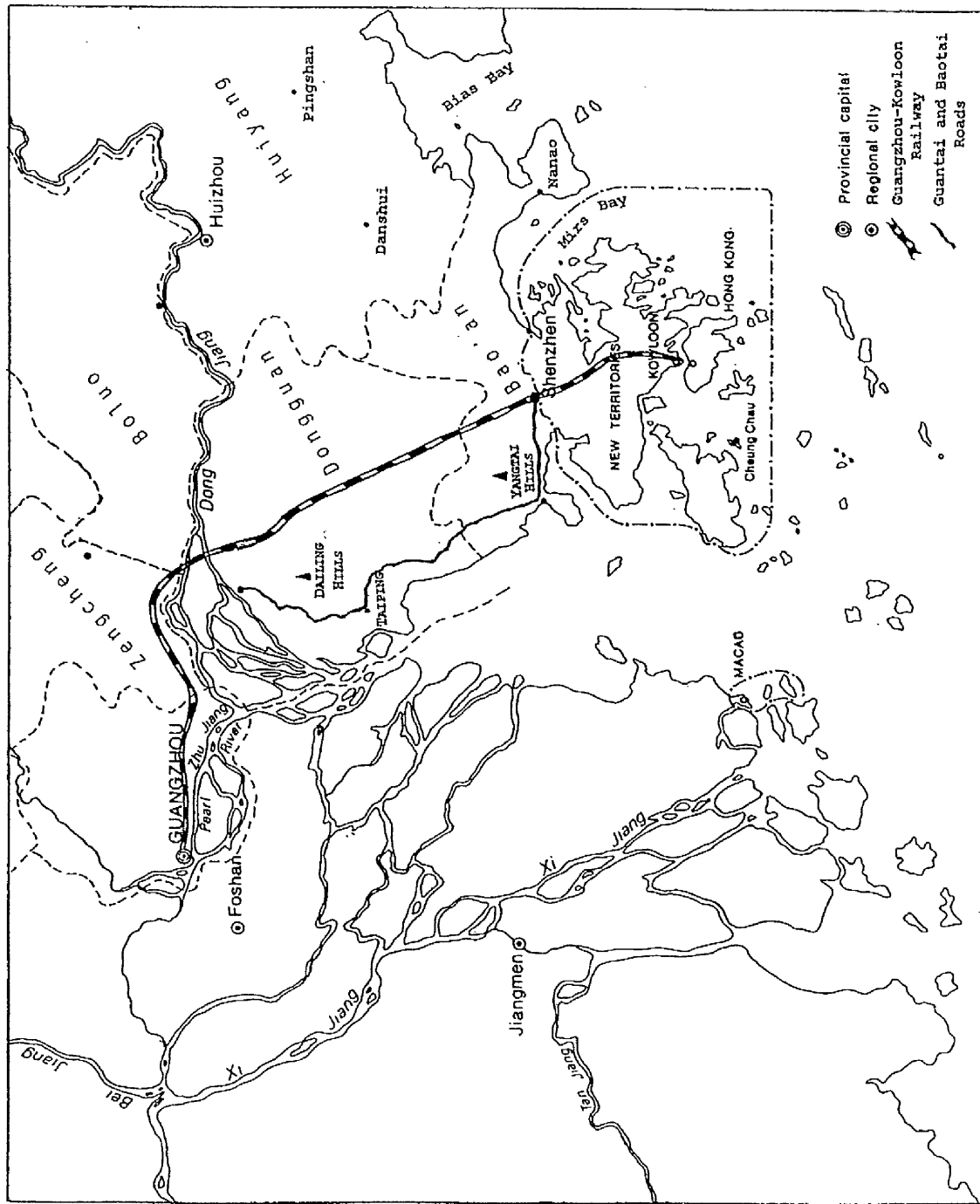
During the initial stage of my research, a number of scholars and friends offered me valuable help in locating the relevant sources. They are Professor Chen Chunsheng, Mr. Ding Xuguang, Professor Huang Zhenwei, Dr. Daniel Kwan, Dr. Joseph Lee, Dr. Alfred Lin, Professor Yang Qingquan and Dr. C. K. Yong. In addition, I would like to express appreciation to Mr. Chen Qingshan, a former commanding officer of the Qiongya Column. Despite his old age, Mr. Chen kindly spent a whole day with me, patiently answered all my questions about the Communist resistant movement in Hainan. I also thank Ms. Xu Yueqing, who is a friend of many old East River guerrillas in Hong Kong and has involved in inscribing and publishing their memoirs. Besides sharing with me her knowledge about the Communist guerrilla activities in Hong Kong, Ms. Xu also told me some interesting stories about her father's cooperation with the guerrillas in Xigong (Saikung) during the war.

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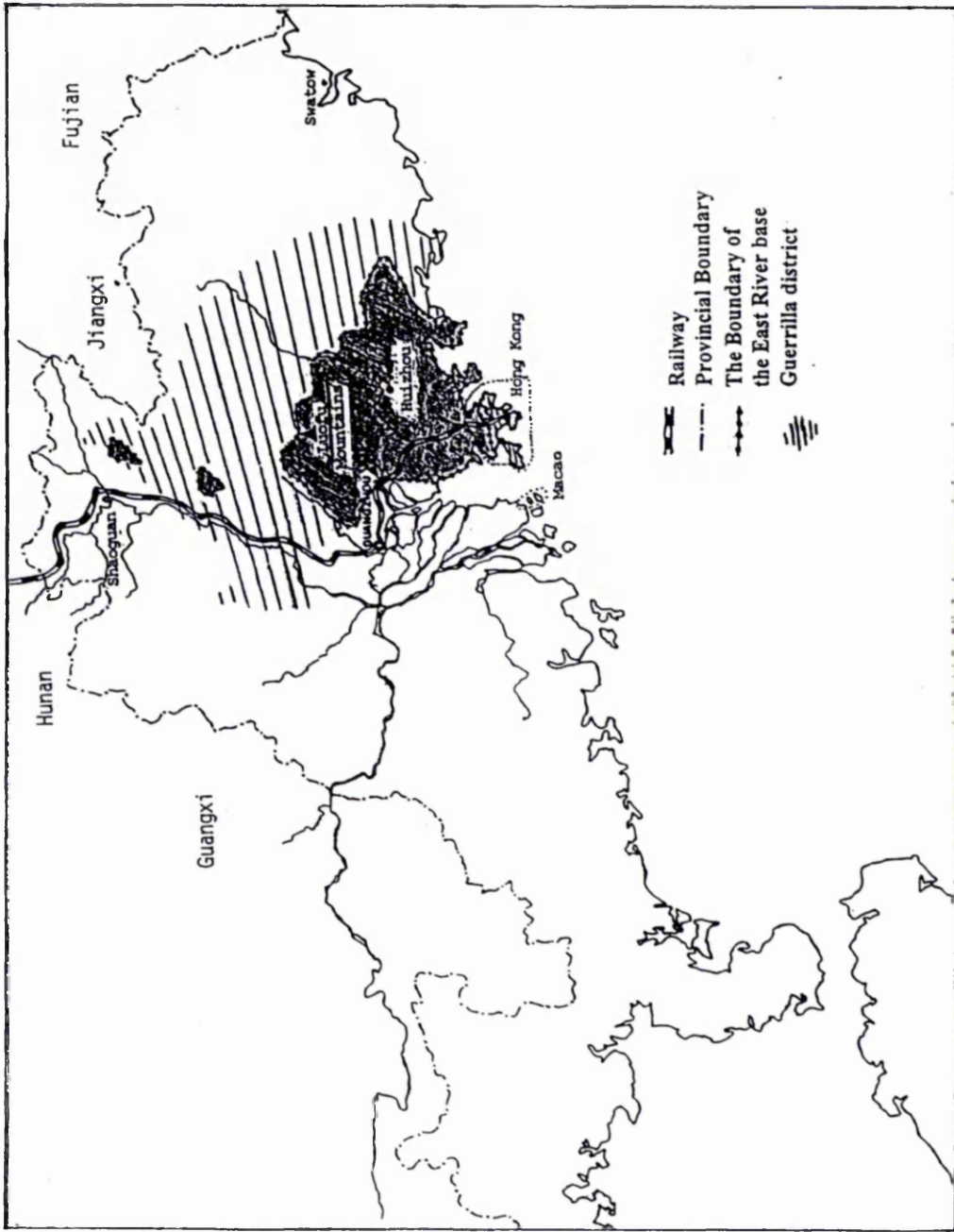
Finally, I must thank my wife Elizabeth for her constant encouragement during my years of study, and her assistance in furnishing the maps presented in this work.

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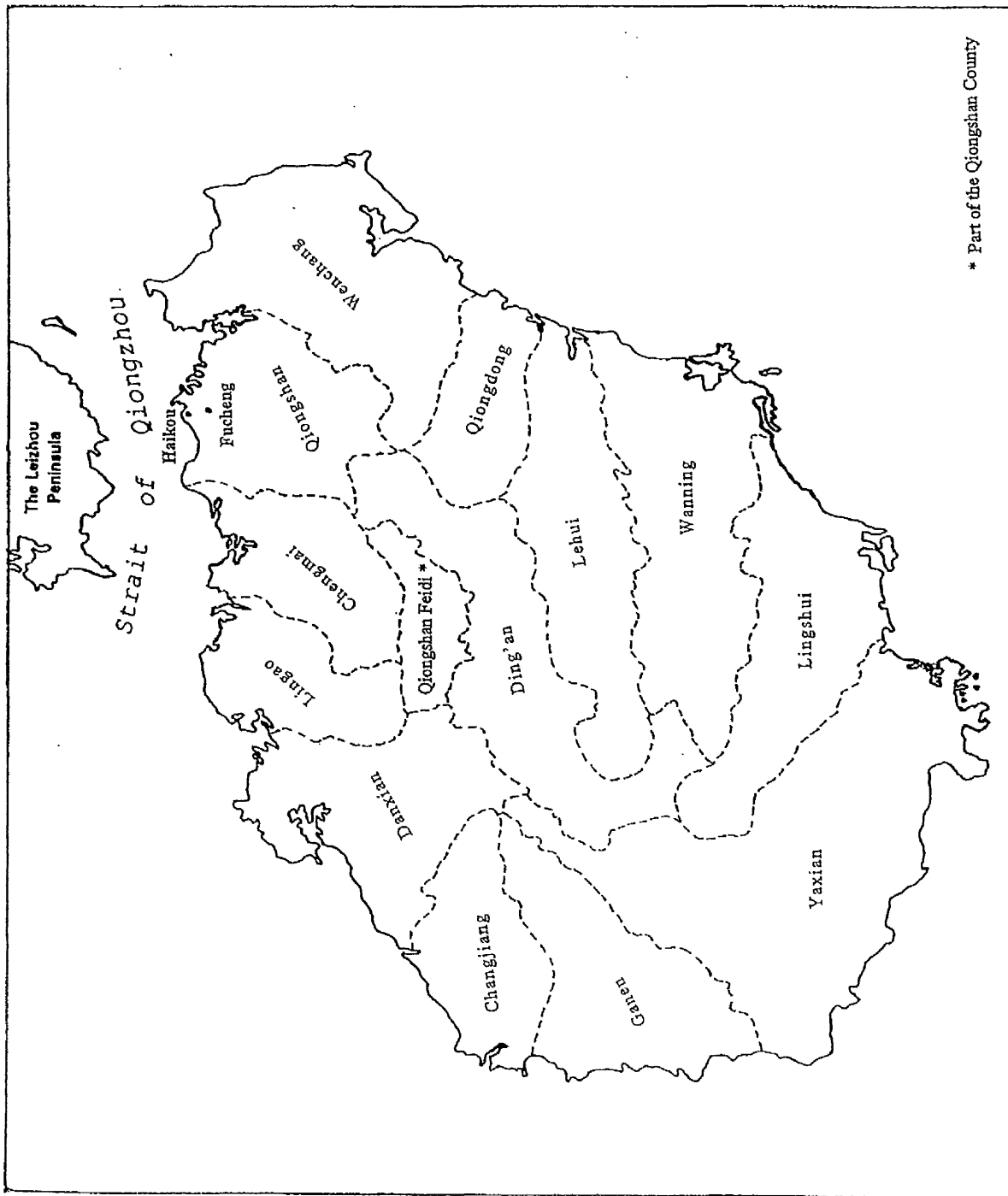
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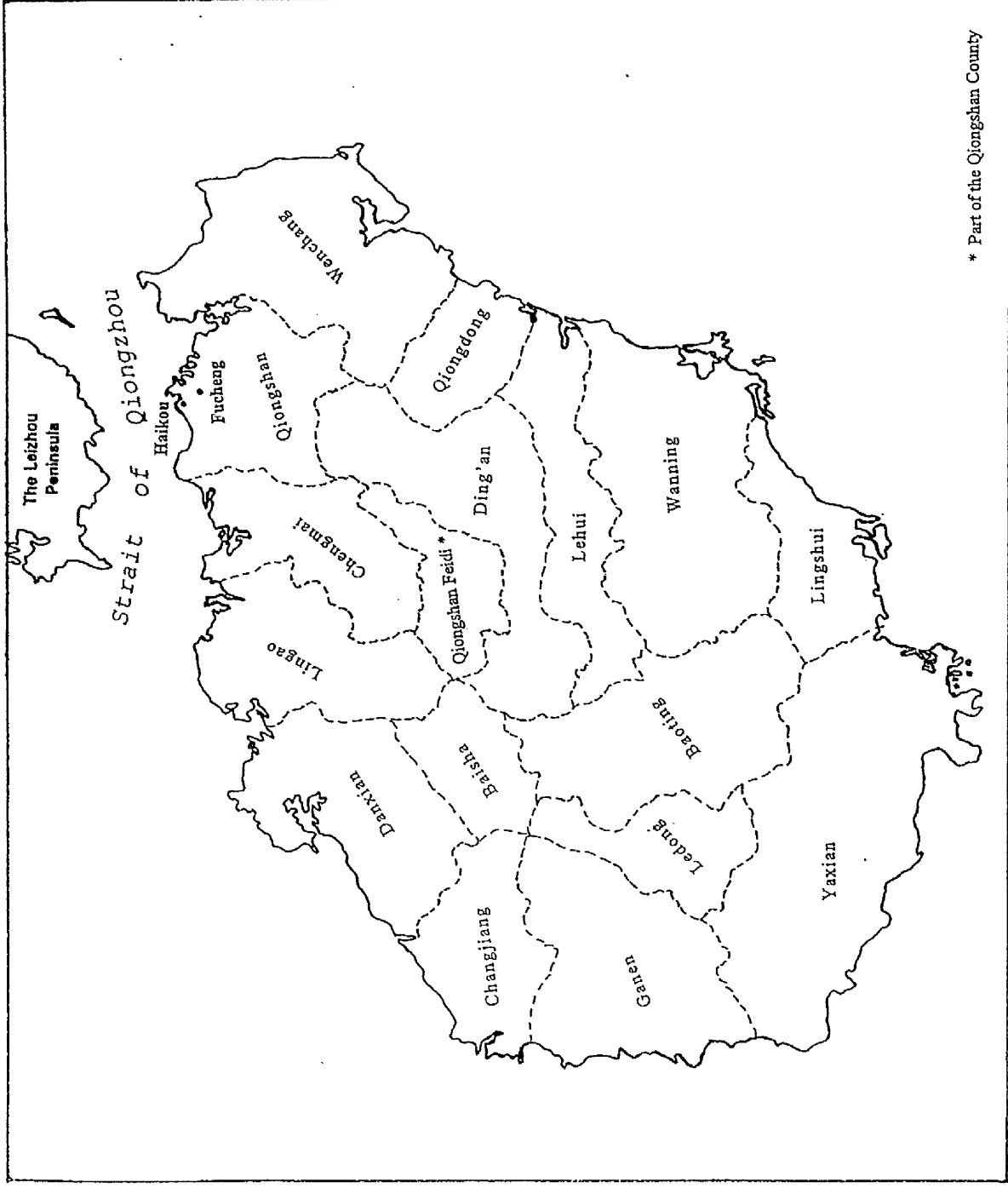
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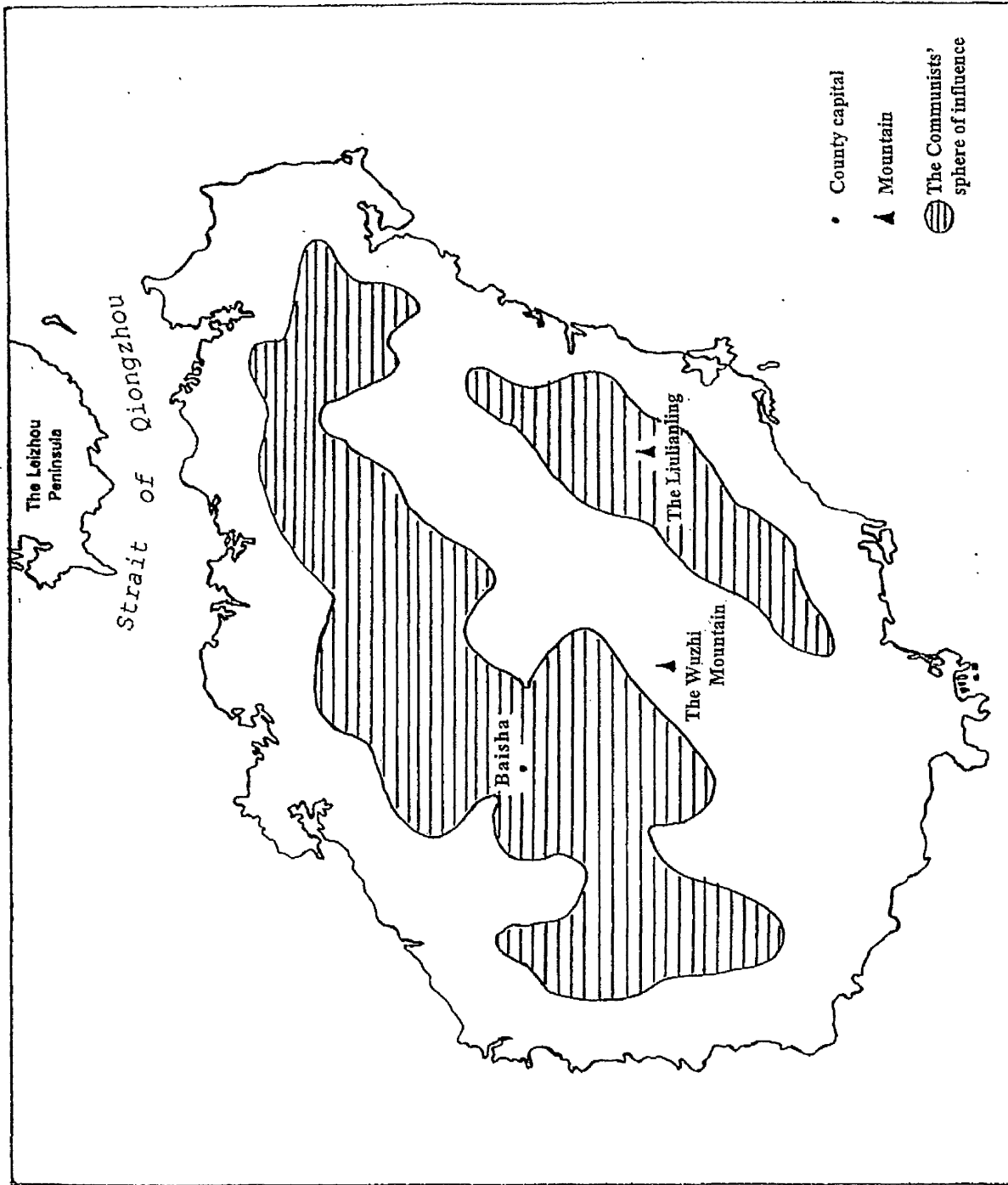
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ABBREVIATIONS

Frequently Cited Sources And Collections Of Documents

- DDZH* Zhonggong Huiyang diwei dangshi yanjiu xiaozu bangongshi and Zhonggong Huiyang diwei dangshi ziliao zhengji xiaozu bangongshi comp. *Dongjiang dangshi ziliao huibian* [Collected materials on the history of the Communist Party in the East River region] vs.1-3, 6, 9. Internal publication, 1983-7.
- DZ* Dongjiang zongduishi bianxiezu comp. *Dongjiang zongduishi* [A history of the East River Column]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1985.
- DZS* Guangdongsheng dang'anguan comp. *Dongjiang zongdui shiliao* [Historical sources on the East River Column]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1984.
- DGGCSSX* Guangdongsheng dang'anguan and Guangdong Huiyang diqu shuiwuju comp. *Dongjiang geming genjudi caizheng shuishou shiliao xuanbian* [Selected historical materials on the finance and taxation of the East River Revolutionary Base Area]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986.
- FBYS* Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi comp. *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* [Research materials on Feng Baiju]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988.
- GDDS* Gangjiu duli daduishi bianxiezu comp. *Gangjiu duli daduishi* [A history of the Independent Battalion of Hong Kong and Kowloon]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1989.
- GDTYS* Guangdongsheng dang'anguan and Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui bangongshi comp. *Guangdongqu dangtuan yanjiu shiliao* [Research materials on the Party and League in the Guangdong region] (1927-1934) and (1937-45). Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986, 1988.
- GDYW* Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiushi ed. *Guangdong dangshi yanjiu wenji* [Collected works on the history of the Guangdong Party]. Vs.2 & 3. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1993.
- GDZ* Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui bangongshi and Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui bangongshi ed. *Guangdong dangshi ziliao* [Sources on the history of the Guangdong Communist Party]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1983-.
- GGLWH* Zhongyang dang'anguan and Guangdongsheng dang'anguan comp. *Guangdong geming lishi wenjian huiji* [Collected documents of

revolutionary history in Guangdong]. 63 vs. Guangzhou: internal publication, 1984-92.

- GL* Zhonggong Shenzhenshi dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui ed. *Gangjiu lieyan* [The vigorous flame of Guangzhou and Kowloon] Internal Publication, 1983.
- GWZ* Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Guangdongsheng weiyuanhui, wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui ed. *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Sources on the culture and history of Guangdong] Guangdong renmin chubanche, 1961-.
- NDZ* Nanfangju dangshi ziliao zhengji xiaozu comp. *Nanfangju dangshi ziliao* [Materials on the history of the Southern Bureau]. 6 vs. Chongqing chubanshe, 1986-90.
- QGGCSSX* Hainan caizheng shuishoushi lingdaoxiaozu bangongshi and Hainan dang'anguan comp. *Qiongya geming genjudi caizheng shuishou shiliao xuanbian* [Selected historical materials on the economy and taxation of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area]. 3 vs. Haikou: Hainan renmin chubanshe, 1984-8.
- QX* Qiongdao xinghuo bianjibu ed. *Qiongdao xinghuo* [The sparks of Hainan Island]. Internal publication, 1980-.
- QZS* Qiongya wuzhuang douzhengshi bangongshi comp. *Qiongya zongduishi* [A history of the Hainan Column]. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986.
- SW* Mao Zedong. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1961-5.
- ZZWX* Zhongyang dang'anguan comp. *Zhonggong Zhongyang wenjian xuanbian* [Selected documents of the Chinese Communist Party Centre]. 18 vs. Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1982-92.

INTRODUCTION

The Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) has been the focus of attention by many historians researching the history of Chinese Communism. They agree that the war had completely transformed the Communist revolution. It was during the war that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerged from the state of near extinction to a position capable of challenging the Guomindang's (GMD) rule both politically and militarily. This dramatic change was brought about, first and foremost, by the CCP's extensive programme of base construction. Apart from the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia (Shaan-Gan-Ning) Border Region, all Communist wartime bases were located behind the Japanese line of occupation. In North China, the Communists had constructed several large bases which commanded a complex system of administration as well as an elaborate socio-economic infrastructure. These well-established Communist bases are generally believed to have laid the foundation for the Party's¹ ultimate victory against the GMD in the civil war. Not surprisingly, they have already formed the subject of several monographs and dissertations.²

However, amidst this familiar story of success, there are some aspects which look less impressive at first glance. During the Anti-Japanese War, the Party established in Guangdong its only two bases in South China - one in the East River region and the other in Hainan Island. Their existence has scarcely figured in many standard accounts of the Communists' war against Japan. Obviously, it is because they were, on the whole, smaller and less consolidated when compared to the northern bases and thus seemed to have little relevance to scholars who are obsessed with the task of explaining the Party's wartime success. Historians' impression of the two southern bases is that they had

¹ In this dissertation, the term "Party" with a capital P is used interchangeably with the term "CCP" to refer to the Chinese Communist Party.

² For the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, see Mark Selden, *China in Revolution: The Yen'an Way Revisited*, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); originally published as *The Yen'an Way in Revolutionary China*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). All citations from Selden's book in this study refer to the new edition; Pauline Keating, *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934-1945*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997); for the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region, see Carl E. Dorris, "People's War in North China: Resistance in the Shansi-Chahar-Hopeh Border Region, 1938-1945," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975); Kathleen J. Hartford, "Step By Step: Reform, Resistance, and Revolution in Chin-Ch'a-Chi Border Region, 1937-1945," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1980); for the Shandong Base Area, see David M. Paulson, "War and Revolution in North China: The Shandong Base Area, 1937-1945," (Ph.D. diss., University of Stanford, 1982); for the Taihang Base Area, see David S. G. Goodman, *Social and Political Change in Revolutionary China: The Taihang Base Area in the War of Resistance to Japan, 1937-1945*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000).

minimal connection with the principal Communist movement in the north and throughout the war, they remained “shadowy” and “insubstantial.”³ Aside from these vague remarks, however, their history is still obscure in western scholarship.

Since the 1980s, Chinese Communist historiography in the West has undergone a paradigm shift. As Stephen Averill observes, the idea of the Communist-led revolution as a unitary, bounded historical phenomenon has given way to the notions of multiple revolutions differentiated by time and place.⁴ There is a realisation that regional diversity has been a consistent feature of the CCP,⁵ and one can no longer claim to understand the revolutionary movement by focusing on its “great names, signal events, and crucial places” alone.⁶ Many scholars are propelled to conduct intensive studies of the Communist revolution in local context and, especially, in geographical areas which have hitherto been neglected. Recognising that the Communist movement was made up of not one but many local revolutions, this change in academic climate paves the way for the present dissertation by allowing historians to view the two southern bases in Guangdong as legitimate constituents of wartime Communism, which deserve greater academic attention.

This dissertation developed originally from one question: why were the Communists’ southern bases singularly unsuccessful? The question is interesting to pursue especially because the experience of the southern bases brings them into sharp contrast with the Communist bases in North China and thus stimulates scholars to rethink some established views about the Communist wartime revolution. Some possible reasons of the southern failure are easy to discern. For instance, the scope of Japanese domination in South China was much more limited than in the north. Hence, the GMD’s rule there was less disrupted. The southern bases were far away from the Party’s wartime command centre in Yan’an. Their founding and operation had no apparent link with the famous Communist Eighth Route and New Fourth armies. However, how these factors actually interacted with each other in restraining the Communist growth in Guangdong has yet to

³ Lyman P. Van Slyke, “The Chinese Communist movement during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 13, Republican China, 1912-1949, Part 2*, eds. John King Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 646.

⁴ Stephen Averill, “More States of the Field Party Two: The Communist-led Revolutionary Movement,” *Republican China*, 18, issue 1 (November 1992), 244.

⁵ Tony Saich, “Introduction: The Chinese Communist Party and the Anti-Japanese War Base Areas,” *The China Quarterly*, 140 (December 1994), 1005.

⁶ Cf. Hans J. van de Ven, “Introduction,” in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, eds. Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1995), xv.

be clarified. Moreover, their relations with other less apparent factors will need to be analysed too.

Most recent studies on wartime Communism in China adopt a "localist" approach, which concentrates on revealing how microsocietal factors such as socio-economic and ecological conditions in a locality could alter the outcome of the revolution. While such an approach is valuable in raising our appreciation of the complicated process in which the Party built up, step by step, its revolution, it nevertheless cannot sufficiently explain the different patterns of base area⁷ development within the Communist movement during the war, in particular, those outside North China. In his recent book on the New Fourth Army, Gregor Benton argues persuasively that one must take into consideration also the higher military strategy of the Party in order to discern the broad pattern in the revolution. The reason, as he sums up, is:

The Communists marshalled their forces in a grand design that crucially influenced the individual bases and subordinated local interests to final nationwide victory. An analysis of higher strategy is thus indispensable for understanding local events and processes. Higher-level decisions interacted with the local leaders having to cope with local environments and thereby created patterns that set one broader region off from another.⁸

Chen Yung-fa's *Making Revolution*, another seminal work on wartime Communism outside North China, also alerts us to the close relationship between the Party's strategy in winning nationwide power and the development of local Communist bases. As Chen asserts, "my analysis of the experience in central and eastern China shows that, if anything, the Party's seizure of the region resulted from Mao Tse-tung's [Mao Zedong] determination to transplant the successful experience of base construction from North China to central China."⁹ Both Benton and Chen underline the important role of Liu Shaoqi in supervising this transplantation of the northern (or Maoist) model to Central China and agree that, without which, the Party was unlikely to attain such a strong presence in the region at the end of the war.

Likewise, Mao Zedong wanted to reduplicate in South China the kind of Communist expansion in the north. As the main body of this dissertation will show, he

⁷ The term "base area" is translated from the Chinese word *genjudi*. It usually refers to an area where the Communists had established relatively secure military control and created a complex politico-economic system.

⁸ Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai 1938-1941*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 710.

⁹ Chen Yung-fa, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986).

did try to transplant the northern model of base construction to the two base areas in Guangdong - even though the timing, the manner and the situation under which this transplantation took place were very different from those in Central China. In view of that, a purely "localist" approach may not be able to help us to comprehend fully why the southern bases eventually failed to achieve the dramatic growth as had happened in Central China. As a result, there is the need to examine both the microsocietal factors and the Party's war strategy at national level, especially their interaction, which made the Communist wartime experience in Guangdong distinctive from its counterparts elsewhere in the country.

It is appropriate to state clearly at the outset what this present dissertation does not intend to do. Since the 1960s, four major theories have been advanced to account for the Communists' rise to power, namely, peasant nationalism,¹⁰ socio-economic reforms,¹¹ organisational skill¹² and moral economy.¹³ Without exception, they all focus on elucidating the Party's ability to rouse the peasantry. Although these theories have inspired a lot of academic debates, it is not my aim here to continue quibbling with such discussion. One reason is that this study is far from an ideal case for testing the validity of these existing theories because peasant mobilisation was largely absent in the Communist southern bases. More important, recent "base area studies" have demonstrated the immense regional diversities of the Communist revolution and argued convincingly the necessity of adopting a multi-causal explanation for its success. In other words, the most profitable way to study the Communist revolution is not to identify some single key factor (as the existing theories have tried to do) that would prove to be of decisive importance in the revolution's success. Rather, historians should approach the subject with great sensitivity to the working of various factors which facilitated or inhibited the revolutionary process; so that, in the end, the new empirical data produced by this research on the southern bases can be useful in furnishing a firm basis for future theorising of the Communist revolution.

¹⁰ Chalmers A John, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Mark Selden, *China in Revolution*.

¹² Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1974.)

¹³ Ralph A. Thaxton, *China Turned Rightside Up: Revolutionary Legitimacy in the Peasant World*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); cf. id., *Salt of the Earth: The Political Origins of Peasant Protest and Communist Revolution in China*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997).

Although Ezra Vogel probably overstates the case by saying that, throughout the war, "the [Guangdong] Communists . . . remained a small secretive, tightly organised band and the masses were outside the revolutionary movement,"¹⁴ there is no doubt that the Party was much weaker in South China than in the North and hence attracted far less public attention. As a result, one seldom comes across substantial intelligence reports, whether foreign or GMD, about the Communist guerrilla activities in Guangdong, and hence any detailed examination of them has to rely principally on the historical sources produced by the Communists themselves. In fact, the research of this dissertation is made possible by the large quantity of historical material from China, which has become available only recently.

A major category of these sources is Party documents, which are reprinted internally and never meant for public consumption. The value of these internal documents for enlightening our understanding of the Party's history has been confirmed by many scholars.¹⁵ These documents, in contrast to open publications, give more details about the problems and difficulties that confronted the Communists, and thus enable one to identify the gap between the Party's stated policies and what actually happened. The main source of Party documents in pre-1949 Guangdong is the *Guangdong geming lishi wenjian huiji* [Collected documents of revolutionary history in Guangdong]. An internal publication, this multi-volume set was published for limited circulation and aimed basically to serve the interests of Party historians. Supplemented to this valuable source are several minor collections, among them the more important ones for the present topic are the *Guangdongqu dangtuan yanjiu shiliao 1937-45* [Research materials on the Party and League in the Guangdong Region during 1937-45], *Dongjiang zongdui shiliao* [Historical sources on the East River Column], and *Qiongya geming genjudi caizheng shuishou shiliao xuanbian* [Selected historical materials on the economy and taxation of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area]. My research in the Guangdong Provincial Archives, the largest deposit of Party documents on pre-1949 Guangdong presently accessible to historians outside China,¹⁶ points to the fact that the above collections have exhausted almost the entire bulk of the archives' holding of relevant sources.

¹⁴ Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968*, 1980 edition, (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1980), 35.

¹⁵ See, for example, Van Slyke's "Foreword" in Chen, *Making Revolution*, xii-xiii.

¹⁶ Although the Central Archives in Beijing are known to hold the single most important collection of documentary sources on the CCP's history, it remains firmly closed to foreign as well as most Chinese researchers.

Another major type of recently available historical material from China is memoirs. Memoirs regarding Communism in pre-1949 Guangdong can be found in, for example, the *Guangdong dangshi ziliao* [Sources on the history of the Guangdong Communist Party], *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Sources on the culture and history of Guangdong], *Dongjiang dangshi ziliao huibian* [Collected materials on the history of the Communist Party in the East River region], and *Qiongdao xinghuo* [The sparks of Hainan Island]. Historians have realised that unlike the west, where writing memoirs is an individual and independent pursuit, it is a community work in Communist China, with the purpose of glorifying the group rather than the individual.¹⁷ Inscribed by local historians, who are usually constrained by the need to harmonise their oral findings to the correct Party lines, these memoirs are even less likely to represent individual testimonies than political stereotypes of historical truth. Because of their apparent deficiencies, Ralph Thaxton declares that these Chinese memoirs are of little value for the study of the Communist revolution and instead strives for the use of “peasant memory,” oral data that he claims to have recorded directly from the former peasant participants in the revolution.¹⁸ However, Thaxton’s advice is neither feasible for a Ph.D. student who works within a limited time frame¹⁹ nor always possible since many of the old cadres are already deceased. To discard these memoirs as historical sources, as Benton says, would mean “to close a main - in some cases the only - door to the past. The question is not whether but how to use them . . .”²⁰ With appropriate techniques, such as showing awareness to their peculiar way of compilation, carefully contextualising their information, and constantly cross-checking the data of one memoir with others, it is not impossible for historians to appraise the evidential values of Communists’ memoirs.²¹

Regarding the structure of this dissertation, it is divided into six chapters. The first one is a survey of the Communist movement in Guangdong from 1928 to 1936, which will discuss the reasons for the Party’s prewar failure as well as the legacy it left for wartime development. Chapter 2 examines how the formation of the Second United Front provided an opportunity for the Party to rebuild its defunct Party structure and

¹⁷ Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934-1938*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), xxi.

¹⁸ Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth*, xiii-xix.

¹⁹ Thaxton himself has spent eight years in gathering these data. See *ibid.*, xiii.

²⁰ Benton, *Mountain Fires*, xx.

²¹ For an excellent introduction to the proper use of memoirs and other Communist sources for historical studies, see Benton, *Mountain Fires*, xx-xxv and *id.*, *New Fourth Army*, 7-12. Benton’s brilliant books have set the model of critical approach and sound method for historians working on the heavily biased Communist sources.

reinvigorate the revolutionary movement in Guangdong. However, since Guangdong was a rear front in China during the first year of the war, the Party's aspiration to expand its strength was, to a large extent, suppressed by the concern of power realities to maintain a harmonious relationship with the GMD government.

Chapters 3 and 4 together form a case study of the Communist resistance in the East River valley. First, Chapter 3 traces the origins of the East River Column and its base from late 1938 up to 1943. It highlights how the restricted extent of Japanese occupation in the Guangdong mainland had created problems for the Party in attempting guerrilla mobilisation. Nevertheless, the East River guerrillas were able to survive throughout those harsh years, not least because of the extensive links between their base area and Hong Kong as well as other overseas Chinese communities. Then, Chapter 4 continues the story from the year 1944 which marks a new phase of the Communist struggle in the East River valley. In response to the Japanese Ichigo offensive, the Party Centre in Yan'an introduced in that year the notion of the "South China battlefield" and made serious efforts in transplanting the northern model of base area expansion to Guangdong. The climax of this work was despatching south two expeditionary forces from Yan'an to expedite the local base construction process. This design would have brought about a turning point to the revolutionary movement in Guangdong if it had not been frustrated by the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

Chapters 5 and 6 constitute another case study, namely, the Communist wartime activities in Hainan. In contrast to the East River Column, the Communist resistance force in Hainan was initially comprised of Red Army remnants. First, Chapter 5 shows how these former Red Army soldiers, under the command of Feng Baiju, were reorganised into a GMD-sanctioned anti-Japanese force. It also studies the GMD-CCP United Front in Hainan from its formal establishment in late 1938 to its eventual collapse in late 1940, signified by the GMD's attack on the Communist base in Meihe. Again, in contrast to the situation of the East River valley, where the scope of the Japanese domination was restricted, the whole of Hainan had basically fallen into the enemy's hands by 1940. The island's political-military condition was auspicious to the type of Communist expansion as favoured by Mao Zedong. Early in 1940, the Yan'an leaders had already desired to develop Hainan into a Communist stronghold in South China, but their plan eventually failed to materialise. Next, Chapter 6 tries to search for the reasons of its failure by first investigating the impact of the communication failure between

Yan'an and Hainan, then the three-way (GMD-Japan-CCP) military contest, and finally the traditional Li-Han ethnic hatred on the course of the Communist revolution in the island.

CHAPTER 1

BRIDGING THE GAP:
COMMUNISTS IN RURAL GUANGDONG, 1928-1936

Guangdong was once an important power base of the CCP. Here the Party tasted its first success in large-scale urban mobilisation during the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike of 1925. Sponsored by the United Front government in Guangzhou and benefiting immensely from the Party's organisational skills, this strike came close to ruining British Hong Kong and liquidating her interests in South China.¹ Also in Guangdong, the Party made its initial experiment in rural revolutionary strategy. Peng Pai almost single-handedly organised the first Chinese Communist peasant movement in his native Haifeng-Lufeng area, where a major rural soviet base was established in 1927 to provide leadership and organisational structure for peasant insurrection.² However, the popularity that the Party enjoyed under the First United Front did not last after its split with the GMD in April 1927. In the face of severe repression by the GMD, both the Guangzhou Uprising and the Hai-lu-feng Soviet ended in disastrous defeat. From then on, the Communist movement in Guangdong was at a low ebb.

The foregoing history is well-documented. What is little told is the fate of the Communists after the first surge of revolutionary fervour subsided. Most western studies on Guangdong Communism conclude in the year 1927 and leave an impression that the Communists thereafter disappeared entirely from the province. However, that is too simplistic. A brief survey of the Communists' activities between 1928 and 1936, as this chapter intends to do, will show that by the mid-1930s, the Guangdong Communists had continued to make active, albeit futile, attempts to revive their revolution. Moreover, it helps one to avoid the pitfalls of the "spotlight approach" which, as Kathleen Hartford rightly criticises, "illuminates key actors and events, but leaves in the shadow the action

¹ Ming K. Chan, "Labor and Empire: The Chinese Labor Movement in the Canton Delta, 1895-1927," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1975), 308-56; Chan Lau Kit-ching, *China, Britain and Hong Kong 1895-1945*, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990), 176-219; Daniel Y. K. Kwan, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Chinese Labor Movement: A Study of Deng Zhongxia (1894-1933)*, (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1997).

² Shinkichi Eto, "Hai-lu-feng - The First Chinese Soviet Government (Parts I & II), *China Quarterly*, no. 8 (Oct.-Dec. 1961): 161-83; no. 9 (Jan.-Mar. 1962): 149-81; Fernando Galbiati, *Peng Pai and the Hai-lu-feng Soviet*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1985); Roy Hofheinz, Jr. *The Broken Wave: The Chinese Communist Peasant Movement, 1922-1928*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 139-283; Robert Marks, *Rural Revolution in South China: Peasants and the Making of History in Haifeng County, 1570-1930*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

transpiring in the corners of the historical stage.”³ It is necessary to identify both the continuities and changes between the prewar and wartime Communist struggle in Guangdong and thus to bring the subsequent discussion on wartime Communism into proper perspective.

After the GMD started purging the Communists in Guangdong, the Party leaders had relocated their headquarters, the Guangdong Provincial Committee, from Guangzhou to Hong Kong. Apparently, this decision was made on the supposition that the British jurisdiction in the colony could offer a shelter for the Communists. However, the Communists' hope to establish a foothold for supervising their revolution on the other side of the border failed to materialise. Recently, Chan Lau Kit-ching has demolished the common misconception that Hong Kong had always been a political haven for Communist revolutionaries. Her research demonstrates that there was close cooperation between the governments of Guangdong and Hong Kong in eliminating the Communists; and, in consequence, “the danger posed by the British colony to the Communists did not seem to be significantly less than that they encountered in Guangdong.”⁴ From 1928 to 1934, the Hong Kong police constantly raided the Guangdong Party's underground headquarters, based on the information elicited from “renegades.” Many Party cadres (*ganbu*) were arrested and extradited to Guangzhou for execution. Despite the Communists' persistence in trying to restore their Party apparatus, which changed its title several times, by September 1934, the provincial command centre ceased to exist in Hong Kong.⁵

Chan's book is so far the only serious study which covers the Communist movement in Guangdong during 1928 to 1936. Unfortunately, Chan confines her scope of interest primarily to Hong Kong, and the findings of her work cannot be generalised to the whole of Guangdong. Similar to elsewhere in China, the Communist revolution in Guangdong after 1927 had shifted its centre of gravity to the countryside. Therefore, a study must examine the Communist activities in the rural setting of Guangdong in order

³ Kathleen Hartford, “Fits and Starts: The Chinese Communist Party in Rural Hebei, 1921-1936,” in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, 144.

⁴ Chan Lau Kit-ching, *From Nothing to Nothing: The Chinese Communist Movement and Hong Kong, 1921-1936*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), 202. According to Chan, the colonial government's attitude towards the CCP was hostile, partly because of its anti-Communist tradition which “had been firmly established by the time of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong Strike-Boycott in 1925-6” (p. 176) and partly because of the Party's radical movements in Hong Kong which threatened local order and stability.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 175; see also Li Miaoxiang, “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zai Xianggang,” [The Guangdong Provincial Committee in Hong Kong] in *Xianggang yu Zhongguo geming* [Hong Kong and the Chinese Revolution], ed. by Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1997), 41-8.

to arrive at a fuller picture of the revolutionary movement. The following discussion will trace the development of the two most important Communist rural soviet bases in Guangdong up till 1936, one in the East River region and the other on Hainan Island. They deserve our attention not only because their existence testifies to the Party's continual efforts in mobilising the peasantry in Guangdong after 1927, but also because it was within these two localities that the two major Communist wartime bases in South China later emerged.

I. The East River Revolutionary Base Area

In the Communist literature, the term "East River region" is a rather elastic one. It is used to designate the drainage basins of, in addition to the East River, the Han River and its tributary, the Mei River. In other words, it covers the whole of present-day eastern Guangdong plus the lower East River valley, which forms part of the Pearl River delta. The East River region is well-known as the cradle of Communists' peasant revolution because of Peng Pai and the soviet he founded in Hai-lu-feng. However, apart from Hai-lu-feng, peasant movements also developed in other parts of the region. Since 1928, the Party had established several small bases here,⁶ which, taken as a whole, constituted the so-called East River Revolutionary Base Area. Although these bases had never joined together to form an integral unit, for most of the time they were under, at least nominally, one unified command of leadership. This was known as the "East River Special Committee," whose embryonic form may have appeared as early as late April of 1927.

a. The Origins

Most of the Communist bases in the East River region owed their origins to the two eastern expeditions launched by the United Front government in Guangzhou in 1925 to push the warlord Chen Jiongming out of the province. Through sending native cadres to accompany the GMD army back to their home county as propagandists, the Party set up numerous secret cells in the region to reach out for new recruits. Under the GMD flag, it

⁶ There are certain disagreements about the exact number of these bases. Luo Shangxian believes that there were six constituent parts of the East River Base Area. See Luo Shangxian, "Tudi geming zhanzheng shiqi de Dongjiang geming genjudi" [The East River Base Area during the period of the Land Revolution], *Jindaishi yanjiu* [Research on modern history], no. 4 (1982), 45. Others hold that the number should be nine. See, for example, Chen Wan'an, Wang Yifan and Yao Chuanyuan, "Dongjiang geming genjudi jianjie," [An brief introduction to the East River Revolutionary Base Area,] *Guangdong dangshi ziliao* (GDZ) [Sources on the history of the Guangdong Communist Party], v. 12 (1988), 182-3. Their disagreements are easy to understand as these bases were never well-established, and their locations were constantly changing due to state suppression.

also organised peasant associations and fought for rent reduction. When the GMD started the purge in April 1927, the East River Communists and peasants responded vigorously to the call of the Party Centre and took up arms to protect the fruits of the revolution. In more than 15 counties, insurrections were recorded and some succeeded in capturing county capitals, albeit only for a few days. Except for Hai-lu-feng, where a relatively secure soviet government was constituted, no other Communist political structure survived the early phase of the GMD repression. At that time, many Guangdong Party leaders believed that the Hai-lu-feng Soviet held the key to the seizure of power in eastern Guangdong, which, in turn, would prepare the way for successful Communist control of the entire province. Even after the destruction of the soviet in early 1928, on Peng Pai's insistence, the Party leaders still strove painfully to recover Hai-lu-feng from the enemy.⁷ Only after repeated failures and the departure of Peng Pai for Shanghai in 1929 did some of them begin to search for a new locus of revolution.

It was in the Baxiang Mountain that the fire of the revolution was revived. Standing on the county borders of Jiayang, Wuhua, and Fengshun, the development of the Baxiang Mountain into a Communist hotbed was very much the effort of Gu Dacun. Gu was a native of Wuhua County, who studied in Guangzhou and joined the Party in 1924.⁸ The following year, Gu participated in the two eastern expeditions, the first time as a "war-area propagandist" and the second time as a peasant mobiliser.⁹ By the spring of 1926, Gu was in Wuhua organising peasants' struggles against landlords charging exorbitant rents and against rapacious merchants for manipulating the price of rice.¹⁰ If Gu's action did sow any seeds of peasant activism, they nevertheless failed to bear fruit because of the collapse of the First United Front. In early 1928, a large-scale military suppression hit Wuhua, forcing Gu and his some twenty followers to take refuge in the Baxiang Mountain.¹¹

Covered by rugged terrain and thick forest, the Baxiang Mountain was an ideal ground for guerrilla deployment. Initially, Gu's band worked as hired farm labourers for

⁷ Lin Zemin, "Hailuhuizi geming genjudi de chuangjian he fazhan," [The Establishment and Historical Functions of the Hailuhuizi Special Committee], *Dongjiang dangshi ziliao huibian (DDZH)* [Collected materials on the history of the Communist Party in the East River region], v. 6 (1985), 13-4.

⁸ Gu Dacun, "Gu Dacun huiyilu" [The memoir of Gu Dacun], *Guangdong wenshi ziliao (GWZ)* [Sources on the culture and history of Guangdong], v. 32 (1981), 1-2; Yang Qing, Yang Miaoli and Yang Sen, "Gu Dacun," *Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan* [Biographies of historical figures of the Chinese Communist Party], v. 5, ed. by Zhonggong dangshi renwu yanjiuhui, (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 270-1.

⁹ Gu Dacun, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-10; Yang Qing, et. al., 274-8.

¹¹ Gu Dacun, 13-4.

the landlords residing below the mountain. A few months later, they began organising poor peasants and hired farm workers into peasant associations. As Gu recalled, at that time, the “white terror” had deterred many peasants from dealing with the Communists. To relieve their fear, he employed secret society practices like drinking chicken blood and swearing oaths of brotherhood to win their trust.¹² Ostensibly, the method brought good results. In August 1928, Gu launched an insurrection in Shekeng of Meixian concurrently with the Party’s followers from the neighbouring five counties (Wuhua, Fengshun, Meixian, Xingning and Dabu), which was said to have mobilised several thousand peasants and seized “large quantities of materials” from the local militias.¹³ The hard work of Gu and his comrades eventually paid off when the East River Special Committee decided to relocate its headquarters to the Baxiang Mountain in 1929. Gu was appointed a member of the committee and was put in charge of military affairs.

b. The Way to a New Soviet

The Baxiang Mountain aside, from mid-1929 onwards, small Communist bases also sprang up in other parts of eastern Guangdong. Without exception, they were all located on the borders of two or more counties, for example, Wu-Xing-Long (Wuhua-Xingning-Longchuan), Mei-Bu-Feng (Meixian-Dabu-Fengshun), Rao-He-Bu-Zhao (Raoping-Pinghe-Dabu-Zhao’an) and Hai-Lu-Hui-Zi (Haifeng-Lufeng-Huiyang-Zijin).¹⁴ The mushrooming of these Communist bases was made possible, first and foremost, by the factional strife within the GMD government. In March 1929, Chiang Kai-shek¹⁵ waged a war against the Guangxi Clique with the objective of curbing the latter’s growing military strength. To ensure his success, Chiang deceived Li Jishen, the warlord of Guangdong and an ally of the Guangxi Clique, to leave Guangzhou for Nanjing. Soon after Li arrived in that city, Chiang had him house-arrested. The incident provided a chance for Chen Jitang, a subordinate of Li, to lay hold on his superior’s position and become the ruler of Guangdong until 1936. Before early 1931, Chen adopted a pro-Chiang stand and engaged in a series of wars, first, with the Guangxi Clique, and, later,

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Gu Dacun, 15-7; Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui, Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui and Dongjiang geming genjudi dangshi ziliao zhengji bianxie xiezuo chu lingdao xiaozu, comp., *Dongjiang geming genjudishi* [A history of the East River Revolutionary Base Area], (Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1989), 91-5. (Hereafter cited as *Dongjiang geming genjudishi*).

¹⁴ For an overview of the development of these bases, see *Dongjiang geming genjudishi*, 119-33.

¹⁵ While the pinyin system is adopted throughout this dissertation, for some proper names such as Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen, the more popular Wade-Giles renderings are used.

with the combined forces of the clique and Zhang Fakui. The government pulling out army units for battles on the western fronts thus created a breathing space for the Communists.

In 1929, the East River Communists implemented land reform to elevate the Party's popularity among the peasantry. Jack Gray observes that since the CCP had made land reform a main component of its rural revolution, it had been fluctuating between two poles derived from two contrasting assumptions. As he shrewdly sums up:

On the one hand, there was the assumption that the more radical the policy of land reform the more solid would be the peasant support created. On the other hand, there was the assumption that the most solid support would be attained by compromise policies which would ensure firm majority commitment to the revolution, while doing no more injury to the interests of the more prosperous than was necessary to attain that end.¹⁶

The directive, which contained guidelines for land redistribution given by the East River Special Committee to different soviet bases in October of that year, exhibited elements of the second assumption. In Article One, for instance, it stated that the land of rich peasants was not to be confiscated except that which had been rented out to tenants or farmed by hired workers. Therefore, a rich peasant who was primarily an owner-cultivator would not have his name in the Communists' confiscation list. Moreover, it was only when a *xiang* had inadequate land to allocate to all poor peasants would rich peasants be persuaded to give up some of their lands. However, it was particularly emphasised in the directive that no political force should ever be used to achieve this purpose.¹⁷ Evidently, behind the lenient treatments of the rich peasants was the consideration that the rich peasants as a class should be "neutralised" rather than eliminated in the process of rural revolution. The Party would be wise to avoid pushing the rich peasants out of the revolution and increasing the number of its own enemies.¹⁸

Besides, the land reform in the East River region also demonstrated a high level of practicality. For example, the principle of *yiduo bushao, yiyou buwu* (to supplement the less with the excess, the 'have-not' with the 'have') was adopted in redistributing land. It

¹⁶ Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 1980s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 266.

¹⁷ "Zhonggong Dongjiang tewe tonggao (di shijiu hao)" [A notice of the East River Party Special Committee (number 19)] (19 October 1929), *Guangdong geming lishi wenjian huiji (GGLWH)* [Collected documents of revolutionary history in Guangdong], v. 28, comp. by Zhongyang dang'anguan and Guangdong sheng dang'anguan, (internal publication, 1984-92), 41-2, 45.

¹⁸ Cf. "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dierci kuodi huiyi guanyu nongcai gongzuo jueyi'an" [Resolution of the Second Extended Meeting held by the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the work in villages] (November 1928), *GGLWH*, v. 13, 138, 142-3.

aimed to correct the former policy of the Hai-lu-feng base, in which the soviet government began its reform by confiscating the land of all people disregarding their class background. After calculating the total amount of land available and working out a quota for each peasant, the soviet then allotted land accordingly. While this "absolute egalitarian" method wanted to ensure an exactly equal share of land for everyone, it soon proved extremely bothersome and disturbed the routines of the farmers. Further, since many peasants were allotted land other than their original pieces, they were very much annoyed. Now with the new *yiduo bushao, yiyou buwu* principles, only the land of the landlords (and the "surplus" land of rich peasants) were confiscated and redistributed to peasants who had little or no land. Although by the new method farmers would not have the same amount of land, on the whole, most poor peasants and hired farm labourers did benefit.¹⁹

Communist literature praises that the agrarian reform in 1929 was successful in improving the peasants' livelihood and cultivating mass support for the Party. To keep step with the surge of this revolutionary tide, the East River Special Committee convened a congress on 1 May 1930 and formally declared the establishment of the East River Soviet Government. The congress also initiated the formation of the Eleventh Red Army, which placed individual East River guerrilla forces under one unified command. Gu was the commander-in-chief of this Red Army, but his authority was subordinated to a newly-established military committee led by Yan Hanzhang, at that time also the secretary of the East River Special Committee. In that year, the East River Communists had a government which ruled a population of over one million and controlled an army of more than 3,000 troops.²⁰

c. The Demise of the Rural Bases

Regardless of whether the revival of Communist revolution in the East River region was apparent or real, what hastened its collapse was, first of all, the "leftist excesses" of the Party's revolutionary strategy, which urged radical actions in defiance of objective conditions. In mid-1930, the Li Lisan Line began to dominate the Party Centre. Sparked off by an unfounded optimism of an imminent world revolution, this insurrection policy insisted on a Communist offensive in cities to achieve nationwide mass mobilisation. Working under its shadow, the Guangdong Provincial Committee ordered

¹⁹ Ibid., 42-3, 47.

²⁰ *Dongjiang geming genjudishi*, 134-47.

attacks on regional cities as preparation for the ultimate seizure of Guangzhou. In the East River Base Area, the Li Lisan Line brought Yan Hanzhang and Gu Dacun into conflict. Yan, fully embracing the Party Centre's optimism, ordered Gu and the Eleventh Red Army to capture Chaozhou city. Considering that suicidal, Gu argued that the Red Army should take the towns of Wuhua and Fengshun, where the GMD's defences were weaker. Probably by invoking Party discipline, Yang made Gu submit to his order of attacking (three times altogether) Chaozhou city, which brought nothing to the Communists except heavy casualties.²¹

Another bone of contention between Yan and Gu was the location of the East River Special Committee. Even before the ascendancy of the Li Lisan Line, Yang had already proposed a relocation of the Committee from the Baxiang Mountain to the Danan Mountain of Huilai County. He stressed that its proximity to the coast would facilitate communication between the Provincial Committee in Hong Kong and the East River Special Committee via sea transportation as well as give the Party a better position to direct urban mobilisation than the remote Baxiang Mountain. This idea was opposed by Gu, who felt that the terrain of the small Danan Mountain was far from ideal for guerrilla deployment. More importantly, Gu believed that the future of the revolutionary movement in the East River region lay not in capturing coastal cities. Rather, it should strive for expansion to the mountainous areas in northeast Guangdong so that the East River Base Area could eventually join other Communist bases in southern Jiangxi and Fujian and play upon the administrative confusion in the border region for survival.²² Gu's aspiration, however, was interpreted by Yan as "mountain-topism," that Gu cherished more protecting his own power base than the expansion of the Communist movement. Despite Gu's strong protest, Yan had the Committee's headquarters transplanted to Danan Mountain in late 1930.

The rule of the Li Lisan Line did not last long in the CCP, but "leftist excesses" reemerged following the rise of Wang Ming and the Internationalists. This time it took the form of a militant line towards rich peasants. In 1931, the East River Soviet Government officially adopted the anti-rich peasant policy. It passed a new land law which authorised the confiscation of all rich peasants' land and specified that they would only be allotted land of poor quality. The law also intensified attacks on landlords. No

²¹ Ibid., 149-50; Huang Zhenwei, *Guangdong geming genjuishi* [A history of the revolutionary bases in Guangdong], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1993), 175-6.

²² Gu Dacun, 20-1, 26.

member of the landlord class, whether rich or poor, would be given land for subsistence. Furthermore, the egalitarian method of land redistribution was reinstated.²³

As one would expect, this radical agrarian reform created much discontentment in the soviet bases. Since land had to be redistributed again, it greatly disturbed the production of farmers. In some bases, cadres reported that they had to redistribute land several times in order to ensure absolute equality. Moreover, many abuses arose because local cadres mishandled the reform. It was noticed that in some villages where Party cadres were too enthusiastic they confiscated not only the land but also the other property of rich peasants. In fact, since Party cadres generally lacked guidelines in differentiating middle peasants from rich peasants, they often mistook the well-off middle peasants as rich peasants. Consequently, the anti-rich peasant measures also undermined the faith of the middle peasants in the Party.²⁴

Another incident, allegedly related to "leftist excesses" and bringing destructive results to the East River Base Area, was the Anti-AB Corps Campaign.²⁵ The origins and nature of this movement have puzzled many historians;²⁶ but attributing it solely to Wang Ming's political line, the standard historiography of mainland China, carries little persuasion. Unfortunately, the scarcity of relevant materials precludes any attempt to arrive at a clear understanding of the incident. However, one thing that is certain is that the Anti-AB Corps Campaign in Guangdong was as devastating to the Party as it was elsewhere. The campaign's chief reliance on the method of *bigongxin* (torture, confession, credulity), rather than careful and thorough investigation, to elicit evidence from AB Corps' suspects had opened the floodgate for abuses. Aggressive individuals easily exploited the campaign to purge dissenters from the Party. Gu Dacun estimated that the Anti-AB Corps Campaign in the East River soviet bases caused the death of about

²³ *Dongjiang geming genjudishi*, 185-6, 232-4.

²⁴ "Zhonggong Dongjiang tewei Xu Gusheng ji Zhongyang de baogao" [A report to the Party Centre by Xu Gusheng of the East River Party Special Committee] (12 November 1932), *GGLWH*, v. 29, 417.

²⁵ The AB Corps was originally a secret body founded by members of the GMD in early 1927 to carry out subversive activities against the CCP. The initials "AB" of the group's name was popularly interpreted as "anti-Bolshevik." However, it actually stood for the two-level structure (provincial and county) of this organisation. See Warren Kuo ed., *A Comprehensive Glossary of Chinese Communist Terminology*, (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1978), s.v. "Ei pi [AB] t'uan."

²⁶ Virtually nothing substantial has ever been written on the rise of the Anti-AB Corps Campaign in places other than Jiangxi, where the movement led to the Futian incident. While some scholars such as Chen Yung-fa interpret the incident as basically an intra-Party power struggle between Mao Zedong and Li Wenlin, others such as Stephen Averill believe that its roots can be traced back to the specific social and political environment of the complex society of the Jiangxi hill country. See Chen Yung-fa, "The Futian Incident and the Anti-Bolshevik League: 'Terror' in the CCP Revolution," *Republican China*, 19, issue 2 (April 1994): 1-51 and Stephen C. Averill, "The Origins of the Futian Incident," in *New Perspectives*, 79-115.

one thousand officials and soldiers in the Eleventh Red Army and was directly responsible for its eventual dissolution.²⁷ Several hundred Party cadres are thought to have been executed too, although no figures are available.

Even worse, the Anti-AB Corps Campaign struck the East River soviet bases at a time when the GMD government in Guangdong stepped up its pacification efforts against the "Communist bandits." In late 1930, troops were moving into northeast Guangdong and beginning to wipe out Communist bases along the borders of Guangdong, Jiangxi and Fujian. The objective of this military operation was to assist Chiang Kai-shek's "encirclement campaigns" of the Jiangxi Soviet by blocking the ways for Zhu-Mao Red Army to retreat once they were defeated. In the East River region, the soviet bases in the Baxiang Mountain, Mei-Bu-Feng, Wu-Xing-Long and Jiao-Ping-Xun became the targets of the GMD army. Already divided by internal struggles, these bases could not stand before the GMD's overwhelming forces. They all disintegrated by the end of 1931, and cadres had to go underground or escape to other bases. In the Baxiang Mountain, Gu preserved the strength of the Red Army by withdrawing it to the nearby county of Zijin. Later, he and his troops were summoned by the East River Special Committee to the Danan Mountain base; but upon his arrival, Gu was taken into custody as an AB Corps' suspect. He was fortunate enough not to be killed, only to be demoted to Luhui as the secretary of the county Party.²⁸

Another wave of bandit suppression followed soon, and this time on a much grander scale. Similar to the previous one, this effort was intended to be a collaboration with Chiang's encirclement campaigns (the fourth and the fifth ones) of the Jiangxi Soviet. Some Communist historians believe that the recurring military suppressions indicated Chen Jitang's determination to free Guangdong from the menace of Communism and thereby consolidate his own rule in the province. However, it seems more likely that what Chen feared were Chiang Kai-shek and his central government army. A Communist presence in Guangdong, although slight, would nevertheless give Chiang a convenient pretext to intervene in the politics of Guangdong. This was especially plausible in view of the fact that Chiang's troops were already stationed in the neighbouring province, fighting against the Communists, and thus "in a position to chase Communist forces over the border into Guangdong and then to contest Chen Jitang's hold

²⁷ Gu Dacun, 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

on the province."²⁹ Chen had to be vigilant in suppressing Communists in order to keep Chiang and the central government out of his territory.

In early 1932, Chen appointed General Li Yangjing to suppress the Communist bases in the coastal counties of eastern Guangdong. With a total force of more than 15,000 troops, Li extirpated the soviet bases one by one.³⁰ In the Danan Mountain, although Gu Dacun was recalled to command the Red Army, he alone could not turn the tide. In June 1935, deeming that the base area could no longer survive, Gu suggested that the East River Special Committee withdraw. He made a plan for the remaining few hundred cadres and soldiers to be divided into small cells and retreat one after another. Unfortunately, Li Chongsan, the then secretary of the Committee, was arrested by the government during his flight. Based on the information elicited from him, the GMD troops searched out and eradicated most of the Communist remnants in the Danan Mountain. Li also supplied the GMD with details about the locations of secret Party branches in eastern Guangdong, many of which were then raided by the GMD police.³¹

By mid-1935, the Communist revolution, as an organised peasant movement, had ceased to exist in the East River region. Survivors of the collapsed soviet bases, however, kept on fighting for the revolution. Cadres in Chao-Cheng-Yao-Ao, for example, opened up new areas of guerrilla warfare along the Min-Yue border. They later participated in the Three-year Guerrilla War under the lead of the Min-Yue Special Committee. On the other hand, Gu Dacun and seventeen survivors who had escaped from the siege of the Danan Mountain Base stayed underground in Dabu County. Working as labourers in a local bowl-making factory, they continued to struggle against the GMD government until the outbreak of the war in 1937.³²

II. The Hainan Revolutionary Base Area

a. From City to Countryside

Communist activities in Hainan began in 1924, when a number of native members, either on the Party's instruction or out of their own initiative, went home to disseminate Marxism and other progressive ideas. Nevertheless, significant progress was

²⁹ John Fitzgerald, "Warlords, Bullies, and State Building in Nationalist China: The Guangdong Cooperative Movement, 1932-1936," *Modern China*, v. 23, no. 4 (October 1997), 429.

³⁰ *Dongjiang geming genjudishi*, 243-4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 262-3; Gu Dacun, 33.

³² Gu Dacun, 34-5.

attained only after the United Front government invaded Hainan in 1925 and expelled the local warlord Deng Benyin from the island. More than two hundred Communist mass workers, most of them Hainanese students, had participated in this expedition. Under the shield of the United Front, they met little resistance in attempting popular mobilisation. In 1926, a labour union was founded in Haikou, which claimed to have a membership of 4,000, among whom were industrial workers, mechanics, boat operators and salespersons. By the end of the year, peasant associations were organised in many counties. Altogether, they boasted a membership of more than 100,000. Peasants' self-defence forces also appeared sooner or later. Over a thousand peasants were said to have participated in classes convened by the "peasant training institutes," which aimed to equip peasants with political and military knowledge.³³ Also in 1926, the Party set up its first branch in Hainan known as the Party Committee of the Hainan Area, later superseded by the Hainan Special Committee. It was headed by Wang Wenming, a Hainan native and a prominent student movement leader of Hainan during the May Fourth period.

On 22 April 1927, the GMD police in the Haikou-Fucheng area, the commercial and administrative centres of Hainan, began to arrest Communists. Barely escaping, the senior leaders of the Hainan Special Committee hid themselves in Wang Wenming's home in the county of Lehui. A few months later, using the trainees from the peasant training institutes as the core, they organised a peasant army whose ranks grew quickly to a thousand men.³⁴ In September, the Hainan Communists complied with the Party Centre's call for armed insurrections during the autumn harvest and attacked Jaiji, the second largest city in Hainan. Owing to bad tactics and poor coordination, the operation was defeated, and the peasant army was forced to withdraw back to the countryside of Lehui where they built a small guerrilla base. Under the leadership of Wang Wenming, the Hainan Communists went further south and, by the end of 1927, successfully erected a few other soviet bases in Wanning, Lingshui and Yaxian Counties.³⁵

³³ Li Liming, "Qiongya geming douzheng de huiyi" [Reminiscences of the revolutionary struggle in Hainan], *GDZ*, v. 6 (1985), 49-53; Xiao Huanhui, "Hainan remin zaoqi de geming douzheng" [The early revolutionary struggle of the Hainan people], *GDZ*, v. 5 (n.p.d.), 58-61; Qiongya wuzhuang douzhengshi bangongshi comp., *Qiongya zongduishi (QZS)* [A history of the Hainan Column], (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 3-5.

³⁴ *QZS*, 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-5; Li Liming, 67.

b. The Li Tribe and Revolutionary Movement

One outstanding feature of the Communist movement in Hainan was the involvement of its aboriginal people, the Lis. Concerning their origins, anthropologists have no definite knowledge.³⁶ The Lis are said to have consisted of many tribes but the four major ones are the Xiao, the Qi, the Bendi and the Meifu. The Lis can also be classified by the extent of their contact with the Han Chinese. Those who have been assimilated into the Han civilisation are called the “tame” Lis (*Shou Li*). The Lis who had been driven inland and settled in the mountainous interior of Hainan are the “wild” Lis (*Sheng Li*). Isolated from the Han Chinese, these “wild” Lis, in many ways, kept their original living style untouched and relied on farming and hunting for subsistence.³⁷ There are no reliable statistics on the Li population in the Republican era. One encounters figures roughly from 200,000 to 490,000.³⁸

The Lis have a long record of rebellion against the Chinese central governments throughout Imperial history. Many have explained this phenomenon in terms of the “wild” or “barbarous” nature of the Li people, but such an approach suggests little more than a cultural disdain of the Han Chinese for the Lis. In fact, most Li rebellions represented a reaction against the territorial encroachment of the Han Chinese upon Li inhabitants. Also, much ethnic hatred of the Lis towards the Han settlers was the result of their exploitation by rapacious Chinese merchants.³⁹ For most of their reign, the GMD authorities did little to interfere with the Lis’ way of living. Not until 1935 did they establish three new counties, Baisha, Yuedong and Baoting, in the Lis’ district of central Hainan to exercise greater control over them. In 1936, Nanjing announced its intention to

³⁶ Some maintain that they were originally a tribe residing in the area of Guangdong and Guangxi who migrated to the island during the Neolithic age. Others believe that the Lis came from the “South Pacific” (today’s Malaysia and Indonesia) since they shared certain common characteristics in social organisation as well as customs with the native people there. See *Hainan Lizu, Miaozu zizhizhou gaikuang* [A brief account of the Hainan Li and Miao Autonomous Prefecture], (Guangdong remin chubanshe, 1986), 44-5. (Hereafter cited as *Zizhizhou gaikuang*).

³⁷ Han Liu, “Hainan: The Island and the People,” *The China Journal*, v. 29, no. 6 (December 1938), 309-10; *Qiongzhou Fuzhi* [Local history of Qiongzhou Prefecture in Guangdong], v. 1, chapter 20, facsimile of the 1980 revision of the 1941 edition, *Zhongguo fangzhi zongshu* [Local history of China series], (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967), 448; Xu Chonghao, *Qiongya zhilüe* [A short geography of Hainan Island], (Zhengzhong shuju, 1947), 75.

³⁸ Xu Chonghao, 62; Guangdong jingji nainjian bianzhan weiyuanhui, *Guangdong jingji nianjian* [Economic yearbook of Guangdong], v. 1, (Guangzhou: Guangdongsheng yinhang jingji yanjiushi, 1941), C-80; *Hainandao zhengzhi jingji shenhui wenhua jiyao*, [An outline of the political, economic, and social conditions of Hainan], (Singapore: Nanyang yingshu Qiongzhou huihuan lianhehui, 1947), 16. (Hereafter cited as *Hainandao jiyao*).

³⁹ Cf. Xu Chonghao, 73-4; 95-6. For a thorough study of the Li-Han conflicts and the mediating role of the central government between the two groups from the period of Han to High Qing, see Anne Alice Csete, “A Frontier Minority in the Chinese World: the Li people of Hainan Island from the Han through the High Qing,” (Ph.D. diss., University of New York at Buffalo, 1995).

develop the economy of Hainan. This immediately triggered a reckless land speculation in the island, which generated tremendous discontentment among the Li people. Many of them were forced to sell their land to powerful Chinese investors, who had the support of government officials. However, due to the outbreak of the war with Japan, Nanjing had to abandon its plan for Hainan, and the incident was prevented from escalating into open confrontation between the Lis and the GMD government.⁴⁰

The Lis are known to have participated in the Hainan Communist movement as early as the 1920s. The initial collaboration between the Lis and the Party was forged by a number of Li natives who became Communists while studying in Guangzhou. They later returned home to develop Party work. In 1927, a Party branch was established in the county of Lingshui. Its secretary was Huang Zhenshi, the son of a local Li chieftain (*dong zhu*). For the sake of strengthening the Communist presence in Lingshui, Huang tried to organise a Communist military force composed principally of Li peasants.⁴¹ He also realised that his aspiration would not be achieved without the support of other local Li chieftains, especially Wang Zhaoyi.

Wang came from an extremely wealthy landlord family in the Baoting district of Lingshui. Since his father's time, the Wang family had been charged by the government to oversee the "Li affairs" of Baoting. Owing to this duty, Wang Zhaoyi commanded a well-equipped Li militia force,⁴² whose service Huang Zhenshi hoped very much to enlist. To win Wang over to the Party, Huang Zhenshi and another Party cadre, Chen Zhefu, arranged for Wu Juequn (Chen's former classmate and the daughter of a pro-Communist Li chieftain, Wu Zhongyu) to become Wang's concubine. The "marriage" was said to have made Wang "enthusiastic" and "vigorous" towards the revolution.⁴³ He joined the Party and became the commander-in-chief of the peasant army in Lingshui,

⁴⁰ Wang Xingrui, *Hainandao zhi Miaoren* [The Miao people in Hainan Island], (Zhuhai daxue chubanshe, 1948), 113-5.

⁴¹ *Zizhizhou gaikuang*, 67-8.

⁴² Fu Heji, "Zhuanqishi beiju renwu - jindai lizu touren Wang Zhaoyi shengping huodong" [A dramatic tragic personage - the life and activities of a modern Li chief Wang Zhaoyi], *Hainan wenshi ziliao* [Sources on the culture and history of Hainan], 8 (October 1993), 150-1; Zheng Youkun, "Wosuo zhidao de lizu touren Wang Weichang Wang Zhaoyi fuzi" [The Li chiefs whom I know as father and son - Wang Weichang and Wang Zhaoyi], *Tongshi wenshi* [The culture and history of Tongshi], 3 (April 1993), 19, 25.

⁴³ Fu Heji, 152; Zheng Youkun, 26; Hu Xuezhong and Zhang Yunhuang, "Huang Zhenshi," in *Qiongya yingliezhuan* [Biographies of the heroic martyrs in Hainan], v. 1, ed. by Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi and Hainansheng minzhengting, (Hainan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 142-3; Zhonggong Lingshui xianwei dangshi bangongshi, "Lingshui qiyi he Qiongya diyige suwei'ai zhengquan" [The uprising of Lingshui and the first soviet type of political entity in Hainan] in *Qiongya diyige suwei'ai zhengquan* [The first soviet type of political entity in Hainan], ed. by Zhonggong Lingshui xianwei dangshi bangongshi, (internal publication, 1987), 13.

which comprised mainly the militia men of the local Li chieftains. In late 1927, Wang captured the county seat of Lingshui and helped the Party establish its first county-level soviet base in Hainan.⁴⁴

Wang Zhaoyi's loyalty to the Party faded soon, however. In February 1928, the Hainan Party ordered Wang to invade Yaxian as a way to consolidate the Communists' presence in southern Hainan. Wang refused to take up the task on the excuse of ill-health. In fact, by that time, he had already defected to the GMD and had made a secret deal with the magistrate of Yaxian, Wang Mingya. Although the Party had no knowledge about that, it nevertheless sensed that Wang Zhaoyi was politically wavering. Some Party leaders, therefore, intended to depose him as the commander of the Lingshui peasant army but refrained from taking hasty action for the fear of alarming Wang.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the Party proceeded with the campaign to conquer Yaxian. Unfortunately, without the backup of Wang Zhaoyi's personal force, they suffered a bitter defeat. In March, on their way back to Lingshui, the Communist army fell into the trap of Wang Zhaoyi. He tricked the Communist commanders away from their troops and had them murdered. The soldiers left behind were either imprisoned or executed. A few days later, taking advantage of the main Communist peasant army's move north from Lingshui to defend the Lehui Soviet against GMD attack, Wangs' two forces occupied the town of Lingshui and dissolved the soviet government.⁴⁶ Wang Zhaoyi was later appointed magistrate of Lingshui by the GMD government.

The reason Wang betrayed the Party is open to debate. Communist sources say that it was because he was not appointed chairman to the Lingshui Soviet Government.⁴⁷ To a certain extent, this explanation holds to the truth. Given Wang's contribution to the Communists' conquest of Lingshui, his expectation of being rewarded a key post in the newly-established soviet was understandable. Equally strong was Wang's immense dissatisfaction when he knew that the Party had no intention of giving him what he wanted. One plausible reason the Party treated Wang in such a way was his background. In early 1928, the Guangdong Provincial Committee had been pressing hard on the Hainan Special Committee for a militant line against the landlord class (see below). It

⁴⁴ *QZS*, 29.

⁴⁵ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zhi Qiongya tewei xin" [Letter from the Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Hainan Special Committee] (26 April 1928), *GGLWH*, v. 9, 385.

⁴⁶ Li Liming, 69; *QZS*, 35-36.

⁴⁷ Fu Heji, 154; Li Liming, 69; Chen Yunming and Xing San, "Wang Zhaoyi," *Baoting wenshi* [The culture and history of Baoting] 4 (July 1989), 65.

would be a great embarrassment for the Hainan Communists if they installed at this moment a wealthy landlord, such as Wang Zhaoyi, to the chairmanship of the Lingshui Soviet. Another plausible reason was that the Party leaders despised Wang as an opportunist who was merely using the revolution for personal gain, for he was found seizing inhabitants' possessions without the Party's consent after the occupation of the town of Lingshui.⁴⁸ Therefore, in addition to harsh reproaches, they deprived Wang of any major position in the soviet.

A noteworthy point is that Wang Zhaoyi was not the only Li who was dissatisfied with the Party. According to a study by two Chinese historians, many Li chieftains in Lingshui, who initially sided with the Communists and contributed their men to the peasant army, shared a similar discontent. The reason was that few of them were assigned to senior posts either in the soviet government or in Party organisations, even though they were instrumental in instating Communist rule in Lingshui. Whether such an arrangement implied any racial discrimination is difficult to tell, but it certainly aroused the Lis' traditional suspicion of the Han Chinese. Instinctively, the Lis perceived their underrepresentation in the decision-making bodies as evidence of distrust and disparagement. Their loyalty to the Party was quickly undermined, and this ultimately accounted for the swift downfall of the Lingshui soviet base.⁴⁹ This argument looks persuasive, especially in light of the same insensitivity towards the ethnic tension by the Party in Guangxi. In that parallel case, the Party entrusted all the key posts in the Right River Soviet to the Han cadres even though the peasant movement led by the local Zhuang leaders had laid the indispensable groundwork for the establishment of the soviet in the late 1920s.⁵⁰ From this point of view, Wang's betrayal of the Party could be another example of the Communists' ineptitude in handling ethnic relations within the revolution.

c. Conflicts over the Pursuit of the Revolution

Apart from the ethnic problem, the Hainan Communist movement was also characterised by constant disputes between the two levels of Party leadership in Guangdong and in Hainan. While this kind of intra-Party conflict was rather common in

⁴⁸ Fu Heji, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Chen Jingci and Huang Mingzhao, "Qianxi Lingshui qiyi shoucuo de yuanyin" [A preliminary analysis of the reasons for the defeat of the Lingshui Uprising] in *Qiongya diyige suwei'ai zhengquan*, 124-5.

⁵⁰ Diana Lary, "Communism and Ethnic Revolt: Some Notes on the Chuang Peasant Movement in Kwangsi 1921-31," *The China Quarterly*, no. 49 (January/March 1972), 131.

the history of the CCP, the case of Hainan seemed particularly bad. From the very beginning, the island's geographical separation from the mainland had given the Hainan local cadres a legitimate and convenient justification to argue for a different approach to the revolution from that pursued in the rest of Guangdong. The situation was aggravated by communication backwardness.⁵¹ More often than not, when problems arose concerning the revolution, the Hainan Communists had to rely on their own judgement rather than wait for instructions from above. Gradually, the Hainan Party developed an independent spirit which, although enabling the Communist revolution to sink roots in the local society, eroded the grip of the Guangdong provincial leadership over their Hainan subordinates.

One issue which strained the relation between the Hainan cadres and their mainland superiors in the late 1920s was whether the local revolution should set its top priority on the capturing of Haikou-Fucheng. Communist historians claim that the Guangdong Provincial Committee, plagued by Qu Qiubai's "leftist putschism," insisted on doing so. To the Guangdong Party leaders, the seizure of Haikou-Fucheng was perceived as the key to the control of the whole island, and they thus compelled the Hainan cadres to accomplish the task as soon as possible.⁵²

To the Hainan Communists, the goal set by the Guangdong Provincial Committee sounded too idealistic. The reason was because the two cities, Haikou and Fucheng, were not only garrisoned by the GMD army but were also surrounded by plenty of militia forces, which were either pro-GMD or hostile to the Communists. The peasant army which the Party relied upon was, by and large, small in size, ill-trained and short of ammunition. Realising their own weaknesses, Wang Wenming and the Hainan Special Committee turned their attention to southern Hainan where the power of the GMD and the "reactionaries" was weaker. It was their intention that when the Communists' position in the south was consolidated, they would return north to take over Haikou-Fucheng.⁵³ In some way, this insurrection strategy corresponded to "the encircling of the cities by

⁵¹ Before radio link was established, communication between the Hainan Party and the Provincial Committee in Hong Kong was maintained by courier - a system which often took one month for a piece of information to be transmitted. Cf. "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei fu Qiongya teweixin" [Letter from the Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Hainan Special Committee] (20 January 1928), *GGLWH*, v. 8, 121-2.

⁵² *QZS*, 17, 30; Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi comp., *Hongqi budao - Zhonggong Qiongya difangshi* [The red flag that does not fall - a local history of the Chinese Communist Party in Hainan], (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubenshe, 1995), 103-8, 119-26. (Hereafter cited as *Hongqi budao*).

⁵³ Li Liming, 67; "Zhonggong Qiongya teweibaogao" [Report of the Hainan Special Committee] (27 December 1927), *GGLWH*, v. 23, 5.

villages” later claimed to have been devised by Mao Zedong. At that time, however, it was denounced by the Guangdong Provincial Committee as an expression of “defeatism.”

Another major issue of dispute was land reform. Incited by the apparent success of Peng Pai’s agrarian revolution in Hai-lu-feng,⁵⁴ the Guangdong Party maintained in late 1927 that a radical land reform would best cultivate peasant activism.⁵⁵ Under the slogan “land to the tillers,” Party cadres everywhere in the province were instructed to confiscate relentlessly the properties of landlords and other “anti-revolutionaries.” In January of 1928, the Provincial Committee further commanded the Hainan Party to deepen its agrarian revolution by exterminating all feudalistic forces in the soviet bases. This would include the massacre of all wealthy landlord-gentry, whether they were “local bullies and evil gentry” or not.⁵⁶

Contrary to their comrades in Hai-lu-feng, the Hainan Communists were more aware of their fragile presence in the countryside. They, therefore, opted for a more conciliatory stance in pursuing their agrarian reform. The “Temporary Resolutions on the Land Question,” passed by the Leihui Soviet in January 1928, exhibited many similarities with the moderate land redistribution later implemented in the East River Base Area in 1929. Notably, both stipulated that after a landlord’s land was confiscated, he and his family would be allotted a small piece of (poor) land to support their living.⁵⁷ There was no massive slaughter of landlords. Only those who were classified as “local bullies and evil gentry” would be executed publicly as a lesson to others.⁵⁸ On the whole, the land reform in Hainan was confined to attacking the wealthy and despotic landlords. The cooperation of the “progressive gentry” and small landlords was consciously sought. In Lingshui and Leihui, some of them were even assigned to minor responsibilities in the

⁵⁴ Cf. Shinkichi Eto, “Hai-lu-feng (Part II),” 156-60, 168-9, 174-6; Robert B. Marks, 234-62.

⁵⁵ The radical nature of this land reform was later rectified by the Guangdong Provincial Committee in its Second Extended Meeting convened in November 1928. See “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dierci kangda huiyi guanyu nongcun gongzuo jueyi’an” (November 1928), 137-44.

⁵⁶ “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei fu Qiongya teweixin” (20 January 1928), 115-6.

⁵⁷ For an overview of the land reform programme in Hainan during this period, see Wang Liqi, Xing Yisen and Wu Li, *Qiongya geming genjudi de jingji douzheng* [The economic struggle of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area], (Hainan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 37-40.

⁵⁸ In the Lingshui Soviet, for example, only two “evil gentry” were reported to have been executed. That case was regarded by the Provincial Committee as a “joke” and as evidence of the Hainan Party’s toleration of the feudal powers. “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei fu Qiongya teweixin” (20 January 1928), 113-7; see also Li Liming, 65; “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zhi Zhongyang baogao” [Report from Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Party Centre] (18 November 1927) in *Guangdongqu dangtuan yanjiu shiliao (GDTYS)* [Research materials on the history of the Party and League in the Guangdong Region] (1927-1934), comps., Guangdongsheng dang’anguan and Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui bangongshi, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 49.

soviet governments, an arrangement which was criticised by the provincial leadership as condoning feudalistic forces.

Evidently, the Guangdong Provincial Committee found the insubordination of the Hainan Party intolerable. After several harsh reproaches and criticisms, they still failed to bring the Hainan Communists into line with their policy. They, therefore, decided to reorganise the Hainan Special Committee. In June 1928, a non-Hainanese cadre Huang Xuezheng was sent to replace Wang Wenming as the Committee's secretary.⁵⁹

At this juncture, when the two levels of the Party leadership were preoccupying themselves with internal disputes, the GMD launched the "bandit-suppression campaign" under the charge of one of its most capable military officers, General Cai Tingkai. Cai managed to crush the small Communist bases in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the island within a short time. Then, in June 1928, he began "encircling" the soviet base in Lehui. As a result, under the GMD military pressure, the Lehui base shrank rapidly. At the end of that year, it was on the brink of collapse.

In spite of the imminent threat of annihilation, Huang Xuezheng still insisted on a dogmatic application of the "city-centred" approach laid down by the Provincial Committee. He relocated the headquarters of the Hainan Special Committee to the Haikou-Fucheng area with the hope of strengthening labour movement in cities. Believing that such an endeavour would put an end to the Hainan revolution, Wang Wenming defied Party order. He, with a few hundred followers, withdrew from the Lehui Soviet and built a new base in the Murui Mountain.⁶⁰ Soon, thereafter, in July 1929, the Hainan Special Committee in Haikou was smashed by the GMD military police. Huang Xuezheng and some other senior cadres were arrested and executed. Consequently, the destruction of the local leadership threw the Hainan Party into profound confusion. It was eventually rescued from this chaotic situation by the timely and decisive efforts of Feng Baiju.

⁵⁹ Li Liming, 60; *QZS*, 37-8; "Huang Xuezheng ji shengwei de baogao" [A report from Huang Xuezheng to the Provincial Committee] (16 July 1928), in *Qiongya geming genjudi caizheng shuishou shiliao xuanbian (QGCGSSX)* [Selected historical materials on the economy and taxation of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area] v. 3, comps. Hainan caizheng shuishoushi lingdaoxiaozu bangongshi and Hainan dang'anguan, (Haikou: Hainan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 2, 5; Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zuzhibu, Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi bangongshi, and Guangdongsheng dang'anguan, *Zhongguo gongchandang Guangdongsheng zuzhishi ziliao* [Materials on the history of the CCP Guangdong Provincial Organisations], (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1994), 149. (Hereafter cited as *Zuzhishi ziliao*).

⁶⁰ Chen Yongjie, "Qiongya geming genjudi douzhengshi gaishu" [A brief history of the struggle of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area], *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehuikexueban)* [Journal of Sun Yatsen University, social science edition], no.4 (1982), 36; Li Liming, 82-4; *QZS*, 38-42.

d. The Hainan Party under Feng Baiju

Born into a middle-peasant family in Qiongzhan County of Hainan, Feng Baiju⁶¹ joined the revolution in 1926 and showed himself a skilful peasant movement organiser.⁶² By 1929, Feng was serving as the secretary of the Party branch in Chengmai.⁶³ Feng was among the first to receive the news about the decimation of the Hainan Special Committee. Immediately, he sent messengers to other Party branches and called for a meeting to restore the leadership. Concurrently, he himself went to the Murui Mountain to see Wang Wenming. With Wang's approval, he convoked a Party meeting in mid-August 1929 in a place called Nieshandong. Presided over by Wang, who was already severely ill, this meeting reinstated the "rural-oriented" strategy of the Hainan Party before the ascendancy of Huang Xuezheng. A new Hainan Special Committee was formed, and Wang was elected its secretary. However, aware of his poor health and impressed by Feng's prompt action to restore Party leadership, Wang suggested that Feng take his post. Wang died in early 1931. From then on, Feng became the sole leader of the Hainan Party and remained so for the next two decades.⁶⁴

Feng Baiju's rise to Party leadership coincided with the diversion of the GMD's attention from Hainan to the mainland. In 1929, the Guangdong government was increasingly distracted by the strife with the Guangxi Clique and Cai Tingkai's army was recalled from Hainan to strengthen the province's defence. The withdrawal of the GMD troops allowed the Hainan Communists to rehabilitate the former soviet bases in Yuehui, Wanning and Lingshui as well as open up new guerrilla zones in Lingao and Yaxian.⁶⁵ By August 1930, the Hainan Party had founded its own division of the Red Army, which consisted of 1,300 soldiers. It also commanded the Red Detachment of Women, composed of more than a hundred peasant women, who were entrusted with the

⁶¹ Feng Baiju's original name was Feng Yuqiu. Probably at the time when he joined the Party, Feng changed his name to Feng Jizhou. In 1928, for reasons unknown, he dropped that name and adopted Feng Baiju, by which he has since been called. Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming guocheng de lishi qingkuang" [Concerning the history of how I joined the revolution] and Ma Baishan, "Feng Baiju zhuanlie" [A brief biography of Feng Baiju], in *Feng Baiju yanjiu shiliao* (FBYS) [Research materials on Feng Baiju], comp. by Zhonggong Hainanqu dangwei dangshi bangongshi, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988) 414, 608; Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clark, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Communism, 1921-1965*, v. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), s.v. "Feng Pai-chü."

⁶² Feng Baiju, "Wode zizhuan," [My autobiography], FBYS, 327-30; id., "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 412; Hu Tichun, Xu Chunhong and Wang Huanqiu, "Feng Baiju" in *Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan*, v. 5, 308-9; Lin Keze, "Jifeng zhijingcao, zhenjin bupashao - huiyi dierci guonei geming zhanzheng shiqi de Feng Baiju tongzhi" [Remembering Feng Baiju during the period of the Second Revolutionary War], FBYS, 542.

⁶³ Hu Tichun, et. al., *ibid.*, 310-1, 314.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 315-6; Chen Yongjie, 37; QZS, 45.

⁶⁵ QZS, 49-51.

responsibility of defending the headquarters of the Red Army. During peacetime, these women soldiers would travel to the nearby villages to disseminate Communism and cultivate goodwill among villagers towards the Party.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the Communist revival in Hainan was short-lived. The sequence of events that took place in the East River Base Area duplicated itself in Hainan. First came the Li Lisan Line in late 1930. Instigated by this “leftist” political policy, the Guangdong Provincial Committee again instructed the Hainan Special Committee to seize Haikou-Fucheng. Feng Baiju was said to have taken up the task very reluctantly. The military operation brought heavy losses to the Hainan Red Army and was eventually called off by Feng.⁶⁷

After the bitter defeat in Haikou-Fucheng, the Hainan Party was struck by the witch-hunt against AB Corps suspects, which became rampant in 1932. Allegedly, the Anti-AB Corps Campaign was responsible for the lives of more than a thousand innocents, including many senior and competent cadres in the Party, the soviet governments and the Red Army. Again, the scarcity of existing information frustrates attempts to reconstruct a satisfactory outline of this movement. Although the Anti-AB Corps Campaign in Hainan has been portrayed as a purge by Feng Baiju of nonconformists within the Party,⁶⁸ no evidence was presented to substantiate the accusation. Whatever the true nature of the anti-AB Corps movement was, there is no doubt that the Hainan Party as a whole suffered.

In the end, it was the GMD who gave the fatal blow to the soviet bases in Hainan. As part of the overall “bandit-suppression” program in 1932, Chen Jitang appointed Chen Hanguang as the Commissioner of the Hainan Pacification District and granted him 3,000 troops to wipe out the Communists.⁶⁹ In addition to military measures, Chen Hanguang reinforced the *baojia* system with some harsh regulations. For example, it was required that anyone who wanted to visit his/her relatives could only go in the morning and must return home by noon. Otherwise, he/she would be penalised for “dealing with the Communists” (*tongfeizui*). Propaganda which encouraged defections within the Communist Party was also carried out. One GMD pamphlet stated: 1) Communists who

⁶⁶ Ibid., 54-6.

⁶⁷ Li Liming, 86-87; Hu Tichun, et. al., “Feng Baiju,” 317; *QZS*, 56-58.

⁶⁸ Cf. Klein and Clark, eds., s.v. “Feng Pai-chü.”

⁶⁹ Lin Tinghua, “Nanqu sushu de ‘jiaogong’ he ‘fanggong’” [The suppression and pre-cautious measures against the Communists’ undertaking by the southern Pacification Office] in *Nantian suiye* [The Southern Era], a symposium of Chen Jitang’s rule in Guangdong published in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao* [Sources on the culture and history of Guangzhou] v. 37 (November 1987), 364-5.

repent and surrender to the GMD will not be killed; 2) those who do so and bring with them their weapons will be rewarded; 3) any wholesale switching of sides of groups with their arms will be given posts in the government according to their talents.⁷⁰

Already weakened by internal disunity and defection, the Hainan Communists could not withstand the sustained political and military pressures of the GMD. In early 1933, their headquarters in the Murui Mountain Base was besieged. Several times the Red Army tried to break through the siege but failed, with heavy casualties. As the GMD army tightened its blockade, Feng and the remainder, now down to twenty-six men, withdrew further into the remote part of Murui Mountain. For the following three months, they had to rely on nature to provide their needs.⁷¹ They finally escaped the GMD search and went down from the Murui Mountain in April 1933.⁷² Having lost their base, they had to seek refuge in Feng's home village in Qiongsan County. Feng now found himself bearing the arduous task of rebuilding the Party organisations from scratch. No aid from outside was available, for contacts with the Guangdong Party and the Party Centre had already been shattered. Not until mid-1937 could Feng get in touch again with his superiors on the mainland. Although struggling alone, Feng gradually rebuilt the Party by recruiting new followers among the peasantry. On the eve of the Anti-Japanese War, he commanded a small Red Army force, with sixty regular soldiers and two hundred reserves.⁷³

III. Concluding Remarks

This chapter shows that the Communists did not disappear in Guangdong after 1927 but managed to linger on for several years more. Nevertheless, it was true that they had little success in attaining massive peasant mobilisation. Several reasons account for their failure, not least, the fluctuating political line of the higher level of the Party. It generated much internal disunity among the Communists in Guangdong, which prevented their reform programmes in the East River and Hainan soviet bases from fully capitalising on rural misery. In Hainan, the revolution also suffered from local cadres' insensitivity to

⁷⁰ Lin Huicai, "Zai Hainan 'jiaogong,' 'fuli,' 'suijing' de zhenxiang" [The truth concerning "Communist-suppression," "Li-pacification," and "pacification" in Hainan], *Nantian suiyue*, 376.

⁷¹ "Hongqi budao" [The red flag that did not fall], *FBYS*, 343-3; cf. *QZS*, 63-73.

⁷² Jiang Fengbo and Xu Zhangquan, eds., *Tudi geming zhanzheng jishi* [A chronicle of the Land Revolutionary War], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1989), 325.

⁷³ *QZS*, 83; "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei gei nanwei de zonghe baogao" [Miscellaneous reports by the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee to the Southern Committee] (23 Julv 1937). *GGLWH*. v. 40.

ethnic relations which turned traditional hatred between the Han Chinese and the Lis against the Party. Even worse, the indiscriminate hunt for AB Corps suspects paralysed the Party before it was destroyed by the GMD.

Undoubtedly, the Party's prewar failure owed more to the efficiency of state repression than to its own weakness. By and large, it was the factional struggles within the GMD that provided an indispensable living space for the Communists. However, these struggles in Guangdong did not last long enough for the Communists to develop their strength to a level which could counteract the GMD's suppression. Also, the Communists' soviet bases in Guangdong suffered an extra disadvantage. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere, the bases in Guangdong were not located in the border region of two or more provinces and thus could not benefit from the resulting administrative confusion for survival.⁷⁴ Once Chen Jitang's dominance over Guangdong was achieved, the days of the Communists were numbered. As has been shown, the weak Communist bases could not stand up to the intense and systematic repression from the state. Unless state repression were removed or effectively reduced, the Communists in Guangdong would have little hope of achieving their revolution.

It is important to ask whether the prewar Communism in Guangdong had any bearing on the later development of the wartime period. Chan Lau Kit-ching believes that "by 1936 there was virtually nothing significant left of Communism in Guangdong" because the Communists had disappeared virtually from the province and the wartime Communism there had to be "rebuilt almost from scratch."⁷⁵ This view, however, is superficial. Hartford's study on the Communist activities in rural Hebei successfully rectifies the popular assumption that "nothing of any importance transpired in rural areas of the north until the Japanese invasion in 1937." She argues cogently that the Party's prewar struggle there, though it met with repeated defeats, produced "a small but not negligible potential cadres of leaders" and a "revolutionary tradition." Without them the early success of the famed Jin-Cha-Ji (Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei) Border Region was far from probable.⁷⁶

In many ways, the position of the Party in Guangdong on the eve of the Anti-Japanese War was not significantly different from that in Hebei. Years of rural struggle had nurtured a group of dedicated activists for the Party in both the East River region and

⁷⁴ Cf. Roy Hofheinz, Jr., *The Broken Wave*, 276.

⁷⁵ Chan, *From Nothing to Nothing*, 201.

⁷⁶ Hartford, "Fits and Starts," 144, 168.

Hainan under the leadership of Gu Dacun and Feng Baiju respectively. Despite being small in numbers, their commitment to the Communist cause had been tested, and their knowledge of the local environment was beyond doubt. As will be argued in the next chapter, the reason why this revolutionary legacy in Guangdong failed to bring about such dramatic results as in the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region cannot be attributed solely to the Party's inferiority in numerical strength. It was also related to the different political-military developments of the two regions during the war.

CHAPTER 2

THE PARTY ON THE EVE OF JAPANESE PRESENCE
IN GUANGDONG, 1937-1938

The armed conflict which broke out between China and Japan at the Marco Polo Bridge in July 1937 escalated rapidly into a total war. In North China, the war with Japan contributed immensely to the CCP's seizure of rural power. During the initial period of the war, the Japanese army focused on seizing major cities and communication centres. Since their occupation removed state repression in the countryside but was slow to replace it, the war opened up a huge power vacuum for the Communists to fill. The Communist guerrillas, who had infiltrated into the occupied areas, were given virtually a free hand to organise peasants under the pretext of national resistance. Simultaneously, the absence of state control and the coming of Japanese troops provoked widespread panic among the rural elite. They became receptive to the Party's anti-Japanese appeals and were ready to cooperate with the Communists in seeking social order and collective security.

However, the political development described above was absent in Guangdong. Although its major cities had been under Japanese aerial attack from August 1937, they were not occupied until late 1938 and early 1939. In the first year of the war, Guangdong was the rear-front of China. Neither the GMD nor the CCP foresaw when the war would spread to the province. While the latter believed that Japan would eventually invade Guangdong, probably at a later stage of the war,¹ the former was confident that since South China had long been the British sphere of interest, Japan would not dare to lay hands on it at the risk of antagonising a world power. In fact, even the Japanese themselves could not agree on the schedule for the military operation in Guangdong until late August of 1938.² Up till the middle of that year, the war seemed remote to many

¹ At first, the national leaders of the Party seemed to believe that Japan would invade Guangdong as well as Fujian and Zhejiang soon. However, after the turn of 1938, they apparently revised their original forecast and exhibited reservations about an imminent invasion of Guangdong by Japan. See "Zhongyang guanyu nanfang ge youjiqu gongzuo fangzhende zhishi" [Party Centre's instruction on the direction of work in the various guerrilla areas in the south] (1 October 1937), *Zhonggong Zhongyang wenjian xuanbian (ZZWX)* [Selected documents of the Chinese Communist Party Centre], v. 11, comp. by Zhongyang dang'anguan, (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1991), 363; cf. "Zhou Enlai tan baowei huanan" [The discussion of Zhou Enlai on the defence of South China] (20 February 1938), *GDTYS (1937-1945)*, v. 1, 41-3; Ye Jianying, "Muqian kangzhanzhong de jige wenti" [A few questions concerning the present stage of the war] (22 May 1938), *GDTYS (1937-1945)*, v. 1, 91-4.

² Riben fangweiting zhanshishi comp., tran. by Tianjinshi zhengxie bianyi weiyuanhui, *Riben junguozhuyi qinhua ziliao changbian* [Collected materials on Japanese militarism in China], v. 1, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1987), 397-9, 454.

living in the province. The Japanese posed no imminent threat to the ruling authorities; nor was the society or people's livelihood disrupted to a large degree. Consequently, the local Communist resistance had to take a path very different from that in occupied China.

This chapter examines how the Party tried to revive its movement in Guangdong on the eve of the Japanese invasion. The discussion will centre on three main areas of the Communists' activities, namely, the rehabilitation of their defunct organisational structure, the launching of the united-front policy, and the development of the Party's military force. It argues that, by and large, the Communists' pursuit of these tasks was restrained by power realities. Many difficulties that confronted the Guangdong Party arose from the conflict between the desire to expand its influence and the need to maintain a good relationship with the GMD government.

I. Rebuilding Party Organisation

a. The Beginning of Party Reconstruction

After the decimation of the Guangdong Provincial Committee, certain individuals tried to revive the Communist movement by taking advantage of the widespread rage against Japanese aggression. Under the slogan of national salvation, they established some clandestine "peripheral organisations" in Guangzhou. Two of them, which sprang up separately in 1935, deserves our attentions, for they later became important recruiting grounds for the Guangdong Party.

The first one was the League of Chinese Youth (*Zhongguo qingnian tongmeng*; hereafter Chinese Youth) set up by Wang Junyu, a cadre who originally worked in the Shanghai branch of the CCP. While in Shanghai, Wang was in charge of the publication of a bimonthly Communist magazine known as the *Times' Culture*, which was distributed secretly to many places around the country. In several major cities including Guangzhou, readers of this magazine had gathered to form study groups to discuss current affairs. In 1935, after the Shanghai Party branch was overrun by the GMD police, Wang fled to Guangzhou. He quickly got in touch with the local study group for the *Times' Culture* and later reorganised it into the Chinese Youth. At that time, the organisation had a membership of around thirty.³

³ Lu Chuanguang, "Zhongguo qingnian tongmeng de jianli jiqi lishi zuoyong," [The establishment and historical functions of the League of Chinese Youth] in *Guangdong dangshi yanjiu wenji (GDYW)* [Collected works on the history of the Guangdong Party], v. 2, ed. by Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1993), 361.

The founding purpose of the Chinese Youth was not for rebuilding the Party. According to Wang's recollection, he felt that it was inappropriate to do so without prior consent from higher Party authorities.⁴ Nevertheless, he was impressed by the rising nationalism of the Guangzhou students, who became intolerant of the Nanjing government's "passive non-resistance" policy towards Japanese encroachment. Believing that these frustrated students might become valuable resources for the Party in the future, Wang decided to prepare and equip them through the Chinese Youth. The main objective of the Chinese Youth was to propagate Marxism-Communism among students. Members' activities were characterised by strict discipline and intensive study of political ideologies. The Chinese Youth was a secret organisation, and Wang ran it just like an underground Party cell. To avoid possible enemy infiltration, he adopted a rigidly-defined initiation code for new members. Candidates had to go through a fixed period of education, observation and pass an examination. In addition, each of them had to secure recommendations from one to two old members before his or her membership could be granted. Due to these restrictive practices, the Chinese Youth grew slowly, numbering less than two hundred after a year. In spite of that, the Chinese Youth produced several well-known leaders for the Guangdong Party. They included Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao, both of whom were commanders of the later East River Column.⁵

Another "peripheral organisation" that appeared in 1935 was the Society for Breakthrough and Progress (*Tujinshu*). The nature and objectives of this society closely resembled those of the Chinese Youth. Its founder was a Guangdong native named He Sijing, an intellectual who had joined the Party in 1932. During the reign of the GMD's "white terror," He concealed his Communist identity by working as a professor at Zhongshan University. At the same time, he gathered around himself a band of patriotic students who had been attracted to the Communists' nationalistic appeals. In October 1935, having learnt of the Party Centre's united-front policy from the August First Declaration,⁶ He and one of his student leaders, Zhang Zhixin, established the Society for Breakthrough and Progress to promote student patriotic movement. As signified by its title, the Society aimed to unite all progressive students to break through the GMD's

⁴ Ibid., 360.

⁵ Ibid., 361, 363; Wen Zhuohua, "Zhongguo qingnian tongmeng de xingzhi jiqi geming huodong," [The nature and the revolutionary activities of the League of Chinese Youth], *GDZ*, v. 6 (December 1985), 163-4.

⁶ The August First Declaration was published by the CCP Party Centre on 1 August 1935 to declare its intention to enter into a coalition with all patriotic forces in China, including the GMD, in fighting against the Japanese. See *ZZWX*, v. 10, 518-25.



obstruction and bring the high tide of the national salvation sentiment to all parts of China. Members of the Society had to swear allegiance to the Party and keep their identity secret. When the Communists began rebuilding the Party in Guangdong, the Society was instrumental in enlisting student followers. Most of them were coming from the Zhongshan University, where a clandestine Party branch was planted in August 1936, with Zhang Zhixin as the secretary.⁷

While some cadres stayed underground after the Guangdong Provincial Committee was destroyed in 1934, there were a few who went north to connect with other Party branches. By the winter of 1935, they reached the CCP's Northern Bureau in Hebei. Unfortunately, at that time, it had also lost touch with the Party Centre. Probably at their urgings, the Bureau sent Xue Shangshi,⁸ a native of Guangdong, back to lead Communist resistance activities in his home province. However, Xue's primary responsibility was to organise popular anti-Japanese campaigns instead of restoring the defunct Party. During his stay in Hong Kong in the first half of 1936, Xue spent most of his energy on founding a national salvation organisation which would coordinate all resistance efforts in South China. A few months later, Xue returned to the Northern Bureau, leaving his duty in the organisation to He Sijing, who had recently moved to Hong Kong from Guangzhou.⁹

When Xue arrived at the headquarters of the Northern Bureau in Tianjin, two things had happened there. First, the Bureau had resumed their contact with the Party Centre, which then assigned Liu Shaoqi to direct the Bureau's affairs. Secondly, Chen Jitang, together with the leaders of the Guangxi Clique, Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, staged a revolt against Chiang Kai-shek's rule.¹⁰ Seeing that the Party might exploit the situation to its own benefit, Liu Shaoqi sent Xue Shangshi to Guangdong again. Xue's mission was first to explore the possibility of any collaboration between the Party and the southern warlords. If the latter were wavering in their anti-Chiang Kai-shek stand, instructed Liu, then Xue should proceed immediately to rehabilitate the Party organisation

⁷ For the history and activities of the Society for Breakthrough and Progress, see Liu Tianxing, "Guanyu tujinshe de qingkuang," [About the Society for Breakthrough and Progress], *GDZ*, v. 6 (December 1985), 172-80; Tan Xiuzhen, "Tujinshe de jianli jiqi zhuyao huodong," [The establishment and main activities of the Society for Breakthrough and Progress], *GDYW*, v. 2, 369-77.

⁸ Xue had many aliases; for example, Luo Gen, Kong Shangshi, Lao Kong, Lao Yang and Liang Huachang.

⁹ Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, "Yijiu sanliunian Guangdong dangzuzhi de zhongjian he nanfang linshi gongwei chengli shimo," [The beginning and end of rebuilding the Guangdong Party organisation and establishing the Temporary Southern Working Committee in 1936], *GDYW*, v. 2, 381. (Hereafter cited as "Yijiu sanliunian Guangdong dangzuzhi.")

¹⁰ This revolt is usually called the Liang Guang Incident or the Revolt of the Southwest. For details, see Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937*, (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1974), 251-62.

in southern China. To the surprise of many, Chen's coup was so short-lived that it ended before Xue had a chance to meet with any politicians of Guangdong or Guangxi. Ultimately, he settled down in Hong Kong and commenced the programme of Party reconstruction. Through the connections with He Sijing and Zhang Zhixin, Xue made use of the Society for Breakthrough and Progress for recruitment. Then, in September 1936, Xue established the Southern Working Committee to oversee Party activities in South China, particularly those in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong and Macao.¹¹

At approximately the same time when Liu despatched Xue to Hong Kong, Wang Junyu arrived at Tianjin. With the information supplied by a former comrade in Shanghai, Wang found the way to the headquarters of the Northern Bureau. The purpose of his trip was to establish relations with and report his work in Guangzhou to the higher levels of the Party. Wang was said to have been received by a senior member of the Bureau, who affirmed his achievements and suggested that he devoted himself to Party development in Guangzhou. Wang was also told to contact Xue in Hong Kong and subject his activities to Xue's supervision. After Wang returned to Guangzhou, he established the Guangzhou Working Committee and absorbed new blood for the Party from the Chinese Youth. Moreover, another committee was set up by Wang for the purpose of building the Party in the vicinity of the Guangzhou metropolis.¹²

The early attempts to restore the Guangdong Party was never well-coordinated nor carefully planned. The orders of the Northern Bureau to both Xue and Wang did not contain any comprehensive programme on how to pursue such tasks, nor did the Bureau prepare to take any concrete measures to monitor the progress of Party building in Guangdong. In fact, Xue and Wang had received minimal assistance, whether in terms of manpower or financial resources, from the Bureau. Consequently, having left Tianjin, the two men were on their own. Even worse, soon after returning to the south, the two men came into conflict with each other. Xue accused Wang for not submitting to the authority of the Southern Working Committee while Wang questioned the legitimacy of the Committee, doubting that Xue had any authorisation from the Northern Bureau for his action. It was not clear what caused their discord, yet a penchant for personal power, differences in work style, contrasting visions of Party expansion, lack of guidance from

¹¹ "Yijiu sanliunian Guangdong dangzuzhi," 381-3.

¹² Ibid., 382-4; Zhonggong Guangzhou shiwei dangshi yanjiushi bianzhu, *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi* [The local history of the Guangzhou Party], (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1995), 200-1. (Hereafter cited as *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*).

above, and failure to demarcate precisely each person's sphere of responsibility might all have contributed to the break down of cooperation between the two men. Subsequently, their personal disagreements aggravated into open clashes between the two Party organisations under their command in Hong Kong and Guangzhou respectively. In mid-1937, Wang travelled north to take the matter to the Northern Bureau and the Party Centre. During his absence, Xue secretly implanted another Working Committee in Guangzhou, plotting to displace the one established by Wang.¹³ This internal disunity significantly retarded the recovery of the Guangdong Party.

b. Towards a Unified Party

In May 1937, the Party Centre resolved to reactivate the Party apparatus in regions under the GMD control. This decision brought Party rebuilding in Guangdong to a new stage. Outside aid, though in limited quantities, began to pour into the province. In September, the Party Centre despatched Zhang Wenbin,¹⁴ a senior Party member who had been Mao Zedong's personal secretary, to Guangdong to take charge of Party affairs.

Zhang's immediate challenge was to settle the dispute between Xue Shangshi and Wang Junyu. After his arrival, Zhang conducted several hearings in Hong Kong and Guangzhou to interrogate all senior Party cadres. Wang was not included because he had not yet returned from Yan'an. Although Wang's absence inhibited an understanding of both sides of the story, Zhang's concerns were elsewhere. In his mind, the crucial things were the unity and discipline of the Party. While wrongdoers had to be punished, what appeared more important to him was Party education. In November, Zhang convened a joint meeting of the Southern Working Committee and the Guangzhou Working Committee. At the meeting, he denounced the conflict between Xue and Wang as "a quarrel over emotional matters" (*yiqi zhizheng*). Both men were criticised for committing a mistake which was of "petty bourgeois class" nature. Zhang then required the members

¹³ *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 208-9; "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui gei Zhongyang de baogao" [Report from the CCP's Southern Working Committee to the Party Centre] (1 September 1937) and "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" [Report from the CCP's Southern Working Committee] (12 December 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 33-44, 82-4; "Wang Junyu gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de baogao" [Report from Wang Junyu to the Party Centre] (26 May 1937), "Zhonggong Guangzhou shiwei de baogao dagang" [An outline of the report from the Committee of Guangzhou Party] (5 October 1937), and "Zhonggong Guangzhou shiwei dui nanwei jiesan shiwei de yijian" [Opinions concerning the dissolution of the Committee of Guangzhou Party by the Southern Committee] (7 November 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 39, 14-6, 19-27, 33-41.

¹⁴ For a brief biography of Zhang Wenbin, see Liu Shuxin and Ye Wenyi, "Zhang Wenbin zhuanlie," [A brief biography of Zhang Wenbin], *GDZ*, v. 7 (February 1986), 193-206.

of the two committees to undertake a series of self-criticisms for failing to submit their personal interest to the larger good of the revolution.¹⁵

Further, to strengthen the cohesion of the Guangdong Party, Zhang reformed its structure to rid it of administrative confusions resulting from the hitherto disorganised efforts of Party reconstruction. First, the hierarchy of command was realigned. The Guangzhou Working Committee's relationship with the Northern Bureau was terminated. It was reorganised and placed officially under the sole governance of the Southern Working Committee. Zhang also dissolved the original Southern Working Committee founded by Xue Shangshi and replaced it with a new one.¹⁶ The new Southern Working Committee took orders directly from Yan'an, and, from December 1937 to October 1938, also from the Yangzi River Bureau, which represented the Party Centre, to supervise Communist activities in central and southern China. Secondly, Zhang clearly defined the responsibilities of the two committees. As there was no longer any overlapping of duties, Zhang forestalled future rivals for power or unnecessary competition between different sections of the Party. Now, the Guangzhou Working Committee was to assume full charge of Party recruitment in the metropolis. Therefore, Xue could no longer recruit members from the city through either the Society for Breakthrough and Progress or the Party branch in the Zhongshan University, as he did previously. (Such practice had irritated Wang Junyu very much.¹⁷) Nevertheless, the Guangzhou Working Committee had to surrender the right of establishing Party branches outside the provincial capital to the Southern Working Committee. Finally, to better serve the purpose of Party building in Guangdong, Zhang, with the permission of the Yangzi River Bureau, converted the Southern Working Committee into the Guangdong Provincial Committee in April 1938. The Provincial Committee had an expanded membership and a more elaborate structure, including several newly created task-oriented departments.¹⁸

A Party structure without members is like a skeleton without muscles. Membership recruitment, therefore, played a crucial role in reinvigorating the defunct Party. According to Communist historians, both Wang and Xue had committed mistakes

¹⁵ *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 209-10; "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" (12 December 1937), 83-4; Huang Zhenwei, *Zhonggong Guangdong dangshi gailun* [An overview of the history of the Guangdong Communist Party], (Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanche, 1994), 178.

¹⁶ The new Southern Working Committee bore the same title as the old one. In Party publications, the adjective "temporary" was added to the old Southern Working Committee to distinguish it from the new one. However, that adjective did not appear in any original documents.

¹⁷ "Wang Junyu gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de baogao" (26 May 1937), 15-6.

¹⁸ *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 209-10; "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" (12 December 1937), 83-4; *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 270-1, 273-5.

in trying to accomplish such a job. In Wang's case, his problem was "closed-doorism" (*guanmen zhuyi*). Haunted by the experience of repeated betrayals by traitors both in Shanghai and Guangzhou, Wang had adopted very strict procedures to select Party members. His extreme cautiousness had successfully prevented enemy infiltration; but, unfortunately, also had deprived many patriotic and progressive youth of the chance to join the Party. Xue's error was the opposite. Perhaps hoping for quick Party growth, Xue had paid little attention to the background and qualities of new recruits. Consequently, Party branches were filled with "undesirable elements," who showed neither respect for higher authority nor interest in participating in Party life.¹⁹

Zhang attempted to find a balance between the two extremes. On the one hand, he exhorted cadres to make use of the united-front tactic to initiate or infiltrate into various kinds of national salvation organisations. In this way, they could extend their webs of personal connections and absorb more Communist sympathisers into the Party. On the other hand, Zhang carried out a Party examination and reviewed the history of individual members. He discovered that some existing members had records of betraying the Party when Guangdong was under the reign of the white terror. These people had either been dismissed earlier by the Party or left it voluntarily and, yet, somehow managed to regain their membership. Zhang expressed no toleration of the former traitors and had them all expelled immediately.²⁰ Nevertheless, it seemed that this Party review exercise was far from being thorough, especially for Party branches outside Guangzhou and Hong Kong. In Huiyang county, for instance, a cadre named Zhu Kuaiming had a record of betraying the Party twice. Having been expelled once, he rejoined the Party and emerged as the Party secretary of Huiyang. He was later found fleeing before the enemy when the Japanese invaded Huiyang in late 1938.²¹

Certainly, to elevate the overall qualities of the Party members, suitable training must be provided. However, a serious problem that hindered the rehabilitation of the Guangdong Party was the shortage of leaders. Although experienced cadres could be imported from outside, as it did in late 1937 when a number of cadres were despatched to Guangdong from Yan'an, their number was nevertheless small. In addition, these outside

¹⁹ Zhao Shude, "Kangri zhanzheng qianqi Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei de zhongjian he dangzuzhi de dafazhan" [The reestablishment and great development of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee during the early phase of the Anti-Japanese War], *GDIW*, v. 3, 18-9; Wen Zhuohua, 165; "Wang Junyu gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de baogao" (26 May 1937), 15-6.

²⁰ Zhao Shude, *ibid.*, 14-5, 19.

²¹ "Guangdong gongzuo baogao" [A report on the work in Guangdong] (29 January 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 347.

cadres lacked local knowledge. Therefore, the creation of a competent indigenous leadership was of the utmost urgency. However, in Guangdong, it was not possible to carry out systematic efforts to train cadres, partly because of financial difficulties and partly because of political constraints. Subsidies from Party Centre were small on the whole. On the other hand, although the Second United Front had been formally inaugurated in the summer of 1937, politicians of the Guangdong GMD, in different degrees, remained suspicious of the CCP. As a matter of fact, the Guangdong Party had never been able to obtain legal recognition from the provincial government. Thus, Party activities, including cadre training, had to be conducted covertly. Most of the training classes were short-term and without a well-set syllabus. The numbers attending varied from class to class, and only a few hundred cadres might have plausibly undergone the training.²²

c. Limits of Party Expansion

The above account reveals that the rebuilding of the Party in Guangdong commenced in 1936 as a result of certain uncoordinated individual efforts. Major development was seen only after aid and leadership became available from the Party Centre. Undoubtedly, the tight political control in Guangdong and limited resources still posed the greatest obstacles for rapid Party growth. On the eve of the Japanese invasion, the Guangdong Party had a membership of over 7,000. The figure was impressive when compared to less than a thousand a year earlier.²³ However, it fell short of the Guangdong Provincial Committee's target that Guangdong would need a hundred thousand Party members to guarantee the ultimate success of its resistance.²⁴

The renewed Communist movement in Guangdong was basically an urban phenomenon. The majority of the Party's followers were university students, school teachers, and young intellectuals who lived in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Although it was reported in August 1938 that the Party had extended its influence beyond the

²² Jin Yang, "Kangri zhanzheng chuqi Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei xunlianban qingkuang" [The situation of training classes of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee during the early phase of the Anti-Japanese War], *GDZ*, v. 12 (June 1988), 26-8; cf. "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei sigeyue de gongzuo zongjie baogao" [Concluding report of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee on the works of the past four months] (August 1938) and "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zuzhibu baogao" [A report of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee's department of organisation] (August 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 214, 231-2.

²³ Zhao Shude, "Kangri zhanzheng qianqi Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei," 20; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zuzhibu baogao" (August 1938), 238; cf. "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" (12 December 1937), 74-5.

²⁴ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei sigeyue de gongzuo zongjie baogao" (August 1938), 216.

vicinities of these two cities and that Party branches had been established in more than half of the total ninety counties of Guangdong,²⁵ most of them were probably loosely organised, with very low mobilisation capabilities. The only exception was Hainan, where the local Party, rebuilt by Feng Baiju and his Red Army remnants, was known to have consisted of about 85 percent of peasants. Unfortunately, information concerning Party rebuilding in Hainan is scarce. It seems that by late 1938, before the reorganisation of the Hainan guerrillas into the Independent Corps (see Chapter 5), the Hainan Party was still operating in high secrecy and depending mainly on personal connections to expand membership. The Hainan Communists seldom endeavoured to reach out to the masses through united-front propaganda. In particular, their neglect of students had brought them harsh criticisms from the provincial leadership.²⁶

At first glance, it is quite puzzling why the Communists' year-long struggle in rural Guangdong did not facilitate its initial penetration into the countryside during the first year of the war. Perhaps the case is not hard to explain. In accordance with the united-front agreements reached with the GMD in the autumn of 1937, the Party had abandoned its radical land redistribution programme, its principal means of winning peasant support in the prewar period. After the outbreak of the war, the only recourse the Guangdong Communists had for popular mobilisation was nationalist appeals, which were likely to attract adherents from cities where the educated tended to concentrate. For the majority of the rural inhabitants, the Party's anti-Japanese slogans sounded too abstract and unrelated to their immediate concerns. As discussed in the next section, there was little the Party could do to alter the situation. Pressed by circumstances, the Guangdong Party had no other choice but to adopt a very accommodating stance towards the GMD. Its aspiration to achieve rural mobilisation was largely frustrated by its inability to introduce any serious measures in redressing rural inequalities.

²⁵ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zuzhibu baogao" (August 1938), 233-8; cf. "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei anjie gei Changjiangju de baogao" [Report from Nanjie of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Yangzi River Bureau] (24 May 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 177-8.

²⁶ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zuzhibu baogao" (August 1938), 233; cf. "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui gei Qiongya tewe zhishixin" [A letter of instructions from the CCP's Southern Working Committee to the Hainan Special Committee] (26 November 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 58-9; "Ou Zhaohan gei Zhongyang qingnianbu baogao" [Report from Ou Zhaohan to the Youth Department of the Party Centre] (17 October 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 29-30.

II. The Launching of the United-Front Policy

a. The United Front with the GMD

Although the Second United Front was a national policy, its actual implementation varied from place to place. Historians have long pointed out that there were divergent views inside the Party on how the new coalition with the GMD should be worked out. The most notable examples were Wang Ming and Mao Zedong, who differed fundamentally. Wang, being too eager to keep the GMD in the anti-Japanese camp, was willing to compromise to the extent that was basically equivalent to capitulation. Mao, on the other hand, had always been suspicious of the GMD and stressed protecting the Party's independence and initiative within the United Front.²⁷

Similar variants in regard to the practice of the United Front could also be found in the GMD. Provincial/regional officials cooperated with the Communists differently according to their own concerns of wartime security and local balance of power. Their discretion determined whether a working partnership with the CCP could function and prescribed the nature and extent to which the Communists could mobilise the people for the resistance war. On the whole, the Guangdong GMD was not as enthusiastic as its northern counterparts towards the coalition with the CCP because, during the first fifteen months or so of the war, it faced less immediate threat from the Japanese. As a result, the Guangdong Communists had to pursue the united-front policy by exploiting more the contradictions between the Guangdong GMD and Chiang Kai-shek's central government.

While factional strife in the Guangdong GMD had played a decisive role in the survival of the prewar Communist movement, it remained so during the wartime period. After the abortive coup to overthrow Chiang Kai-shek in the summer of 1936, Chen Jitang's predominance in Guangdong came to an end. Because most of his military officers secretly switched sides to Chiang, Chen had no other choice but to step down from his offices and go into voluntary exile. Yu Hanmou, one of Chen's former generals, succeeded him to be the commander-in-chief of the Guangdong army. Yu never commanded a position of power comparable to that of Chen because Chiang Kai-shek had determined to take the opportunity of Chen's defeat to terminate, once and for all, the semiautonomous status of Guangdong. Thenceforth, the arm of the central government intruded into the political arena of the province. Nanjing assigned a number of officials to take over senior posts in the provincial as well as the Guangzhou governments. In

²⁷ See, for example, Gregor Benton, "The 'Second Wang Ming Line' (1935-38)," *The China Quarterly*, 61 (March 1975): 61-94.

particular, the fiscal and party affairs were now firmly in the hands of the members of the CC Clique. Apart from that, Chiang's spy corps, military police, and the Blue Shirts were all very active in Guangzhou. Even in the army, Yu was watched over by members of the *xingying*, an administrative unit which represented Chiang in coordinating regional military affairs.²⁸

This expansion of central control worried Yu Hanmou. His loyalty to Chiang was, indeed, based on calculated mutual gains. Fearing that central government's continual encroachment would ultimately reduce him to a mere figure head of Guangdong, Yu was anxious to seek allies to strengthen his position. A cooperation with the CCP seemed to serve such a purpose best. However, Yu's attitude towards the Communists was cautious and ambiguous. He understood well that Chiang distrusted the Guangdong military men. If he exhibited an unreserved support for the CCP, he would likely anger Chiang and his agents. The result could be disastrous, hastening his downfall as a regional ruler. Therefore, he must be skilful in keeping the powers of the central authorities and the Communists in good balance to maximise his own advantage. Moreover, Yu's concern went beyond the boundary of domestic politics. Since Guangdong was under the influence of the western powers; the British in Hong Kong and the French in Guangzhou Bay and in Hainan, lifting all restrictive measures on the Communists' activities might create international repercussions. These, in turn, would invite intervention from the central government. This caution explains why he refused to give legal recognition to the Party even after the outbreak of the war with Japan. To the Communists, Yu was politically wavering and yet a powerful and "enlightened" ally whom they could not afford to neglect.²⁹

Yu was not the only one who was interested in the Communists. In fact, internal rivalries occurred among the agents of the central government in Guangdong. Factions such as the CC Clique and the Political Learning Clique (*Zhengxuexi*) also exploited the United Front with the CCP to assert their supremacy over the others. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards the Communists were constantly fluctuating, depending on whether or

²⁸ "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" (12 December 1937), 68; "Guangdong de qingkuang" [The situation of Guangdong] (1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 267-8; "Wang Junyu gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de baogao" (26 May 1937), 3.

²⁹ "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao" (12 December 1937), 68; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" [Miscellaneous reports by Zhang Wenbin on the work in Guangdong] (1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 300-1; Zhan Xiaocen, "Kangzhan chuqi wozai Guangzhou de jianwen" [What I saw and heard in Guangzhou during the early phase of the resistance war], *GWZ*, v. 50 (February

not a collaborative relationship would deem beneficial in a particular case at hand. The true “die-hards”³⁰ were the Blue Shirts or the Revival Society (*Fuxingshe*) led by Chen Zongzhou and Fang Shaoyun. This group was extremely hostile to the Communists and was a staunch supporter of the GMD one-party dictatorship. As the strongest among all the forces representing the central authorities, the Revival Society troubled Yu the most.³¹ It was also the Party’s principal target of struggle within the unity of the United Front.

A major public manifestation of the GMD-CCP coalition in Guangdong was the establishment of the Eighth Route Army Office in the provincial capital. Complying with the agreements between the two parties, Chiang Kai-shek allowed the Communists to set up liaison offices in several cities of the country to solicit aid for the Eighth Route Army. The negotiation for establishing one of these offices in Guangzhou began in November 1937 when Zhang Yunyi was despatched by the Party Centre to discuss the issue with Yu Hanmou. After Yu’s consent was secured, the office, directed by Yun Guangying, started to operate in January of the next year.

Strictly speaking, the Eighth Route Army Office represented the CCP Party Centre only, but its legal status proved to be a valuable vehicle for the Guangdong Party, which was still illegal, to carry out its united-front work with the GMD government. For example, it was through this office that Guangdong Communists conducted their negotiations with the GMD. Yun, in particular, secured from Yu Hanmou the release of a number of political prisoners who were either former cadres or Communist sympathisers. Again, through the office, the Guangdong Party was able to implant several hundred of its members and progressive elements in the political work corps of Yu Hanmou’s army.³² Furthermore, from time to time, the office arranged high-ranking Party leaders to visit Guangzhou and propagate for the United Front. For instance, in May 1938, Ye Jianying

³⁰ During the Anti-Japanese War, the Communists used this term in two senses. It refers either specifically to the right wing of the GMD or more generally to anyone who were staunchly anti-Communist.

³¹ “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao” (1938), 297-9; *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 213-4.

³² Yun Guangying, “Kangri zhanzheng baofa qianhou wodang zai Guangdong kaizhan gongzuo de huiyi” [The recollections of the development of the Party’s work in Guangdong before and after the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War], *GWZ*, v. 28 (1980), 7; *Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui*, “Balujun zhu Yue banshichu” [The Eighth Route Army Office in Guangdong] in *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao zhuanji yanjiuji - kangri zhanzheng shiqi* [Collection of historical materials on special topics of the history of Chinese Communist Party - the Anti-Japanese War period], v. 2, ed. by *Zhonggong Zhongyang dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui zhengji yanjiushi*, (Beijing: *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe*, 1989), 148-50. (Hereafter cited as “Balujun zhu Yue banshichu”).

was invited to deliver a public speech at Zhongshan University. Ye was said to have been warmly welcomed by the senior officials of the Guangdong government.³³

Another expression of the GMD's support for the United Front was the permission to publish two Communist-sponsored newspapers in Guangzhou. The first one was the *Salvation Daily (Jiuwang ribao)*, which was originally run by a group of famous left-wing intellectuals in Shanghai. After the Chinese territory of the city had fallen to Japan, the newspaper was relocated to Guangzhou and was back in publication on New Year's day of 1938. The director of the *Salvation Daily* was Guo Moruo, and the editor-in-chief was Xia Yan. According to Communist historians, the administration of the newspaper was monitored by the Guangzhou Eighth Route Army Office.³⁴ When Guo Moruo first spoke to Yu Hanmou of his intention to republish the *Salvation Daily* in Guangzhou, Yu responded favourably by offering a subsidy of two thousand *yuan*. A number of senior GMD officials, including Zhan Xiaocen, the secretary of the Guangdong GMD, and Li Xihuan, head of the Guangdong army's political division, became consultants of the newspaper.³⁵ In April 1938, another newspaper, the *New China Daily (Xinhua ribao)*, established a branch in Guangzhou and began distribution. It contained mainly Communist propaganda and news concerning the Eighth Route and the New Fourth armies. The *Salvation Daily* and the *New China Daily* were the two main propaganda tools that the Communists in Guangdong could use for preaching the anti-Japanese cause to a wider audience. Together, their average sale volume reached several thousand a day, with the majority of their readership coming from the educated class.³⁶

In a very limited number of cases, the Party was able to win support from prominent GMD officials through the united-front appeals. An outstanding example was Zhan Xiaocen, who had been dissatisfied with the increasing "bureaucratisation" of the GMD. Several times he urged his superiors to carry out reforms and remove restrictions on popular mobilisation but received no support from them. Perhaps out of great disappointment with the GMD, Zhan became very sympathetic to the Communists. In August 1938, he published a periodical known as the *Voice of Salvation (Jiuwang*

³³ *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 212-13; Huang Jianxin, "Kangzhan chuqi Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei de tongyi zhanxian gongzuo" [The united-front work of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee during the early phase of the resistance war], *GDZ*, v.14 (December 1988), 201.

³⁴ Huang Jianxin, *ibid.*; *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 212.

³⁵ Huang Jianxin, *ibid.*

³⁶ Huang Jianxin, *ibid.*; Xia Yan, "Huiyi *Jiuwang ribao* (Guangzhouban)" [Remembering the *Salvation Daily* (the Guangzhou version)] in *Guangdong geming baokan* [Revolutionary newspapers and magazines in Guangdong], v. 1, ed. by Zhonggong Guangdongsheng dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, Guangdong xinwen xuehui, and Guangzhoushi xinwen xuehui, (internal publication, 1987), 127.

husheng) and established an organisation with the same name.³⁷ *The Voice of Salvation* was the first and probably the only GMD-related wartime publication which was devoted to the promotion of the United Front. Zhan himself had contributed articles to it calling for a more intimate partnership between the government and the Communists.³⁸

Evidently, Zhan was in the minority in the Guangdong GMD, because his words and deeds made him suspect to his party fellows as working secretly for the CCP. Zhan's outspoken sympathy for the Communists brought him to clash with other senior GMD officials, including Yu Hanmou. He was arrested by the government in February 1938 for not being subservient to his superiors but was released a few months later.³⁹

When seeking a cooperation with the GMD, the Guangdong Communists realised that it had very scanty resources at their disposal. The Party had just rehabilitated its organisation and was far from being an influential political force. It commanded no sizeable guerrilla armies like those in North and Central China. What it could rely upon were patriotic appeals and public opinions. However, these things were intangible, as the Party leaders well knew it. Seeing no other alternative, their united-front policy emphasised cultivating the goodwill of the GMD. It was claimed that during the first year of the war, Guangdong had been hailed as "a model of the United Front."⁴⁰ This statement actually tells us less about the peaceful relationship between the GMD and the CCP than the highly accommodating stance of the local Communists. In both open publications and internal Party documents, repeated efforts were made to curb excessive and harsh criticisms of the government. Even one-sided praise of the Communists' achievements was criticised as disregarding the united-front principle of mutual respect. In an article published in the *Salvation Daily*, Liao Chengzhi, head of the Eighth Route Army Office in Hong Kong, (see below) reminded the leftist writers that the GMD armies, just as the Eighth Route Army, had contributed greatly to the resistance war and should also deserve their praises. He especially denounced the previous practice of some who made jokes of the defeat of a GMD army, for whoever in the resistance camp was defeated, Liao asserted, it was ultimately the Chinese people who suffered.⁴¹

³⁷ Huang Jianxin, 203-4.

³⁸ See, for example, Zhan Xiaocen, "Liji kaifang yanlun chuban jihui jieshe ziyou" [Allow immediately for freedom of speech, publication, meeting and formation of associations] (21 November 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 39, 139-41.

³⁹ Zhan Xiaocen, "Kangzhan chuqi wozai Guangzhou de jianwen," 5-6; "Guangdong de qingkuang" (1938), 269, 272; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 329.

⁴⁰ Huang Jianxin, 195; Zhan Xiaocen, "Kangzhan chuqi wozai Guangzhou de jianwen," 5.

⁴¹ Liao Chengzhi, "Yiqie fucongyu kangzhan" [Everything subordinated to the resistance war] (3 February 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 39, 266-7; cf. "Wenjie gei Zhonggong Zhongyang Changjiangju baogao" [A report by

In spite of the Party's conscious efforts to avoid "friction" with its supposed ally, anti-Communist incidents did happen occasionally. For instance, in January 1938, the *Zhongshan Daily* published a series of articles written by right-wing writers. They professed to have disclosed the conspiracy of the CCP and advocated publicly that China would always have only "one government - the central government, one leader - Chiang Kai-shek, and one ideology - the Three People's Principles." These articles had met with hostile response from the left-wing writers and triggered a series of heated debates between intellectuals coming from both camps. At last, for the sake of unity, the Party had to affirm publicly and through meetings with the government officials that it would fully support the GMD in the war against Japan. Simultaneously, it asked the left-wing intellectuals to exercise self-control and explained to them that any violent polemics would not help but endanger the United Front. Another incident took place in late August of the same year, when the GMD in Guangzhou, following the example in Wuhan, shut down the local printing office of the *New China Daily*. In response, the Party held a media conference at which Liao Chengzhi defended eloquently against accusations that the *New China Daily* had been plotting to undermine the United Front by defaming the GMD government. Eventually, the mobilisation of mass pressure won and the GMD allowed the *New China Daily* to resume its distribution.⁴²

Communist historians claim that the Guangdong Party had been successful in overcoming "frictions" with the GMD government. To a certain extent, this was true because the anti-Communist current did subside for the time being. However, from another perspective, the Party's constant resort to accommodation, persuasion and education revealed its weaknesses and the fragility of the United Front. The dependence on the goodwill of the suspicious GMD government for war mobilisation had severely crippled the Party's ability to increase its popularity and power. This was reflected even more plainly in the social dimension of the Party's united-front policy.

Wenjie to the Chinese Communist Yangzi River Bureau] (12 February 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 110; "Zhonggong hanwei Chaoshan fenwei gongzuo baogao" [A report on the work of the Chaoshan Divisional Committee of the Chinese Communist Hanjiang Committee] (17 February 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 43, 77-8.

⁴² Huang Jianxin, 218-221; *Zhonggong Guangzhou difangshi*, 228-31; "Wenjie gei Zhonggong Zhongyang Changjiangju baogao" (12 February 1938), 110; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 317-20.

b. The United Front with the Society

After the formal establishment of the Second United Front, Mao Zedong reminded his comrades that the United Front should not be taken as simply an alliance between the GMD and the CCP but also as a nationwide mobilisation which included all Chinese patriots regardless of their political orientations, classes and occupations.⁴³ This social dimension of the United Front was important for broadening the Party's mass basis which, after 1927, tended to rely solely on the class support of peasantry. Nevertheless, in view of the political-military conditions of Guangdong, Zhang Wenbin admonished his subordinates not to "rush to do great things." The direction of the Party's mass work was not to strive for instant, large-scale mobilisation but to gradually build up its own strength for future use. That meant the united-front work amidst the masses had to be conducted within the boundaries drawn up by the GMD government. Cadres were ordered to infiltrate government-sponsored national salvation organisations and obtain for themselves a legal status in leading popular movements. All independent actions in the Party's name were discouraged.⁴⁴ The following paragraphs will survey the Communists' social united-front activities in Guangdong and examine the difficulties they encountered due to their reliance on the GMD's acquiescence for organising popular resistance.

Because of their comparatively acute political awareness and high receptivity to patriotic propaganda, students formed the most vital resource for the Party's wartime mobilisation. Compared to elsewhere, the student movement in Guangdong enjoyed one special advantage. The war with Japan had resulted in an exodus of dislocated students from occupied China. Especially in big cities such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai, thousands of students fled south to Guangzhou for refuge. Since these students had been radicalised by the war, they played a vanguard role in pushing the expansion of the student movement in Guangdong.⁴⁵ Many student patriotic groups began to spring up in major cities of the province. Initially, the politicians of Guangdong perceived this rising tide of student nationalism as an asset to increase their own influence. In varying degrees,

⁴³ Mao Zedong, "Urgent tasks following the establishment of Kuomintang-Communist Cooperation" (29 September 1937), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (SW)*, v. 2, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 39.

⁴⁴ "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui gei Qiongya tewei zhishixin" (26 November 1937), 57, 59; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 311-3; cf. Liang Weilin, "Lun xinxingshi yu jiuwang qingnian de gongzuo taidu, fangshi de zhuanbian" [A discussion on the new situation and the change in the youth's attitude and methods to the salvation work], *GGLWH*, v. 36, 294-5.

⁴⁵ Wu Hua, "Guangdong qingnian gongzuo baogao" [A report on the youth work in Guangdong] (November 1938), *GDTYS* (1937-1945), v. 1, 216.

the different factional groups within the government took the initiative to establish a number of student anti-Japanese organisations so as to simultaneously encourage student movement and harness student activism for their benefit.⁴⁶

Due to this favourable development, students became the main targets of the Communists' social united front. Members of both the Chinese Youth and the Society for Breakthrough and Progress were told to participate in all sorts of legal student bodies. Party members and associates were persuaded to infiltrate government-sponsored organisations and seize their leadership. A successful example was the Guangzhou's Students' Association for Resistance and Reinforcement. Originally founded by the GMD Guangzhou city branch, this association had been greatly despised by many progressive intellectuals who regarded it as consisting of primarily "traitors" and "running dogs." It was later infiltrated by the Communists. Through their patience and hard work, the association was said to have been completely transformed and became a major centre of student movement in Guangzhou.⁴⁷

Although the Communists infiltrated many student associations, they were not always successful in assuming control of them. As a result, problems arose. While patriotic student groups proliferated without a central coordinator, they found themselves arguing with each other over questions such as priorities of goals and mobilisation tactics. At some point, disagreements became so great that they impeded cooperation between these groups. To solve the problem, the Party leaders called for a struggle with "closed-doorism" and "sectarianism" in student work. Communist writers commenced a vigorous propaganda programme on the need to unify the student movement. The result of this struggle was the creation of the Young Anti-Japanese Vanguard of Guangdong in January 1938. The Vanguard was the first youth organisation which aimed to provide leadership for province-wide anti-Japanese mobilisation of students as well as other young people, such as workers and farmers. It was instituted by combining eight Communist-influenced student associations in Guangzhou. The Party understood that

⁴⁶ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 324; Kangxian duishi bianxiezu, "Guangdong qingnian kangri xianfengdui jianshi" [A brief history of the Young Anti-Japanese Vanguard of Guangdong], and Zeng Qingliu and Han Juting, "Kangxian de kangri tongyi zhanxian gongzuo" [The anti-Japanese united-front work of the Anti-Japanese Vanguard] in *Kangxian yanjiu* [Research in the Anti-Japanese Vanguard], ed. by Guangdong qingyunshi yanjiu weiyuanhui and Guangzhou qingyunshi yanjiu weiyuanhui, (Guangdongsheng renmin chubanshe, 1989), 22, 99.

⁴⁷ Wu Hua, "Guangdong qingnian gongzuo baogao" (November 1938), 214; for a survey of the Party's student work before the fall of Guangzhou, see "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei qingnianbu guanyu Guangdong qingnian gongzuo baogao" [A report by the Youth Work Department of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee on the Youth Work in Guangdong] (September 1939), *GDTYS* (1937-45), v. 1, 291-309.

such an ambitious scheme could not be materialised without the GMD's consent.

Therefore, it invited Zhan Xiaocen to be the official head of the Vanguarders although, secretly, the Vanguarders were under the strict command of the Communists.

Once established, the Vanguarders expanded rapidly, and its branches appeared in most universities and middle schools. In 1938, there were about 10,000 Vanguarders in the entire province, growing to about 60,000 at its peak.⁴⁸ Under the patriotic banner of national salvation, these Vanguarders marched to visit factories and villages to disseminate the message of national resistance to workers and peasants. Moreover, literacy classes, discussion sessions, dramas, plays, and choirs were employed to elevate their national consciousness. The Vanguarders claimed themselves a semi-military establishment. Their members ostensibly received basic training in military tactics and were indoctrinated with Marxist ideology. Undoubtedly, the Vanguarders were the most influential mass organisations that the Party commanded in wartime Guangdong. They continued to function until 1940 when the GMD authorities suppressed the Vanguarders, apparently alarmed by their rapid growth,. Many Vanguarders members eventually joined the Communists' guerrilla forces and carried on their fight against the Japanese invaders.⁴⁹

Apart from students, the Party also attempted to build up its power among workers in Guangzhou. Labour unions were established for workers in ferries, printing companies, and the oil-extraction industry. However, without exception, these unions were small, comprising less than twenty thousand members in total. Their influence was heavily contested by the GMD-authorized unions which were more powerful and larger in size.⁵⁰ In addition, the Party was known to have infiltrated several national salvation societies for women. These women societies were usually sponsored by wives of prominent GMD officials. They were useful in arousing public sympathy and soliciting logistics for the war; but because they had no closely-knitted organisational structure, they were incapable of large-scale mobilisation.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Huang Yixiang, "Zhandou zai nanhai zhibin de Guangdong qingnian kangri xianfengdui" [The Young Anti-Japanese Vanguarders of Guangdong fighting at the coast of the South China Sea], *Xueshu yanjiu* [Journal of Academic Research], no. 3 (1981), 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-34; Chen En, et. al., "Guangdong qiannian kangri xianfengdui de zhandou licheng" [The course of struggle traversed by the Young Anti-Japanese Vanguarders of Guangdong], *Xueshu yanjiu*, no. 3 (1982), 85-93; Kangxian duishi bianxiezhu, 21-48.

⁵⁰ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 307-8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 309; cf. Wu Kunshun, "Zai Guangdong 'fukanghui' de zhandou suiyue" [The months and years in the Guangdong 'women's resistance association'], *GDZ*, v. 13 (September 1988), 108-22.

Since Guangdong was the homeland of most Chinese living abroad, overseas Chinese constituted another prime target in the Communists' social united front.⁵² Before the outbreak of the Pacific War in late 1941, Hong Kong was the Party's main base to rally overseas support. Concurrently an international city and a traditional port of departure for emigrants, Hong Kong facilitated the united-front work by providing convenient communication links and established networks. Furthermore, since the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, the colonial government in Hong Kong had become more tolerant of Communist-inspired resistance activities, for Japanese aggression in China had also threatened British commercial interests. As long as such activities would not involve Britain in open clashes with Japan, the British were willing to assist China's war effort and allow the promotion of the national salvation movement in its colony.

The Communists had three major united-front outposts in Hong Kong. The first was the Hong Kong branch of the Eighth Route Army Office. It was Zhou Enlai who presented the Party's request to the governor of Hong Kong via the British Ambassador to China, General Carl. Zhou claimed that the heroic resistance of the Eighth Route and the New Fourth armies had won not only admiration but also contributions such as funds and material aid from the overseas Chinese. The Party therefore needed an office in Hong Kong to handle these contributions. Zhou's request was soon granted. However, to avoid defying openly Britain's neutrality in the war between China and Japan, the office had to run behind the facade of the *Yuehua* company. The office began to operate in January 1938 with Liao Chengzhi and Pan Hannian as its directors.⁵³ The second outpost was the China Defence League headed by Song Qingling (Madame Sun Yat-sen). The purpose of the League was to rally support for China's resistance, particularly money and logistic supplies. Because of Song's personal charisma, the League enjoyed popularity among many famous personages both within and outside China.⁵⁴ The third centre was the Leisure Music Club (*Yuxian yueshe*), established in 1930 to provide entertainment for

⁵² Although the term "overseas Chinese" (*Huaqiao*) might sometimes be used in a sense which excludes the "compatriots of Hong Kong and Macao" (*Gang'ao tongbao*), for the sake of clarity, I shall use it to designate both groups in this dissertation.

⁵³ For the history and contributions of the Eighth Route Army Office in Hong Kong, see Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei "baban" dangshichu, "Balujun zhu Xianggang banshichu" [The Eighth Route Army Office in Hong Kong], in *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao zhuanji yanjiuji*, v. 2, 156-84; cf. Kurt Werner Radtke, *China's Relations with Japan, 1945-83: The Role of Liao Chengzhi*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 65.

⁵⁴ For Song's anti-Japanese activities, see Wu Shuzhen, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Song Qingling zai Guangdong de douzheng" [The Struggle of Song Qingling in Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War period] in *Guangdong kangzhan shi yanjiu* [Research in the history of the resistance war in Guangdong], ed. by Guangdongsheng Zhonggong dangshi xuehui, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1987), 333-46.

Chinese seamen in Hong Kong. In early 1936, Zeng Sheng, a student of the Zhongshan University and a member of the Chinese Youth, went to Hong Kong and worked as a seaman. Through arranging entertainment and benevolence functions for his fellow seamen, Zeng came into contact with some old Communist members who had lost touch with the Party since the late 1920s. Together, they formed a work group to coordinate Communist activities among Chinese seamen and used the Leisure Music Club for outreach purposes. In 1938, the Leisure Music Club had a membership of thirty thousands.⁵⁵

The united front with overseas Chinese brought to the Party a huge amount of money and war materials. However, prior to the fall of Guangzhou, a large portion of these resources went to the Eighth Route and New Fourth armies instead of to the Guangdong Communists. Nevertheless, the Party's vigorous patriotic propaganda had raised a general concern for the resistance war among overseas Chinese communities. In response to the Communists' nationalist appeals, thousands of Chinese living abroad returned to their homeland to fight in the war. In Hong Kong, through kinship bonds, the Party had raised several "Home-Going Service Regiments" (*huixiang fuwutuan*) and mobilised over a hundred patriotic Guangdong natives to go back to their home counties to participate in local defence. In spite of their small number, these returning natives were very active and, in many cases, helped stimulate greater local attention for the resistance. The number of returning natives grew tremendously after the Japanese invaded Guangdong in late 1938, and they formed an indispensable source of recruits for the early Communist resistance guerrillas.⁵⁶

In assessing the accomplishment of the Guangdong Party's united-front policy before the Japanese invasion, it is appropriate to say that conceivable progress was confined primarily to a few urban centres. Aside from Guangzhou and Hong Kong, Shantou was perhaps the only other place that witnessed a comparatively positive atmosphere for the GMD-CCP cooperation. Before his transfer from Shantou in April 1938, General Li Hanyun, the military commander of local GMD army, appeared to be

⁵⁵ Zeng Sheng, "Zai Xianggang congsi Haiyuan gongyun de huiyi" [Recollections of the work of the seaman's movement in Hong Kong], *GDZ*, v. 14 (December 1988), 28; cf. id., *Zeng Sheng huiyilu* [The memoir of Zeng Sheng], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1991), 77.

⁵⁶ Huang Weici and Xu Xiaosheng, "Guangdong huaqiao, gang'ao tongbao huixiang fuwutuan dui zuguo kangzhan de gongxian" [The contributions of the Service Regiments of overseas Chinese from Guangdong and the compatriots of Hong Kong and Macao to the resistance war], *GDIW*, v. 3, 385-86; Liu Xuan, "Xianggang qingnian kangri de yimian qizhi -Xianggang Huiyang qingnianhui" [A flag of the youth resistance work in Hong Kong - Hong Kong Association of Huiyang youth], *GDZ*, v. 10 (June, 1987), 58-73; Zheng Ziming, "Haifeng jiuwang yundong de dongtai" [The situation concerning the salvation movement in Haifeng], *GGLWH*, v. 41, 440-1; Zeng Sheng, "Zai Xianggang congsi haiyuan gongyun de huiyi," 28-29; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 88-9.

positive towards the United Front. A famous slogan coined by him was: “resistance against the enemy regardless of which political parties; eliminating traitors regardless of whether relatives or friends” (*kangdi bufen dangpai, chujian wulun qinyou*). In addition to the release of a number of political prisoners, Li sanctioned the establishment of several national salvation organisations for the youth in counties under his governance. However, in reality, Li’s support for the United Front was only partial, and he feared any kind of genuine mass mobilisation. While allowing student corps to follow his troops to the villages and carry out anti-Japanese propaganda, Li strictly prohibited them to organise villagers into any sorts of groupings. Their sole duty was to cultivate the loyalty of the peasants to the government, and to persuade them to buy the national salvation bonds issued by the GMD.⁵⁷

Perhaps the Party’s united-front works were least successful in the former soviet bases, especially those of Hai-lu-feng and Hainan Island. Since the local societies had undergone radical land revolution, class hatred was deep-rooted. With the experience of class struggle still vivid in their minds, neither landlords nor peasants trusted each other; and they refused to cooperate in spite of the Party’s mediation. Although many peasants still held a good impression of the Communists, they were unwilling to commit themselves to the Party’s new policy. Most of them had no faith in the recently installed United Front, and they preferred to wait and see.⁵⁸

A major difficulty for the Party in preaching the anti-Japanese propaganda to workers and peasants was that these people saw no direct connection between the war and their livelihood. They found the Communists’ nationalistic appeals too abstract and foreign especially because the Japanese invasion did not seem to pose a real threat to them. The only exception was the fishermen living at the coast, who were frequently harassed by the Japanese navy. Some of them, under Japanese coercion or bribery, supplied them with intelligence of Guangdong’s coastal defence. The Party had realised the urgency of organising these fishermen for self-defence. Several times it urged the government to militarise fishermen and contemplate the possibility of launching seaborne guerrillas. Also, it put forward a number of proposals for the improvement of their

⁵⁷ “Chaoshan gongzuo baogao” [A report on the work in Chaoshan area] (1937), *GGLWH*, v. 43, 59-60.

⁵⁸ “Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui baogao” (12 December 1937), 69; “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao” (1938), 304; “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei gei nanwei de zonghe baogao” (23 July 1937), 13; “Zheng Zhong zhi zichengxiang xin” [A letter from Zheng Zhong to brother Zicheng] (December 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 41, 184.

livelihood so that no more fishermen would be bribed by the enemy and become their agents.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the GMD government paid little heed to this advice.

As far as ordinary people were concerned, economic hardship was their real preoccupation. Some Communists in Guangdong, borrowing propaganda materials from northeast China, tried to relate poverty to Japanese imperialism and preached that only after the Japanese were defeated could people's living condition be elevated.⁶⁰ However, before the Japanese invaders actually appeared in the province, most people could only associate their hardship with exploitation by the government, capitalists and landlords. In fact, the immediate effect of the war on the people was the heavy burden of taxation. Moreover, due to the scarce government subsidies, a majority of government-sanctioned self-defence programmes had to be financed by the people themselves. This added an extra burden for those who were already living beneath the poverty line. Furthermore, grievances resulted because the purchase of national salvation bonds supposed to be voluntary but was made compulsory by many local magistrates to yield profits.⁶¹ Besides government officials, rural elite also abused the resistance efforts. In Punyu, the leaders of a village had set up a mutual help society to stock grain for the war effort. Every villager was required to contribute a fixed portion to it. However, after the grain was collected, some of the leaders smuggled it outside and sold it for profit.⁶²

With these drawbacks and dissatisfactions, it was not surprising that anti-war and anti-government sentiments prevailed over some rural communities. Peasants in Puning complained to the Communist propaganda teams, "All you said is about resisting the Japanese and the final victory. Yet what benefits will the final victory bring to us? We can't see any now! What we do see now is this thing requires money and that thing requires money too. We are afraid that before the Japanese have arrived, we're already dead!" In Shunde, they said in anger, "Why talk about fighting against Japan? We don't even have enough to eat! The Japanese have not yet brought starvation to us, nor have

⁵⁹ See, for example, Li Fangyuan, "Zenyang dongyuan yumin wuzhuang ziji" [How to mobilise the fishermen to militarise themselves?] (19 June 1938) and Hua Qing, "Baowei Chaoshan yu kaizhan ziweituan puxun gongzuo" [The defence of Chaoshan and the development of general training work] (September 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 42, 223-31, 309; "Zhonggong Chaomei tewei zhi Zhongguo Guomindang Chaomei gexian shidangbu xin" [A letter from the Chinese Communist Chaomei Special Committee to the Party branches of the Guomindang in various cities of Chaomei County] (15 July 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 43, 123-4.

⁶⁰ "Zhonggong Puningxian gongwei shiyi yuefen gongzuo baogao" [The November report of the Chinese Communist Puning County Working Committee] (10 December 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 42, 55.

⁶¹ "Shantou de gongzuo baogao" [A report on the work in Shantou] (November 1937), *GGLWH*, v. 42, 13-4; "Chaoshan gongzuo baogao" (1937), *GGLWH*, v. 43, 63; Yu Quan, "Punyu siqu de jiuwang gongzuo" [National salvation work in the Fourth District of Punyu County] (25 April 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 41, 431-2.

⁶² Yu Quan, *ibid.*, 432.

they enslaved us as cows and horses. But the landlords have already inflicted a lot of sufferings on us!” In Huilai, some peasants jeered at a speaker of national resistance, “You people speak so eloquently because you are fed well. But we are not!” In responding to the government’s call for organising self-defence, a group of salt makers living at the coast replied, “We don’t know how the Japanese and the traitors will treat us when they arrive. What we do know now is you [the government agents] are going to kill us.” Finally, it was not uncommon in Chaoshan area that the youth workers who accompanied Li Hanyun’s soldiers to the villages were scolded by the peasants as the “running dogs” of the government.⁶³

The Party understood that unless it could do something to improve the livelihood of the common people, it would have no hope of arousing their interests in the anti-Japanese cause. However, despite the Communists’ constant petitions, the GMD authorities in Guangdong refused to introduce any major socio-economic reforms. The Party did try to lead a few economic struggles through the legal organisations under its control; but, again, the efforts were confined mainly to Guangzhou. The most notable example was the strike by the oil-extraction workers. These workers had already been mobilised twice by the Party in response to the government’s calls for public anti-Japanese demonstrations. Unfortunately, their patriotism won no sympathy from the factories’ owners, who considered that the workers’ action disrupted production and therefore deducted two-day wages from all the participants. As a result of this heavy-handed response, the dissatisfied and enraged workers went on strike. In collaborating with their struggle, Communist writers carried out intense propaganda to stir up public sympathy for the workers. In the end, due to government intervention, these workers won back their lost wages.⁶⁴ Truly, the story of the oil-extraction workers represented only one of the very tiny number of cases in which the Party was successful in improving the labourers’ living conditions. In most circumstances, the Party restrained itself from taking radical measures to avoid provoking the GMD government and the big capitalists.

⁶³ “Shunde shenghuo xieshi” [The realities of life in Shunde County] (27 February 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 41, 389; “Chaoshan gongzuo baogao” (1937), 63-4.

⁶⁴ “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao” (1938), 320-1; Xia Fu, “Gejie yizhi qilai yuanzhu zai ji’e xianshang de zhayou gongren” [All rise up to support the oil extraction workers who are living on the verge of hunger] (25 December 1937) and Ba Feng, “Yonghu zhengfu kangzhan daodi - liubai zhayouye gongyou fandui changshang tingzha de douzheng” [Support the government, Resist to the end - the struggle of six hundred oil extraction workers against the factory owners’ decision to stop the oil extraction process] (16 February 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 39, 201-4, 293-6.

In the countryside, the Communists could do even less to relieve peasant hardship. It was reported in one Party document that the tenants in a district of Meixian had been mobilised to press the landlords for rent reduction.⁶⁵ However, this must be an isolated incident. In most areas, the Party relied on the GMD government to carry out rent and interest reductions; worse yet was the fact that neither did local officials bother to enforce nor were landlords ready to comply with these regulations. Therefore, by failing to offer any concrete gains to the peasants, the resistance movement attracted few followers in the rural areas, and many rural mass organisations existed in name only.

III. The Development of the Party's Military Force

The establishment of a Communist armed force appeared late in the agenda of the Guangdong Party, evidently because the question assumed no real urgency in the light of the early war development. Regarding the remnants of the Red Army guerrillas in the province, the Guangdong Party received no instruction from the Party Centre to send them north to join the New Fourth Army. Thus, the Guangdong Party leaders had to settle the matter on their own, with reference to their understanding of the Second United Front.

In early 1937, the Southern Working Committee under Xue Shangshi thought that since the Party was going to form a coalition with the GMD and ceased its armed insurrection, there was no point in maintaining the guerrillas and their bases. Also, if these guerrillas were not disbanded, their continual existence would certainly irritate the GMD and threaten the stability of the United Front. Therefore, after the Southern Working Committee had resumed contact with the Hainan Special Committee, the first thing Xue ordered Feng Baiju to do was to dissolve his guerrilla force. According to Xue's directive, the 150 or so guerrilla soldiers, apart from a few who might stay to develop the Party work, would have to be sent home. The Party might give a small remuneration to assist them for a living. Furthermore, all arms possessed by the guerrillas had to be buried. Xue's directive was said to have created great disturbances among the guerrillas. Many of them felt abandoned by the Party and thought of withdrawing their loyalty to the revolution. Even worse, while the Hainan guerrillas eventually submitted to the Party's authority and laid down their arms voluntarily, their act, far from winning the goodwill of the government, actually encouraged the GMD police to step up their arrest of

⁶⁵ "Meixian Songyuanqu gongzuo gaikuang" [Work in the Songyuan district of Mei County] (1939), *GGLWH*, v. 42, 73-4.

Communists. Consequently, intent on saving the lives of his comrades, Feng defied Xue's order and stopped demobilising his guerrilla force.⁶⁶

At this critical moment, Zhang Yunyi arrived at Hong Kong. As a representative of the Party Centre, Zhang's mission was to promote greater cooperation with the GMD officials in southern China. However, Zhang had also been charged by Yan'an with the task of preserving the Party's guerrilla force in the south and rectifying any excessive accommodation to the GMD government.⁶⁷ With Zhang himself a native of Hainan, it was no surprise to see him intervening in the decision of the Southern Working Committee on behalf of the Hainan guerrillas. In the summer of 1937, the Southern Working Committee admitted its error on disbanding the guerrillas. The guerrillas were then advised to stay vigilant and "not to hurry to go down from the mountains and expose themselves."⁶⁸ Zhang also instructed Feng to seek negotiations with the Hainan government to reorganise his guerrillas into an independent anti-Japanese corps of the GMD. This then began a protracted negotiation between the two sides which did not conclude until December 1938. Had Zhang continued to stay in Guangdong, he probably would have done his best to preserve also the guerrillas force of Gu Dacun, who had resumed contact with the Guangdong Part in early 1938. Unfortunately, by the end of 1937, Zhang Yunyi was transferred to Central China to take up a post in the New Fourth Army. The Party affairs in Guangdong were thereafter under Zhang Wenbin's control.

Zhang Wenbin had a different vision of building up the Party's military strength from Zhang Yunyi. Consistent with his tactic of extending the Party's mass support, Zhang Wenbin insisted that the Communists should secure for themselves an armed force only by way of the United Front. Any ventures outside this parameter was conceived to

⁶⁶ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" [A report by Zhang Wenbin on the work in Guangdong] (7 March 1940) and "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" [A report by Zhang Wenbin on the work in Guangdong] (23 April 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 80, 181-2; Hu Tichun, Xu Chunhong and Wang Huanqiu, "Feng Baiju zhuan" [A biography of Feng Baiju], *Qiongdào xinghuo (QX)* [The sparks of Hainan Island], v. 3 (1981), 40; Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi yanjiushi ed., *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan* [A biography of General Feng Baiju], (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1998), 156-8. (Hereafter cited as *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan*).

⁶⁷ Zhang Yunyi demonstrated a firm interest in defending the independence and autonomy of the Communist armed forces within the coalition with the GMD in the Zhangpu Incident that occurred in late 1937. While he was negotiating with the GMD authorities for the release of the Communist guerrillas' weapons seized by the government troops in Zhangpu, Zhang told the guerrillas that "they should go up the mountains and fight if their independence was in the slightest way threatened." Zhang's toughness was supposed to have made the GMD yield to the Communists' request. See Benton, *Mountain Fires*, 176; cf. "Zhongyang guanyu nanfang ge youjiqu gongzuo fangzhende zhishi" [Party Centre's instruction on the direction of work in the various guerrilla areas in the south] (1 October 1937), *ZZWX*, v. 11, 362-4.

⁶⁸ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 182; *Feng Baiju jiangjun zhuan*, 158; *QZS*, 92.

be wrong and dangerous. Though in a vague manner, he criticised Zhang Yunyi's toughness as "leftist," which would expose the identity of Party members to the government and bring about losses.⁶⁹ Rather, Zhang Wenbin prescribed two directions in which the Guangdong Communists should proceed to develop their military power. The first one was through the GMD army. On the one hand, Party members and associates were sent to attend the GMD's military training classes. In this way, they infiltrated the army and sought a chance to establish clandestine cells amidst the soldiers. Nevertheless, even Zhang himself agreed that such a method was far from satisfactory because the GMD could easily discover these cells and suppress them.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Party tried to forge a bond with GMD army officials, who displayed sympathy to the Communists' anti-Japanese stance.⁷¹ One example was Mo Xiong, the army commander in the Nanxiong County, whom the Party had won over in 1938. Mo was said to be very supportive to Communist guerrilla warfare in northern Guangdong throughout the period of the Anti-Japanese War.⁷² Nevertheless, Mo was one of the few mid-ranking officials that the Communists succeeded in winning over. For others, their sympathy towards the Party faded as soon as they encountered pressure from their superiors to tighten their guard against political deviants.

The second direction that Zhang Wenbin prescribed for building up the Party's military strength was through the local self-defence forces. The idea of organising province-wide anti-Japanese communal defence forces was raised in late 1937, when the fall of Nanjing had triggered a panic in Guangdong and alerted the government to the urgency of self-defence. In January the next year, Yu Hanmou announced the plan to establish rural self-defence corps in the entire province to assist the army in local defence, and a committee composed of over twenty senior GMD officials was set up to take charge of the matter.⁷³

⁶⁹ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 332.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 335-36.

⁷² For details of Mo's collaboration with the Party, see Mo Xiong, "Wo yu gongchandang hezuo de huiyi" [My recollections on cooperation with the CCP], *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao*, v. 31 (March 1984), 18-38; cf. Gu Dacun, 38-9.

⁷³ Mei Jia and Qiu Shi, "Kangri zhanzheng Guangdong zhanchang dashiji" [Great events of the Guangdong battlefield in the Anti-Japanese War], *GWZ*, v. 50 (February 1987), 220-1; "Geming de Guangdong minzhong wuzhuang qilai - Yuzongsiling zai kangri ziweituan tongshuai weiyuanhui juizhi dianli zhong yanci" [Militarising the revolutionary masses of Guangdong - Inaugural address made by the Commander-in-Chief Yu Hanmou on the formation of the Committee for Governing anti-Japanese Self-Defence Corps], the *Jiawang ribao* [*Salvation Daily*] (18 January 1938).

Indeed, local defence was not a new concept for rural Guangdong. Many large lineages were known to have very powerful militia forces, a factor which contributed to the long history of inter-lineage feuding in the province. However, to have these self-defence forces serving the resistance purpose of the government, one that went beyond the traditional parochial interests of villagers, was not a readily accepted idea. Many people feared that the government plan was a prelude to full-scale conscription to the army. As the Japanese troops moved inland towards Wuhan instead of heading southward, the general panic in Guangdong subsided. Collective security then lost its momentum as a mobilisation factor. Hundreds of *zhuangding* (young able-bodied males) were reported to have escaped to Southeast Asia to evade recruitment into the government's local defence corps. Those who were rich hired substitutes for their sons. In addition, many people refused to bring their own weapons when joining the corps as the government required. They feared that their weapons would be expropriated despite Yu Hanmou's reassurance that the government had no intention to do so.⁷⁴

Even though the GMD's mobilisation for self-defence was so unpopular, Zhang still saw it as a good chance for the Party to develop its military power. While assisting the government in promoting the idea of self-defence, Party cadres were also directed to launch "individual united-front work." They should try to become good friends of local officials or members of the rural self-defence committees so as to secure for the Communists top positions in the defence corps. There is no reliable figure on the total number of defence corps that had come under the Communists' control by way of this method, but the Party claimed to have achieved certain progress in counties such as Zhongshan, Dongguan, Huiyang and Zengcheng.⁷⁵

In April 1938, a proposal was put forth in a Party meeting to reorganise and expand the guerrillas troops of Gu Dacun into a division of the New Fourth Army so that the Party could have its own army for fighting the guerrilla war once the Japanese arrived. However, Zhang Wenbin regarded such an idea as of secondary importance and insisted that the Party should stick to the tactic of seizing control of local defence forces under the concealment of the United Front.⁷⁶ Actually, Zhang doubted the feasibility of building up

⁷⁴ "Chaoshan gongzuo baogao" (1937), 62; Wang Jun, "Qiongya zhongzhong" [Various things about Hainan], *Jiawang ribao* [Salvation Daily], (5 May 1938); Yu Guangying, "Wuzhuang minzhong de zhengzhi gongzuo" [The political work on militarising the masses] (1 September 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 251; Hua Qing, "Baowei Chaoshan yu kaizhan ziweituan puxun gongzuo" (September 1938), 307-8.

⁷⁵ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo de zonghe baogao" (1938), 333, 336.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 336; Luo Fanqun, "Wodui kangzhan chuqi Guangdong junshi gongzuo de zairenshi" [My reconsideration of the military work in Guangdong during the early phase of the resistance war] in

the Communists' military strength on the basis of the former guerrilla troops because it would upset the harmony with the GMD. In the end, the seventeen or so guerrilla troops of Gu were handed over to the Yangzi River Bureau, which decided to disband them. Gu recalled that many of them got killed by the GMD and the rural elite after returning home. Gu was allowed to work in the Provincial Committee as the head of the United Front Work Department in early 1939. Gu himself acknowledged that the arrangement was so ironical for a person like him, who had been a staunch fighter against the GMD for nearly a decade. Despite his frequent pleas to develop guerrilla activities, he was ordered by Zhang to focus on cultivating a friendly relationship with the GMD politicians. Gu soon showed himself unfit for the new appointment and, plausibly for this reason, he was transferred to Yan'an for re-education by late 1939.⁷⁷

In their memoirs, several cadres held Wang Ming responsible for the Guangdong Party's insufficient attention to the preparation of an independent armed force. Gu, in particular, criticised that Zhang Wenbin indulged in Wang's political line and, as a result, became "an addict of the United Front."⁷⁸ One must be cautious in accepting these testimonies too readily, for the Communists use the term Wang Ming Line in a very loose manner to describe any compromising actions of the Party regardless whether they had been inspired by Wang Ming or not. Moreover, to explain the question solely by means of political ideology tends to oversimplify the complex reality.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that Zhang Wenbin had demonstrated a high sensitivity to the wartime settings of Guangdong in formulating his policy and was never a blind follower of Wang Ming. Until October 1938, Guangdong was virtually untouched by the war, and the political control of the GMD government remained intact. For the weak Communists who were in close touch with the GMD authorities, there was little choice but to adopt the more conciliatory course of struggle favoured by Wang Ming. By showing their enthusiasm in the United Front, the Communists enjoyed certain advantages. On the one hand, by constantly resorting to the united-front appeals, the Party could neutralise possible attacks from the GMD government. On the other hand, by

Kangzhan chuqi Zhonggong Zhongyang Changjiangju [The Chinese Communist Yangzi River Bureau in the early phase of the resistance war], comp. by Zhonggong Hubeisheng dangshi ziliao zhengji bianyan weiyuanhui and Zhonggong Wuhan shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji bianyan weiyuanhui, (Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1991), 650.

⁷⁷ Gu Dacun, 35-9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 37, 39; Luo Fanqun, 654-55; Wang Junyu, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Zhonggong Guangdong dangzuzhi huodong de lianduan huiyi" [Some recollections on the activities of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Party during the period of the Anti-Japanese War], *GWZ*, v. 36 (October 1982), 16-7.

promoting the anti-Japanese cause, it could take advantage of the aroused patriotism within China to put continued pressure on the GMD for further political concessions. However, if the Party behaved too aggressively in expanding its military power, it would definitely provoke hostile reactions from the GMD. After all, it was extremely doubtful whether the Party could mobilise the masses for army building by appealing to patriotism and collective security alone without introducing socio-economic reforms. However, deprived of any bases, the Party could do nothing significant on its own. In short, Zhang's emphasis on the need to maintain a friendly relationship with the GMD look sensible in the light of the political development of Guangdong during the first year of the war.

IV. Concluding Remarks

The war with Japan provided an opportunity for the Guangdong Party, which was greatly weakened by repeated state crackdowns, to re-emerge as a major force in the province's resistance movement. The rising national sentiment and the subsequent formation of the Second United Front helped to bring back the Communist revolution from the remote rural corner to the urban and cosmopolitan setting. Under the banner of national salvation, the Communists attracted numerous followers from patriotic students and intellectuals in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, as well as the Chinese living overseas. Party organisations were reactivated with membership growing gradually.

However, unlike North China, Japanese aggression did not lead to the disintegration of the GMD rule in Guangdong. The Guangdong Party leaders, notably Zhang Wenbin, were painfully aware of the fragile position of the newly-restored Party. They therefore tried hard to secure the goodwill of the GMD and confined the Communist-led resistance activities to the prescribed sphere. No doubt, this reliance on the consent of the GMD severely crippled the Party's ability for popular mobilisation, particularly in the countryside. In comparison, Hartford has argued cogently that the prewar Communist revolutionary struggle in rural Hebei contributed significantly to the early success of the Jin-Cha-Ji border region. She finds that in some locations of western and central Hebei, the small number of prewar Communist activists who survived managed to seize local control well before the arrival of the Eighth Route Army.⁷⁹ However, in Guangdong, the prewar Communist cadres such as the Red Army remnants,

⁷⁹ Hartford, "Fits and Starts," 144-74.

who stayed underground in the countryside, were unable to reproduce similar “fits and starts” because the war had not occasioned political anarchy in the province. Neither were they given a free hand to mobilise the peasants and seize power as their counterparts did in rural Hebei;⁸⁰ nor were they actually allowed to take up such an aggressive role by the Guangdong Party, which was so anxious to preserve its harmony with the GMD.

In the eyes of the Guangdong Party leaders, except Zhang Yunyi, the Red Army remnants in the province represented more of an embarrassment than an asset, since their continual existence was deemed to have obstructed the improvement of the Communists' relationship with the GMD. Consequently, the Party was prepared to forsake them. It was almost by chance that a number of the Hainan guerrillas were preserved and granted permission to negotiate with the GMD for reorganisation. However, until late 1938, the negotiation showed little prospect of bearing fruit (see Chapter 5). The dissolution of Gu's guerrilla bands therefore seemed justified to many in the Party. In fact, even if Gu and his fighters were allowed to stay, it was doubtful whether they would have contributed in any remarkable way to the Party's subsequent commencement of guerrilla warfare in the East River region. As the next chapter will show, after Japan had invaded Guangdong, its restricted extent of occupation provided little room for large-scale guerrilla mobilisation as in North China. The exact difficulty which confronted the Communist leaders of Guangdong was: Should they allocate more manpower to develop guerrilla fighting and base construction or to continue in their efforts to maintain the delicate united-front cooperation with the GMD government?

⁸⁰ Hartford also pointed out the importance of the Japanese invasion in clearing state repression for the local cadres and in providing latter opportunities for seizing control of the locales. See *ibid.*, 168.

CHAPTER 3
GUERRILLA WAR IN
THE EAST RIVER VALLEY, 1939-1943

I. Japanese Invasion of Guangdong

On 12 October 1938, the Japanese army landed in the Bias Bay of Guangdong. With strong air and naval support, it easily broke through the defence line of the Chinese coastal garrisons and pursued the fleeing troops towards the lower East River. Viewing that no time should be spared for the Chinese army to regroup and put up more effective resistance, the Japanese military proceeded at once to capture Guangzhou. By the time the vanguard of the Japanese army reached the vicinity of the city, the GMD government and all major officials had already withdrawn. On the afternoon of 21 October, the Japanese marched their troops into the provincial capital.

The swift defeat of the GMD in Guangdong owed much to their lack of preparation, both militarily and psychologically, for the coming of the war. Many Chinese politicians, of whom Chiang Kai-shek was the most notable example, believed firmly that Japan would not direct its aggression towards Guangdong for the reason of avoiding open hostility with Britain. Although several pieces of intelligence confirmed that from mid-1938 onwards, the Japanese were amassing their forces in Formosa (Taiwan), which might have indicated a military operation against Guangdong, Chiang continued to pull troops out from the province to join battles elsewhere.¹ Inside the Guangdong government, a similar optimism prevailed. Zhan Xiaocen stated that because 12 October, the day on which the Japanese landed in the Bias Bay, was the eve of the Mid-Autumn Festival, nearly all senior officers of the local garrisons had left their units for Guangzhou to celebrate the festival with their families.²

Chiang underestimated Japan's determination to cut off the supply links to China, which, presumably, played a vital role in bringing Chiang's Chongqing government to submission. While respecting the neutrality of Hong Kong in order to avoid conflict with

¹ "Huanan lunxianqu teji," [A special series on the occupied areas in South China] (July, 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 391; Li Jiezhi, "Guangzhou zai kangrishi shi zenyang lunxiande," [How did Guangzhou fall in the Anti-Japanese War?], *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* [Selected materials on culture and history], v. 2, (September, 1961), 12-3; Zhan Xiaocen, "Kangzhan chuqi wozai Guangzhou-de jianwen," 8; Military History Section, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, U.S., *South China Area Operations Record (1937-1941)*, (Tokyo: Japanese Monograph No. 180, 1956), 11. (Hereafter cited as *South China Record*).

² Zhan, *ibid.*, 9; cf. Li Jiezhi, *ibid.*, 14-5.

the British, the Japanese moved on to capture other major ports on the coast of Guangdong following their occupation of Guangzhou. In February 1939, they launched a surprise landing on Hainan Island. Guarded by a force composed of only a few thousands soldiers, the island soon fell into the enemy's hands. To further seal Chongqing off from outside aid, the Japanese carried out another military campaign in June to capture Swatow. Quickly outmanoeuvring the defenders, the troops took over the city and advanced inland. By the end of that month, Chao'an was occupied.³ From then on until 1944, the extent of Japanese domination in Guangdong remained more or less the same, except for the inclusion of Hong Kong after the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941.

After the fall of Guangzhou, Yu Hanmou and his army retreated north to Shaoguan (Qujiang) and made it the provisional capital of the province. In January 1939, following the conclusion of the Nanyue military conference, in which the strategy of war was reoriented and the war zones of the country were redrawn,⁴ Chiang Kai-shek reorganised the governing body of Guangdong. He appointed Zhang Fakui (the general of the "Ironsides") to be the Commanding General of the Fourth War Zones, later redesignated the Seventh War Zone. The areas basically covered both Guangdong and Guangxi.⁵ Yu Hanmou became Zhang's deputy and remained the commander of his army, which was reorganised from the Fourth Route Army to the Twelfth Group Army. However, according to British intelligence, this arrangement was likely "a face-saving device" because half of Yu's forces had actually been reassigned to the other generals' command.⁶ Another new appointment was Li Hanyun. He was installed simultaneously as the civil governor of Guangdong and the military commander of the western region of the province. Finally, Yu Senwen became the Secretary General of the Guangdong GMD, the post formerly held by Zhan Xiaocen.

This new leadership was meant to boost the war spirit of the Guangdong people. In order to do this, after the reorganisation, the Shaoguan government introduced a series of measures to try to win back public credibility. It discharged and demoted a number of

³ *South China Record*, 48-50.

⁴ For details about the Nanyue military conference, see Hsi-sheng Chi, *Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937-45*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982), 53-6.

⁵ Zhang held this command post until early 1945; but, in 1940, he was ordered by Chiang Kai-shek to move his headquarters to southern Guangxi and leave the defence of Guangdong again to Yu Hanmou.

⁶ War Office Archives (WO) 106/5796, 9 March 1939, Yu Han-mou: extract from "Shanghai Naval and Military Intelligence Summary No. 47"; cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 73.

military officers who had been found fleeing their posts or performing poorly in the battles. Moreover, military reforms and training programmes were commenced to improve the army's combat capabilities. Further, popular mobilisation was generally encouraged. In the Japanese-occupied areas, guerrilla activities carried out by communal-organised militia forces were acknowledged and sometimes highly praised. In eastern Guangdong, the GMD appointed Xiang Hanping, who stationed his headquarters at Huizhou, to direct the anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare.⁷

Nevertheless, what ultimately restored the Guangdong people's confidence in the government was its ability to hold on to the foothold in Shaoguan against the Japanese offensives. In December 1939 and May 1940, the Japanese launched two large-scale military campaigns in north Guangdong. The former aimed to forestall a conceivable GMD's counter-offensive to retake Guangzhou, and the latter was an auxiliary operation in the Japanese plan to capture Yichang of Hubei. In most Chinese literature, whether pro-GMD or not, the two battles were always depicted as the success of the Guangdong army in repelling the enemy's intrusions.⁸ There is no doubt that the Chinese soldiers had fought far more courageously and with greater coordination in these battles than they did formerly in defending Guangzhou. However, it seems that on both occasions, the Japanese withdrew to Guangzhou instead of pushing forward to Shaoguan because they considered their main objectives achieved and were preoccupied by other more urgent tasks.⁹ In any event, after the so-called Battles of North Guangdong, the GMD gradually consolidated its position in Shaoguan and retained an effective administration there until early 1945.

It was against this background that the Party commenced its guerrilla movement in Guangdong. Two areas, the East River valley and Hainan Island, became the chief foci of the "people's war." This chapter will concentrate on tracing the development of the East

⁷ "Huanan lunxianqu teji" (July, 1939), 394; Liang Shan, Wang Fuchang and Zhong Haimo, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi de Guangdong zhengmian zhanchang" [The front battlefield of Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War], *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* [Journal of the Zhongshan University], no. 3 (1988), 52-3; Zhang Fakui, "Kangri zhanzheng huiyilu," [The reminiscences on the Anti-Japanese War], *GWZ*, v. 55 (June 1988), 44-5; "Zhang daisiling zhangguan Fakui, Yu zongsiling Hanmou, Li zhuxi Hanyun gao lunxianqu ziweituan youjidui shu," [A letter from Commanders Zhang Fakui, Yu Hanmou and Governor Li Hanyun to the self-defence and guerrilla corps in the occupied areas], *Guangdongsheng zhengfu gongbao* [The gazette of the Guangdong Provincial Government] vs. 416-40, (1 June 1939), 295-6; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 72, 87.

⁸ See, for example, Lian Shan, et. al., *ibid.*, 53; Zhang Fakui, *ibid.*, 51; He Yingqin, *Rijun qinhua banian kangzhanshi* [The history of the eight-year war of resistance against the Japanese invasion of China], (Taipei: Guofangbu shizheng bianyiju, 1982), 140; Yun Shicheng, *Yuezhān qinian* [Seven years of the war in Guangdong], (Guangzhou: Qianfeng baoshe, 1946), 26-31.

⁹ Cf. *South China Record*, 79-86, 105-9.

River Column from its origins to its formal establishment in 1943. Particular attention will be paid to elucidating the tremendous difficulties which the Party confronted in its guerrilla mobilisation on the Guangdong mainland. In addition, some remarkable aspects regarding the struggle of the East River guerrillas will be explored. Among these are the rescue of many famous personages and foreign prisoners-of-war in Hong Kong. The final section will then examine the tactics and measures by which Communists managed to survive the adverse geopolitical conditions of the East River valley.

II. The Commencement of the Guerrilla Movement

The Guangdong Party was no better prepared than the GMD for the Japanese invasion. The enemy's arrival seemed so sudden that the Party leaders simply did not know how to respond. Even worse, at that critical moment, Zhang Wenbin, the secretary of the Guangdong Provincial Committee, was away from Guangzhou in Yan'an to attend the CCP's Sixth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee (29 September to 6 November 1938). It was only three days before the fall of Guangzhou that the Party leaders, assisted by Huang Wenjie, the special delegate from the Yangzi River Bureau, came up with some emergency solutions. Those who attended the meeting were informed that the GMD army was not going to defend the provincial capital but would soon retreat to Shaoguan. The participants then resolved to also relocate to Shaoguan the Provincial Committee, the Eighth Route Army Office, and the headquarters of other major Party-affiliated mass organisations such as the Anti-Japanese Vanguard.¹⁰ In order to explore the feasibility of launching guerrilla war in the occupied areas and to provide leadership for it, two Party apparatuses, known separately as the Southeast Special Committee and the Southwest Special Committee, were hastily set up to undertake the necessary groundwork respectively in the southeast and southwest parts of central Guangdong.¹¹

¹⁰ "Guangdong qingnian gongzuo baogao" [A report on youth work in Guangdong] (January 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 113, 120; Liu Shuxin and Ye Wenyi, 202; Luo Fanqun, 652-4; Yun Guangying, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi de balujun Guangzhou banshichu" [The Eighth Route Army Office in Guangzhou during the Anti-Japanese War], *GDZ*, v. 4 (1985), 100; *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 268, 278-9.

¹¹ The Southwest Special Committee was superseded by the Central Area Special Committee, which was instituted in early 1939. The Southeast Special Committee was abolished in November 1939. Its responsibilities were then distributed between the Central Area Committee and the East River Special Committee (established in February 1939). See *Zuzhishi ziliao*, 278-9, 281.

a. The Fourth Extended Meeting

In January 1939, having reestablished itself in Shaoguan, the Guangdong Provincial Committee convened the Fourth Extended Meeting. It was presided by Zhang Wenbin, who, by that time, had returned to Guangdong. Besides announcing the resolutions of the Sixth Plenum, the meeting also discussed the Party's policies concerning the direction of the resistance movement. A heated debate was sparked off over the question of establishing an open, Communist-led military force. This question had been raised in the Party's agenda before, but it obviously assumed greater relevance and urgency now. Two opposite views were said to have emerged during the meeting. Apparently, the first one was based on the prediction that the war would soon spread to the entire Guangdong Province, which, thereby, would constitute a vast occupied area beyond the reach of the GMD. This position argued that the Party should begin without delay the work of military expansion and preparation for a large-scale people's guerrilla mobilisation resembling that in North and Central China. Liang Guang, the secretary of the Southeast Special Committee, and Liao Chengzhi were its principal proponents. In fact, shortly after the fall of Guangzhou, the two men, on their own initiatives, had despatched Zeng Sheng and a batch of cadres from Hong Kong to Huiyang to organise local guerrilla resistance. They sought permission for their action straight from the Party Centre in Yan'an rather than waiting for instructions from the Guangdong Provincial Committee.¹²

On the other hand, a significant number of participants in the meeting had their primary interest in upholding the united-front collaboration with the GMD. They contended that the Party should avoid provoking the GMD by suppressing its aspirations to create a Communist army and concentrate on developing Guangdong into "a model province of the United Front." In their memoirs, some former cadres identified Bo Gu (Qin Bangxian), who attended the meeting as the representative of the CCP Southern Bureau, as the most vigorous advocate of this view.¹³ What these memoirs try to imply is

¹² Chen Shanxin, "Liang Guang," [Liang Guang], *Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan*, v. 56, 243-4; "Huibao renmin kangri youji zongdui de chuangjian" [The establishment of the Huibao People's Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Force], *DDZH*, v. 2, 8, 16; Liao Chengzhi, "Guanyu chengli Guangdong renmin kangri youjidui wenti" [The question concerning the establishment of the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Force], *Nanfangju dangshi ziliao (NDZ)* [Materials on the history of the Southern Bureau], v. 4, ed. by Nanfangju dangshi ziliao zhengji xiaozu, (Chongqing chubanshe, 1990), 163; cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 70.

¹³ See, for example, Liao Chengzhi, *ibid.*; Gu Dacun, 37; cf. Yin Linping, "Mao Zedong sixiang zhiyin dongzong zouxiang shengli." [Mao Zedong's ideology directs the East River Column to success] in *Gangjiu lieyan (GL)* [The vigorous flame of Guangzhou and Kowloon], ed. by Zhonggong Shenzhenshi dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui, (internal publication, 1983), 5-6. The CCP Southern Bureau was initiated in late 1938.

that even though Wang Ming's Yangzi River Bureau had already been superseded by Zhou Enlai's Southern Bureau in November 1938, his "erroneous political line" was still contaminating the Party in the south through Bo Gu, a long-time associate of Wang. Again, one must be careful not to follow such reasoning too readily in blaming Wang Ming and his "capitulationism" for retarding the Communist growth in southern China. Since to say that Bo Gu favoured a conciliatory stance is one thing and that the Guangdong Party adopted such a position because of Bo's influence is another.

The last chapter argued that the Guangdong Communist leaders refrained from taking a bold step in the military issue because of the concerns of power realities rather than political ideologies. Zhang Wenbin, in particular, demonstrated an acute awareness of the Party's fragile presence and the necessity of nurturing its strength under the shield of the United Front. It is reasonable to assume that he continued to exercise such discernment in the Fourth Extended Meeting; and, given his top position in the Guangdong Party, his opinions were more likely to have an impact on the Party's policy formulation than those of Bo Gu. Regarding Zhang's role in the Party's military plans, Communist literature (mainly memoirs and biographies) portrays him either as a faithful adherent to Mao Zedong's principle of "independence and autonomy"¹⁴ or as a sufferer of Wang Ming's "capitulationism."¹⁵ To some degrees, these conflicting accounts may suggest that Zhang's own position lay somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. In other words, Zhang did not oppose the idea of organising popular guerrilla movements in Guangdong, but he sanctioned only those efforts which were undertaken within the parameters prescribed by the GMD.

It has already been pointed out that Zhang was in Yan'an when the Japanese started invading Guangdong. However, he may not have stayed long enough to have learned about Mao's secret concluding speeches at the Sixth Plenum which criticised Wang Ming's "capitulationism" and asserted the primacy of preserving the Party's independence and achieving its military expansion.¹⁶ Even if he did, Zhang's

and headed by Zhou Enlai, which superseded Wang Ming's Yangzi River Bureau in supervising Party activities in South China.

¹⁴ See, for example, Liao Chengzhi, "Guanyu chengli Guangdong renmin kangri youjidui wenti," 163; Liu Shuxin and Ye Wenyi, 202; Yang Kanghua, "Zhang Wenbin tongzhi dao dongzong," [Comrade Zhang Wenbin visited the East River Column], *GL*, 32-7.

¹⁵ See, for example, Chen Shanxin, 243; Gu Dacun, 37-8; Wang Junyu, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Guangdong dangzuzhi huodong de lianduan huiyi," 16-7.

¹⁶ A number of delegates to the Sixth Plenum, including Wang Ming, had already left Yan'an when Mao delivered his two concluding speeches on 5 and 6 November 1938. Shum Kui-kwong claims that Mao had deliberately kept these criticisms known only to the remaining participants, "most of whom were top-ranking party and military leaders in north China." See Shum's *The Chinese Communists' Road to Power*:

appreciation of the remarkable wartime differences between South and North China in political and military settings would have reminded him of the need to adjust this aggressive stance in Guangdong. It seems that Zhang had exhibited reservations about the prediction that the GMD would soon be pushed out of the province by the Japanese and that political anarchy was imminent. He was more interested in contemplating the notion that the threat of Japanese aggression would drive the Guangdong government towards greater collaboration with political deviants, principally the CCP, for survival's sake. This logic justified the Party's continual investment in the political coalition with the GMD.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Zhang did not write off the possibility that the war in Guangdong might escalate to a point which would result in the eventual dissolution of the GMD's rule. He admitted that the Party had to prepare itself militarily for the coming of that day. However, similar to his earlier stand, Zhang's guidance to the Party was again to strive for building its military power through the channels laid down by the GMD's authorities. Probably, Zhang realised that before the Japanese invasion had sufficiently undermined the GMD's position in Guangdong, any hasty action to put up a guerrilla army under the Communist flag would only bring trouble. To him, infiltration instead of confrontation remained the best way to develop the strength of the Guangdong Communists. Thus, when Zhang called for the militarisation of the Party in the Fourth Extended Meeting, in his mind was not the founding of a Communist army like the Eighth Route or the New Fourth. Rather, the Party's role was to mobilise the people in the occupied areas into GMD-sanctioned guerrilla forces. These forces, at least outwardly, should be "under GMD leadership and conform to its prescribed form;" and were expected to fight the war alongside government troops.¹⁸

If the above reconstruction is correct, then Zhang did not depart from his early insistence on nurturing the Communists' military power through the United Front, even though a stronger emphasis on it was now given. In short, while the Fourth Extended Meeting was supposed to reorient the Party's strategy in respect of the new political

The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935-1945, (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), 145. For an overview of the Sixth Plenum and the possible role it performed in rectifying Wang Ming's accommodative stance in the United Front, see Shum, 138-46; cf. Gregor Benton, "The 'Second Wang Ming Line,'" 84, 91-3.

¹⁷ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 163-4; cf. "Wu Youhen guanyu Yuedongnan tewei gongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" [A report by Wu Youhen to the Party Centre concerning the work of the Guangdong Southeast Special Committee] (13 January 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 41, 118.

¹⁸ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 75.

situation, owing to the uncertainties about the development of the war in Guangdong, Zhang and many other leaders chose to cling to their previous cautious approach.¹⁹ The two tasks, those of keeping the united-front relationship with the GMD and promoting military expansion, were to be pursued together and with equal diligence. Having arrived at such a conclusion, the Guangdong Provincial Committee gave its, albeit belated, consent to the establishment of the East River guerrillas²⁰ but ordered them to operate under the GMD's "legal titles" (*hefa fanhao*) and to seek subsidies from the government (see below).

As subsequent events unfolded, the Japanese had little territorial interest in Guangdong. Prior to 1944, they were content to fortify their footholds in Hainan and the major ports along the coast of Southeast China. On the other hand, Zhang's anticipation of a more progressive Guangdong government seemed to come true. For the first half of 1939, the general atmosphere in Shaoguan manifested greater unity, more tolerance and increasing openness to mass movement due to the anxiousness of the GMD to restore public confidence in the recently-reorganised government. This development explained why the Guangdong Provincial Committee gradually shifted its focus of activity back to the United Front with the GMD. The orientation occurred despite the fact that the Fourth Extended Meeting had stipulated that equal attention had to be paid to the military work. For the promotion of the anti-Japanese cause in the GMD-controlled areas, a new magazine *The New South China* was inaugurated in Shaoguan on 1 April 1939.²¹ Moreover, the Party mobilised more than eight hundred of its members and progressive youth to assist political training in Yu Hanmou's army and carried out mass propaganda to improve the popular image of his soldiers. The Party's mobilisation for Yu Hanmou's army was cited by Lin Ping (alias Yin Linping), the Political Commissar of the future East River Column, as proof of the Provincial Committee's lack of attention to the military work. He criticised that less than thirty cadres were assigned to help develop guerrilla movement in the enemy's rear, far smaller in scale compared to the aid rendered to the GMD's army.²²

¹⁹ Cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 191.

²⁰ Cf. Gu Dacun, 37; Liao Chengzhi, "Guangdong renmin kangri youjidui wenti," 163.

²¹ For details, see Zhong Zi and Hou Yuexiang, "Kangri shiqi Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei de houshe - Xinhuanan zazhi" [An outlet for the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee during the Anti-Japanese War - the *New South China* magazine,], *Guangdong geming baokan*, v. 1, 145-54.

²² Yin Linping, "Mao Zedong sixiang zhiyin dongzong zouxiang shengli," 6; for the Party's political work in Yu Hanmou's army, see Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui, "Zhandouzai dishier jitanjun zhengong zongdui neide Zhonggong tixiadang zuzhi," [The Chinese Communists'

Before moving on to delineate the early history of the East River guerrillas, it would be worthwhile to sum up this section by looking at Yan'an's attitude towards the commencement of guerrilla warfare in Guangdong. Unfortunately, there is very scanty information on this aspect. Most of the documents from the Party Centre to the Guangdong Provincial Committee presently available were dated after 1943. Nevertheless, what can be said is that Yan'an's plan for Hainan was different from that for the Guangdong mainland. For Hainan, which was under Japanese domination in 1939, Yan'an opted for a policy of vigorous army expansion and base construction resembling that in North and Central China (see Chapter 5). However, for the Guangdong mainland, Yan'an agreed with the Guangdong Provincial Committee that caution had to be exercised in conducting resistance activities. Although in one instance it urged the Guangdong Communist leaders to mobilise local support for the East River guerrillas and help them to grow within the possible constraints, on the whole, Yan'an took no action to push forward a bold policy in the East River valley.²³ Evidently, Yan'an also realised that the local situation there was far from ideal for the implementation of the type of guerrilla expansion promoted by Mao Zedong in the north. The East River guerrillas were allowed to hang on, probably because they were viewed as a potential asset for future Communist expansion in South China.

b. The Origins of the East River Guerrillas

Since the Japanese landing in Bias Bay, Liao Chengzhi had been watching closely their movements and pondering on the possibility of popular guerrilla movement.²⁴ The neutrality of Hong Kong (where Liao resided) had freed him from the chaos and confusion resulting from the enemy's invasion. This advantage, together with the proximity of the colony to the East River valley, allowed Liao to play an active role in local guerrilla mobilisation. Thus, in late October 1938, Liao despatched a group of cadres, led by Zeng Sheng, the seaman, to Huiyang County to organise mass resistance.

underground Party organisation which fought within the Political Corps of the Twelfth Group Army], *GDZ*, v. 14 (December 1988), 130-66.

²³ "Zhongyang guanyu Qiongya gongzuo gei Yuewei de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to the Guangdong Provincial Committee concerning work in Hainan] (26 January 1940), *ZZWX*, v. 12, 245; "Zhonggong Zhongyang dui Guangdong gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre on work in Guangdong] (11 March 1940), *NDZ*, v. 4, 44.

²⁴ Gu Dacun said that Liao Chengzhi wanted a forward policy of military struggle in Guangdong because he was influenced by Ye Jianying. Gu Dacun, 37; Cf. Li Juemin, "Huiyi Liu Shaoqi, Ye Jianying and Chen Yun jiejian women de tanhua" [Reminiscences concerning the talks by Liu Shaoqi, Ye Jianying and Chen Yun to us], *GDZ*, v. 4 (1985), 141.

Zeng Sheng was a native of Pingshan, Huiyang. His origin was perhaps the reason he was commissioned as the leader of the group,²⁵ as he became a Communist only in 1936 and was relatively junior in the Party. After Zeng arrived at Pingshan in October 1938, he tried to establish an anti-Japanese force with local Party help, but only a dozen or two Party members could be successfully mobilised. Consequently, Zeng had to turn to the Party in Hong Kong and the Leisure Music Club for recruits. About two hundred people were said to have been sent from Hong Kong to fill the ranks of his guerrilla force. Among them were a significant number of unemployed seamen; and, as a result, Zeng's guerrillas were initially called by others the "Seamen's Guerrilla Unit." However, in order to obtain a "legal title" from the government, it later adopted the formal title of the Hui-Bao People's Anti-Japanese Division.²⁶

These early guerrillas were anything but competent fighters. Most of them joined the guerrilla unit out of pure patriotism or a simple desire to defend their home county, many were natives of Huiyang and Bao'an. They received no prior military training and comprehended little about the art of guerrilla fighting. Zeng himself confessed that as a young intellectual, he knew nothing about guerrilla deployment.²⁷ As a result of these weaknesses, once engaged with the enemy, this guerrilla band broke up instantly and had to retreat to Hong Kong. Upon arrival, these guerrillas were denounced by the Southeast Special Committee for fleeing before the enemy but were acquitted because of their lack of experience. After a three-day rest and regrouping, they were despatched back to Huiyang.²⁸

Besides Zeng's unit, the Guangdong Party also controlled by way of infiltration a number of self-defence forces in the vicinity of Guangzhou before the Japanese invasion. In Dongguan, there were two Communist-controlled forces. The first one was the Model Defence Corps of Able-Bodied Males (*mofan zhuangdingtuan*), organised by Wang Zuoyao. Wang was a graduate of the Yantang Military Academy, founded by Chen Jitang, and had once served as a petty officer in Chen's army. He joined the Party in 1936

²⁵ Cf. *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-9; "Guangdong gongzuo baogao" [A report on the work in Guangdong] (29 January 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 347-8; "Huibao renmin kangri youji zongdui de chuangjian", 8-9; Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clark, eds., v. 2, s.v. "Tseng Sheng"; "Wu Youheng guanyu Xianggang shiwei gongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" [A report by Wu Youheng to the Party Centre concerning the work of Hong Kong's City Committee] (16 February 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 44, 270.

²⁷ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105, 107; "Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (29 January 1939), 350-1, 355; "Wu Youheng guanyu Yuedongnan tewei gongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" (13 January 1941), 63; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 185.

and was instructed in early 1938 to go back to his home in Dongguan to organise a local anti-Japanese force. Wang soon commanded a force of about one hundred men, of whom the majority were students.²⁹ The second one, led by Huang Mufen, was a guerrilla force which was comprised primarily of Party members. Pretending to be a genuine local self-defence force, this guerrilla unit obtained a legal title from the local magistrate as the People's Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Division of Dong-Bao-Hui (Dongguan-Bao'an-Huiyang) Border. However, shortly afterward, Huang Mufen's Communist identity was betrayed to the GMD authorities, and he had to leave his troops. The Dongguan Party appointed Wang Zuoyao to take over Huang's place, and Wang's own regiment then merged with Huang's original force.³⁰

The two guerrilla units of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao were the forerunners of the East River Column. At first, they operated separately and had little contact with each other. It was not until May 1939 that a military committee, headed by Liang Guang and Liang Hongjun, was established to coordinate their activities and provide training for the guerrilla fighters. Begun with a modest strength of less than five hundred men in total, an opportunity for rapid expansion came to the East River guerrillas in late 1938. Then Ye Ting, the Commander-in-Chief of the New Fourth Army, visited Hong Kong to solicit contributions for his troops. It seems probable that Liao Chengzhi, who had a strong desire for rapid Communist military growth in Guangdong, took the initiative to persuade Ye Ting to seek Yu Hanmou's authorisation for organising guerrilla movement in the province. Through the arrangement of the Eighth Route Army Offices in both Hong Kong and Shaoguan, Ye contacted Yu, who appointed Ye the commander of the guerrilla forces in the East River valley (Ye's place of birth). Ye then contemplated the notions of creating an anti-Japanese base and developing an army of over ten thousand troops with the guerrilla bands of Zeng and Wang as the nucleus. According to the GMD's intelligence, Ye intended that this army, once established, would be placed as a subdivision under the New Fourth Army. However, when Chiang Kai-shek was informed of Ye Ting's plan, he opposed it fiercely. In the end, Yu Hanmou had to cancel Ye's

²⁹ "Dongguan zhongxin xianwei de jianli he kangri jiuwang yundong" [The establishment of Dongguan County's central committee and the anti-Japanese national salvation movement], *DDZH*, v. 1, 84; "Dongguan kangri mofan zhuangdingtuan" [The Model Defence Corps of Able-Bodied Males in Dongguan], *DDZH*, v. 2, 19-25.

³⁰ "Dongbaohui bianqu gongwei de gaikuang" [The general situation of the working committee in the border region of Dong-Bao-Hui] and "Kucaodong zhengxun" [The reorganisation in Kucaodong], *DDZH*, v. 1, 93-4, 96-101; Wang Zuoyao, *Dongzong yiye* [A recollection of the East River Column], (Shaoguan?, 1984), 70-1; "Wu Youheng guanyu Yuedongnan teweji gongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" (13 January 1941), 68-71.

appointment and send him back to southern Anhui, the headquarters of the New Fourth Army.³¹

To a certain extent, Chiang's violent reaction to Ye's guerrilla plan in the East River region had justified Zhang Wenbin's cautious approach in military work. He instructed the guerrillas of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao not only to conceal their Party's affiliation but also to focus on the improvement of their quality instead of the expansion of their quantity. As a result, after more than one year of their establishment, the total rank of the East River guerrillas were still under a thousand men. The need to contain their size was considered a survival tactic by Zhang. As he believed, the smaller the size of the guerrillas, the lesser the extent they were perceived as a threat to the GMD. Also, the fewer the hostilities they might provoke, the better the chance of their survival.³²

The problem of provision was also a major reason why Zhang Wenbin wanted to curb the growth of the East River guerrillas. Since the Japanese-occupied area of the East River valley was very small, it provided no suitable sites for the guerrillas to build a base and develop means to support themselves. At the same time, the "legal titles" that the East River guerrillas obtained from the GMD government were not accompanied by any financial subsidies or arm supplies.³³ Consequently, they had to rely almost exclusively on money and material aid donated by patriotic Chinese living overseas. It was reported, for instance, that clothing and medicine weighing about forty to fifty piculs were entrusted to the East River Overseas Chinese Home-going Service Regiment for delivery to the guerrillas. Moreover, in early 1939, about 200,000 Hong Kong dollars were remitted to Zeng Sheng by overseas Chinese through Song Qingling.³⁴ Feng Jianchuan even claims that the total amount of money donated to the East River Column numbered several

³¹ Wang, *ibid.*, 75-8; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 106, 119; "Guangdongsheng 'jianfei' huidong gaikuang ji fangzhi qingxing baogaoshu" [A report on "bandit" activities and controlling them in the Guangdong Province] (10 May 1946), *Quanzonghao* 3/5/393.

³² "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 75-6, 83-4.

³³ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 124. However, Wang Zuoyao recalled that the "legal title" did bring his own division a small monthly subsidy from the GMD (probably for the first half a year). See Wang Zuoyao, "Dongjiang kangri genjudi shuishou de jianli," [The establishment of a taxation system in the East River Anti-Japanese Base Area] in *Dongjiang geming genjudi caizheng shuishou shiliao xuanbian (DGGCSSX)* [Selected historical materials on the finance and taxation of the East River Revolutionary Base Area], comp. Guangdong sheng dang'anguan and Guangdong Huiyang diqu shuiwuju, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1986), 362; cf. *id.*, *Dongzong yiye*, 102.

³⁴ Huang Weici, "Huaoqiao he gangao tongbao dui dongjiang kangri zhanzheng de gongxian" [The contributions of overseas Chinese and the compatriots of Hong Kong and Macao to the anti-Japanese struggle in the East River region], *GL*, 226-7; Ren Guixiang, *Huaxia xiangxingli* [The centripetal force of China], (Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1993), 227.

million dollars, but his figures cannot be verified.³⁵ Despite these seemingly impressive numbers, Zhang was right to point out that overseas aid alone could not sustain the East River guerrillas in the long run. Unless the problem of finance and supply could be solved, keeping the size of the East River guerrilla forces small appeared to be the best solution in coping with the adverse situation.³⁶

c. The Eastward Retreat

From 1939 onwards, Chiang Kai-shek demonstrated an increasing resentment towards the “illegal” expansion of the Communists behind Japanese lines in North China and the Lower Yangzi valley. After the Fifth and the Sixth GMD Congresses (March and November 1939), the central government applied both political and military measures to curb the continual Communist expansion. These measures resulted in what the Communists called “the first anti-Communist upsurge,” in which a series of bloody clashes or instances of “friction” (*moca*) took place between both armies.³⁷ As the United Front between the GMD and the CCP deteriorated rapidly throughout the country, the political atmosphere in Guangdong also became tense.

Against the optimism of Zhang Wenbin, the relationship which the Party deliberately cultivated with Yu Hanmou did not protect it from the attacks of the “die-hards.” Zhang originally hoped that even though the GMD elsewhere in China had become increasingly anti-Communist, the Party’s political coalition with the Guangdong GMD could still survive if it could play skilfully on Yu’s conflict with the central government.³⁸ However, as later events showed, this hope was ill-founded. Zhang was slow to realise how seriously Yu’s position had been undermined by his defeat in Guangzhou and the subsequent reorganisation of the Guangdong government. In many ways, Yu’s power had thenceforth been effectively checked by Chiang Kai-shek. One example was Chiang’s appointment of Li Hanyun, who was said to be “close” to the

³⁵ Feng Jianchuan, “Huanan kangri zongdui de jianli jiqi lishi gongxian” [The establishment and historical contributions of the South China Guerrilla Bands], *Huanan shifan daxue xuebao* [Journal of South China Normal University], no.3 (1985), 48. Feng does not specify what currency he is referring to.

³⁶ “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao” (7 March 1940), 77.

³⁷ Van Slyke, “The Chinese Communist movement,” 658-63; for the particular case of Shandong, see David M. Paulson, “Nationalist Guerrillas in the Sino-Japanese War: The ‘Die-Hards’ of Shandong Province,” in *Single Sparks: China’s Rural Revolution*, eds. Kathleen Hartford and Steven M. Goldstein, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 128-50.

³⁸ “Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei zonghe baogao” [Miscellaneous reports by the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee] (19 April 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 378-9; “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao” (7 March 1940), 128; “Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao” (23 April 1940), 170-1.

central government, as the civil governor of Guangdong. The position allowed Li to take charge of the province's finances and taxation and thus keep Yu in check by monitoring the supplies for his army.³⁹ Yu's eclipse made him more and more ready to yield to the demands of the central government. Although he welcomed the assistance of the Communists for consolidating his position in Shaoguan during the first few months of 1939, when Chiang determined to press on with an anti-Communist policy in Guangdong, Yu simply lacked the strength nor had the will to resist it.

In late 1939 and early 1940, the Guangdong GMD exerted tighter restrictions over those mass organisations which were suspected of having relations with the Communists. For instance, subsidies to the Young Anti-Japanese Vanguard were terminated. In many places, local authorities dissolved branches of the Vanguard, and their members were forced to join the government-sponsored Three People's Principles Youth Corps. By mid-1940, the Vanguard ceased to function in the province.⁴⁰ The GMD also disbanded many service teams formed by overseas Chinese, which had displayed open sympathy towards the Communists and were instrumental in supplying the East River guerrillas with war materials and recruits. In February 1940, the GMD police arrested twenty three members of the East River Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment on the charge of conspiracy to subvert the government. Some of them were tortured seriously while undergoing interrogation. When the *New South China* revealed this fact and demanded an explanation from the GMD authorities, the latter retaliated by suspending the newspaper for two months. At last, due to the vigorous intercessions of many overseas Chinese communities, the prisoners were released.⁴¹

In March 1940, as part of the scheme to uproot Communist influence in Guangdong, the GMD army attacked the guerrilla forces of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao. Technically speaking, the two forces were officially-approved local people's militias; but, somehow, their Communist affiliation had been betrayed. Zeng Sheng

³⁹ Cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 104; Foreign Office Archives (FO) 371/41662, 25 March 1944, Mr. Healey (Political Warfare Mission, Washington) to P.W.J.C..

⁴⁰ Chen En, et. al., "Guangdong qiannian kangri xianfengdui," 91-2; Huang Yixiang, "Zhandou zai nanhai zhibin," 32-3.

⁴¹ Huang Weici and Xu Xiaosheng, "Dongjiang huaqiao huixiang fuwutuan geishu" [A brief narrative concerning the East River Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment], *Guangdong huaqiao gangao tongbao huixiang fuwutuan shilliao* [Historical sources on the service regiments of overseas Chinese from Guangdong and the compatriots from Hong Kong and Macao], comp. Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui and Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, (internal publication, 1985), 14-7; "The telegram of the Guangdong Provincial Government" (April 1940), *Quanzonghao* 2/2/3; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei Zhongyang shujichu dian" [Radio message from the Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Secretariat of the Party Centre] (23 February 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 33-4; Zhong Zi and Hou Yuexiang, 152.

believed that the true nature of his guerrillas could be recognised by anyone because they were genuinely anti-Japanese and protected the people by fighting the enemy. Also, in contrast to the GMD's soldiers, smuggling and corruption was non-existent in the East River guerrillas.⁴² Nevertheless, it seems also probable that since Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao insisted on operating their units independently and rejected any kind of co-optation or reorganisation, as instructed by the Party, they aroused the suspicious of the GMD authorities.⁴³

In any event, the threat of annihilation was imminent. From December 1939 to early March 1940, the Southeast Special Committee held several meetings with Zeng and Wang and discussed the future of the Second United Front. They concluded that the GMD would soon break up with the CCP and bring about the "third civil war." Therefore, due to their military inferiority, the East River guerrillas should retreat eastwards to Hai-lu-feng. Hai-lu-feng was chosen because, geographically, it was much more suitable than the East River valley for base building. Moreover, it was the place where the first Communist rural soviet had been founded, and the local "revolutionary tradition" would ensure the guerrillas a certain degree of popular support. Hai-lu-feng thus seemed an ideal site for preparing for long-term strife with the GMD once the Second United Front broke down.⁴⁴

After the proposal was passed, the Southeast Special Committee reported it to the Guangdong Provincial Committee. According to Zeng Sheng and some other veterans, the Provincial Committee had no response to this matter, and the East River guerrillas therefore treated its silence as a sign of approval.⁴⁵ However, in a report furnished to the Party Centre in April 1940, Zhang Wenbin stated that he had instructed the two guerrilla units to stay in their places and exploit the contradictions between the Japanese and the GMD for their survival. Unless the situation was too critical, and only after fierce fighting, were they permitted to retreat to Zijin or Hai-lu-feng.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, perhaps

⁴² Zeng Sheng *huiyilu*, 138.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, 138-45; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei qingwei gei Zhongyang qingwei de baogao" [A report from the Youth Committee of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Youth Committee of the Party Centre] (November 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 493.

⁴⁴ Dongjiang zongduishi bianxiezu comp., *Dongjiang zongduishi (DZ)* [A history of the East River Column], (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1985), 31-2; Wang, *Dongzong yiye*, 104-5; Zeng Sheng *huiyilu*, 146-7.

⁴⁵ Zeng Sheng, Wang Zuoyao, Yang Kanghua, Zhou Boming and Pang Wo, "Dongjiang xinghuo - Bao'an diqu kangri zhanzheng huiyilu" [The sparks of the East River - reminiscences on the Anti-Japanese War in the district of Bao'an], *Dongjiang xinghuo* [The sparks of the East River], v. 1, ed. by Shenzhen shiwei xuanchuanbu, (no publisher, 1979), 25.

⁴⁶ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 186-7.

due to some failures in communication, this instruction never reached the East River guerrillas.⁴⁷

In late February 1940, the East River guerrillas were informed that the GMD was preparing an anti-Communist military operation against them. A week later, on the night of 8 March, Zeng Sheng moved his troops eastwards; and Wang's units followed the next day. However, during the retreat, the two guerrilla forces were pursued and assaulted by government troops. Zeng's unit suffered heavy casualties and lost contact with Wang's group. The two guerrilla units reached Haifeng separately in late April; and, by that time, their ranks were drastically reduced from seven hundred men to one hundred.⁴⁸ After their reunion, there were intense debates among the guerrillas concerning their future. Should they stay in Hai-lu-feng or return to the East River valley or should they simply disband? At one point, their disagreement was so great that no effective and unified leadership was able to be maintained, and it was highly likely that many were going to desert their cause in the face of extreme adversity.⁴⁹

The guerrillas were eventually "rescued" from their confused state and disunity, say Party historians, by the May Eighth Directive which Yan'an issued to the Guangdong Provincial Committee and reached the guerrillas in early June.⁵⁰ Basically, the directive stated that the political situation in China had developed to a point at which there was a real danger of the GMD capitulating to Japan and dissolving its alliance with the CCP. That had not yet happened; but neither was it easy to achieve a turn for the better in the situation. In view of that difficult state, the Communists must be bold in carrying out their guerrilla war in the enemy's rear and fear no "friction" with the GMD in order to survive and grow. Under this guiding principle, the guerrilla units of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao were ordered to move back to the Dong-Bao-Hui region and continue their resistance by playing upon the contradictions between the GMD and the Japanese. To remain in the rear front and not fight the Japanese, asserted the directive, was absolutely wrong politically and doomed militarily. It was because the GMD would destroy them as

⁴⁷ Wu Youheng said that the Southeast Special Committee did not maintain very close contact with the Guangdong Provincial Committee, but he did not give any reasons. "Wu Youheng guanyu Yuedongnan teweigongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" (13 January 1941), 123-4.

⁴⁸ *DZ*, 32-6; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 147-56; "Liang Guang guanyu Pingshan shijian jingguo de baogao" [A report by Liang Guang regarding the incident in Pingshan] (12 April 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 133-7.

⁴⁹ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 156-7; Liao Chengzhi, "Dui Zengbu shoudao yanzhong daji zhi piping ji chuli yijian," [Criticisms and opinions concerning Zeng's unit being heavily assaulted] (23 April 1940), *Liao Chengzhi wenji* [The collected works of Liao Chengzhi], v. 1, comp. Liao Chengzhi wenji bianji bangongshi, (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1990), 74-5.

⁵⁰ *DZ*, 36-7; Feng Jianchuan, 46; Chen Lian, ed., *Kangri genjudi fazhan shilue* [A brief history of the development of the anti-Japanese base areas], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1987).

bandits, and they would have no chance to develop. The directive also contained a few suggestions on how the guerrillas should prepare for their return.⁵¹

It is illuminating to compare this directive with that which Mao Zedong sent to the CCP Southeast Bureau on 4 May 1940, four days before the issuing of the May Eighth Directive. In that directive, Mao showed a similar concern for the possible capitulation of the GMD to Japan. He explained in more detail why, to avert such a danger, the Party had to step up army expansion and base building in the occupied areas and should not fear to engage in self-defence battles with the GMD armies. The reason, Mao believed, was that struggle, rather than making concessions, was the best way to prevent the GMD from capitulating, provided it was carried out on the principle of "fighting on just grounds, to our advantage, and with restraint." Only through struggling against the GMD "die-hards" would the Party be able to make them "afraid of repressing us, to reduce the scope of their activities in containing, restricting and combating the Communist Party, to force them to recognise our legal status, and to make them think twice before causing a split."⁵² Mao emphasised that this strategy of struggle by way of guerrilla expansion in the enemy rear applied to the Communist forces throughout the country regardless "whether the force involved is the Eighth Route Army, the New Fourth Army or the South China Guerrilla Column."⁵³

The directive of May 4 was issued at a time when Mao desired strongly to transplant the successful experience of base construction in North China to Central China. The purpose of the directive was to bring about conformity to such a model by rectifying the "deviant practice" of Xiang Ying, who was unwilling to break with the GMD and established anti-Japanese regimes in the occupied areas.⁵⁴ Similarly, the May Eighth Directive was issued for the sake of rectifying "deviant practice." However, in contrast to Xiang, who had refrained from moving his troops into the enemy rear, the East River guerrillas' fault was that they had pulled themselves out of it. Also worth noting is what happened after this initial act of Yan'an, or specially Mao, in trying to achieve a

⁵¹ "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu Zeng Sheng, Wang Zuoyao liangbu yinghuifang Dongguan, Bao'an, Huiyang diqu jixingqian yingzhuyi shixiang de zhishi (zhailu)" [Instructions from the Chinese Communist Party Centre concerning the return of the two units of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao to Dongguan, Bao'an and Huiyang and those items of which they should take notice before returning (an excerpt)] (8 May 1940), *NDZ*, v. 4, 46-7.

⁵² Mao Zedong, "Freely expand the anti-Japanese forces and resist the onslaughts of the anti-Communist die-hards" (4 May 1940), *SW*, v. 2, 433.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 431, cf. 434. The term South China Guerrilla Column was used to denote a number of Communist-led guerrilla units in South China. The one in the East River valley and the other in Hainan Island were no doubt the most important among them.

⁵⁴ For the general context of this directive, see Benton, *New Fourth Army*, 684-93.

nationwide conformity to the northern model of base construction. In Central China, Yan'an began to pour in reinforcements and other resources to expedite the local base building process.⁵⁵ The consequence of that was the Party's rapid growth and seizure of the region. However, in the East River valley, Yan'an took no similar action before 1944. As has been suggested earlier, Yan'an regarded the restricted scope of Japanese occupation in the Guangdong mainland as far from suitable for the type of Communist expansion as practised in North China. Another plausible reason is that Yan'an had been too preoccupied with the development of base areas in Central China, which held a more immediate strategic value in Mao Zedong's grand design of conquering national power,⁵⁶ and could spare no extra resources in assisting base building in the south.⁵⁷ The May Eighth Directive, then, led not to expansion but containment of the Communists' power within the small area of the East River valley.

It is interesting to ask why Yan'an wanted the struggle of the East River guerrillas to be circumscribed by the northern model if it could not reproduce the same effect as in North China. Unfortunately, this question cannot be satisfactorily answered due to the scarcity of relevant information. Perhaps, Yan'an realised that it was politically unwise to allow the East River guerrillas, who claimed themselves as an anti-Japanese force, to operate in the rear front. The reason was that the GMD would very likely to use it as the case to discredit the Party, charging the Communists with merely using the war for self-expansion. Nevertheless, judging from the contents of the May Eighth Directive, Yan'an's decision seemed to have been based on a genuine belief that the East River guerrillas could not possibly survive without playing upon the contradictions between the GMD and the Japanese. Although the northern model would not bring about a Communist expansion in the East River valley, it still offered the best solution for the local guerrilla movement to sustain itself in the midst of so many odds. On balance, it is possible that both considerations were actually in the mind of the Yan'an leaders when the May Eighth Directive was issued. In any event, the requirement to conduct guerrilla activities within the narrow strip of occupied area in the East River valley had created tremendous difficulties for the local guerrillas. How they managed to survive in such a harsh situation will be discussed in the last section. Before that, this study will examine

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Chen, *Making Revolution*.

⁵⁶ Gregor Benton has pointed out that, early in 1939, Mao Zedong had "defined central China as a potential escape hatch for the Party in the north, to be activated if the Eighth Route Army's survival in the difficult conditions north of the Yellow River was endangered." See his *New Fourth Army*, 711.

⁵⁷ Cf. the discussion on creating bases in Hainan in Chapter 5.

how they resumed their guerrilla activities and also some of their remarkable achievements in rescue and intelligence work during the war.

III. Return to the Front Line

Having spent a few months of rest and regrouping in Haifeng, the East River guerrilla troops, now less than two hundred, resumed their mission and moved back to the East River valley. As a way to strengthen the guerrillas' leadership, the Guangdong Provincial Committee appointed Lin Ping, a former Red Army officer and the Secretary of the East River Special Committee at that time, as the political commissar of the two forces. In September 1940, a meeting was held in a village called Shangxiaping, which began with a period of deep reflection on the guerrillas' past "mistakes" and a recapitulation of the May Eighth Directive. Lin then affirmed the importance of "struggle within the United Front" in regards to their future resistance efforts. Especially, the guerrillas were reminded not to be deterred from taking up self-defence battles. The general rule they should adhere to was: "never attack unless deliberately provoked, but always counter when provoked." The two units of Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao were renamed the Third Battalion and the Fifth Battalion of the Guangdong's People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas while, externally, they still claimed to be a genuine communal defence force. Finally, the meeting concluded that the guerrillas had to create their own bases, and two sites were selected: one in the Daling Hills of Dongguan and the other in the Yantai Hills of Bao'an.⁵⁸

a. The Beginning of Base Construction

A base area was of paramount importance to the guerrillas because it provided them refuge and nourishment. However, the terrain of the East River valley offered little prospect for successful base building. As an integral part of the Pearl River delta, the East River valley was basically a small piece of lowland deprived of extensive rugged terrain or thick dense forest.⁵⁹ The Daling Hills and the Yantai Hills, where Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao chose to construct their first resistance bases, were probably the highest

⁵⁸ DZ, 40; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 168.

⁵⁹ For general overviews of the geographical conditions of the Pearl River delta, see Chen Zhengxiang, *Guangdong dizhi* [A geography of Guangdong], (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1978), 162-80; also Wu Shangshi and Zeng Zhaoxuan, "Zhujiang sanjiaozhou" [The Pearl River delta], *Lingnan xuebao* [The Lingnan Journal], v. 8, no. 1 (Dec. 1947), 105-22.

hills in the valley;⁶⁰ yet neither one of them exceeded six hundred metres in height. Even worse, the East River lowland was located immediately between Guangzhou and Hong Kong, and major communication lines that linked the two big cities together cut across it. On the western side of the East River Base Area was the Guantai-Baotai road⁶¹ whereas on the east was the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway. Together, they demarcated the boundaries in which the guerrilla troops could operate; and, as Zeng Sheng recalled, this area was less than 140 square kilometres.⁶² Although the East River guerrillas managed to expand eastwards during the last years of the war, they were unable to join together their bases on both sides of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway. It was because the Japanese had maintained firm control of the railway throughout the war to ensure the smooth flow of troops and materials between the two major city ports.

Still, Zeng and Wang hoped that mass support could, to a certain extent, offset their geographical disadvantages. Once moved into their designated base sites, the East River guerrillas established several "mass movement corps" to undertake the task of mass mobilisation. Probably because many of these guerrillas were originally students and educated workers, they were particularly active in mobilising the people through education. Besides organising literacy classes and night schools, they set up a middle school in the Daling Hills base to provide full-time education for young students whose study was interrupted by the war. However, it was compelled to close down two months after its inauguration due to the unstable military situation.⁶³ In early 1941, two newspapers, *Unity* (*Dajia tuanjie*) and *New People* (*Xin baixing*), were published to popularise the anti-Japanese sentiment both within and outside the base area. These newspapers were also meant to be a tool of internal propaganda for the East River guerrillas. Constant reports of their victories over the enemy, no matter how small, helped keep up the morale of the guerrilla soldiers. The two newspapers were later combined and became the *Advance* (*Qianjinbao*), which remained the official publication of the East River Column until 1946.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Zeng Sheng believed that what

⁶⁰ "Dalingshan kangri genjudi de xingcheng he fazhan" [The creation and development of the anti-Japanese base in Daling Hills], *DDZH*, v. 2, 26; *DZ*, 38-40; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 168-9.

⁶¹ The two roads belonged to a larger system that linked Guangzhou and Shenzhen. They ran from Dongguan city to Taiping and then to Bao'an.

⁶² *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 170.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 179-80.

⁶⁴ "Dongjiang zongdui jiguanbao - Qianjinbao" [*Advance* - the newspaper of the East River Column], *DDZH*, v. 2, 154-9; Li Zheng, "Dongzong zaoqi de baozhi - Xing baixing bao" [*New People* - the early newspaper of the East River Column] and Chen Hua, "Jiji qingfeng jianekou" [A courageous and pioneering attempt to destroy the enemy], *GL*, 376-88, 389-95.

really enabled his troops to win the people's confidence was their anti-Japanese stand. In contrast to the GMD's army, which fled the enemy, the East River guerrillas were willing to fight the Japanese and protect the people. In gratitude, the people supplied them with food and intelligence; some even sent their children to join the guerrillas.⁶⁵ Allegedly, owing to the conscious efforts in sealing a bond with the people, the East River guerrillas managed to quickly recover to their strength before the "eastward retreat" in mid-1941, and grow, though slowly, to over a thousand men by the end of that year.⁶⁶

In examining the Communist revolution, several recent studies have highlighted the role of the rural elite.⁶⁷ Their disposition towards the revolutionary movement, whether passive acquiescence or active suppression, could be crucial in determining its outcome. Unfortunately, there are only glimpses of the elite's involvement in the early history of the East River Base Area. As far as we know, the Party attempted to seek their support by anti-Japanese appeals. A number of "progressive gentry" were said to have participated in the "anti-Japanese democratic governments," which were ostensibly instituted on the "three-thirds system" basis in several *xiang* under the Communists' rule.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the Party tried to deter the elite from collaborating with the Japanese by adopting some high-handed measures. In the Daling Hills base, Zeng Sheng is known to have expropriated the land and properties of several landlords as punishment for their collaboration with the enemy.⁶⁹ However, his action soon alarmed other landlords in the Daling Hills area. They secretly forged an anti-Communist coalition with Liu Faru, a big landlord of Shuixiang, Dongguan, who had been enlisted by the Japanese to command a local puppet troops; and, in mid-1941, they staged an abortive attack on Zeng Sheng's guerrilla unit. Determined to teach these landlords a lesson, Zeng executed one of them, who was thought to be the main organiser behind the plot, while imposing heavy fines on the others.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 171-8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 185, 206; "Dalingshan kangri genjudi," 28.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Chen, *Making Revolution*; Stephen Averill, "Local Elites and Communist Revolution in the Jiangxi Hill Country," in *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, eds., Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 282-304; Kathleen Hartford, "Repression and Communist Success: The Case of Jin-Cha-Ji, 1938-1943," in *Single Sparks*, 92-127.

⁶⁸ "Dalingshan kangri genjudi," 28; *DZ*, 43; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 177-8; Zhonggong Dongguanshi Dalingshanzhen weiyuanhui and Dongguanshi Dalingshanzhen renmin zhengfu zhenzhi bangongshi, comp., *Dongguanshi Dalingshanzhen zhi* [A history of the Daling Hills town in Dongguan City], (Dongguan, 1991), 255-6.

⁶⁹ See Wang Zuoyao, "Dongjiang kangri genjudi shuishou de jianli," 364.

⁷⁰ "Dalingshan kangri genjudi," 28; Wang, *Dongzong yiye*, 155; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 187-9; "Wang Zuoyao tongzhi huiyi Dongguan renmin kangri wuzhuang jianli de jige wenti" [A few questions about the

If Zeng believed that his tough stand would bring the landlords to submission, he was certainly wrong. They fought back in September the same year and, this time, together with the GMD army. In addition to supplying the GMD soldiers with intelligence, the landlords organised their own militias to hunt down Party cadres who hid underground. In villages pacified by the government troops, they took the initiative to reinstall the *baojia* system and maintain local order.⁷¹ Owing to this concerted repression by the GMD and the rural elite, Zeng had to abandon his base in late 1941. It took the Communists more than one year to gradually recover control over the area. In early 1942, Zhang Wenbin criticised Zeng Sheng for committing the mistake of “leftist excesses” in this struggle against the landlords. Perhaps, in Zhang’s mind, Zeng had failed to keep one of Mao’s principles for struggling against the “die-hards,” which stated that after repulsing their attack, the Communists should try to bring about a truce and seek unity again with them. On no account should they be carried away by success.⁷² Though Zeng did not dare to confront Zhang’s judgement at the time, he wrote in his autobiography that he refused to admit such an accusation at heart. He contended that his action was justified on the principle of struggle within the unity of the United Front.⁷³ Regardless whose view holds more truth, the defeat in the Daling Hills base obviously revealed how vulnerable the early position of the East River guerrillas was.

b. Advance into Hong Kong

In early November 1941, the Japanese began massing their troops in Bao’an. Their intention to capture Hong Kong was noticed by the East River guerrillas, who immediately prepared to extend their sphere of activities to the colony. In fact, early in April 1941, the Communists had attempted to mobilise peasants in some parts of the New Territories. Guerrilla activists were sent to the villages in Xigong (Saikung) to publicise the resistance cause through plays and songs, which stressed patriotism rather than Communist ideology. They also taught the local villagers farming techniques and methods to defend themselves against bandits. It was reported that within six months,

establishment of the people’s anti-Japanese force in Dongguan as recalled by Comrade Wang Zuoyao, *Dongguan fenghuo* [The fire of Dongguan], v. 1 (1982?), 65.

⁷¹ “Dalingshan kangri genjudi,” 28; ; “Wang Zuoyao tongzhi huiyi,” 65.

⁷² Mao Zedong, “Current problems of tactics in the anti-Japanese United Front,” (11 March 1940), *SW*, v. 2, 426.

⁷³ “Wang Zuoyao tongzhi huiyi,” 65; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 237; cf. Huang Weici, Deng Ting and Ye Qingmao, “Haina baichuan, bili qianren,” [A board-minded person] in *Huainian Zeng Sheng tongzhi* [In remembrance of Comrade Zeng Sheng], ed. by “Huainian Zeng Sheng” bianjizu, (Guangzhou: Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, 1996), 129-30.

over three hundred people in the New Territories were mobilised to join the East River guerrillas.⁷⁴ Due to these pre-Pacific War mobilisation efforts, the Party was therefore able to establish itself quickly in the colony after it was invaded. Xigong, in particular, became a Communist guerrilla stronghold throughout the Japanese occupation.

On the eve of the Japanese invasion, the British government in Hong Kong initiated a series of negotiations with Liao Chengzhi on a joint military operation with the CCP against Japan. The original plan was that the Hainan Communist guerrillas would blow up the Japanese airfield in Hainan for the British.⁷⁵ In return, the British would render them aid in the form of ammunition and wireless communication equipment. Perceiving this as a chance for strengthening the Party's position in South China, Liao insisted on the provision of arms also to the East River guerrillas as a basic requisite. The British finally agreed to equip the Hainan guerrillas with either one thousand revolvers or two hundred and fifty light machine guns. Moreover, for their counterparts in the East River valley, the British would provide five hundred revolvers and fifty light machine guns.⁷⁶ These terms, if fully implemented, would have certainly enhanced the military capabilities of the Communist guerrillas in Guangdong. In the end, they failed to materialise, in part, because Liao Chengzhi might have asked too much from the British⁷⁷ and, in part, as suggested by Mo Shixiang, because both sides failed to foresee the imminence of the Pacific War.⁷⁸

The East River guerrillas followed the Japanese troops to Hong Kong when the invasion of the colony began. Their main objective, however, was not to assist the defence of Hong Kong by harassing the enemy rear. Rather, they were there to collect the large amount of weapons and war materials left behind by the retreating British army and, concurrently, to make use of every opportunity to establish footholds in the New

⁷⁴ David Faure, "Saikung, the Making of the District and its Experience during World War II," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 22 (1982), 199.

⁷⁵ The purpose of this plan was not entirely clear. Perhaps, it aimed to deprive the Japanese of an air base to bombard the Allies' troops in Indo-China, or to divert Japanese attention temporarily from Hong Kong to elsewhere so as to buy time for preparing the defence of Hong Kong.

⁷⁶ "Yu yuandong yingjun tanpan hezuo kangri gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de dianbao" [A series of radio messages to the Chinese Communist Party Centre regarding the negotiations with the British army in the Far East for cooperation against the Japanese], no. 3, (7 December 1941), *Liao Chengzhi wenji*, v. 1, 108.

⁷⁷ It was Liao's intention that the British might even render supplies to the New Fourth Army, but he was warned by Mao not to ask for too much. See "Yu yuandong yingjun tanpan hezuo kangri gei Zhonggong Zhongyang de dianbao," no.2, (14 November 1941), *Liao Chengzhi wenji*, v. 1; 106-7, 110, note 2.

⁷⁸ Mo Shixiang, "Mengyou he duishou" [Ally and Rival], *Jindaishi yanjiu* [Research in modern history], no.4 (July 1996), 90.

Territories.⁷⁹ In many villages, the local inhabitants welcomed the guerrillas because of their efforts at eradicating brigands, who proliferated in the New Territories after the dissolution of British rule. A British army officer, who escaped from captivity in the Japanese concentration camp, was amazed at the effectiveness of the Communist guerrillas in maintaining rural control in Xigong. As he put it:

Under the protection of these guerrillas, this district as I saw it, was as safe as it had been under British rule, if not safer, as these guerrillas had the complete confidence of the villagers. This surprising state existed within two months of the influx of numerous bandits from China immediately following the withdrawal of the British forces from the New Territories.⁸⁰

To capitalise on their popularity among the rural people, the East River guerrillas established in Hong Kong a subdivision of their force known as the Hong Kong and Kowloon Mass Anti-Japanese Battalion. This new guerrilla unit was commanded by Cai Guoliang, a former worker in a canned-food factory, and its operations covered the whole colony.⁸¹

c. The Great Covert Rescue

Being the only Communist force present in the vicinity of Hong Kong, the East River guerrillas were entrusted by Yan'an with an extremely challenging task after the fall of the colony, namely, to evacuate from there a large group of prominent Chinese intellectuals. This operation, commonly designated in Communist publications as the Great Covert Rescue (*mimi dayingjiu*),⁸² owed its origins to the New Fourth Army Incident (or Wannan Incident). The GMD's military assault on the New Fourth Army in January 1941 was designed by Chiang Kai-shek as a measure to halt the Communists' expansion in Central China.⁸³ As it turned out, the event aroused widespread public indignation against Chiang and many prominent intellectuals became his fiercest critics. When this public outrage began to subside, Chiang reacted by tightening control on the mass media. Fearing that the personal safety of these intellectuals might be endangered,

⁷⁹ Gangjiu dili daduishi bianxiezu, comp., *Gangjiu dili daduishi (GDDS)* [A history of the Independent Battalion of Hong Kong and Kowloon], (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1989), 16-7; WO 208/254, 14 June 1942 xxtract from report by Lt.-Col. C.R. Spear; WO 208/334, 12 March 1943 xxtract from GHQ INDIA W.I.S. No. 71.

⁸⁰ WO 208/254, 14 June 1942 extract from report by Lt.-Col. C.R. Spear.

⁸¹ *GDDS*, 25; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 213-4.

⁸² A volume which collected dozens of short memoirs concerning this rescue operation has used this particular phrase as its title. Huang Qiuyun, Xia Yan and Liao Mosha, eds., *Mimi dayingjiu* [The Great Covert Rescue], (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986).

⁸³ For the latest account of the Wannan incident in English, see Benton, *New Fourth Army*, 511-616.

the Party evacuated them systematically from the GMD's areas (e.g., Chongqing and Guilin) to Hong Kong. It was originally intended that they might eventually be sent to various cities in Southeast Asia to continue propagating for the Chinese resistance. However, before that could be arranged, the Party hoped that these intellectuals might exploit the special political status of Hong Kong as a temporary propaganda base to promote national unity and the anti-Japanese cause. For such purposes, a committee for cultural work, headed by Liao Chengzhi, was formed to foster the local cultural movement for national resistance in Hong Kong.⁸⁴

Since this large group of prominent intellectuals was so valuable to the Party's united-front propaganda, Yan'an could not afford to have it arrested by the Japanese. Therefore, the East River guerrillas had to undertake the rescue work in great urgency and with due care. Three main difficulties confronted the guerrillas. The first one was to gather their rescue targets. During the Japanese invasion, many intellectuals had left their home and hid elsewhere. The guerrillas could only conjecture that most of them had taken refuge on Hong Kong Island. Fortunately, these intellectuals maintained very close contact with each other; so, when the guerrillas found the first two of them, Zhang Youyu and Xue Boqin, they were able to search out the others one by one.⁸⁵

Next, the guerrillas had to decide on the methods of escape. For those who were old and weak, and for those whose identity could easily be recognised by the Japanese, the guerrillas arranged an escape by sea. Thus, of the former category, He Xiangning and Liu Yazhi, the two senior members of the left-wing GMD, were smuggled out in a big boat to Shanwei in Haifeng County. The latter category, which included Xia Yan, Qian Jiaju, Situ Huimin, Cai Chusheng and Wang Ying, fled first to Macao. After that, they either

⁸⁴ Liang Shangyuan, *Zonggong zai Xianggang* [The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong], (Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press Ltd., 1989), 74-9; Huang Jianxin and Mo Zhenshan, "Zhongguo gongchandang zai Xianggang de kangzhan wenhua huodong," [The anti-Japanese cultural activities of the Chinese Communist Party at Hong Kong], *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu* [Research on the history of the Chinese Communist Party], no. 6 (1988), 13-6; Yuan Shaolun, "Shenggang kangzhan wenhua yu Zhonggong tongzhan celiie," [The culture of resistance in Guangzhou and Hong Kong and the united-front strategy of the Chinese Communist Party], *GDZ*, v. 19 (December 1991), 199-203; cf. "Liao Chengzhi deng guanyu wenhua tongzhan zuzhi de juti yijian zhi Zhongyang shujichu bing Zhou Enlai dian," [Radio message from Liao Chengzhi and others to the Secretariat of the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai concerning concrete suggestions on the organisation for a cultural united front] (24 March 1941) and "Zhou Enlai guanyu Xianggang wenyi yundong qingkuang xiang Zhongyang xuanchuanbu he wenwei de baogao" [A report by Zhou Enlai to the Propaganda Department and the Cultural Committee of the Party Centre concerning the situation of the cultural movement in Hong Kong] (21 June 1942), *NDZ*, v. 6, 5-6, 15.

⁸⁵ *GDDS*, 19, Pan Zhu, "Hukou jiujiingying" [Saving the elite from the mouth of the tiger] in *Mimi dayingjiu*, 30-1; Zhonggong Huizhoushi dangshi bangongshi, "Guanyu 'qiangjiu wenhua ren' zhuanti de zongshu" [A general discussion on the special topic of 'rescuing the intellectuals'], *DDZH*, v. 3, 9. A map indicating the various escape routes can also be found on page 30 of this volume (*DDZH*, v. 3).

went inland or passed by Guangzhou Bay (today's Zhanjiang city) to Guilin.⁸⁶ The remainder in Hong Kong, constituting the majority, had to travel overland to the East River Base Area. Two major routes were selected. Those who took the "eastern route" went through the Kowloon peninsula to Xigong. From Xigong, they were picked up by sampans or steamers and taken to the mainland via the Bias Bay and then led by other guerrillas to the bases. Others followed the "western route" which set off from Kowloon via Quanwan and Yuanlang to the Shenzhen border. After crossing the Shenzhen river, they had to walk for more than fifteen kilometres before entering the Communists' guerrilla sphere in Bao'an. Whichever route they took, before embarking on their trip, these intellectuals and progressive people were all asked to dress themselves as fishermen and refugees. Also, during the evacuation, the guerrillas had to protect the escapees' lives from the threats of the bandits.⁸⁷

Thirdly, after the escapees had arrived safely at the resistance base, the rescue operation was not yet over. Because the East River Base Area was small and less consolidated, these prominent people had to be relocated to the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region or other parts of unoccupied China. However, before they left, the East River guerrillas had to cater for their material needs. This created a tremendous burden on the base area's already strained financial conditions. As Zeng Sheng recalled, when the rescue movement reached its climax in early 1942, there were escapees arriving at the base area every day or two.⁸⁸ For most of the time, the food he could provide was dog meat and green vegetables only. In January 1942, Zhang Wenbin reported to the Party Centre that over two hundred intellectuals had been staying at the East River valley, and he requested an urgent remittance of one million *yuan* from Yan'an to solve their financial difficulties.⁸⁹ Fortunately, by mid-1942, all escapees were able to resettle elsewhere. It was estimated that about eight hundred prominent Chinese intellectuals, political personages and their relatives had been evacuated from Hong Kong.⁹⁰ Considering the problems involved and the great efficiency of the East River guerrillas,

⁸⁶ *GDDS*, 23; Liang Shangyuan, 84-6; "Guanyu 'qiangjiu wenhua ren'," *ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷ *GDDS*, 20-23; Liang Shangyuan, 83-4; "Guanyu 'qiangjiu wenhua ren'," *ibid.*, 10-14; see also Chen Zhixian, "Dapengwan huhang" [Convoying in the Bias Bay] and He Wu, "Datong Pingshan jiaotongxian" [Opening up the traffic route to Pingshan], *Mimi dayingjiu*, 91-6, 153-7.

⁸⁸ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 223, 225.

⁸⁹ "Wenbin gei Zhongyang, Shaomei, and nanwei de baogao" [A report by Zhang Wenbin to the Party Centre, the Committee of Shaomei and the Southern Committee] (10 January 1942), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 176. It was difficult to determine what currency *yuan* was actually referring to since most sources made no effort to specify it. Nevertheless, in this case, it seems likely that Zhang was talking about the *guobi* issued by the GMD government.

⁹⁰ *GDDS*, 24; Liang Shangyuan, 86; "Guanyu 'qiangjiu wenhua ren'," 17.

one could hardly exaggerate that the Great Covert Rescue was a truly remarkable accomplishment.

d. The International Anti-Fascist United Front

During the Great Covert Rescue, the East River guerrillas also saved from Hong Kong several GMD-related personages, among them General Chen Ce and Madam Yu Hanmou (Shangguan Dexian). Such action was politically motivated, that is, to win their goodwill for the United Front's sake. Extra energy and resources had been spent, particularly in the rescue of Madam Yu Hanmou, who had with her 120 piculs of luggage. To ensure the smooth passage of the escape parties, the guerrillas had to hire a big boat and dozens of coolies for transporting her belongings.⁹¹ Unfortunately, despite Madam Yu's promise to testify to her husband about the East River guerrillas' patriotism and enthusiasm for the anti-Japanese cause, it effected no improvement in the relationship between the CCP and the GMD in Guangdong.

Comparatively speaking, the assistance which the East River guerrillas lent to the foreign prisoners-of-war (POW) escaping from the Japanese concentration camps in Hong Kong brought more encouraging results. Their rescue actions gave much substance to "the International Anti-Fascist United Front," which Mao Zedong was eager to promote in order to rally sympathy and material aid from international communities to the CCP.⁹² In May 1942, the British government authorised the establishment of the British Army Aid Group (BAAG). Its main architect was Lindsay Ride, formerly the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps and the Commander of the Hong Kong Field Ambulance. After the British defeat in late 1941, Ride became a POW, but he managed to escape from Japanese detention with the assistance of the East River guerrillas. Upon his arrival at Chongqing, Ride persuaded his superiors to form a special military unit in southern Guangdong to organise escapes from the prisoner camps in Hong Kong. Ride's idea gave rise to the BAAG, which based itself first in Huizhou and later Guilin.

From the beginning of its activities, the BAAG forged a close partnership with the East River guerrillas. The latter, aside from helping the BAAG agents to contact the

⁹¹ Qiu Yintang, "Husong Yu Hanmou furen" [Convoying Madam Yu Hanmou], *Mimi dayingjiu*, 180-94.

⁹² Mao Zedong, "On the International United Front against Fascism," (23 June 1941), *SW*, v. 3, 29; cf. "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu Taipingyang zhanzheng baofahou yu yingmei jianli tongyi zhanxian wenti gei Zhou Enlai deng de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to Zhou Enlai and others concerning the question of establishing the united front with Britain and America after the outbreak of the Pacific War] (8 December 1941), *NDZ*, v. 3, 71.

POW camps, provided them also with logistics and convoy support. During the later years of the war, the scope of their cooperation extended to gathering intelligence about the deployment of Japanese troops in South China. Due to the need to enter into extensive dealings with the Communist guerrillas, the BAAG's operation was constantly interfered with by Chongqing. Such action, in turn, strained relations between China and Britain. In spite of numerous ups and downs, the partnership between the BAAG and the East River guerrillas survived until the Japanese surrender in 1945.⁹³ There is no exact figure on the number of foreigners rescued by their joint efforts. An estimation given by Huang Zuomei, the Party cadre in charge of organising assistance to foreign escapees, numbered at least eighty six.⁹⁴ In acknowledging the East River Column's outstanding contribution to the Allies during the war, the British government awarded a MBE order to Huang (known to them as Raymond) in 1946 on the recommendation of the BAAG.⁹⁵

The BAAG was not the only British agency which was interested in the East River guerrillas. As late as July 1943, the Special Operation Executive (SOE), a military organisation which undertook subversive activities in enemy-occupied areas, had tried to conduct sabotages in Hong Kong in conjunction with the Communists operating in the vicinity. A plan known as Oblivion was drafted by the SOE, which was designed to introduce a specially trained unit of Canadian Chinese into Hong Kong to carry out industrial and shipping sabotages. Moreover, this unit was to set up clandestine wireless stations on the coast to collect and signal miscellaneous information about the Japanese as a crucial preparation for a conceivable Allied landing in South China. Finally, the Oblivion group should be ready for any duties deemed necessary for the restoration of British sovereignty over Hong Kong after World War II. To have all these objectives achieved effectively, the SOE reckoned that active support from the East River guerrillas was indispensable. In exchange for their service, the SOE prepared to offer them military training and various kinds of war supplies. The volume of this potential aid should not be underestimated. At some point, the SOE proposed to introduce arms sufficient to equip

⁹³ For the history of the British Army Aid Group and its cooperation with the East River Column, see Edwin Ride, *BAAG: Hong Kong Resistance 1942-1945*, (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981); on the Chinese side, see *DZ*, 116-18; *GDDS*, 103-10; Huang Zuomei, "Dongjiang zongdui de guoji diwei" [The international status of the East River Column] (10 June 1946) in *Dongjiang zongdui shiliao* (*DZS*) [Historical sources on the East River Column], comp., Guangdongsheng dang'anguan, (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1984), 694-7.

⁹⁴ Huang Zuomei, "Dongjiang zongdui yingjiu guoji youren tongji," [Statistics on the 'international friends' rescued by the East River Column] (19 February 1946), *DZS*, 683. An English version of it is preserved in FO 371/53741, 28 April 1946, from Hilda Selwyn-Clarke to Sir Hebert Phillips.

⁹⁵ "Huang Zuomei," *Guangjiaojing* [Wide Angle Magazine], June 1986, 16-8; cf. FO 371/53741, 21 June 1946, from Lt.-Col. S. I. Derry to Mr. Kitson.

30,000 guerrillas on the Southeast China coast. Intended to strengthen the bargaining position of the SOE, the officer in charge of the operation strongly suggested to his superiors to initiate this cooperation with the Communists in the name of the Allied High Command. Again, if Oblivion could have been executed, it would have completely revolutionised the political and military future of the East River guerrillas. Nevertheless, the plan was finally abandoned on the objection of General Wedemeyer, the Allied Commander in Chief in the China Theatre and the U.S. Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek. It was highly probable, as the SOE believed, that the real opposition actually came from Chiang, who could not tolerate such an ambitious military plan that would certainly enhance the power of his political adversary.⁹⁶

By 1944, even the Americans were aware of the strategic potential of the East River guerrillas because of the latter's actions in recovering a number of Americans pilots shot down by Japanese. These pilots belonged to the Fourteenth Air Force Squadron which was charged with the responsibility of bombing the Japanese strategic points in Southeast China. A British intelligence source reported that one of these pilots, Lieutenant Donald W. Kerr, had met Zeng Sheng personally and was given "a very full account of the whole history of their [East River Column's] associations with the British." Zeng also asked Kerr to take General Chennault a letter, written in English, in which Zeng promised to render the Americans assistance in rescue work, intelligence and sabotage.⁹⁷ Zeng's offer coincided with the shift of opinion among a number of high-ranking American, who believed that the Allies' war efforts in China would be profit much more by supporting the CCP rather than the GMD. As they were disgusted by Chongqing's corruption and poor military performance during the war, they believed that the Communists were a dedicated and effective anti-Japanese force. In fact, in July 1944, an article published in *Amerasia* particularly introduced the Communist guerrillas in Guangdong and Hong Kong to the American public and praised their impressive achievements in rescuing many Chinese and foreign escapees. It urged the Allies to establish close working relations with them and to strengthen their activities with

⁹⁶ Special Operations Executive Archives (HS) 1/133, 28 April 1944; December 1944 B/B 234 to B/B 100; 23 May 1945 Melbourne to London; HS 1/171, 3 July 1943 From Mr. Michael Kendall; HS 1/180, 14 December 1944.

⁹⁷ WO 208/451, 12 July 1944 Major D.R. Holmes to Major Egerton Mott.

material, technical and financial aid so that these guerrillas could contribute more effectively to the Allies' offensive against the Japanese.⁹⁸

Although a formal partnership between the Allied forces and the CCP did not materialise due to the American fear of the growing threat of Soviet Communism, the American military officials in South China did seek assistance from the East River guerrillas. Upon their request, Zeng Sheng set up a special corps consisting of two hundred people, who collected intelligence for the American army. Valuable information such as the secret communication code of the Japanese South China Fleet, their military deployments, and location of the enemy's air bases, dockyards and oil depots were supplied. According to the Communist sources, the Americans were so amazed with what the intelligence corps of the East River guerrillas had done that they praised it as their "most important intelligence station in Southeast China."⁹⁹

IV. Struggle for Survival

It has been argued before that the Guangdong Party had been trying hard to achieve an uneasy coexistence by upholding the United Front with the GMD and simultaneously increasing its military strength. However, the eclipse of Yu Hanmou rendered this goal unfeasible, for the Party could no longer count on his resistance to central government's encroachment to ward off Chiang Kai-shek's onslaught on the Communists. The deterioration of the United Front in Guangdong was rapid though not sudden. From 1940 onwards, there were systematic crackdowns on the Communist organisations throughout the province, driving the Party underground. In Shaoguan, the Eighth Route Army Office, the local branch of the *New China Daily*, and the *New South China* were both shut down by early 1941. Further, the hundred or so political workers in Yu's army were forced to withdraw. In May 1942, even the clandestine headquarters of the CCP North Guangdong Committee was raided by the GMD police.¹⁰⁰ From then on,

⁹⁸ "The Canton-Hong Kong Guerrillas and Allied Strategy in the Pacific," *Amerasia*, v. 8, no. 13 (July 1944), 215-20.

⁹⁹ Huang Zuomei, "Women yu Meiguo de hezuo" [Our cooperation with America] (4 February 1946), *DZS*, 667-82; id., "Dongjiang zongdui de guoji diwei," 698.

¹⁰⁰ The Guangdong Provincial Committee was divided into two in December 1940. The North Guangdong Committee was responsible for directing underground Party work in the northern part of the province which was still governed by the GMD government. The South Guangdong Committee, on the other hand, oversaw the guerrilla movement in the occupied areas. It was based in Hong Kong and was dissolved after the fall of the colony. After the destruction of the North Guangdong Committee, there was no provincial Party organ in Guangdong until January 1943, when the Temporary Guangdong Provincial Committee was instituted in the East River Base Area. It was superseded by the Guangdong Regional Committee in July 1945. See *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 295, 300-3, 310.

guerrilla resistance became the only expression of the Communist movement in Guangdong.¹⁰¹

The collapse of the political alliance with the GMD, coupled with the outbreak of the Pacific war, turned the situation of the East River Communists from bad to worse. They found themselves sandwiched between the Japanese, stationed at Guangzhou and Hong Kong, and the GMD, who maintained a front-line military headquarters in Huizhou.¹⁰² In their immediate surroundings, there were numerous puppet troops and GMD "official" guerrillas. Repeated harassment by these hostile forces severely weakened the Communist guerrilla movement in the East River valley. Moreover, the extension of Japanese aggression to Hong Kong and the Southeast Asian countries had cut the overseas supply line, which the East River guerrillas depended heavily upon, and thrown them into grave financial difficulties. The guerrilla economy further deteriorated in 1943 when a severe famine hit Guangdong. The problem of survival had never been so acute before.

In the spring of 1942, just a few months before his arrest by GMD spies, Zhang Wenbin was in the East River Base Area.¹⁰³ He had long reckoned that the political and geographical constraints of the East River valley inhibited any attempt to erect a consolidated Communist base, so it was very likely that during this stay the adverse local conditions reinforced his earlier belief. He therefore proposed that Zeng Sheng and Wang Zuoyao petition Yu Hanmou to end the civil war and restoring the "legal titles" of the East River guerrilla units so that they would have their own legitimate zones of operation and receive subsidies from the GMD government.¹⁰⁴ To some extent, this reflected

¹⁰¹ Cf. Warren Kuo, *Analytical History of the Chinese Communist Party*, v. 4, (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1971), 450. According to Kuo, the suppression of the CCP's organisations in Guangdong belonged to a larger operation of the GMD security authorities to curtail Communist influence in South China.

¹⁰² Huizhou had been occupied twice by the Japanese in 1939 and 1941, but they retreated soon due to the inability to put in enough garrisons. The GMD was able to hold the city until early 1945.

¹⁰³ In November 1940, Zhang Wenbin was transferred by the Party Centre from the Guangdong Party to work as the assistant secretary of the newly-established Southern Working Committee, which assisted the Southern Bureau in supervising Party activities in a number of provinces in South China, including Guangdong. During the Japanese invasion, the members of the Southern Working Committee had a meeting in Hong Kong. They, too, were evacuated from the colony by the East River guerrillas. In the spring of 1942, Zhang spent about two months observing the work of the guerrillas in the East River Base Area. In June, he was arrested by GMD spies while on his way to the border region of Guangdong and Fujian. He died in prison in August 1944 because of serious illness. *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 293; Liu Shuxin and Ye Wenyi, 203-5.

¹⁰⁴ "Wenbin gei Zhongyang, Shaomei, and nanwei de baogao" (10 January 1942), 176; Zhang Wenbin, "Women de zhuzhang," [Our Standpoints] (late January 1942), *DZS*, 43-4; Yang Kanghua, "Zhang Wenbin tongzhi dao dongzong," 37; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 249-50; cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 77.

Zhang's continual doubt about the applicability of Mao Zedong's model of guerrilla warfare in North China to Guangdong. Nevertheless, his proposal was not opposed by Yan'an. Several negotiations with the government took place subsequently, but no agreement could be reached since the GMD had no interest in making any compromise. By early 1943, the East River guerrillas had given up virtually any "false hope" of reaching a truce with the GMD. Even though, publicly, they still called for negotiations with the government for the sake of national unity, internally, the guerrillas understood well that this was merely united-front rhetoric. In order to survive, they had to rely on their own efforts.¹⁰⁵ The following discussion will examine their survival strategies one by one.¹⁰⁶

a. Encountering Military Challenge

Reducing Provocation. Facing overwhelming military threats, the East River guerrillas devised several tactics to minimise potential losses. First of all, they tried to reduce provocation as much as possible. In particular, direct confrontations with the Japanese army were always dissuaded because it had far superior equipment and training. As one of the BAAG officers observed, the Communists refrained from doing anything which tended to draw Japanese reprisals to their activities, and that constituted the baseline for their cooperation with the British.¹⁰⁷ The adoption of this tactic did not mean that the guerrillas had abandoned their anti-Japanese stance. Rather, they chose as their targets largely the puppet troops. These puppet troops were usually composed of ex-bandits, outlaws and vagrants. They became ideal preys for the Communist guerrillas not only because assaults on them were unlikely to invite Japanese reprisals, but also because they were badly-disciplined, low in morale and disintegrated quickly before a well-

¹⁰⁵ "Lin Ping gei Zhongyang bing Enlai dian" [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (22 November 1942), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 215; "Zhou Enlai guanyu Dongjiang youjidui jieqia tanpan wenti zhi Zhonggong Zhongyang shujichu dian," [Radio message from Zhou Enlai to the Secretariat of the Party Centre concerning the question of negotiation of the East River Guerrillas] (3 September 1942), *NDZ*, v. 4, 52; "Yinianlai zhengzhi gongzuo de zongjie" [A conclusion of the past year's political work] (14 May 1943), *DZS*, 354-6; Zhou Boming, et. al., "Lin Ping jianku fenzhan zai Dongjiang" [Lin Ping's hard struggle in the East River region], *Guangdong dangshi* [The history of the Guangdong Party], v. 2 (June 1990), 7; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 282.

¹⁰⁶ The Party's ability in counteracting repression from the Japanese and the rural elite, and its importance to the ultimate success of the Communist base in Jin-Cha-Ji have been cogently spelled out by Hartford in her article, "Repression and Communist Success." As the reader will learn, some of her findings echo what I have discovered in the East River Base Area.

¹⁰⁷ WO 208/451, 12 July 1944 From Major D. R. Holmes to Major Egerton Mott; cf. WO 208/318, 18 February 1944 Kweilin Intelligence Summary No. 36; HS 1/134, 2 February 1945 from Major E. B. Teesdale to Lt.-Col. D. Gill-Davies.

coordinated offensive.¹⁰⁸ This was testified to by American intelligence: "The Japanese and the Nanking regime have not equipped the puppets at all comparably to the Japanese Army, and the majority have little interest in the Japanese cause. They are said to possess no real fighting strength and regard employment by the enemy merely as a means of easy livelihood. As a result anti-Japanese forces have frequently been successful in operating against much larger numbers of puppets."¹⁰⁹

The similar tactic was also employed in coping with the GMD's suppression. Whenever possible, the guerrillas avoided direct engagement with the main forces of the government but instead concentrated on obliterating the "most wicked and weakest ones" among the "die-hard" army.¹¹⁰ In most instances, this referred to the "official" guerrillas or, as the Communists called them, "the miscellaneous armies" (*zapaijun*), who were originally brigand gangs co-opted by the GMD authorities. There were obvious advantages of focusing military assaults on such groups. First, similar to the puppet troops, these "miscellaneous armies" were generally poorly paid and ill-fed, and were easily defeated. In addition, since they commonly preyed upon the local inhabitants for food, clothing and other necessities, Hence, they aroused much hatred from the rural populace.¹¹¹ By getting rid of them, the Party could increase its popularity among the people. Further, the Communists rightly perceived that there were deep mutual distrusts between the government and the "miscellaneous armies." The latter always interpreted their order from the GMD to suppress the East River guerrillas as a plot to grind down the strength of both sides by bringing them into conflict.¹¹² On the other hand, among the "miscellaneous armies" themselves, fighting broke out frequently, as each wanted to expand the sphere of its influence at the expense of others. Playing skilfully upon these contradictions, Zeng Sheng claimed that he was successful in alienating some

¹⁰⁸ "Yijiu sisan nian de junshi gongzuo zongjie tigang" [A brief summary of military work in 1943] (1943) and He Dinghua, "Bao'an dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie" [A summary of military work of the Bao'an Battalion in 1943] (March 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 224, 355-6.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, "The Japanese Occupation of Southeast China Coast," (26 January 1945), (Microfilmed by The University Publications of America, Inc., 1977), 2.

¹¹⁰ "Guangdong renmin kangri youji zongdui zongduibu, zhengzhibu de zhishixin (xinyihao)" [A letter of instructions from the Political Department of the Guangdong People's Anti-Japanese Guerrillas (new no. 1)] (4 April 1943) and "Muqian xingshi yu women de gongzuo (xingerhao zhishixin)" [The current situation and our work (a letter of instructions, new no. 2)] (31 July 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 175, 185; cf. WO 208/318, 18 February 1944 Kweilin Intelligence Summary No. 36.

¹¹¹ He Dinghua, "Bao'an dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie" (March 1944), 360-1.

¹¹² "Dongjiang zongdui Huiyang dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie" [A summary of the military work of the Huiyang Battalion of the East River Column in 1943] (25 February 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 264.

“miscellaneous armies” from the GMD, allied with others, and destroyed or dislodged those who remained hostile to the East River guerrillas.¹¹³

Fighting for Small Victories. The tactic of reducing provocation was carried out in the East River Base Area concurrently with another tactic which was designed to change the guerrillas’ attitude towards warfare. They were encouraged to fight frequent but small engagements with the enemy, instead of extensive ones, and to accumulate minor victories into a major one.¹¹⁴ The rationale behind this was obvious. Large-scale operations were costly, and the outcomes were always difficult to predict. By curtailing the size of the raids and targeting primarily the weakest units of enemies, whether the Japanese puppet troops or the “miscellaneous armies,” the Communists could ensure constant victories in their military operations. These victories, no matter how minor, were extremely valuable in bolstering the morale of the guerrilla fighters and the masses in the base area.

“Grey Military Forces.” The third tactic of the East River guerrillas was to conceal the identity of parts of their forces, turning them into what the Communists regarded as “grey” or “peripheral” military units (*huise, waiwei wuzhuang*). These “grey military units” could take up whatever forms of appearance except the Communist one, such as communal defence force, rural elite’s militia, GMD’s “official” guerrillas, bandit groups, or even puppet armies. In theory, the Party assumed secret control over these “grey” military units; but, outwardly, they operated independently and abstained from any overt, concerted activities with the East River guerrillas.¹¹⁵ A convenient method to create a “grey” military force was to implant the Communist guerrillas into bandit gangs, for bandit leaders exercised almost no discrimination in recruitment and welcomed as many followers as possible. Also, as bandits were the usual targets of co-optation by both the GMD and the Japanese, the Communists thus found an easy means to disguise some of their guerrilla forces as the “miscellaneous armies” and the puppet troops.

Although getting in was not a problem, how to stay on was more complicated. On the one hand, the Party wanted its guerrilla cadres to mingle with the bandits and behave like them in order to avoid too overt a Communist presence. On the other hand, the Party was anxious to prevent its own men from being corrupted and degenerating into real

¹¹³ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 264-6, 272-3.

¹¹⁴ “Muqian xingshi yu women de gongzuo (xingerhao zhishixin)” (31 July 1943), 185; “Dongjiang zongdui Huiyang dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie” (25 February 1944), 278.

¹¹⁵ “Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian” [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (March 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 241.

bandits. Certain guidelines were thus laid out. For example, the cadres were permitted to go to gambling houses or play mah-jong in tea houses. If necessary, they could even join the secret societies such as the three-dots society (*sandianhui*). However, they were prohibited from visiting prostitutes and smoking opium. Moreover, everything they seized from looting and plundering had to be surrendered to the Party.¹¹⁶ There are no cases from the sources about the guerrilla cadres being corrupted while working among the bandits. Rather, there were incidents in which these cadres behaved with too much discipline that their identity was betrayed and their missions were thwarted.¹¹⁷

Instigating Mutinies. Occasionally, the Party attempted to instigate mutinies in the puppet and the "miscellaneous" armies as a way to weaken the hostile camps. The GMD intelligence said that the Communists enticed puppet soldiers to switch side (*fanzheng*) by offering them financial rewards. Leaflets were said to have been circulated in the occupied areas stating that any puppet army officer who turned to the Communists with ten or more fully-armed soldiers would be awarded ten thousand *yuan*. Puppet soldiers who defected to the Party with their weapons would also be awarded three thousand to fifty *yuan* accordingly. Even those who came empty handed were promised twenty *yuan*, provided they had valid proof of identity.¹¹⁸

In reality, it took more than simple material rewards to stage a successful mutiny in the puppet or GMD's armies. A long period of planning and preparation was very often required. The Party would commonly target an army division whose commanding officer was known personally by the East River guerrillas. For instance, Liang Deming, a puppet army commander who had switched sides to the Communists, was Wang Zuoyao's old classmate in the Yantang Military Academy.¹¹⁹ Through such a connection, the first contact between the two sides was established. In the beginning, patriotic appeals were used. Wang exhorted Liang on the importance of national resistance and the wickedness of traitors. Even though Liang's initial response was positive, the Party did not require him to start a mutiny instantly. Instead, he was asked to enter a non-aggression agreement with the East River guerrillas and supply them with intelligence and

¹¹⁶ "Cong kangri minzhong wuzhuang dou huhang dadui" [From the people's anti-Japanese forces to the Convoy Battalion], *DDZH*, v. 2, 183-4.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 181-91; Li Zhiguang, "Huodongyu Dongbaohui bianqu de yizhi 'huise wuzhuang'" [The operation of a "grey-coloured military unit" in the Dong-Bao-Hui border region], *Dongguan fenghuo* [The fire of Dongguan], v. 9 (October 1986), 1-14.

¹¹⁸ "Guangdongsheng zhengfu kuaiyou daidian" [A telegram of the Guangdong Provincial Government] (May 1941), *Quanzhonghao* 2/2/2.

¹¹⁹ Huang Qin, "Huiyi cedong Liang Deming qiyi de yiduan jingli" [Reminiscences on the staging of Liang Deming's uprising], *Dongguan fenghuo*, v. 9 (October 1986), 63.

war materials. The purposes of that was to lower the risk of cooperation with the Communists and to test Liang's trustworthiness. Only after a period of observation did the Party call upon Liang to revolt, and it had to provide Liang with financial assistance and military backup before getting his acquiescence to switch sides.¹²⁰

"Double-Sided" Governments. As Hartford points out, the Party in the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region employed the policy of "double-sided" governments to win over potential supporters. These governments, "which cooperated with the Japanese by day and the border region by night . . . permitted [Communist] sympathisers to do a little bit for the resistance cause at fairly small risk . . . rather than presenting them with the choice of doing a great deal (an all-out struggle) at enormous risk (to the death), or doing nothing at all."¹²¹ The same tactic was also used in the East River region. Earlier it was shown that Zeng Sheng had exhibited little tolerance towards those elite who collaborated with the Japanese. However, the Party evidently had learned from the defeat in Daling Hills that such an uncompromising attitude would do no good to the guerrilla movement and had to be changed. Now, "double-sided" governments were not only accepted as a legitimate struggle tactic but were actively pursued. In the New Territories, for example, many puppet village chiefs had "white skin, red hearts." They were instrumental in guaranteeing a steady flow of intelligence to the guerrillas and ensured that no surprise attack would come upon them from the Japanese. The Party also encouraged its own activists to infiltrate various puppet organisations in order to gather intelligence and carry out subversive activities.¹²²

United-Front Propaganda. Although the United Front as an alliance with the GMD had ceased to function, the Communists never abandoned it as a useful political tool to rally public sympathy and ward off possible attack. A Party's motto at that time was "make more friends." Besides launching vigorous propaganda, the Party also exhorted cadres to utilise all possible social relations, such as relatives and family, fellow townsmen, classmates and colleagues, to win over sympathisers so that the "die-hards" rather than the Communists themselves would end up in isolation. Moreover, the Party applied its tripartite divisions of society to the GMD for united-front manoeuvring.

¹²⁰ "Zhengqu Liang Deming, Mai Dingtang qiyi de jingguo" [Staging the uprisings of Liang Deming and Mai Dingtang], *Dongguan fenghuo*, v. 4 (March 1986), 156-64; cf. "Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian" (March 1943), 241; Huang Qin, 62-72.

¹²¹ Hartford, "Repression and Success," 118-9.

¹²² *GDDS*, 161-4; Luo Yuzhong, "Gangjiu dadui zai Shatoujiao de qingbao gongzuo" [The intelligence work of the Battalion of Hong Kong and Kowloon in Shatoujiao], *GL*, 185-6.

Cadres were reminded not to mistake the GMD as a homogenous entity, but one that was also comprised of middle and progressive elements. Their goodwill to the Party was consciously secured through the *Advance*, which constantly published articles preaching against civil war and calling for internal unity. Furthermore, the Party paid much attention to its united-front work with the new GMD military commanders, who had been recently transferred to Guangdong from other provinces. For the purpose of devising a method to win them over, the East River guerrillas were ordered to conduct thorough researches on their attitude towards the Party and the civil war, and also their relationship with their colleagues.¹²³

Improving Combat Skills. In contrast to the two famous Communist resistance armies, the Eighth Route and the New Fourth, the nucleus of the East River Column was not constituted from old Red Army soldiers. Most of its ranks were initially patriotic students, seamen, workers and overseas Chinese immigrants, who had no experience in guerrilla fighting. Military ignorance was certainly one of the major deficiencies, which prevented the East River guerrillas from having effective control of their bases during the early years. In view of that, from time to time when the situation allowed, military classes were held to teach the recruits combat techniques and guerrilla tactics. A particular emphasis was on fighting the “annihilation” battles (*jianmiezhàn*). The guerrillas were to avoid head-on engagements with the enemy, which would only exhaust their ammunition and manpower and yield no gains at all. Rather, they should concentrate on obliterating one unit, usually the weakest, of the enemy army in each battle. The strategy did not mean to necessarily kill them all but preferably intern the enemy soldiers and seize their weapons. To be able to achieve such an aim efficiently, the guerrillas had to learn to attack by surprise, increase their mobility, and combine political propaganda with guerrilla deployment.¹²⁴

b. Strengthening Their Economic Position

Tax Stations. During its founding period, the East River Column depended heavily on overseas aid, which, however, was not reliable. After the “eastward retreat,”

¹²³ “Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian” (March 1943), 240; “Guangdong renmin kangri youji zongdui zongduibu, zhengzhibu de zhishixin (xinyihao)” (4 April 1943), 176-7; “Muqian xingshi yu women de gongzuo (xingerhao zhishixin)” (July 1943), 186-7.

¹²⁴ Wang Zuoyao, “Lun muqian de jige zhanshu yuanze” [A discussion on a few of the present guerrilla tactics] (June 1943), *DZS*, 170-5; id., “Dongjiang junzheng ganbu xuexiao de qianqian houhou” [The origins and end of the Dongjiang Political and Military Cadres School], *GL*, 16-22.

this aid began to drop because a number of Chinese communities abroad became hesitant to make contributions to the those who were denounced as “bandits” by the GMD government.¹²⁵ Overseas aid finally dried up after the outbreak of the Pacific War when Southeast Asia came under Japanese domination. Although income was raised from confiscating the land and properties of “local bullies” as well as from seizing smugglers’ goods, these methods could by no means constitute a sound economic basis for the East River guerrillas.¹²⁶

Early in 1940, Wang Zuoyao began experimenting with the scheme of setting up tax stations as a solution to his guerrillas’ financial difficulties. This idea was first proposed to him by Zeng Hongwen.¹²⁷ Zeng was an ex-bandit chief and probably also a member of the *Hongmen* secret society.¹²⁸ Perhaps, drawing from his own experience of collecting “protection fees” from travellers, Zeng suggested that Wang establish tax stations along major trade routes near the resistance base so that he could charge the merchants tolls. At first, three stations were erected on the highways between Hong Kong and the mainland. Merchants were encouraged to donate money on a voluntary basis, and a flag was said to have hung over the tax station which stated clearly that the money collected would be used for the resistance cause. Since the guerrillas provided escorts to any merchants who made the donation, many were willing to pay because banditry was rampant at that time. Due to the busy traffic on these routes, more than a thousand *yuan* could be collected every day.¹²⁹

Later, to ensure a stable income, merchants were no longer asked to pay voluntarily. Instead, the guerrillas would charge convoy fees according to the weight (in picul) of their goods. By the end of 1941, a rudimentary taxation system had been implemented, which calculated taxes according to the type and value of commodities. The system continued to be refined and elaborated in subsequent years. Figure 1 lists some examples of goods and the tax rates charged on them in 1942 and 1943. It shows

¹²⁵ He Wu, “Dongjiang kangri genjudi Ludong he Boluo diqu de shuishou gongzuo” [Taxation in Ludong and Boluo of the East River Anti-Japanese Base Area] and Lai Yang, “Ludong shuishou gongzuo de yidian huiyi” [Some reminiscences on taxation in Ludong], *DGGCSSX*, 370, 378.

¹²⁶ Wang Zuoyao, “Dongjiang kangri genjudi shuishou de jianli,” 362, 364.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 363; Zeng Hongwen, “Huidongbao kangri youjiqu de shuishou gongzuo,” [Taxation in the Hui-Dong-Bao guerrilla areas], *DGGCSSX*, 367.

¹²⁸ Wang, *Dongzong yiye*, 161-2; “Guanyu ‘qiangjiu wenhua ren’,” 13; Zeng Sheng *huiyilu*, 164.

¹²⁹ Zeng Hongwen, 368; Deng Yuxin, “Dongjiang kangri genjudi shuishou de tedian he zuoyong,” [The characteristics and functions of tax collection in the East River Anti-Japanese Base Areas] in *Kangri genjudi de caizheng jingji* [The economy and finance of the anti-Japanese base area], ed. by Caizhengbu caizheng kexue yanjiusuo, (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng chubanshe, 1987), 344.

that the rates were high on strategic (e.g. tyres) and luxury goods (e.g. cigarettes and cosmetics) while generally low for daily necessities such as food and clothing.

Figure 1.

<i>Types of Goods</i>	<i>Tax Rate</i>
Rubber Tyres	15%
Dyes	15%
Cigarettes, Wine	12%
Cosmetics	12%
Salted Fish, Fresh Fish	7%
Poultry	7%
Grains	5%
Fruits	5%
Vegetables	5%
Eggs	5%
Daily Accessories	5%
Old Clothes	3%
Firewood, Coal	3%
Sundry items	3%

Taxation Rates of the East River Guerrilla Base in 1942 and 1943¹³⁰

When examining the Communists' efforts in solving the economic crisis in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, Chen Yung-fa argues that they resorted to the cultivation and exportation of opium.¹³¹ However, there is no evidence that the Party in the East River valley was involved in the production of opium, although many peasants of the region did earn their living by cultivating it. In fact, according to Wang Zuoyao, the East River guerrillas at first prohibited opium from passing through their tax stations. Once discovered, all opium would be confiscated.¹³² Nevertheless, this policy was later amended, allegedly because of the peasants' petitions. Many of them were also said to have asked the guerrillas for protection of their poppy fields against raids by bandits and puppets. In response to their requests, the guerrillas charged them a small fee called

¹³⁰ Li He, "Dongjiang kangri genjudi Luxi diqu shuishou gongzuo de jianli he fazhan" [The establishment and development of taxation in Luxi region of the East River Anti-Japanese Base Area] and Zhang Hua, "Wozai Ludong youjiqu shuishou gongzuo de huiyi," [My recollections on taxation in the Ludong guerrillas region], *DGGCSSX*, 392, 398; cf. "Kangzhan shiqi Dongguan caishui zhanxian de douzheng," [The struggle on the battle line of finance and taxation in Dongguan during the Anti-Japanese War], *Dongguan fenghuo*, v. 5 (1984), 183-4.

¹³¹ Chen Yung-fa, "The Blooming Poppy under the Red Sun: The Yan'an Way and the Opium Trade," in *New Perspectives*, 263-98.

¹³² Wang Zuoyao, "Dongjiang kangri genjudi shuishou de jianli," 364.

lijin.¹³³ However, it seems more probable that the real reasons behind the policy change were the base area's financial difficulties and the great profit of taxing the opium trade. A Party document of 1945 indicates that opium had become a conventional item in the guerrillas' tax list and a forty percent rate was applied. While cultivation of opium was tolerated in the East River valley, smoking it, asserted Communist sources, was firmly prohibited.¹³⁴

Due to the increasing reliance on tax collection, more and more tax stations were established. By 1945, there were five principal tax stations located respectively in Ludong (east of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway), Luxi (west of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway), Huidong (eastern Huiyang), Boluo and Gangjiu (Hong Kong-Kowloon). Under them were thirteen intermediate stations and 107 branch stations. Over 900 men worked as tax officials.¹³⁵ Reliable statistics are generally absent concerning the amount of tax levied. Although we have a few pieces of tax collection records, they look puzzling rather than illuminating. For instance, in Bao'an, it was recorded that the total amount of tax collected in 1943 was about seven million *yuan* and the expense of the local guerrilla battalion per month was estimated at ten thousand *yuan* per month, that is, about 1.2 million a year.¹³⁶ However, in the same year, the guerrillas in Huiyang were reported to have collected about 579 million *yuan* and had spent 459 million of it.¹³⁷ The big contrast between the two figures might be attributed to the different currencies they were referring to; the first one was the GMD's *guobi*, and the second one was the puppet money. Another important point to note is that although these figures generally looked huge, they were not really that impressive when one takes into account the rapid depreciation of both currencies throughout the war period.

Among the five principal tax stations, the one in the Hong Kong-Kowloon area was the most profitable.¹³⁸ In fact, Hong Kong continued to be a main source of income for the East River guerrillas even though it had fallen to Japan. David Faure has noted that the rice shortage in the colony during the years of the occupation gave rise to a

¹³³ "Kangzhan shiqi dongguan caishui zhanxian de douzheng," 183.

¹³⁴ "Guanyu zhengshou shuijuan wenti de zhishi," [Instructions concerning the question of levying taxes] (1945), *DGGCSSX*, 105.

¹³⁵ Deng Yuxin, 345.

¹³⁶ He Dinghua, "Bao'an dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie" (March 1944), 385.

¹³⁷ "Dongjiang zongdui Huiyang dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie" (25 February 1944), 273.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 272-3; *GDDS*, 165; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 253; Chen Guangxian, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi gangjiu shuizhan jianli he fazhan," [The establishment and development of the tax stations in Hong Kong and Kowloon during the Anti-Japanese War], *DGGCSSX*, 372-3.

massive smuggling trade in Xigong.¹³⁹ Despite the GMD's blockade, which was rather ineffective, food supplies continued to flow from unoccupied China into Hong Kong. On the other hand, industrial products such as clothing, gasoline and medicine were smuggled from Hong Kong to the mainland. A large volume of this smuggling trade was handled by "travelling merchants" (*shuik*) who toured frequently between the two places.¹⁴⁰ Having a relatively firm control of the smuggling routes between Hong Kong and unoccupied China, both on land and sea, the Communist guerrillas were able to profit enormously by taxing this illicit trade. Both Chinese and Western sources confirm the importance of this taxation to the East River guerrillas.¹⁴¹ A British intelligence report particularly emphasised that because the Communists controlled "ninety per cent of the [smuggling] trade between Hong Kong and Free China," and because this trade was "very considerable in volume and value," by levying taxes on it, they "greatly strengthened their financial position."¹⁴²

The immense economic value of the tax stations to the Communists made them frequent targets of assault by both the Japanese and the GMD armies. Tax officials were extremely vulnerable since they had to work on major trade routes where people travelled frequently. The very nature of their duties exposed them easily to enemy attack. Many tax officials were known to have been murdered by the enemy who disguised themselves as merchants or hawkers.¹⁴³ The only method for tax officials to evade harassment was to shift the location of their stations constantly so that it would be hard for the enemy to hunt them down.¹⁴⁴

Besides attack from outside, the East River guerrillas also encountered problems of maintaining an efficient tax collection from within. As the taxation system became increasingly sophisticated, some tax officials were found incapable of handling their duty such as estimating correctly the value of goods. Thus, they ended up either overcharging the people and damaging the Party's image or levying less than required and incurring

¹³⁹ Faure, "Saikung," 197; cf. WO 208/334, 12 March 1943.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 197-8; Deng Yuxin, 344; Shi Ming, "Bao'an shiuzongzhan de jianku douzheng," [The arduous struggle of the chief tax station in Bao'an], *DGGCSSX*, 384.

¹⁴¹ *GDDS*, 165; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 253. On the Western side, see the next note.

¹⁴² WO 208/451, 12 July 1944 From Major D.R. Holmes to Major Egerton Mott.

¹⁴³ Lai Yang, 379; cf. "Guangdong renmin kangri youji zongdui zongduibu, zhengzhibu de zhishixin (xinyihao)" (4 April 1943), 175; "Muqian xingshi yu women de gongzuo (xingerhao zhishixin)" (31 July 1943), 188; "Guangdongsheng disihuliqu fangjiao jianwei jihua" [The plan for guarding against and eradicating the evil and deceitful elements in the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth districts of the Guangdong Province] (10 June 1942), *Quanzhonghao*, 2/2/1-2.

¹⁴⁴ He Wu, "Dongjiang kangri genjudi Ludong he Boluo diqu de shuishou gongzuo," 370-1.

losses.¹⁴⁵ However, what troubled the Party the most were the problems of corruption and embezzlement. It was laid down as the rule that tax officials had to surrender all tax money collected to the guerrillas' headquarters. In return, they were granted, regardless of ranks, the same amount of monthly stipend. Shi Ming, a former tax official, said that the monthly stipend afforded to buy him only two catties of peanuts or three catties of sweet potatoes.¹⁴⁶ Their hard lives probably explained why many tax officials turned to corruption or embezzlement to improve their living. Some were even found using the tax money to subsidise the expense of their families at home.¹⁴⁷ To combat these problems, the Party resorted mainly to education. Intensive rehabilitation camps were organised for those who had been proved guilty of corruption or embezzlement. The results seemed quite encouraging, for many who had gone through these camps repented and rectified their past errors. Nevertheless, there were some who failed to repent; for example, Feng Gen who had repeatedly committed the same crimes and showed no sign of regret. He was eventually executed by the Party.¹⁴⁸

"Crack Troops and Simple Administration." The "crack troops and simple administration" policy was implemented in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region in late 1941 as part of Yan'an's overall programme of coping with the political and economic crisis, which was triggered by a combination of the Japanese offensive in North China and the intensification of the GMD's blockade of the border region.¹⁴⁹ Aside from reducing the size and cost of the administration, this policy, according to Mark Selden, represented an attack on the "bureaucratism" entrenched in the border region.¹⁵⁰ In varying degrees, "crack troops and simple administration" had been applied to other resistance bases in 1942 and 1943. The immediate context for its adoption in the East River region was not the intense Japanese offensive since large-scale mopping-up campaigns that exclusively targeted Communist guerrillas were rare in Guangdong. Rather, it was the great famine in 1943 when thirty percent of Guangdong's population was said to have died and another twelve percent migrated to other provinces.¹⁵¹ Grain raids by hungry peasants took place

¹⁴⁵ Shi Ming, 386; "Guanyu zhengshou shuijuan wenti de zhishi" [Instructions concerning the question of levying taxes] (1945), *DGGCSSX*, 106; cf. "Shuizhan de gaizao jianguo ji mofan lizhi" [The reform of tax station and the model example] (5 February 1945), *DGGCSSX*, 112.

¹⁴⁶ Shi Ming, 389.

¹⁴⁷ "Shuizhan de gaizao jianguo ji mofan lizhi" (5 February 1945), 112.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-1; "Guanyu qiangjue Feng Gen de xunling" [Concerning the order to execute Feng Gen] (3 June 1945), *DGGCSSX*, 135-8.

¹⁴⁹ Selden, 169-213.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 172-3.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Office of Strategic Services, "The Japanese Occupation of Southeast China Coast," (26 January 1945), 3.

in several counties including Hai-lu-feng, Zijing and Lianping while in Shantou, incidents of cannibalism were reported.¹⁵² Even worse, although the poor harvest had severely reduced local rice production, many merchants still smuggled rice out to Hong Kong for greater profits and thus further aggravated the problem of rice shortage in the mainland.¹⁵³ “Crack troops and simple administration” was practised in the East River Base Area primarily as a measure to alleviate the economic burden. It did not apply, however, to combat “bureaucratism” because the base area had not yet developed an extensive administrative structure. Even the instruction of “crack troops” was implemented to a very limited extent. After all, the East River guerrillas were a tiny force which, by the end of 1943, consisted of only a few thousand men. Nevertheless, the Party did discharge some “unfit” soldiers, such as those too old, physically weak or handicapped, to cut down expense on food.¹⁵⁴

c. Coping with Geographical Constraints

Seaborne Guerrillas. Mao Zedong, in his “Problems of strategy in guerrilla war,” argued that the river-lake-estuary regions had a greater potential for guerrilla warfare than the plains. It was because the former allowed the development of seaborne guerrillas, who could fight against the Japanese in a kind of battle not dissimilar to that practised by pirates and water-bandits. However, he regretted in 1938 that little attention had yet been paid to this possibility.¹⁵⁵ In late 1941, the East River guerrillas made their attempt to extend their activities to the sea in the hope of compensating their geographical restrictions on land. Zeng Sheng was the first to contemplate this notion of establishing a “guerrilla navy.” As an ex-seamen, he believed that the vast ocean opened extra room for guerrilla manoeuvring. In the beginning, the seaborne guerrillas consisted of only a few fishing boats operating mainly around the Xigong peninsular. When Communist influence gradually reached the whole coast of Bias Bay and Mirs Bay, the guerrilla fleet

¹⁵² “Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian” [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (22 April 1943) and “Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian” [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (3 July 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 259, 265; Wu Huaxu, “Yijiu sisan nian Chaoshan hanzai jianwen” [Some accounts of the famine in Chaoshan in 1943], *GWZ*, v. 11 (December 1963), 96.

¹⁵³ WO 208/334, 12 March 1943.

¹⁵⁴ “Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang bing Enlai dian” [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (22 April 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 259; He Dinghua, “Bao’an dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie” (March 1944), 224, 381; “Dongjiang zongdui yinianban (yijiu sisan nian zhi yijiu sisi nian shangbannian) gongzuo baogao (zhai yao)” [A report on the work of the East River Column for the past one and a half year (1943 to the first half of 1944) (an excerpt)] (November 1944), *DZS*, 283.

¹⁵⁵ Mao Zedong, “Problems of strategy in guerrilla war against Japan,” (May 1938), *SW*, v. 2, 96.

expanded to include several fishing junks and small motor ships. Two “naval bases” were built, one in Nan’ao and the other in Yangcaowan.¹⁵⁶

The guerrillas’ ambition to develop their power on sea was facilitated by their successful mobilisation of fishermen. Most fishermen on the southeastern coast of China were from the Danjia people. Spending most of their lives on boats, these people were despised by the land settlers. Due to such discrimination, the Danjia could not sell their fish directly to the people on land. They had to go through the *yulanzhu*, the wholesalers/fish dealers, most of whom exploited the Danjia fishermen by either keeping down their prices or imposing various surcharges for the transaction. The Party was consciously trying to win the trust of the Danjia fishermen. At first, it sent several cadres to work and live among them and gradually become their friends. Then these cadres began to organise the fishermen into cooperatives. Through these cooperatives, the Danjia sold their fish in the town of Shayuchong on the Bias Bay’s coast, which was under the Communists’ control. Thus, it lessened their dependence on the fish dealers. Finally, using patriotic appeals, the Party succeeded in getting many of the fish dealers’ acquiescence to trade in fairer terms with the Danjia. Those who did not accede were denounced by the Party as *yuba* (“fish tyrant”) and were punished.¹⁵⁷

In gratitude for the Party’s help, the Danjia fishermen taught the East River guerrillas to operate fishing boats, to observe weather changes, and to learn to convert “fish bombs” (an explosive which the fishermen used to catch fish) for combat purposes.¹⁵⁸ The Communist seaborne guerrillas were most effective in eradicating pirates and in capturing war supplies from small and isolated Japanese transportation steamers.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, since this guerrilla fleet was poorly-equipped and humble in size, it posed no serious threat to the Japanese, nor did it contribute substantially to make up for the Communists’ deficiencies on land.

¹⁵⁶ *GDDS*, 58, 61; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 350-2.

¹⁵⁷ Chen Guangxian, 373; *GDDS*, 59; Xiao Chun, “Kaizhan yumin gongzuo de huiyi,” [Reminiscences on launching the work among fishermen] in *Huoyue zai Xiangjiang* [Active in Hong Kong], ed. by Xue Yueqing, (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., Ltd., 1993), 165-7.

¹⁵⁸ *GDDS*, 60; Xiao Chun, 167; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 350-1.

¹⁵⁹ *GDDS*, 72; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 353, 357; Wang Jin, “Dapengwan shang dayouji,” [Fighting guerrilla war on the Bias Bay], *GL*, 182.

d. The Rectification Movement

The rectification campaign, which marked the watershed of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region,¹⁶⁰ had only a marginal impact on the Communist base in the East River valley. Although plans were devised to implement the movement, which was meant to elevate Party consciousness of the cadres and rectify some of their arrogance and bureaucratic behaviours, most failed because of the unstable military situation. Indeed, the East River guerrillas had experienced neither the security of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region nor the rapid expansion of the northern Communist bases in the early years of the war which made the movement possible and necessary there. Due to the paramount concern for survival, only a watered-down version of the rectification campaign was practised. As far as the presently-available documents reflect, the rectification movement scarcely affected the East River Base Area.¹⁶¹

V. Concluding Remarks

Before the Japanese had started their invasion of Guangdong, the local Communist leaders were already divided about whether or not the Party should develop its own military force. After the fall of Guangzhou, this question generated even more heated debates. The dispute arose not so much from different political lines but from military considerations: Did the war situation in Guangdong permit the kind of guerrilla expansion of North China? Liao Chengzhi, who initiated the guerrilla movement in the East River valley, made his decision on the prediction that the war with Japan would spread quickly to the whole of Guangdong. However, this prediction was proved wrong. With the exception of Hainan, the Japanese remained concentrated in small fortified sections around major ports on the coast of Southeast China. The occupied area of the East River valley was a long but narrow strip of land which offered little room for effective guerrilla deployment. In short, prior to 1944, the objective conditions in the Guangdong mainland were not ready for launching Mao's "people's war," and the birth of the East River guerrillas was, as hindsight suggests, a premature one.

¹⁶⁰ Selden, 144-65.

¹⁶¹ "Lin Ping guanyu shida zhengce zhixing qingkuang gei Zhongyang de baogao," [A report from Lin Ping to the Party Centre concerning the execution of the ten grand policies] (1 July 1945), "Yinianlai zhengzhi gongzuo de zongjie," [A conclusion of past year's political work] (14 May 1943) and "Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu zai quandui jinxing zhengdun 'sanfeng' yundong de zhishi" [Instructions from the political department of the East River Column concerning the implementation of the movement to rectify the "three styles of working"] (25 March 1944), *DZS*, 162, 366-7, 399-400.

Originally, the Guangdong Party intended to nurture this infant Communist force under the shelter of the United Front. From 1939 to early 1940, Zhang Wenbin tried hard to reconcile the two goals of achieving harmony with the GMD and secretly strengthening the Party militarily. Unfortunately, this strategy eventually failed because of the rapid deterioration of GMD-CCP relations. It seems that the only feasible alternative left was to relocate the East River guerrillas to a geographically suitable area, but this "deviant practice" was suppressed by the Party Centre. Yan'an's decision to confine the guerrilla struggle in the East River valley to the occupied area (that is, in conformity to the pattern set by their northern counterpart) sprang not from the desire to bring about a growth of the Communist power in the south. Rather, it was due to the awareness that the East River guerrillas' survival must depend on the contradictions between the GMD and the Japanese. Nevertheless, how to work out these contradictions to the Communists' favour was not an easy task for the East River guerrillas. This chapter has studied a number of tactics and measures which they devised to cope with the adverse military, economic and geographical situation in the East River valley. Truly, not all of these tactics and measures worked well, nor were they being employed evenly; but, taken together, they enabled the guerrillas to survive and testified to the Party's creativity and flexibility in adapting itself to an extremely hostile environment.

It may be appropriate to conclude this chapter by underlining the role of Hong Kong in the Party's wartime mobilisation in South China. Even though it was a misfortune for the East River guerrillas that they were unable to benefit militarily from their cooperation with the British, their links with Hong Kong proved to be a great asset. To begin with, the early ranks of the East River guerrillas were composed mainly of patriotic overseas Chinese coming from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Many of them were received by the Party branch and the Eighth Route Army Office in Hong Kong, which furnished them with necessities and supplies before sending them off to the East River region. Moreover, deprived of a large and consolidated base, the East River guerrillas found it virtually impossible to sustain their resistance without financial and material aid from overseas during their early years. Most of this aid was transferred through Hong Kong, which was within easy reach of the guerrillas due to the proximity of the East River Base Area to the colony. Not least, Hong Kong itself was a significant base in organising support for China's war efforts, and from which Song Qingling had used her popularity to rally a large quantity of aid to the Party. Although Hong Kong was

occupied by Japan in late 1941, it did not cease to be a main source of financial assistance to the Communists. The tax money levied on the massive smuggling trade, which developed between Hong Kong and the unoccupied China, contributed immensely to the improvement of the economic basis of the East River guerrillas. Finally, the rescue of the large number of prominent Chinese intellectuals and foreign POW from Hong Kong won much fame for the guerrillas both domestically and internationally. These efforts, as described in the next chapter, were crucial to the “successful retreat” of the East River Column to Shandong.

CHAPTER 4

THE ABORTIVE REVOLUTION, 1944-1945

I. The New Political Context

The Communists commenced their base construction in the East River valley in late 1940, but they made little headway prior to 1944. Above all, the restricted Japanese occupation on the Guangdong mainland, coupled with Mao Zedong's insistence on building bases in the enemy's rear, circumscribed the scope in which the East River Communists could expand. The geographic disadvantage, the inability to put up a strong military presence, and the constant "friction" with the GMD further reduced the goal of the local resistance movement to mere survival. With all these problems, in some sense, the struggle of the East River guerrillas could be regarded as a qualified success because they were able to hold on to their foothold. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of the revolution went beyond self-preservation. If the Communist revolution involved what Chen Yung-fa has called the "two concomitant processes," that is, "the peasants' seizure of power at the grassroots level and the CCP's state building at all levels,"¹ then one must conclude that, before 1944, the revolution had not yet taken place in the East River valley.

The year 1944 marked a new phase of the Communist movement in Guangdong. From that time onwards, vigorous and intense efforts were employed to expand and transform the East River guerrilla zone into a base area in its real sense. A number of reform programmes were introduced to create a resistance regime and rouse peasant activism. This shift from guerrilla warfare to peasant mobilisation as the prime mode of Party work had a great deal to do with the desire of the Yan'an leaders to assimilate Communism in South China into the principal Communist revolution. What induced them to contemplate such a policy in the East River region, which they had hitherto refrained from, was the changing political situation in China. By the latter half of 1943, the tide of the Pacific War began to turn against Japan. Troops had to be pulled out continually from the China theatre for war efforts on other fronts. In North China, the Japanese gradually withdrew their army from the deep countryside and replaced intensive pacification work by occasional quick sweeps. The decline of Japanese repression enabled the Communists' northern bases, which had been hit so hard by the Japanese

¹ Chen, *Making Revolution*, 499.

mop-up operations since late 1940, to strive for further consolidation. It did so by implementing more thoroughly mass campaigns to deepen peasant activism. With the strengthening of the Party's position in North China, Yan'an could then spare more attention and energy for expansion in the south. Thus, it hoped that the Communists would have a firmer ground in the post-war military contest with the GMD. A golden opportunity to put such aspiration into practice came when the Japanese resumed their offensive in China, known as the Operation Ichigo.

Operation Ichigo was the greatest military offensive of Japan in China after 1937-38. Its primary objective was to create a continental corridor in China as an alternative to the sea lanes, which had come under heavy Allied aerial and submarine attacks. The new land route would supply the Japanese army in Southeast Asia and transport from there strategic raw materials back to Japan. The successful realisation of this scheme, believed the Japanese strategists, would sustain the country's war efforts indefinitely and insure "a posture of undefeatability" against the Allied counter-offensive.² Operation Ichigo began in April 1944. The main arena of battle centred on Central and South China as the Japanese troops sought to clear the railways which linked Zhengzhou and Hankou (the southern part of the Ping-Han railway), Hankou and Guangzhou, as well as Hengyang and Liuzhou. By early winter, the Ichigo forces had advanced into Guangxi and captured the American airfields in Guilin, Liuzhou and Nanning. On 10 December, they were joined by the Japanese troops in northern Vietnam who had crossed the border into China; and, thereby, linked up the transportation line of Vietnam with that of China proper. The Ichigo offensive did not stop there but turned westward to Guizhou. At one time, the threat appeared so great to Chongqing that it had to despatch its own garrison units to make a last-ditch defence against the Japanese advance. However, when the Japanese reached Tushan, a town about 300 kilometres from Chongqing, the momentum of Operation Ichigo was spent and could go no further.³

Commenting on Operation Ichigo, Ch'i Hsi-sheng states, "no single military event in the second half of the war ever had a stronger impact upon Chinese politics and the Chinese military than this operation [Ichigo]."⁴ His study demonstrates that the operation severely undermined the GMD's military strength. Not just the number of casualties was

² According to Ch'i Hsi-sheng, the goal to destroy the American air bases in Southeast China, where the B-29 bombers had the range to strike into the heart of Japan, was only of secondary importance in Operation Ichigo. See his *Nationalist China at War*, 68-74; cf. *Riben junguozhuyi*, v. 3, 181-2.

³ This summary of the Operation Ichigo is drawn from Ch'i, 73-82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

enormous, more than 310,000 had been reported, but it included the most competent fighters of the central authorities. Since the GMD relied heavily upon its military might to safeguard its political existence, argues Ch'i, the disastrous defeats in 1944 directly contributed to the downfall of the GMD regime after the war.⁵

While Operation Ichigo proved disastrous to the GMD regime, it created an environment conducive to rapid Communist growth in Central and Southeast China. Ever since Chalmers A. Johnson published his seminal work in 1962,⁶ there has largely been academic consensus that the Anti-Japanese War constituted the pivotal period in the history of the Chinese Communist revolution. Although Johnson's thesis of peasant nationalism has been shown to be largely untenable to many scholars in accounting for the Communists' rise to power,⁷ he identifies other ways by which the Japanese invasion assisted the Communist penetration into the countryside. In the case of the East River region, probably the most conspicuous one was the expulsion of the GMD from the rural area.⁸

In fact, before the commencement of the Operation Ichigo, the East River guerrillas already had a foretaste of a void of the GMD, which allowed them to expand reasonably, when the Japanese launched their only large-scale mopping-up campaign in the East River delta in November 1943. About ten thousand Japanese troops were said to have been employed to pacify the vicinities along the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway. Communist sources hold that the enemy's mop-up was targeted on their guerrilla force, but British intelligence reveals that it was the GMD who suffered. The GMD military units which operated on both sides of the railway were either obliterated or pushed out of the area by the Japanese, who endeavoured to keep safe communications between Guangzhou and Hong Kong. In contrast, the Communists, who aside from cleverly avoiding direct confrontation with the Japanese troops, enjoyed a strong grass-roots network and were thus able to stay on and use the opportunity to consolidate themselves.

⁵ Ibid., 79-82.

⁶ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*.

⁷ See, for example, Chen, *Making Revolution*, 513-4; Donald G. Gillin, "Peasants Nationalism' in the History of Chinese Communism," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, v. 23, no. 2 (February 1964), 269-89; Hartford, "Repression," 94. These scholars point out that peasants responded more positively to the Communists' socio-economic reforms than the vague appeals of nationalism, and Japanese savagery was likely to reduce rather than encourage mass activism.

⁸ Johnson, 70.

Especially, the countryside west of the railway became completely beyond the reach of the GMD forces.⁹

Out of this development, the East River guerrillas issued a manifesto on 2 December 1943 declaring the formation of the East River Column. Zeng Sheng was made its commander with Wang Zuoyao as his deputy. Lin Ping continued to hold the post of political commissar. Although the East River guerrilla movement was a Communist product right from its beginning, this fact was deliberately distorted in the December manifesto. It asserted that the East River guerrillas chose to subordinate themselves to the CCP's leadership because they were utterly disappointed with the GMD's one-party dictatorship and their brutality in suppressing political deviants. However, the CCP's united-front policy, declared the manifesto, was found absolutely correct since it brought about national unity against Japanese imperialism.¹⁰ Apparently, the design of the manifesto was to shame the GMD on account of its inability and unwillingness to fight against the enemy. Nonetheless, another purpose of the manifesto was to induce people's confidence in the East River guerrillas. By shaking off its cover of a communal defence force, the East River Column was now theoretically placed on an equal footing with the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies. It was believed that this arrangement would raise the prestige of the Column among the "basic masses" and won over their allegiance to the resistance movement under the Communist leadership.¹¹ Nevertheless, it was not until the Japanese had launched the Operation Ichigo, which significantly altered the political-military situation in South China, that the East River Column was able to follow the example of their northern counterparts in organisation and expansion.

During Operation Ichigo, the Japanese army in Guangdong was assigned a supportive role to clear the southern part of the Hankou-Guangzhou railway. This required uprooting the GMD footholds in north Guangdong. In early 1945, Japanese troops invaded Shaoguan and forced Yu Hanmou's army to retreat to the border region of Guangdong and Jiangxi. The GMD front-line military command headquarters in Huizhou

⁹ WO 208/318, 18 February 1944 Kweilin Intelligence Summary No. 36; WO 208/451, 12 July 1944 Major D. R. Holmes to Major Egerton Mott; cf. "Fensui Riweijun 'wanren dasaodang'" [Demolish the Grand Mopping-Up Campaign of ten thousand Japanese and puppet troops], *DDZH*, v. 2, 101-9.

¹⁰ "Dongjiang zongdui chengli xuanyan" [The manifesto of the establishment of the East River Column] (2 December 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 201-8.

¹¹ "Lin Ping, Yang Kanghua, Li Dongming dui jinhou sangeyue zhengzhi gongzuo de zhishixin (xinsihao)" [A letter of instruction by Lin Ping, Yang Kanghua and Li Dongming concerning the political work of the following three months (new no. 4)] (1 November 1943), *DZS*, 378-9; Zeng Sheng, et. al., 57.

was also destroyed by the Japanese, who were anxious to protect the province's coast against the anticipated Allied landing.¹² This extensive enemy occupation opened up a possibility for the Party to pursue an aggressive base building policy. In July 1944, a British intelligence agent foresaw this implication of the resumption of the Japanese offensive to the Communist movement in the East River region. He wrote:

If the present Japanese offensive [Operation Ichigo] leads, as it must lead, to any regrouping of Central Government forces in Kwangtung [Guangdong], then it is considered highly probable that the Reds will turn this circumstance also to their own advantage. Underground penetration of the whole East River area by the Communists is known to be considerable and if, for example, all Central Government forces were to withdraw from the East River, then the Reds would be likely to expand considerably, and in a short time, their sphere of influence.¹³

The new situation prompted the Guangdong Party to shift its struggle from "anti-die-hards self-defence" to preparation for a counter-offensive against the Japanese. Party cadres were exhorted not to be satisfied with their temporary stability in the East River valley but to widen their field of vision and adopt a "big knife and broad axe" working style. They should use this chance to consolidate their present footholds and concurrently strive for creating guerrilla zones throughout the whole province.¹⁴ From 1944 onwards, bold attempts were made to expand the East River Army and erect a complex administrative structure in the East River Base Area. Moreover, various mass programmes that had been practised by the Party in the north were systematically implemented. It was envisaged that these programmes, whose effectiveness in galvanising popular support had been tested elsewhere, would produce the same results in Guangdong. The content and details regarding these measures will be studied in-depth in the next section.

By and large, the East River Communists' espousal of the northern pattern of base expansion in 1944 was in direct response to Yan'an's will to bring this guerrilla force into the orbit of the principal Communist movement. The plausibility of this interpretation is strengthened by Yan'an's introduction in the same year of the notion of a South China battlefield. This battlefield, confined primarily to Guangdong and garrisoned by the East

¹² Liang Shan, et. al., 55; Mei Jia and Qiu Shi, 259-60; Zhang Xiaofei, "Lun kangri zhanzheng zhongde Guangdong Guomindang zhanchang" [A discussion on the GMD's battlefront in Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War], *Jinan Xuebao* [Journal of Jinan University], v. 18, no. 4 (October 1996), 80-1.

¹³ WO 208/451b, 12 July 1944 Major D. R. Holmes to Major Egerton Mott. Original emphasis.

¹⁴ "Dongjiang zongdu silingbu, zhengzhibu dui dangqian gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Command Bureau and Political Bureau of the East River Column on the present work] (4 February 1945), *DZS*, 153-56; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 380-3.

River Column and the Independent Corps (Qiongya Column) in Hainan, was parallel with that in North China of the Eighth Route Army and in Central China of the New Fourth Army. It was regarded as “one of the CCP’s three great battlefields in the enemy rear.”¹⁵ No doubt, the usage of the phrase “South China battlefield” had the psychological effect of bolstering the spirit of the southern cadres and fostering greater unity. Nevertheless, it also revealed that Yan’an had now defined a clear strategic role for the southern bases. When the similar idea of a Central China battlefield was raised a few years earlier, Mao Zedong wanted to achieve through it a strong Communist presence south of the Yellow River so as to “prevent the encirclement of Communist bases in the north and to allow southward development.”¹⁶ Now the application of the same idea to South China had a similar objective; that is, to build up the Communist strength in Guangdong so that the Party could have a force to harass the GMD’s rear in the future national contest and safeguard the fruits of the revolution in Central and North China. This aspiration led Yan’an to despatch south two of its expeditionary forces in late 1944. Their mission was to expedite the progress of the revolutionary movement in Guangdong by establishing a big Communist base on the border of Guangdong, Fujian and Jiangxi. This ambitious plan, had it not been thwarted by the sudden surrender of Japan in August 1945, would have completely revolutionised the post-war balance of power between the CCP and the GMD in South China. The third section of this chapter will discuss its evolution.

II. Consolidating the East River Base Area

To capitalise on the disintegration of the GMD rule in Guangdong, occasioned first by the Japanese mop-up in late 1943 and then the Ichigo offensive in late 1944 and early 1945, the Party launched a series of campaigns to deepen its influence in the East River region. These campaigns were inter-related and reinforced each other. Due to their relatively short history, some of them lasted less than a year by the end of the war, they left behind only a handful of historical material. Nevertheless, their features and implementation can still be sketched. By presenting such an outline, the following

¹⁵ “Zhonggong Zhongyang junwei guanyu huanan genjudi gongzuo gei Zeng Sheng, Feng Baiju deng de zhishi” [Instructions from the Military Committee of the Party Centre to Zeng Sheng, Feng Baiju and others concerning work in the base areas of South China] (15 July 1944), *ZZWX*, v. 14, 279; “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fandui neizhan dongyuan de zhishixin” [A letter of instruction from the Political Bureau of the East River Column concerning anti-civil war mobilisation] (4 September 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 34; Zeng Sheng, “Yinianlai de duidi douzheng” [The struggle against the enemy in the past year] (1 January 1945), *DZS*, 132.

¹⁶ Benton, *New Fourth Army*, 711.

discussion tries to chart the new development of the Communist movement in the East River region and substantiate the argument that the northern experience of base construction was now imitated seriously by the Guangdong Communists.

a. The Army Expansion Campaign

During the last phase of the war, the Party all over the country called for the resumption of rapid army growth. This was in part a response to the opportunities for territorial expansion spawned by Operation Ichigo. The ultimate intent, however, was to prepare the Party for seizure of Japanese-held territories and its military showdown with the GMD after the defeat of Japan, which was now anticipated.¹⁷ While sharing these same concerns, army expansion in the East River Base Area had a more immediate purpose of its own. It was to provide a sufficient level of military security to permit the implementation of political and socio-economic reforms. Previously, unstable military conditions prevented the Communists from carrying out any concrete work to foster peasant spontaneity. With the removal of the GMD from most of Guangdong, the Party now needed a large army both to consolidate its rule in the "old liberated zones" and to reach out to the areas recently occupied (nominally) by the enemy. Army expansion then became the central concern of the East River Column. The pace of developing from a guerrilla force to a regular army was accelerated.¹⁸ In the summer of 1944, its ranks grew to over four thousand. The Communists expected this number to quadruple by mid-1945. Moreover, the scheme of people's militias, either divorced from or engaged only part-time in production, was commenced. Their strength grew impressively to about forty thousand at the end of the war.¹⁹

¹⁷ Van Slyke, "The Chinese Communist Movement," 709.

¹⁸ "Dongjiang junzhengwei zhi Zhongyang junwei dian" [Radio message from the East River Political-Military Committee to the Military Committee of the Party Centre] (8 March 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 251.

¹⁹ "Zhonggong Guangdongsheng linweihui gongzuo jue ding zhaiyao" [An extract of the resolutions on the work of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Temporary Committee] (August 1944), "Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre] (1 July 1945) and "Lin Ping zai Guangdongqu dangwei ganbu huiyishang de zongjie baogao" [The concluding report by Lin Ping in the cadre meeting of the Party Committee of the Guangdong Region] (22 July 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 304, 405, 457; "Dongjiang zongdui yinianban (yijiu sisan nian zhi yijiu sisi nian shangbannian) gongzuo baogao (zhaiyao)" [A report on the work of the East River Column for the past one and a half year (1943 to the first half of 1944) (an excerpt)] (November 1944), "Zeng, Wang, Lin xiang Zhou Enlai bing Dangzhongyang, Zhongyang junwei baogao dongzong renyuan zhuangbei deng qingkuang" [A report from Zeng Sheng, Wang Zuoyao, and Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai, the Party Centre, and the Central Military Committee on the ranks and equipment of the East River Column] (6 August 1944), and Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu, "Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu dui dangqian zhengzhi gongzuo de zhishixin" [A letter of instruction from the Political Bureau of the East River Column on the present political work] (1 February 1944), "Dongjiang zongdui chengli zhounian jinian xuanchuan jiaoyu dagang" [An outline of the propagandist education on the anniversary of the establishment of the East River Column] (December 1944), *DZS*, 285-6, 301, 385, 453.

i. Recruitment: methods and problems

Theoretically, the East River Column followed three basic criteria in recruiting new fighters. First, the candidates must be politically flawless. Secondly, they must understand the meaning of the resistance cause and exhibit confidence in the Communists' anti-Japanese army. Thirdly, they must be physically fit and without any bad habits. Every new recruit had to be examined by the Political Training Unit of the Column and undergo political education and military training, which varied from one week to half a month, before being assigned to different guerrilla units.²⁰ In searching for recruits, the East River Column, in line with the general Party policy, prohibited forced conscription or annexation of local people's forces. Rather, it insisted that joining the army must be voluntary, and the best way for army expansion was the mobilisation of the masses.²¹ In reality, the Column recruited soldiers from whatever sources it could reach; for example, communal defence forces, brigands, pirates, secret societies and puppet defectors.

A very effective method to increase army expansion was the competitive spirit. A competition known as "army expansion hero" was organised within the East River Column between individuals and different guerrilla units. Anyone who could mobilise either twenty (or more) people or five people with rifles to join the Column would be awarded the honour of "army expansion hero." A similar award would also be granted to a guerrilla unit which achieved the highest rate of growth. Side by side with the competition of "army expansion hero" was that of the "fighting heroes," which aimed at improving the combat quality of the Column. To become a "fighting hero," a guerrilla soldier had to attain three outstanding accomplishments: a.) confiscate from the enemy five pistols or one light machine gun within half a year; b.) attain a shooting accuracy over sixty percent; c.) know how to use all kinds of weapons possessed by the guerrilla army.²²

At the end of the war, the ranks of the East River Column rose to about 11,000 men. Although it still fell short of the Communists' expectation, this growth enabled them to maintain a relatively effective military control of the East River region. The

²⁰ "Lin Ping, Yang Kanghua, and Li Dongming dui jinhou sangeyue zhengzhi gongzuo de zhishixin (xinsihao)" (1 November 1943), 380.

²¹ "Dongjiang zongdui silingbu, zhengzhibu dui dangqian gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Command Bureau and Political Bureau of the East River Column on the present work] (4 February 1945), *DZS*, 155.

²² "Youjidui zhi yingxiong' jiyu tiaoli" [Regulations on granting "guerrillas' heroes"] (1 February 1944) and "Dongjiang zongdui silingbu, zhengzhibu guanyu 'youjidui zhi yingxiong' tiaoli zhi buchong tongzhi" [Supplements concerning the regulations on "guerrillas' heroes" from the Command Bureau and Political Bureau of the East River Column] (13 February 1944), *DZS*, 382-3, 390-1.

British intelligence reports confirmed this consolidation of the Communist position. They stated that unless a much more coordinated military campaign; that is, one that employed a substantial number of troops - was launched, neither the GMD nor the Japanese could hope to inflict serious harm on the East River guerrillas.²³ However, while the GMD was prevented from doing so because of the Japanese advance, the Japanese were quite happy to leave the Communists alone. They did so because their armed strength had already become over-stretched and because the Communists were causing them few immediate problems.

Notwithstanding this positive result, closer scrutiny reveals some problems in army expansion. As the number of soldiers increased, the shortage of war materials and weaponry became serious. Many guerrillas did not have a proper uniform or shoes to wear. Inadequate weaponry also constituted a considerable portion of "empty-handed" soldiers in the East River Column, who were probably equipped only with big swords or spears.²⁴ Although Zeng Sheng recalled that his guerrilla cadres had the technology to make rifles, it seems that only a very limited amount was actually produced to supply the Column. The most common way to acquire weapons was to capture them from both the GMD and the Japanese puppet troops.²⁵

In addition, rapid army expansion brought about a severe lack of leaders, particularly at the middle and lower levels. This problem was partially remedied by the inauguration of the Military and Political Training Academy of the East River in July 1944. The purpose of the academy was to train military cadres who were capable of leading the transformation of the East River Column into a regular army and gradually changing its mode of combat from guerrilla fighting to positional warfare.²⁶ It was intended that the academy would develop into a branch of Yan'an's Resistance University. Even though that hope did not materialise, the academy served the immediate pressing needs of the Column by nurturing several hundred army officers.

²³ HS1/134. 10 February 1945 SGD. E. B. Teesdale to Lt. Col. D. Gill Davies; WO 208/451, 19 February 1944 and 24 February 1944 B. A. A. G., Kweilin to Military Attache, H. B. M. Embassy, Chungking.

²⁴ "Guanyu jiaqiang budui genghao zhixing renwu de xunling" [Instructions concerning the strengthening of the force in executing its tasks] (20 April 1944) and "Zeng, Wang, Lin xiang Dangzhongyang, Zhongyang junwei baogao dongzong liuyuechu xun ren yuan zhuangqi qingkuang" [A report from Zeng Sheng, Wang Zuoyao, and Lin Ping to the Party Centre and the Central Military Committee on the ranks and weaponry of the East River Column] (29 June 1945), *DZS*, 248-50, 345.

²⁵ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 125, 384; cf. "Zhonggong Guangdongsheng linweihui gongzuo jue ding zhaiyao" [An extract of the resolutions on the work of the Chinese Communist Guangdong Provincial Temporary Committee] (August 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 303-4.

²⁶ Wang Zuoyao, "Dongjiang junzheng ganbu xuexiao," 24-5.

Furthermore, the influx of new recruits had lowered markedly the ratio of Party members in the army. Prior to the expansion campaign in early 1944, the Party's goal was to maintain member's ratio at sixty percent of the main divisions of the East River Column and forty percent of its area ones. Later, this ratio was lowered to an average of thirty percent of the total Column force. However, even such a modest goal was beyond what it could attain. An estimate in late 1944 showed that Party members constituted only twenty-five percent of the Column's troops. Since the drop in ratio might result in loosening the Party's control over the army, intense political indoctrination had to be launched repeatedly inside the army to remedy the situation.²⁷

A more bothersome issue in army expansion was indiscriminate recruitment, which the Party leaders denounced as *lafu zhuyi*. Despite the Party's insistence on striving for both quantitative and qualitative growth, many cadres tended to sacrifice the latter for the former's sake. Consequently, "undesirable elements" were recruited. These included the physically unfit; one Communist document reports that cadres admitted even carriers of sexual and other serious infectious diseases into the army.²⁸ There were others who were politically uncommitted and poorly disciplined. For example, in Dongguan, a bandit gang recently co-opted into a division of the Column was discovered embezzling money from the people on the pretext of levying "anti-Japanese public grains." The incident brought considerable damage to the prestige of the Communist army.²⁹ In the North River region, where the Party began to extend its influence into in early 1945, the lack of discernment in army recruitment was ostensibly responsible for the sneaking of GMD spies into the local platoon, who instigated five incidents of group desertion.³⁰ Only after the Party had strictly enforced the examination of new recruits was the mistake of indiscriminate recruitment rectified. In some places, cadres were instructed to make home visits to ensure that the new soldiers had a proper background.³¹

²⁷ "Lin Ping, Yang Kanghua, and Li Dongming dui jinhou sangeyue zhengzhi gongzuo de zhishixin (xinsihao)" (1 November 1943), 380; "Dongjiang zongdui yinianban (yijiu sisan nian zhi yijiu sisi nian shangbannian) gongzuo baogao (zhaiyao)" (November 1944), 286; "Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu dangwu gongzuo de jue ding" [Resolution of the Political Bureau of the East River Column on present party work] (19 November 1944) and Zhang Haixiao, "Lun zuzhi de fazhan wenti" [A discussion on the organisational development] (December 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 73-5, 125-7.

²⁸ "Yijiu sisan nian shangbannian junshi gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongguan dadui" [The concluding report of the Dongguan Division on military work in the first half of 1944] (1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 497.

²⁹ Li Zheng, "Queli zhengque de qunzhong guandian, zouqunzhong luxian" [Establish the correct mass view, follow the mass line] (March 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 295-301.

³⁰ "Guanyu taolun Li zhengwei baogao de zhishi" [Instructions concerning the discussion of the report submitted by Political Commissar Li] (10 July 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 479.

³¹ "Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui" [The concluding report on the work of the Fifth Division of the East River in the last half a year] (18 June 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 412-3.

Party sources reckon that the recruitment of former bandits or GMD soldiers had brought to the East River Column some kind of “exploitative class consciousness” and “GMD working style.” These gave rise to the problems of “warlordism” and “bureaucratism,” which manifested themselves chiefly in the worsening relationship between the military officers and the soldiers. Many officers were found showing no care for their subordinates but resorting constantly to torture and scolding to enforce discipline. In some cases, they were said to have given out orders to their soldiers at gun-point. Ill-treatment of soldiers led to an increase of the number of desertions.³² To combat “warlordism” and “bureaucratism,” the Party issued a directive in December 1944, which pointed out that, far from maintaining discipline, torture and scolding would only destroy the solidarity of the Column. On the contrary, exercising concern for soldiers’ welfare was the best way to boost their initiative and alertness. Military officers were required to study documents on improving officer-soldier relations and to conduct self-criticism sessions at regular intervals. During these sessions, senior officers would begin criticising themselves on mistakes committed. Then the soldiers were allowed to criticise their superiors, and it was guaranteed that they would not be punished for their action.³³

ii. Army Mass Work: The “Support the Government, Love the People” Campaign

Attention to propaganda work among the masses was a major feature that set the Communist army apart from its warlord/GMD counterpart. The Party held that the real strength of an army depended not only on its numbers and weaponry but also on its relations with the populace. During the Jiangxi Soviet period, Mao Zedong and his colleagues had devised the “three disciplines and eight points of attention” to cultivate goodwill among villagers towards the Red Army. During the war, the same goal was sought through the campaign “Support the Government, Love the People” (*yongzheng aimin*). The title of this campaign indicated that its focus was on strengthening the bonds between the army and the resistance regime and between the army and the population. However, as it proceeded, the emphasis shifted predominantly to the latter. The Party’s ideal was that army-populace relations would be like “blood and flesh;” and, through the

³² “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu jinxing guanbing guanxu de jiantao fandui dama zhidu de zhishi” [Instructions from the Political Bureau of the East River Column concerning the evaluation of the official-soldier relation and opposition against the system of torture and scolding] (2 December 1944), *DZS*, 457-8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 459.

campaign, the army would demonstrate that it was “coming from the people, belonged to the people and for the people.”³⁴

In the East River Base Area, the “Support-Love” campaign was launched in the spring of 1944 and was repeated again once in 1945. It began by intensive ideological education intended to establish the “mass viewpoint” of the army. Besides undertaking self-reflection, cadres had to study a set of prescribed documents and participate in group discussion, conferences and “recollection evening meetings.” For the last one, cadres of the same guerrilla unit would gather together one night and reminisce about what they had done in the past year to care for the people. Self and peers’ evaluations would follow, which stressed examining both attainments and shortcomings. Certain groups of cadres were required to pay special attention to the loving of the people. They were those in charge of cookery, miscellaneous duties and logistic work. Since they had frequent contacts with the people, the Party believed that they would be at a higher risk of breaching the regulations. After the ideological education, a “love-the-people covenant” (*aimin gongyue*) was issued, and the soldiers of the Column pledged to uphold it.³⁵

Practically, the East River guerrillas increased their influence among the populace in several ways. First, they presented themselves as protectors of the people. Aside from the general enforcement of law and order in the countryside, the Communists took seriously their role of protecting the peasants against grain raids by bandits and puppet troops. Also, they increased efforts to organise the people for communal defence. Sometimes, in enemy occupied areas, the Communists provided leadership for peasants’ resistance against tax, grain levy, conscription and corvée.³⁶

Secondly, to counter traditional prejudices, which associated soldiers with corruption, injustice and other undesirable tendencies, the Party remoulded the public image of its army through strict discipline and service to the people. During the “Support-Love” campaign, the East River Column reviewed its discipline records and settled old

³⁴ “Zenyang zhixing ‘fadong yongzheng aimin yundong’ de zhishi” [How to execute the instruction of “launching the ‘Support the Government, Love the People’ movement”?] (17 February 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 241-2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 243; “Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui” (18 June 1944), 413, 417; “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fadong yongzheng aimin yu yongjun youkang yundong de zhishi” [Instructions from the Political Bureau of the East River Column concerning the mobilisation for the movements of “Support the Government, Love the People” and “Support the Army, Favour the Military Dependents”] (28 January 1945), *DZS*, 466-8.

³⁶ He Dinghua, “Bao’an dadui yijiu sisan nian junshi gongzuo zongjie” (March 1944), 364-5; “Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui” (18 June 1944), 415; “Yongzheng aimin ying zhuyi de shixiang” [Points of attention in the campaign of “Support the Government, Love the People”] (15 February 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 235; “Zenyang zhixing ‘fadong yongzheng aimin yundong’ de zhishi” (17 February 1945), 244.

grievances. This included returning borrowed things, compensating for any damages done and apologising for wrongs the guerrillas had committed. On the positive side, the soldiers performed services for the people which were not ordinarily considered duties of the military. Among them were cleaning villages, carrying water, cutting firewood, repairing roads and building bridges.³⁷

Thirdly, the East River Column engaged in production together with the peasants. While one reason was to prepare the base area for the anticipated economic crisis in 1945³⁸ (see the discussion on Production Campaign), another one was to counteract the common prejudice that soldiers were “parasitic,” who simply lived off the hard labour of the peasants. The Party instructions prescribed that every member of the Column had to spend a few hours a day to help peasants transplant rice seedlings (in spring) or harvest crops (in summer or autumn.) Moreover, soldiers had to engage in all kinds of other food production activities such as opening up new farmland, repairing irrigation and hunting wild animals.³⁹ One Party directive also instructed them to encourage and assist people to develop handicraft industries for products of daily necessity such as toothbrushes, shoes, soap, plain cloth, bamboo hats and palm-leaf rain cloth.⁴⁰ However, whether this instruction was ever seriously implemented is far from certain.

Fourthly, the Party exercised special favour towards military dependants. It was a written rule that these people enjoyed priority in getting help from soldiers for farm work. Other less tangible benefits included New Year’s visits and greetings by government and army officials. This favouritism had an obvious propaganda purpose. By showing that a soldier’s family would be well taken care of, the Party hoped to lessen peasants’ reluctance to join the army.⁴¹ Further, a project was commenced to build monuments to pay respect to soldiers who died fighting and honour them as martyrs (*lieshi*). The

³⁷ Li Zheng, “Queli zhengque de qunzhong guandian, zouqunzhong luxian” (March 1945), 301; “Mengbao de aimin gongzuo” [The work of “love the people” by the Mangbao unit] (5 February 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 217; Xiao Shi, “Ruhe gaibian Jinjielingcun dui women de guanlian” [How to change the attitude of the people in Jinjieling Village towards us?] (5 February 1945), *DZS*, 472.

³⁸ “Zenyang zhixing ‘fadong yongzheng aimin yundong’ de zhishi” (17 February 1945), 240-1; “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fadong yongzheng aimin yu yongjun youkang yundong de zhishi” (28 January 1945), 465.

³⁹ “Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui” (18 June 1944), 417; Li Zheng, “Queli zhengque de qunzhong guandian, zouqunzhong luxian” (March 1945), 301; “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fadong yongzheng aimin yu yongjun youkang yundong de zhishi” (28 January 1945), 468.

⁴⁰ “Guanyu jiaqiang budui genghao zhixing renwu de xunling” (20 April 1944), 250.

⁴¹ “Zenyang zhixing ‘fadong yongzheng aimin yundong’ de zhishi” (17 February 1945), 244; Li Zheng, “Queli zhengque de qunzhong guandian, zouqunzhong luxian” (March 1945), 301; “Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fadong yongzheng aimin yu yongjun youkang yundong de zhishi” (28 January 1945), 468.

endeavour was to exhort others to imitate their spirit of self-sacrifice and to teach the public that dying for the resistance cause was a very noble act.⁴²

Last but not least, occasionally, the East River Column organised different social functions to improve its public relations. For instance, it hosted a number of “army-civilian gatherings,” in which the Communist soldiers and people came together and enjoyed entertainment such as singing and operas. In the Dongguan-Bao’an region, an incidental philanthropic institution known as the Association for Production and Relief was initiated by the army in March 1944 to solicit monetary and grain donations for war and disaster victims.⁴³

The aim of the army’s action of “loving the people” was to elicit from them a feeling of gratitude, which could then be translated into a positive commitment to support the army. The degree of its success, as far as Communist materials tell, varied from one place to another. Generally speaking, “old-liberated areas,” where the East River Column had a firmer hold, yielded better results. The people’s impression of the Communist army had improved enormously; and, on the whole, they were more willing to join the East River Column and the Communist-organised militias. Other forms of popular support like provision of intelligence, lodging, caring for the wounded and logistic aid were also displayed.⁴⁴ In Huiyang, people supported the Communist army by taking part in the grain donation movement. Promoted by some peasant activists in late 1944, this particular movement successfully rallied enthusiastic participation not only from the peasants but also some members of the local elite. Most *xiang* of the county were involved in the movement. In Pingshan *xiang* alone, about 1,500 piculs of grain were said to have been donated by the masses to the East River guerrillas.⁴⁵

b. Democratic Governments

The Communists exercised their rule in most wartime bases through the so-called anti-Japanese democratic governments. These governments emerged from the Party’s need to have an administrative arm to carry out its socio-economic reforms in the

⁴² “Qingzhu Dongjiang zongdui chengli zhounian jinian banfa” [Ways to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of the East River Column] (20 November 1944), *DZS*, 124-5.

⁴³ Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui” (18 June 1944), 418; Xiao Shi, “Ruhe gaibian Jinjielingcun dui women de guannian” (5 February 1945), 474.

⁴⁴ Bannianlai gongzuo zongjie baogao - Dongzong diwu dadui” (18 June 1944), 418; “Yijiu sisinian shangbannian junshi gongzuo zongjie baoguo” (1944), 483-4.

⁴⁵ “Huiyang xiang gongzuo de jingyan” [The experience of grain donation in Huiyang] (15 November 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 65-8; “Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan” [The people’s democratic government in Ludong district of the East River’s liberated region], *DDZH*, v. 1, 49.

countryside. In order to legitimise them and ward off criticisms from opponents, the Communists injected a “democratic” component into the formation of their resistance governments. This is the well-known “three-third system,” introduced by the Party in 1940. Ideally speaking, it limited Party members’ ratio to one third in major organs of the governments and representative assemblies of Communist bases throughout the country. The other two-thirds were reserved for non-Party progressives and “middle elements.” Such a design was to project a populist image on the Party’s political rule and make it in appearance more acceptable, especially to the traditional rural elite. Nevertheless, as many scholars have observed, popular participation in the Communist governing bodies was always guided, and the Party never intended to compromise its control and leadership over rural administration.⁴⁶

The first attempt of the East River guerrillas to establish an “anti-Japanese government” actually predated the introduction of the “three-third system.” In the winter of 1938, taking advantage of the Japanese withdrawal from Danshui of the Huiyang County, Zeng Sheng and his guerrilla force moved in and restored local order. He erected in the town a political structure allegedly imitating the model of the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region. On 10 December 1938, over five hundred people apparently attended a mass meeting, which passed a resolution forming a ruling authority known as the Executive Committee of the Second District of the Huiyang County. Composed of a number of “elected” officials, the Executive Committee issued an announcement that promised democratic rule, the civil rights of the people and the implementation of economic reforms. However, this government was short-lived, not least because of Zeng’s inability to put up a strong military presence. In early 1939, he was forced to retreat from Danshui by Lou Kun and his “official guerrillas.” This group was formerly a bandit unit from the area, who were co-opted by the GMD army. The government was dissolved on orders of the GMD authorities in May 1939.⁴⁷

From then on until 1944, there are only glimpses of the Party’s efforts in erecting rural administration in the East River valley. The Communists said that they had set up small “democratic governments” in villages and *xiang* in their guerrilla base; but, in many instances, this meant only the appointment of Party sympathisers to local leadership. It is

⁴⁶ See, for example, Van Slyke, “The Chinese Communist Movement,” 702; cf. Mao Zedong, “On the question of political power in the anti-Japanese base areas,” (6 March 1940), *SW*, v. 2, 418.

⁴⁷ *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 110-7; “Dongjiang diyige kangri minzhu zhengquan - Huiyangxian dierqu zhengweiyuanhui” [The first anti-Japanese democratic regime in the East River region - The Executive Committee of the Second District of the Huiyang County], *DDZH*, v. 1, 60-7.

a fact that during their early years, the East River guerrillas spent most of their energy on building up military strength. While this policy was denounced by the Party Centre as “pure militarism” and “guerrillarism,” it was inevitable because of the precarious position of the East River Communists. Much more than their northern comrades did the East River guerrillas realise the truism that “military and political control served as the essential prior condition for the pursuit of all other work.”⁴⁸

In 1944, when the military situation there became relatively stable, the Communists paid more serious attention to their construction of rural administration on both sides of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway. In January, Lin Ping announced in the *Advance* the Party’s intention to implement democratic rule in the East River Base Area and invited comments and advice from people of different backgrounds outside the Party.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, he radioed the Party Centre for guidance on how the anticipated “democratic governments” should be organised. He asked specifically whether these governments should retain the original GMD’s administrative structure, imitate the model of Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region or any other Communist bases.⁵⁰ The answer of the Party Centre was characterised by great flexibility. There was no need for the East River Communists to copy any model but to devise one which best served their interests in the light of local conditions. What they should bear in mind was that these “democratic governments” should generally adhere to “the spirit of new democracy” and practise the “three-third system” to absorb non-Party personages. Nevertheless, Lin was reminded that this goal had to be pursued alongside another; that is, the assurance of Communist leadership.⁵¹

Half a year later, the first Communists’ “democratic government” above district (*qu*) level appeared in the East River region. It covered the parts of Dongguan and Bao’an Counties lying west of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway. The territory was regarded as an “old-liberated zone,” and the resistance regime had jurisdiction over nine districts with

⁴⁸ Van Slyke, “The Chinese Communist Movement,” 650.

⁴⁹ Lin Ping, “Guanyu Zhongguo gongchandang zai Dongjiang dihou qianxian diqu shishigexiang zhengce wenti de tanhua” [Talks by Lin Ping concerning the Chinese Communist Party’s implementation of various policies on the front line and enemy rear in the East River region] (21 January 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 247-51.

⁵⁰ “Lin Ping gei Enlai bing Zhongyang dian” [Radio message from Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai and the Party Centre] (20 January 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 45, 239.

⁵¹ “Zhongyang shujichu guanyu Dongjiang youjiqu jianli kangri minzhu zhengqian wenti gei Lin Ping de zhishi” [Instructions from the Secretariat of the Party Centre to Lin Ping concerning the question of establishing anti-Japanese democratic governments in the East River guerrilla zone] (31 January 1944), *ZZWX*, v. 14, 161-2.

a population around 600,000.⁵² The following year, other “democratic governments” of similar scale sprang up in Ludong, the area east of the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway; Huidong, the eastern part of Huiyang County; Boluo and Haifeng. However, they never joined together to form an integrated regional administration. Because all these governments were short-lived, they have left very few historical materials. Only for the Ludong Democratic Government is there comparatively more information to outline the process of its formation.

Ludong had a surface area of about 1,200 square kilometres and a population of 580,000. Its boundaries were drawn on the north by the East River, on the south by Bias Bay, the west by the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway and the east by the Huidan river and the Ao'tou road. As preparation for creating a government, the Party convened a “meeting for national affairs” (*guoshi zuotanhui*) from 29 March to 1 April 1945. Originally, about a hundred or so guests were invited to attend the meeting, but more than 350 people eventually showed up. They were said to have come from diverse backgrounds. The list included progressive landlord-gentry, former members of the Chinese United League (*Tongmenghui*), ex-GMD army officers, notable intellectuals, members of minor political parties, seamen and peasants.⁵³ To help the participants concentrate their minds, the Party tried as hard as it could to provide them a safe and comfortable environment. Security control over the meeting sites was tightened, and news about the guerrilla battles taking place nearby was censored. During the four days of the conference, provisions were to be as good as possible. For instance, meat was served with each meal and entertainment programmes were performed every night.⁵⁴

Lin Ping inaugurated the conference with a six-hour report on the development of the “anti-Fascist war” both internationally and domestically. He particularly highlighted the recent GMD defeats by Japan in South China and attributed them to Chiang Kai-shek’s one-party dictatorship. This undertaking aimed at proving one point: China required a democratic reform, whose type had been advocated and practised by the Party throughout the occupied areas. The reform was needed to bring about real national unity to China, without which the country would have no chance of winning the war. This

⁵² Tan Tiandu, “Huigu kangzhanzhong de Luxi minzhu zhengquan” [Reminiscences on the democratic government in Luxi during the resistance war], *DDZH*, v. 1, 34-5.

⁵³ “Dongjiang zongdui guanyu ‘guoshi zuotanhui’ qingkuang baogao” [A report by the East River Column concerning the “discussion meeting for national affairs”] (April 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 311-2; “Dongjiang jiefangqu minzhu zhengzhi de kaiduan” [The beginning of democratic politics in the East River liberated areas], *DDZH*, v. 1, 68-9.

⁵⁴ “Dongjiang zongdui guanyu ‘guoshi zuotanhui’ qingkuang baogao” (April 1945), 314-5.

patriotic appeal was constantly resorted to by Lin to justify the necessity of cooperation between the rural elite and the Party. After Lin's report, Party cadres spent time in explaining the procedures of setting up democratic government and pursuing socio-economic reforms. To lessen the elite's fear of the reform policies, the Party assured them that the rent-interest reduction campaign would not be the first step to full-scale confiscation. Things such as "communised property and wives," purported by GMD propaganda, would never take place.⁵⁵ A resolution was then passed in the conference on establishing the Ludong Legislature, which comprised representatives from different districts and *xiang*. Any citizen over the age of eighteen, regardless of sex, presumably had the right to elect delegates to it. The Legislature would be responsible for electing members to the Executive Committee, which was officially the highest executive body in the Ludong liberated area.⁵⁶

A few weeks after the conference, the first congress of the Ludong Legislature was convened and was attended by forty nine delegates. No information is available on how these delegates were elected and when the local election was held. However, it seems very likely that the Party had carefully scrutinised all candidates and precluded any "anti-Communist die-hards" from participating.⁵⁷ One thing certain is the Party's adherence to the principle of the "three-third system." Only sixteen out of these forty nine delegates of the legislature were Communists. Similarly, in the Executive Committee subsequently formed, Party members occupied only one-third of the nine committee seats. The Executive Committee had one chairman and two vice-chairmen, whose duty was to oversee all the administrative work of the resistance regime. Under the Committee, there were five departments which were in charge of military, finance, civil affairs, education and construction. In the interest of simplifying administration, each department employed no more than three full-time officials.⁵⁸ During the congress, Rao Zhangfeng, the secretary of the East River Column's Command Bureau, presented on behalf of the Party a ruling manifesto consisting of seventeen articles, which acted as a constitution of the

⁵⁵ "Dongjiang jiefangqu minzhu zhengzhi de kaiduan," 69, 72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁷ Cf. "Dongjiang zongdui silingbu, zhengzhibu dui dangqian gongzuo de zhishi" (4 February 1945), 154.

⁵⁸ "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong linshi xingzheng weiyuanhui cao'an" [A draft plan on the Temporary Executive Committee of the Ludong liberated area in the East River region] (1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 598-9; "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 43, 45.

resistance regime. The manifesto was passed by the congress together with a series of laws meant to put its objectives into practice.⁵⁹

Van Slyke observes that the “three-third system” was designed as a united-front device to broaden the Party’s basis of support by enlisting the services of the middle and upper strata of rural society. Their talents and administrative skills, in addition to the wealth and productive power they controlled over the countryside, were invaluable to the effective running of the newly-founded resistance regimes.⁶⁰ This concern was apparently in Lin Ping’s mind when he emphasised to his comrades at a Party meeting that the chief function of the “three-third system” in Guangdong was to foster internal unity. For that reason, the Party could be “weaker” in democratic governments in the sense that it was not necessary to occupy the leading posts. Of course, Lin was not suggesting the relinquishment of Communist control over the base area. He insisted that the personnel of the resistance regime must adhere to its ruling manifesto; and more importantly, the Party must have absolute command of the army. Lin believed that it constituted the foundation of democratic rule. What Lin actually meant was that Party members, if necessary, could occupy less than one third of the offices in the governments. Further, unlike that in North and Central China, there was no need to insist on having a Party member as the chairman of the executive body. Lin thought that these concessions would allow the Party to better cooperate with other democratic powers and win the support of the “intermediate forces.”⁶¹

In his study of the Communist wartime revolution in Central China, Chen Yung-fa aptly demonstrates that the Communists’ rural administrative reform could have been a formidable tool for class struggle when combined with peasant mobilisation strategies. By carefully manipulating rural election processes, the Party, on the one hand, weakened the grip of the elite on local administration and, on the other hand, established the “superiority of the basic masses” over the feudal forces. Gradually, the seizure of administrative power was accomplished without fomenting any all-out opposition from the traditional rural leadership.⁶² However, there was no parallel development in the East River Base Area. While Communist open publications assert that the “three-third

⁵⁹ “Ludong minzhu zhengzhi de xinjieduan” [The new stage of democratic politics in Ludong] (May 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 367-81.

⁶⁰ Lyman P. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967), 144, 151-2.

⁶¹ “Lin Ping zai Guangdongqu dangwei ganbu huiyishang de zongjie baogao” (22 July 1945), 464.

⁶² Chen, *Making Revolution*, 223-58.

systems" had been widely adopted, internal Party documents reveal that only in Ludong was the system genuinely applied. For its other counterparts, the "three-third system" was enforced by appointment rather than election. All the personnel in the governments was appointed by the Party, though in a ratio of one-third Party member to two-thirds non-Party people.⁶³

The Party resorted to such an arrangement because of the awareness that its socio-economic reforms had not yet deepened to a level which could arouse sufficient peasant activism. Most local elections ended in installing the traditional gentry back to village and *xiang* leadership. Even Ludong was not totally exempted from that situation. Since the Party had no confidence that its sympathisers would win in rural elections, it thereby chose to appoint suitable personages to the county-level governments, though it regarded the method as purely transitional.⁶⁴ Even so, as Lin Ping himself admitted, the Party's control reached only the upper levels (county) of rural administration. The lower levels were still in the hands of the elite since "the masses had not learned to elect people who could really represent their interests."⁶⁵ Even up till the last stage of the war, the traditional elite still retained its hold on rural politics in the East River region.

c. Taxation Systems

The previous study showed that the East River guerrillas imposed a custom duty on trade passing through their base to support themselves when overseas aid was brought to an end by the outbreak of the Pacific War. As the East River Base Area as well as the East River Column expanded, the need to establish a sound and stable economic basis grew. Like Communist bases elsewhere, when military control and administrative machinery became more effective, the Party adopted a unified progressive tax system. The Communists promised that this new tax system would not only supersede all the GMD's miscellaneous taxes and surtaxes but also distribute the burden of financing the

⁶³ "Lin Ping zai Zhongyang dian" (1 July 1945), 404; "Boluo xian kangri minzhu zhengqian de huigu" [Reminiscences on the anti-Japanese democratic government in Boluo County], *DDZH*, v. 1, 55; cf. Jiang Shixiong, "Dongjiang kangri minzhu zhengqian de jianshe" [The construction of anti-Japanese democratic governments in the East River region], *GDYW*, v. 3, 281-2.

⁶⁴ "Boluo xian kangri minzhu zhengqian de huigu," 55; Ya Han, "Boluo jiefangqu minzhu jianshe de huigu" [Reminiscences on the establishment of democracy in the liberated zone of Boluo] (10 June 1946) and Ye Feng, "Ludong yinianlai jianzheng gongzuo de zongjie" [The summary of last year's work of political development in Ludong] (May 1946), *DZS*, 593, 597-8, 606-8.

⁶⁵ "Lin Ping zai Guangdongqu dangwei ganbu huiyishang de zongjie baogao" (22 July 1945), 464.

resistance regime fairly to the whole population of the East River Base Area.⁶⁶ Three main types of taxes were introduced: trade and commercial, public grain and land taxes.

Very little is known about the trade and commercial tax. The only piece of documentation was produced by the Ludong government on 1 October 1945 after the war.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this document gives us some ideas about tax rates and taxed items in Ludong because it is a revised edition of earlier stipulations. To a certain degree, it should reflect the situation during the last months of the war. The trade and commercial tax consisted of four major groups: import, export, business and special taxes (e.g. selling cigarettes and wine). Basically, import and export taxes evolved from the earlier practice of charging tolls on merchants passing along trade routes inside or near the Communist base. The main difference was that goods were now specifically categorised into imported and exported ones. As concerned the function of business and special taxes, they were introduced primarily to enlarge the tax basis of the resistance regime and thereby increase its revenue. To a certain degree, the levying of these two taxes reflected the gradual consolidation of the East River Base Area, for it fostered trade and commercial activities to the extent that made imposing taxes on them profitable.⁶⁸

Figure 2.

Export Tax		Import Tax	
<i>Type of Goods</i>	<i>Rate</i>	<i>Types of Goods</i>	<i>Rate</i>
Livestock	15%	Cigarettes	15%
Oil, Firewood, Charcoal	15%	Luxury Items	12%
Dried Food, Eggs	12%	Important Merchandise	10%
Fertilisers, Lime	10%	(e.g. tyres, spare machine parts)	
Lumber	10%	Bottled Wine	8%
Marine Products	8%	Daily Necessities	6%
Agricultural Produce	8%	Miscellaneous	5%
Paper, Flour, Wheat	5%	(e.g. stationery, old clothes)	
Salt (per picul)	300 <i>yuan</i> *	Earth Salt (per picul)	200 <i>yuan</i> *

* probably *guobi*

Import and Export Taxes of the East River Base Area in 1945

⁶⁶ "Dongjiang zongdui silingbu, zhengzhibu dui dangqian gongzuo de zhishi" (4 February 1945), 158;

"Dongjiang zongdui silingbu, zhengzhibu de xunling" (20 January 1945), 335.

⁶⁷ "Dongjiang jiefangqu shuiwuchu zhengshou shuilu tiaoli" [Regulations on tax levying by the Taxation Department of the Ludong Liberated Area of the East River region] (1 October 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 601-3.

⁶⁸ Cf. Tan Tiandu, 40; "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 50.

Figure 2 lists some examples of the taxed items in the base area's import and export trade. Compared with figure 1 (Chapter 3), an overall increase of tax rates occurred, due certainly to the Party's increased fiscal demand in a period of general expansion. Nevertheless, the high tax rates on goods such as food, fuel, and fertiliser for export might also reveal the Communists' desire to attain, to some degree, self-sufficiency for their base. They wanted to discourage peasants from selling their products outside simply to get a better price because that would lead to paucity of supply inside.

Before the formal institution of the "resistance public grain" (*kangri gongliang*), better rendered as "public grain tax," the East River guerrillas had approached the population occasionally to ask for grain contributions. The Party claimed that all contributions were voluntary, but it is a fact that there was little room for ordinary people to negotiate with the Communists except perhaps on the amount of "donation."⁶⁹ The public grain tax was first levied by the "democratic government" in Luxi. It was collected according to the income of each individual. Those who had an average below six piculs were exempted. Others were as the following:

Figure 3.

<i>Income of an Individual (in piculs)</i>	<i>Rate</i>
Below 20	3%
50	4%
70	5%
100	7%
150	10%
200	12%
500	15%
Above 500	20%*

* the highest rate applied

The Public Grain Tax of the Luxi Democratic Government in August 1944⁷⁰

No information, however, is available on how the income figures were calculated, whether they were per annum or per crop. Equally unclear is who was actually being taxed since the "individual" could refer to either individual male adults or to every household head.

⁶⁹ "Kangzhan shiqi Dongguan caishui zhanxian de douzheng," 184; cf. "Luxi zhengliang gongzuo de yixie jingyan" [Some experiences on the work of levying grain in Luxi] (1946), *DZS*, 612-3.

⁷⁰ "Zhonggong Guangdongsheng linweihui gongsuo jue ding zhaoyao" (August 1944), 307; cf. "Luxi zhengliang gongzuo de yixie jingyan" (1946), *DZS*, 612.

In December 1944, the method of calculating grain tax was refined and clarified. It was based on each household's income per crop. Tax payers were divided into four groups - landlords, tenants, owner-cultivators and lineage-estate managers - each with different tax rates. For landlords, on every picul of grain they received as land rent, a five percent tax was charged. Tenants who, after paying rent to their overlords, yielded less than ten piculs of grain were exempted. Otherwise, the amount over the original ten piculs was subjected to one percent of tax. Owner-cultivators, whose size of crop was under twenty piculs, paid two percent of tax. Those who yielded more had to pay a three percent rate. For lineage-estates, the rates ranged from seven percent at the lowest to twenty percent at the highest rate, depending on the amount of land production. The estate manager was the person who was responsible for the payment. Grain tax was to be collected twice a year. People who enjoyed tax reduction or exemption included widows and orphans, who were small landlords but had an income of fewer than five piculs of grain per crop; military dependants, including those serving in the GMD's army; victims of Japanese-puppet forces' grain raids; and people who had made significant contributions to the resistance cause.⁷¹

From 1945 onwards, the collection of public grain tax was combined with land tax. The new tax regulation fixed the rate at seven percent of the total size of each crop. This was equally shared between landlords and tenants. However, in places where rent reduction had already taken place, the share between the two would be 2.5 percent for landlords and 4.5 percent for tenants. Owner-cultivators had to pay the grain tax by themselves (some sources give a rate of 4 percent.) In addition, landlords and owner-cultivators were liable for the payment of land tax, which was twelve percent on their rent income from each crop. Figure 4 gives an example of the amount of tax which a landlord had to pay for every picul (100 catties) of grain harvested from his land.

Figure 4.

<i>Landlord's Rent Income in a crop of 100 catties</i>	30	35	40	45	50	55	60
<i>Land Tax</i>	3.6	4.2	4.8	5.4	6.0	6.6	7.2
<i>Public Grain Tax</i>	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5

⁷¹ "Zhengshou kangri gongliang tiaoli" [Regulations on levying public grain tax] (December 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 116-7; "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 49-50; Ye Yuan and Liao Rongkeng, "Ludong xingzheng weiyuanhui xinerqu dangzheng jianshe he huidong qingkuang de huiyi pianduan" [Some reminiscences on the activities and party-political development of the Ludong Executive Committee in Second New District], *GL*, 339-40.

<i>Total Tax Paid</i>	7.1	7.7	8.3	8.9	9.5	10.1	10.7
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unit = catties (of grain)

Example of Tax Burden for Landlords in the East River Base Area

If a plot of land was poor and grew less than a hundred catties of grain per crop, both the land tax and public grain tax could be lowered to some degree depending on the situation. For land which was particularly poor and grew less than fifty catties of grain, the tenants would be exempted from paying the grain tax.⁷²

Despite the Party's claim that its taxation was more reasonable than that of the GMD, not every one agreed with the assertion. In some places of Ludong, both landlords and peasants complained about the tax burden because they were required to pay more to the Communist regime than they had previously done to the GMD authorities. The reason behind this related not so much to the Communists' taxation rate but to the people's practice of tax evasion in the past. Using tricks like concealing the amount of their land and underreporting farm production, they managed to pay less under the GMD rule. Still, for the sake of easing their dissatisfaction and, more importantly, to forestall the GMD spies using this pretext to stir up mass unrest, the cadres of Ludong pleaded with their superiors to amend the tax rate to accommodate their local situation.⁷³

The Party encountered many difficulties in implementing its taxation policies; and, just as the GMD, it was unable to pre-empt tax evasion. One of the problems was the absence of land records, which provided information on the size and quality of the land farmed by each tenant household. Without that, tax collectors could only rely on people's self-reporting to estimate the amount of grain yielded.⁷⁴ Another problem was the lack of tax officers. This was caused partially by the fact that many cadres, who were originally intellectuals and students, were unable to distinguish different types of grains and were ignorant about the measures used by the peasants. A number of short-term training classes were then organised, but it is apparent that the problem of trained tax officers was never satisfactorily solved. In some areas, the Party relied on village heads to collect tax.

⁷² Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu, "Zhengshou kangri gongliang yu tianfu zanxing tiaoli" [Provisional regulations on levying public grain tax and land tax] (1944?), *DZS*, 529-30; "Luxi zhengliang gongzuo de yixie jingyan" (1946), 613; "Huang Lu guanyu Ludong zhengshou kangri gongliang baogao" [A report by Huang Lu concerning the levying of public grain tax in Ludong] (6 June 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 417; Tan Tiandu, 40.

⁷³ "Huang Lu guanyu Ludong zhengshou kangri gongliang baogao" [A report by Huang Lu concerning the levying of public grain tax in Ludong] (6 June 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 415-8.

⁷⁴ "Luxi zhengliang gongzuo de yixie jingyan" (1946), 615-6, 618.

However, if these people were not popularly elected, abuses always resulted. For instance, some village heads were found embezzling the tax grain by lying that it had been raided by the Japanese-puppet troops.⁷⁵

In sum, though a progressive taxation system was adopted in the East River Base Area, the Party lacked the capacity to ensure its thorough implementation. Tax evasion was common. Not just the landlords abused the tax system but many peasants, the supposed allies of the Party, also tried to lighten their tax burden by underreporting production, soaking the grain in water or mixing it with sand.⁷⁶ It remained true that before the Party's influence penetrated deep into the village levels and through various mobilisation programmes built up sufficient grassroots support, it could do nothing effective to minimise the problem of tax evasion.⁷⁷

d. Rent and Interest Reduction Campaigns

During the Anti-Japanese War, the policy of rent and interest reductions replaced land redistribution as the Party's chief expedient to improve peasants' livelihood and win their political allegiance. Its proclaimed moderate nature was designed to pacify the landlords and elite class within the social united front.⁷⁸ Although rent and interest reductions may have been introduced to the East River valley as early as 1943,⁷⁹ they were probably enforced only in late 1944.

Two directives issued in December 1944 officially launched the reduction movement in Guangdong.⁸⁰ Both of them emphasised that the pursuit of rent and interest cuts was fundamental to peasant mobilisation and base consolidation because the policy would raise the peasants' political consciousness and initiatives, sealing them firmly to the Party. This fact was said to have been already proven by the Communists' experience in North and Central China. In addition, it was contended that once the peasants were unified behind the Party, the application of all other mass programmes in the base area would be greatly facilitated. As Yang Kanghua, author of one of the directives, wrote:

⁷⁵ Ibid., 617-9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 619.

⁷⁷ Cf. Chen, *Making Revolution*, 376-82, 404-5.

⁷⁸ Nevertheless, as Chen Yung-fa aptly shows, the apparently moderate nature of these economic programmes could be transformed into class struggle, see *ibid.*, 181-201.

⁷⁹ See, for example, "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 47; Zeng Sheng, et. al., 71.

⁸⁰ Lin Ping and Yang Kanghua, "Guanyu zhankai jianzu jianxi yundong de zhishi" [Instructions concerning the launching of the rent and interest reductions] (19 December 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 111-4; Yang Kanghua, "Jianjue zhixing jianzu jianxi zhengce" [Insisting on implementing the policies of rent and interest reductions] (25 December 1944), *DZS*, 518-25.

Only by insisting on implementing the rent and interest reduction movement can we strengthen our army's relations with the people as "flesh and blood," give a true mass basis to the anti-Japanese resistance regimes, greatly develop the people's militias and local guerrilla forces, carry out large-scale production campaigns, endure hard and long-term struggle, and [eventually] win the final victory.⁸¹

Granted the extreme importance of rent and interest reductions, it is reasonable to ask why the campaign was not enforced in the East River region earlier. Lin Ping and Yang Kanghua, who co-authored the other directive, explained this slowness by blaming the background of the majority of the cadres who joined the Party during the war. Since these cadres had not been "baptised by the struggle of the land revolution," they were unable to break through the concept of "pure military struggle" and adopt a correct mass viewpoint.⁸² Lin and Yang also criticised the "rightist tendency" within the Party, which accounted for excessive accommodation to the landlords as exemplified in some cadres' negligence or fear to carry out rent and interest reductions. The two authors therefore called for a battle against this "rightist tendency," even though a note was attached to warn against "leftist excesses" and remind the cadres to pursue the land policy within the framework of the anti-Japanese United Front.⁸³

Because the main goal of the rent and interest reductions was to rouse the peasantry, Party leaders insisted that cadres must conduct the campaign as a genuine mass movement. They must mobilise the peasants to stand up and struggle against their landlords for a cut in rent and interest. The role of the resistance government was primarily to assist the peasants, and no cadre should think that the campaign could be successfully implemented by simply issuing some legal commands. Such action would merely turn the movement into "empty talk" and "formalism" (*xingshi zhuyi*). Moreover, cadres must not let develop the idea that rent and interest reductions was a "grace" bestowed by the Party to the masses.⁸⁴

We have from the Ludong government the most detailed regulations on rent and interest reductions in the East River Base Area. They apparently followed closely the land laws decreed by the Party Centre in 1942, which were intended to be applied to the

⁸¹ Yang Kanghua, "Jianjue zhixing jianzu jianxi zhengce" (25 December 1944), 520.

⁸² Lin Ping and Yang Kanghua, "Guanyu zhankai jianzu jianxi yundong de zhishi" (19 December 1944), 111.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 112-3; Yang Kanghua, "Jianjue zhixing jianzu jianxi zhengce" (25 December 1944), 521-2.

Communist bases all over the country.⁸⁵ Basically, fixed rents, mostly in kind, were reduced by twenty-five percent (from an average rent-to-harvest ratio of fifty percent to 37.5 percent.) For share-cropping, which was not so widely practised in Guangdong during this period, the rent was to be lowered by twenty-five to forty percent to make the landlords' share below thirty-five percent of the total size of the crop. Annual interest rates were to be cut to thirty percent or below, and they could not be higher than thirty catties of grain.

The Party had established a set of rules to prevent landlords from abusing the reduction campaigns. For example, article eight forbade landlords to increase their land rent as a way to collect the original amount of rent after reduction. Article fifteen protected the rights of the tenants by specifying in what circumstances landlords could terminate land contracts with tenants and take back their land. Article sixteen stipulated that land contracts should be fixed for a period as long as possible, preferably over five years, to help peasants concentrate on production.⁸⁶ However, for the United Front's sake, the regulations also required peasants to pay their rent and interest, after reduction, to the landlord on time. In case of conflicts and disputes over rent and interest reductions, there were committees comprising representatives from landlords, peasant and the resistance government to help in arbitration. Nevertheless, it was specified that the resistance government had the right to make the final judgement.⁸⁷

It appears that the rate of rent and interest reductions was not dogmatically enforced throughout the base area. In Ludong, cadres felt the need to adjust the percentage of the rent cut. As they discovered, except the extremely poor ones, most peasants benefited not at all from rent reduction because their gains from reduced rent were offset by the payment of the public grain tax.⁸⁸ On the other hand, in several districts of Luxi, the reduction rates for rent and interest were actually determined by negotiations (allegedly monitored by the Party) between landlords and the peasant associations. The agreements were generally quite favourable to the landlords. For instance, the landlords in the Xinsanqu were allowed to have a rent-to-harvest ratio of as

⁸⁵ "Ludong minzhu zhengzhi de xinjiedian" (May 1945), 386-96; cf. Lin Ping and Yang Kanghua, "Guanyu zhankai jianzu jianxi yundong de zhishi" (19 December 1944), 112; "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu kangri genjudi tudi zhengce de jue ding" [Resolutions of the Party Centre concerning land policies in the anti-Japanese base areas], *ZZWX*, v. 13, 280-9.

⁸⁶ "Ludong minzhu zhengzhi de xinjiedian" (May 1945), 387-8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 389-9, 393-4.

⁸⁸ "Huang Lu guanyu Ludong zhengshou kangri gongliang baogao" (6 June 1945), 415-8.

high as forty percents. Interest rates could also reach fifty percent.⁸⁹ In Baosiqu, it was even laid down that landlords would get an exemption from rent reduction if the rent constituted less than forty percent of the total production of the land per year.⁹⁰

Landlords' resistance to rent and interest reductions did take place. Aside from some "progressive landlords" who agreed to voluntarily cut the rent, many rejected the idea right away. They threatened to take back the land from the peasants if the latter dared to raise the rent issue. Although some landlords agreed to rent reduction, others covertly maintained the old rate. There were incidents in which landlords meddled in peasant meetings to prevent peasants from discussing rent reduction. On the side of the peasants, the majority hesitated to participate in the campaigns. Party cadres listed a number of other reasons that accounted for their passivity. First, since peasants had been under the yoke of exploitation for over a thousand years, their minds were predominated by "fatalism" and the "slavery idea." Secondly, it was common for peasants to avoid confrontation with their landlords, especially when the latter were their relatives in the same lineage. Thirdly, many peasants feared that the Communist regimes would not last, nor their reform programmes. The landlords would soon fight back, they believed, and anyone who took part in rent reduction would suffer even worse than before.⁹¹

In Central China, the Party made intensive use of stage-managed struggle meetings to break through peasant passivity and pitted them against their traditional overlords. Chen Yung-fa's painstaking study has demonstrated how this tactic succeeded in arousing mass spontaneity and mobilising tenants to join peasant associations.⁹² However, struggle meetings were rarely engendered in the East River Base Area. Evidence seems to suggest that the East River cadres tended to resort to coercion for quick and easy rent and interest reductions. For example, in Ludong, guerrilla troops were said to have accompanied the peasants to obtain their landlords' acquiescence to reduction.⁹³ There was at least one incident in which a member of the gentry-landlord class was arrested for his "stubborn opposition" to the Communists' economic reforms.

⁸⁹ "Jianzu jianxi yundong manyan liao xinsanqu" [The spread of the rent and interest reductions to the New Third District] (5 February 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 181-3.

⁹⁰ "Baosiqu jianzu jianxi tiaoli" [Regulations for rent and interest reductions in the Baosiqu District] (22 November 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 97-8.

⁹¹ Cf. "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 48; Wang Shizhao, "Kangri shiqi de Dongbao xingzheng dudaochu," [The Political Supervision Office of the Dongbao region during the Anti-Japanese War period], *GDZ*, v. 7 (February 1986), 26; "Xianqi jianzi jianxi yundong de nuchao" [Stir up a roaring tide of rent and interest reduction campaigns] (5 February 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 46, 226-7.

⁹² Chen, *Making Revolution*, 181-201.

⁹³ "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 48.

This case was very likely to be a warning to others who refused to submit to the Party's authority.⁹⁴ More interesting, in recently-liberated areas such as Jiangbei and Boluo, the Party forced landlords to "refund" excess rent and interest (*tuizu tuixi*) collected in the past year(s) before launching the reduction campaigns. This method was believed to be effective in mobilising the peasants for the subsequent reduction because they already had a foretaste of its material benefits.⁹⁵

It is difficult to assess how successful the rent and interest reduction movement was in galvanising mass support for the Party in the East River region. Veterans' memoirs almost unanimously say that the movement united the peasants with the Party, citing as evidence increased peasants' participation in mass organisations and people's militia forces. Tan Tiandu, for example, claims that the reduction campaigns helped to raise the membership of the "peasant resistance association" in Luxi from under eight thousand in late 1944 to about 350 thousand by September 1945.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, even if, as these memoirs suggest, rent and interest reductions were really that effective in arousing peasant activism, it remains a fact that their implementation was cut short by the Japanese surrender. As a result, they failed to attain their full maturity.

e. The Production Campaign

The Party organised its first production campaign in early 1944 to increase food production. The action was a direct response to a serious drought, which hit Guangdong in previous year and led to widespread crops failure. The East River Column suffered badly from the resulting famine. Many guerrilla fighters had to endure prolonged hunger and some died of malnutrition. However, the result of the production campaign was far from satisfactory because other things took higher priority, among them army expansion. Nevertheless, in the winter of 1944, the Party anticipated that food supplies would again turn scarce. Several causes were identified. Firstly, the harvest of 1944 was generally poor, and the winter crop of the year was damaged by frost. Secondly, the Party predicted that the Japanese would soon return to pacify their rear and guard the coast against Allied landing after the conclusion of their offensive in north Guangdong. Thirdly, food shortage might be aggravated by some "evil merchants," who smuggled food out of the

⁹⁴ Ibid.; Ye Feng, "Ludong yinianlai jianzheng gongzuo de zongjie" (May 1946), 607-8.

⁹⁵ Ya Han, "Boluo jiefangqu minzhu jianshe de huigu" (10 June 1946), 595-7; Zhong Zi, "Zhendong Jiangbei de tuizu yundong" [The rent refund movement that shook the Jiangbei region] (1 May 1945), *DZS*, 575-8.

⁹⁶ Tan Tiandu, 37.

base area in order to sell it elsewhere for better prices. For the East River Base Area to survive through the coming economic crisis, it was necessary to renew the efforts in promoting production.⁹⁷

To ensure the success of the production campaign, the Party consciously integrated it with other mass movements carrying out in the East River Base Area. In many places, the campaign was introduced right after or simultaneously with the implementation of rent and interest reductions. Evidently, it was the assumption that as the peasants' share in their crops increased, they would have greater incentive to boost farm production. On the other hand, food production also formed a significant component of the "Support-Love" movement. As studied earlier, every soldier of the East River Column had to engage in agricultural work side by side with the peasants for several hours a day. In the production campaign, the most prominent contribution of the army was opening up wasteland for farming. This was sometimes done by converting hill sides or even public highways into cultivated land. To stir up the soldiers' spirit for production, the Party again made use of competitions. Anyone who achieved outstanding results, such as opening up over two *mu* of wasteland, yielding a good crop, or raising a certain number of livestock, was awarded the honour of "labour hero."⁹⁸

To better coordinate the production efforts of the resistance government, the army and the mass associations, the Party set up in different parts of the base area the Committee for Production and Relief Works (or Construction Work) (*shengchan jiujihui* or *shengchan jianshehui*.) One of its functions was to offer loans or other financial assistance to poor peasants for buying seeds and farm tools. Moreover, the committees organised work teams to assist families which had inadequate manpower to till their land. Sharing draught animals was also arranged between different households. Apart from solving practical problems for peasants, an important job of the committees was to formulate production strategy. Peasants were directed to set their priority in growing crops, such as melons, beans and aubergines, which could yield fast and easy harvests. Lastly, the committees attempted to develop handicraft industries. These were supposed

⁹⁷ Yang Kanghua, "Jianjue zhixing jianzu jianxi zhengce" (25 December 1944), 520-1; "Guanyu ruhe yu lianghuang zuodouzheng de zhishi" [Instructions concerning how to struggle against the food crisis] (1945), *DZS*, 462; "Zenyang zhixing 'fadong yongzheng aimin yundong' de zhishi" (17 February 1945), 240-1.

⁹⁸ "Guanyu ruhe yu lianghuang zuodouzheng de zhishi" (1945), 464; cf. "Youjidui zhi yingxiong' jiyu tiaoli" (1 February 1944), 383.

to take the form of cooperatives (*hezuoshe*) and produce goods such as oil, bean curd and clay pottery.⁹⁹

The Communists realised that the appeal of material benefit alone could not adequately stimulate peasant initiative. There was the need to work on the psychological side too; that is, to counteract the traditional prejudice against manual labour. A labour-hero campaign resembling that in the army was applied to the general public. Early in 1943, the labour hero movement had already been launched among the peasantry in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. Mark Selden has shown that this movement not only elevated the peasants' incentive to increase farm production but also provided the Party an opportunity to identify and train grass-roots leaders for revolutionary change in villages. Besides creativity, labour heroes possessed intimate knowledge of village life, which "enabled them to develop indigenous means for resolving intractable economic and social problems."¹⁰⁰ Wu Manyou, one of the border region's heroes, was originally a refugee but attained a relatively affluent living through constant hard work. His experience was hailed as a model for others during the inauguration ceremony of the Ludong Legislature. Originally, the Ludong government wanted to follow the border region's example of extending the labour hero campaign to every village and district under its governance. There would be annual labour hero meetings which would publicise the outstanding accomplishments of these men and women.¹⁰¹ However, nothing eventually took place due to Japan's surrender.

One similarity shared by the production campaign in the East River Base Area and that in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region was its common stance on the role of women. Women were hailed as the main force of production in the liberated areas of Guangdong.¹⁰² The production campaign mobilised women for both agricultural works and household industries. However, as in Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, the Party's mobilisation of women was marred by its reluctance to challenge the traditional views of women and their role in the family. While the Party acknowledged that women suffered many inequalities under traditional society which were against the Communists' ideals, it refrained from taking immediate action to get rid of these inequalities. The Party justified

⁹⁹ "Guanyu ruhe yu lianghuang zuodouzheng de zhishi" (1945), 463; Tan Tiandu, 38; "Dongjiang jiefangqu Ludong kangri minzhu zhengquan," 50.

¹⁰⁰ Selden, 206.

¹⁰¹ "Ludong minzhu zhengzhi de xinjieduan," (May 1945), 374-5.

¹⁰² "Dongjiang zongdui zhengzhibu guanyu fazhan benqu funu yundong de zhishi" [Instructions by the Political Bureau of the East River Column concerning the development of the women's movement in this region] (21 February 1945), *DZS*, 479.

its inconsistency by arguing that "a long-term struggle" would be required to elevate the status of women. Women were exhorted to remain patient and avoid taking drastic measures to address the problems on their own. For example, advocating the abolition of concubinage and child betrothals (*tongyangxi*) was denounced as "leftism." Cadres were sent to counsel women who had been oppressed by their husbands or mothers-in-law. These women were encouraged to return home and restore the family's harmony instead of breaking it up.¹⁰³ As in the border region, the Communists did little to advance directly women's social rights for fear of destroying "the family's capacity for unified action," which was essential for the production movement.¹⁰⁴ They contended that when women were able to participate in production and acquired their own livelihood, their status would be improved accordingly.

When examining the Party's mass programmes in the East River Base Area, the preceding section has made few remarks on the relationship between the ecological conditions of Guangdong and the Communist reform policies. Pauline Keating, in her recent study on the rural reconstruction movement in two counties inside the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, argues that ecological factors could in some ways inhibit tremendously the Party's pursuit of socio-economic reforms.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the validity of her argument cannot be tested by the East River case because the Party's mass programmes lasted only a very brief period, a year or less. Those policies, on the one hand, left behind scanty documentary information for detailed study and, on the other hand, precluded genuine interaction between them and the local ecological setting. Above all, the East River Base Area lacked the kind of military security present in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, which, as Keating herself admits, would have allowed ecological factors to play a more determinant role in the course of the revolution.¹⁰⁶

III. Expansion Beyond the East River Valley

Consolidation of the East River Base Area went hand in hand with expansion of Communist influence beyond the East River valley. In July 1944, amidst Operation Ichigo, the Party Centre radioed Lin Ping to take advantage of the situation to develop Communist power in Guangdong. Foreseeing that the Japanese offensive would create an

¹⁰³ Ibid., 478, 481-2.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Patricia Stranahan, *Yan'an Women and the Communist Party*, (Berkeley, Calif.: UCB, Center for Chinese Studies, 1983), 75.

¹⁰⁵ Pauline Keating, *Two Revolution*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 15.

opportunity to Communist penetration into northern Guangdong, Yan'an instructed Lin to send there able cadres or small military units to organise guerrilla resistance. Lin was also urged to establish contact as quickly as possible with the guerrillas operating in Hainan and Chaoshan so that guerrilla warfare could be pushed forward to the whole of Guangdong and ultimately encircling Guangzhou.¹⁰⁷ In response to the Party Centre's directive, the East River Column and the Guangdong Party¹⁰⁸ resolved to establish a new base in the Luofu Mountain, from which they would influence the territory bordering Guangdong and its neighbouring provinces (Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan and Guangxi).¹⁰⁹ A batch of cadres was thereafter despatched to the Luofu Mountain to carry out the groundwork.

Meanwhile, to ascertain the moves of the Japanese army in northern Guangdong, the Party sent Wu Qiang with a vanguard of several hundred men north to the North River. Beyond the Party's knowledge as well as the GMD's was that the Japanese offensive in South China during the summer-autumn of 1944 focused on clearing the railway, which linked Henan and Guangxi. Therefore, when the Japanese army marched north from Guangzhou, the GMD troops stationed in north Guangdong thought that the enemy was coming for them and therefore retreated to the mountains on the provincial border. However, when they discovered that the Japanese army had turned westward to Guangxi, they came down and returned to their position. At this juncture, they clashed with the Communist vanguards, who had just seized Qingyuan. Severe fighting with the GMD forces brought heavy casualties to Wu's contingent, and it had to be recalled in November 1944.¹¹⁰

The Japanese offensive finally hit north Guangdong in the first month of 1945 as they strove to occupy the southern part of the Guangzhou-Hankou railway. The Party responded to the resulting political anarchy by despatching two expeditionary forces to the North River region and the northwest part of the provincial border. Within half a year,

¹⁰⁷ "Zhongyang guanyu Dongjiang zongdui kauzhan dihou youji zhanzheng gei Lin Ping de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to Lin Ping concerning the launching of guerrilla war behind the enemy's rear by the East River Column] (25 July 1944), *ZZWX*, v. 14, 297-8; "Zhonggong Guangdongsheng linweihui gongzuo jue ding zhaiyao" (August 1944), 303.

¹⁰⁸ After the GMD's raid in 1943, the Communists reformed the Guangdong Party, and the Temporary Party Committee of the Guangdong Province was instituted to oversee Party affairs. It was stationed in the East River Base Area, with Lin Ping as the secretary. In July 1945, the committee changed its title to the Party Committee of the Guangdong Region. See *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 302-3, 310.

¹⁰⁹ "Zhonggong Guangdongsheng linweihui gongzuo jue ding zhaiyao" (August 1944), 303; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 380-1.

¹¹⁰ Wu Qiang, "Zhandou zai Beijiang" [Carrying out fighting in the North River region], *GDZ*, v. 9 (February 1987), 66-71; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 388-91.

they founded small bases in the respective areas. Similarly, the Japanese military endeavours to toughen their defensive work on the coast had facilitated Communist infiltration into eastern Guangdong. The East River Column extended its guerrilla sphere as far as Haifeng, although it still could not link up with the guerrillas operating in the Chaoshan region. In view of the favourable development, the Party accelerated the pace of base construction in the Luofu Mountain. Another expeditionary force, led by Wang Zuoyao and Yang Kanghua, was sent there to eliminate the remaining opposition and organise peasant militias. Probably in the early summer, the Communists relocated their provincial Party headquarters and the command centre of the East River Column to the Luofu Mountain. A local Daoist temple was apparently converted into their headquarters.¹¹¹

The real significance of the Communist expansion in Guangdong during the last stage of the war cannot be fully appreciated without considering Yan'an's strategy in preparing its post-war contest with the GMD for state power. Looking retrospectively, the Party's wartime success in North China was indisputable for its ultimate conquest of national power, which is why scholarly works on the history of the Communist revolution tend to concentrate on that region. However, such an approach obscures the fact that the Yan'an leaders were never confident that their northern bases alone would generate sufficient strength for defeating the GMD. From the beginning of the war, they were not satisfied with confining the Communists' sphere of influence to the north. Mao Zedong, in particular, assigned an important supportive role to the New Fourth Army and strove hard to link up this armed force in Central China with its counterpart in the north. It is true that during the early years of the war, South China was too remote; for Yan'an leaders were busy in directing the construction of Communist bases elsewhere. Although they did cherish the hope of transforming Hainan Island into a Communist stronghold and using it as a springboard for conquering South China in the future, this plan miscarried (see next chapter). In spite of failure, when the Communists' control on northern and central China had been consolidated, Yan'an again contemplated territorial expansion in the south. Operation Ichigo provided an excellent context for fulfilling Yan'an's aspiration, and the existence of a number of active guerrilla forces in Guangdong, most notably the East River Column, increased its feasibility.

¹¹¹ Wu Qiang, *ibid.*, 71-81; Xie Yongkuan, "Yuebei Ludong diqu kangri douzhan de huiyi" [Reminiscences on the anti-Japanese struggle in the eastern side of the railway in north Guangdong], *GDZ*, v. 13 (September 1988), 87-97; *DZ*, 134-40; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 391-402.

In fact, Yan'an's planning was to establish a large Communist base in the border region of two or more southern provinces. Party historians claim that this thought had already been in the minds of Yan'an leaders when Japan commenced its invasion of Guangdong in October 1938. However, it turned out to be merely wishful thinking due to the limited scope of the enemy's occupation.¹¹² During the New Fourth Army Incident, the collapse of the Second United Front looked so imminent that some members of the CCP's Central Committee proposed to launch a strong Communist expeditionary force into South China to revive the old soviet bases, including that on the border between Guangdong and Fujian. This action would ensure that the Party would have the upper hand in the approaching military confrontation with the GMD. It was dropped after the domestic situation gradually improved.¹¹³

As late as the summer of 1944, the notion of founding a large Communist base in South China reappeared in the agenda of the Party Centre. In July, Fang Fang, Gu Dacun and Zhang Dingcheng were summoned to give their opinions on how the Communist guerrilla movement could be further developed in the south in view of the Japanese Ichigo offensive. These three people were consulted because they had extensive experience in conducting guerrilla fighting in the Guangdong-Fujian border. They unanimously confirmed the urgency and worthiness of the Party Centre's southern expansion strategy.¹¹⁴

Yan'an's intention to adopt a forward southern policy was also disclosed in a conversation between Chen Yi and John S. Service in August 1944. Chen told Service confidently that in case of Japanese occupation of the Canton-Hankou railway, the Communists rather than the GMD would be able to assume control over the Southeast corner of China. While the experience in North China had already proved that the Communists could survive much better than the GMD troops under guerrilla conditions, they enjoyed an added advantage in the south because of the presence of the old soviet bases. These bases could be revived and expanded within a short period of six months. So far the Communists had abstained from doing so, as Chen stated, because "they want

¹¹² See, for example, Zhao Shude, "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu kaipi Wuling kangri minzhu genjudi de zhanlue juece de yanbian" [The evolution of the Chinese Communist Party Centre's strategic decisions concerning the development of the anti-Japanese democratic base area in Wuling], *Dangshi yanjiu* [Research in Party history], no. 4 (July 1986), 50.

¹¹³ Zhang Hongzhi, *Zhongguo kangri youji zhanzheng shi* [A history of the anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare in China], (Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995), 843.

¹¹⁴ "Gu Dacun, Zhang Dingcheng, Fang Fang guanyu kaizhan nanfang youji zhanzheng de yijian gei Ren Bishi de baogao" [A report given by Gu Dacun, Zhang Dingcheng, and Fang Fang to Ren Bishi concerning the suggestions on developing guerrilla war in the south] (6 July 1944), *GDTYS* (1937-1945), v. 2, 487-92.

to avoid more trouble with the Kuomintang [Guomindang], which would consider such expansion an aggressive act by the Communists and resist it violently. The Communists are not afraid of this competition with the Kuomintang, but it would be a stage closer to civil war, and it would interfere with fighting the Japanese.” Nevertheless, Chen did not write off the possibility that the Party might have to alter its position, as he went on to say, “now, however, the situation may be changing. The possible near collapse of the Kuomintang in these areas, and the importance of the areas to the United Nations [*sic*] war effort must be considered.”¹¹⁵

Indeed, about a month after Chen’s conversation with Service, the Party Centre put its plan of southward advancement into action. In September, the Yan’an leaders met at Yangjialing and officially installed their strategy for the final stage of the war, which was known as “the two-wing development” (*fazhan liangyi*). This strategy endeavoured to establish Communist strongholds in both the northeastern and southeastern parts of China. For the present discussion, the erection of the “southern wing” was to be accomplished jointly by the East River Column and the expeditionary forces despatched south from Yan’an. The first of these latter forces, led by Wang Zhen and Wang Shoudao, departed from Yan’an in November 1944. It was composed of five thousand troops drawn from the 359th Brigade. In mid-1945, the remainder of the Brigade, having been reorganised and put under the command of Zhang Qilong and Wen Niansheng, also went south. Accompanying them were two hundred political and military cadres whom the Party Centre sent to assist the East River Column in establishing new bases. The third expeditionary force, which was intended to follow soon but precluded from doing so due to the end of the war, was said to have Gu Dacun as its commander.¹¹⁶

The site chosen for the projected southern base was the Wuling Mountain range, which separates Guangdong from its neighbouring provinces (except Fujian). Initially, the locus of the base was to be built around the border region of Xiang-Yue-Gan (Hunan-Guangdong-Jiangxi). However, as with the building of all other Communist bases, political considerations took precedence over all other factors; and the final decision had

¹¹⁵ Joseph W. Esherick, ed., *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Despatches of John S. Service*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 214-5.

¹¹⁶ Tian Youru, *Zhongguo kangri genjudi fazhanshi* [A history of the development of the anti-Japanese base areas in China], (Beijing chubanshe, 1995), 530; Wang Shoudao, *Yinanzheng* [Reminiscences on the southern expedition], (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1981), 7-21; Zhang Hongzhi, 842-4, 856-9; Zhao Shude, “Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu kaipi Wuling,” 51-3; “Zhongyang guanyu huanan zhanlue fangzhen he gongzuo bushu gei Guangdongqu dangwei de zhishi” [Instructions from the Party Centre to the Regional Committee of the Guangdong Party concerning the war strategies direction and the preparation work of South China] (16 June 1945), *ZZWX*, v. 15, 146.

to be dictated by the Japanese advancement in South China. Contrary to Yan'an's prediction, the major battlefield of Operation Ichigo in the autumn of 1944 fell on Guangxi instead of northern Guangdong. As a result, the locus was shifted to the border of Guangxi and Hunan. In October and November, Yan'an twice cabled Lin Ping urging him to transfer as many cadres as possible from the East River Column to southwest Guangdong to strengthen local guerrilla leadership. In addition, he had to transmit the order to the Hainan Communists that they had to complete their conquest of the whole island as soon as possible and expand into the Leizhou Peninsular.¹¹⁷ However, this westward development encountered many practical problems because the East River Base Area was too far away to east and contact with Hainan had never been effectively restored (see next chapter). The Communists were finally freed from such difficult situations when the Japanese shifted their offensive from Guangxi to northern Guangdong. Yan'an then returned to its original plan of erecting a base in Wuling around the border region of Xiang-Yue-Gan.¹¹⁸

In mid-1945, having spent some time in assisting the expansion of bases in Central China, Wang Zhen and Wang Shoudao proceeded to the Wuling region. On 22 July, Mao Zedong radioed the men, informing them of the recent withdrawal of five divisions of Japanese troops from Hunan and Guangxi to the north. He asserted that this should not be interpreted as a sign of abandonment of South China by the Japanese since they would at least keep their control of Guangzhou and the whole Guangdong-Hankou railway. Apparently, the purpose of Mao's words were to remind the two Wangs of the continued strategic relevance of the Wuling base, especially in light of his warning in the radio message that China was in "grave danger of civil war." His order to them was summarised as follows: "Your sole mission was to make full use of the present precious time to establish the Wuling Base Area on the border between northern Guangdong and southern Hunan, to unite with our army in Guangdong, and to prepare to tie down the GMD in the south during the post-war civil strife." The two Wangs were also counselled

¹¹⁷ "Zhongyang guanyu fazhan Guangdong youji zhanzhengdeng wenti gei Ling Ping de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to Lin Ping concerning the questions of developing guerrilla warfare in Guangdong] (26 October 1944) and "Zhongyang guanyu Dongjiang, Qiongya gongzuo gei Lin Ping de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to Lin Ping concerning the work in the East River region and Hainan] (14 November 1944), *ZZWX*, v. 14, 388-9, 399.

¹¹⁸ Zhao Shude, "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu kaipi Wuling," 51-3.

to render assistance to the East River Column so that this southern force, "which had been founded years ago," could be "preserved and developed."¹¹⁹

On that same day, Mao gave a radio message to Zhang Qilong and Wen Niansheng. Similarly, Mao reiterated to these two commanders of the second southern expeditionary force the strategic importance of Wuling base to the postwar Communist struggle in South China. On the condition of not exhausting their soldiers, said Mao, they should try to shorten their travelling time so that they would reach Wuling and join the first expeditionary force by the end of 1945. Last but not least, they should maintain constant radio contact with the two Wangs.¹²⁰

As for the East River Communists, Yan'an's final resolution on the exact site of the land for the Wuling base had reached them earlier. In a directive dated 16 June 1945, they were reminded that their present base area in the East River valley could not possibly be the centre of future Communist struggle in South China. To effectively counteract suppression by the GMD after the war, they must commence quickly to build a new base in the Xiang-Yue-Gan border region. A large number of cadres should be sent there as soon as possible.¹²¹ Approximately one month later, another directive arrived from Yan'an, which anxiously asked the East River Communists how their work in northern Guangdong was progressing. It also exhorted them to pay their greatest attention to the task. The paramount importance of the projected Wuling base to the prospect of the Communist revolution in South China was stressed forcefully:

The problem of South China hinges on whether or not you can establish within a year (you cannot afford to miss this chance!) a base area, which has a real mass foundation, in the mountainous region of northern Guangdong, southern Hunan and southern Jiangxi. It is necessary that, after the occupation of Guangzhou and the lowland area by the British, the Americans and the army of Chiang Kai-shek, a year later our army can have the mountainous areas to rely upon and continue our struggle in South China. This new base area will give your rapidly-developing main force mass support as well as favourable geographical conditions, which are indispensable for its military manoeuvring. If this task cannot be accomplished, then you will encounter failures a year later.¹²²

¹¹⁹ "Mao Zedong guanyu muqian xingshi yu chuangli Wuling genjudi deng wenti gei Wang Zhen, Wang Shoudao de zhishi" [Instructions from Mao Zedong to Wang Zhen and Wang Shoudao concerning the present situation and questions of establishing the Wuling Base Area] (22 July 1945), *ZZWX*, v. 15, 186-7.

¹²⁰ "Zhengqu niandi daoda Wuling yu Wang Zhen bu huihe" [Fighting to reach Wuling by the end of the year and joining forces with the force of Wang Zhen] (22 July 1945) in *Mao Zedong junshi wenji* [Selected military writings of Mao Zedong], v. 2, (Junshi kexue chubanshe and Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), 807.

¹²¹ "Zhongyang guanyu huanan zhanlüe fangzhen he gongzuo bushu gei Guangdong qutangwei de zhishi" (16 June 1945), 145-7.

¹²² "Junwei guanyu chuanguangzao Xiang-Yue-Gan-Gui bian genjudi gei Guangdongqu dangwei de zhishi" [Instructions from the Military Committee to the Regional Committee of the Guangdong Party concerning

Subsequent events show that the Yan'an leaders, especially Mao, were correct in stressing the absolute significance of the Wuling base to the Communist struggle but were wrong on the timing. A few weeks after issuing the above directive, Japan had surrendered. Though surprised by the event, Mao nevertheless did not at once abandon his ambitious plan of southern expansion. On 11 August, he cabled both the first expeditionary force and the East River Column to move with full speed to northern Guangdong and join their forces. To the latter, Mao particularly warned that "without that [the Wuling base], you will have no road to retreat to."¹²³ However, the end of the war made the realisation of Mao's plan extremely difficult. Despite the Party's effort to conceal its southward advancement, Chiang Kai-shek had knowledge of it through his intelligence agents. On his command, the GMD armies in both Guangdong and Hunan, under Yu Hanmou and Xue Yue respectively, who had been seeking refuge in the mountains along the border between the two provinces, tried to intercept and destroy the Communist troops coming from the north. The Japanese surrender allowed Chiang's armies to better coordinate their military deployment against the Communists. Wang Shoudao recalled that as many as five divisions of the GMD army were once after his force, and frequent military clashes with them led to mounting casualties.¹²⁴

Still, Mao was not deterred by adversity. On 25 August, he radioed Wang Zhen and Wang Shoudao insisting on the continuation of their operation. He tried to boost their spirit by telling them that a corps of the East River Column was coming north to reinforce them. What Mao had failed to appreciate was the extremely critical situation that the first southern expeditionary force was actually facing. It was fighting against a GMD army which was much larger and more powerful than itself. The expeditionary force was, moreover, unable to obtain any help from the people because its northern soldiers were unfamiliar with the Wuling environment and completely ignorant of the local dialects. Hungry, tired and vulnerable, the two Wangs felt compelled to take the matter into their own hands. After consulting with other senior cadres, they decided to retreat north to join forces with the New Fourth Army. On 29 August, they despatched a

the creation of a base area on the border of Hunan, Guangdong, Jiangxi and Guangxi] (15 July 1945), *ZZWX*, v. 15, 181.

¹²³ "Zhongyang guanyu chuangli Xiang-Yue bian genjudi deng gei Guangdongqu dangwei de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to the Regional Committee of the Guangdong Party concerning the establishment of a base area on the border of Hunan and Guangdong] (11 August 1945), *ZZWX*, v. 15, 226; Wang Shoudao, 125.

¹²⁴ Wang Shoudao, 126, 151; cf. Zhongguo dier lishi dang'anguan comp., *Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Guomindangjun jimi zuozhan riji* [Confidential battle diaries of the GMD army during the Anti-Japanese War Period], v. 3, (Beijing: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 1995), 1855-6.

radio message to Mao and the Party Centre, explaining the impossibility of continuing the mission and pleading for acquiescence to their decision. Without waiting for Yan'an's reply, the two Wangs ordered retreat immediately. The manner of their retreat reflected their desperate situation. To lighten their load, the soldiers had to abandon all unnecessary equipment. For example, each soldier was allowed to have one coat only. Wang Zhen, who was sick at that time, was said to have abandoned even his bed and blanket. Accepting that it was futile to push on, Mao approved the retreat and also recalled the second expeditionary force. When the one thousand men from the East River Column led by Wang Zuoyao finally made their way to the border region, they could not even see the backs of their northern comrades.¹²⁵

IV. Post-War Relocation

Japan's surrender meant no real peace for China. The country was thenceforth plagued by open civil strife between the GMD and the CCP. In Guangdong, with Yan'an's grandiose design of expansion aborted, the East River Column now concentrated on stiffening its position against GMD military suppression by seizing territories and armaments from the Japanese. On 11 August 1945, Zhu De, the Chief Commander of the Communist army, had already ordered his troops all over the country to accept the Japanese surrender and eliminate any opposition to it. The East River Column was authorised to disarm the Japanese stationed on both sides along the Guangzhou-Kowloon railway.¹²⁶ However, this authorisation received little respect from the Japanese forces, who were instructed to hold their ground and surrender to no one other than GMD military officials. Consequently, only a few hundred Japanese soldiers surrendered to the Column.¹²⁷

At that time, there were rumours that the East River guerrillas desired to take over Hong Kong from the Japanese so that they would be in a position to hand it over to the British. This move was said to have been designed to increase both the prestige and the bargaining power of the Communists. These rumours probably reached Chongqing and to

¹²⁵ Wang Shoudao, 144-53; Zhao Shude, "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu kaipi Wuling," 55-6; Wang Zuoyao, "Jinjun Wuling, jieying Wang Zhen budui nanbu" [Deploy into Wuling, stand ready for the southern expedition force of Wang Zhen], *GWZ*, v. 36 (October 1982), 1-4.

¹²⁶ "Yan'an zongbu mingling diwuhao" [Order number five from the Yan'an headquarters] (11 August 1945), *ZZWX*, v. 15, 222; "Dongjiang zongdui jinji mingling" [Emergency order of the East River Column], *DZS*, 346.

¹²⁷ "Lin Ping guanyu Guangdong gedi junshou wanjun weigongshi gei Zhongyang de baoyao" [A report by Lin Ping to the Party Centre concerning the "die-hards" 'encirclement' in every part of Guangdong] (9 September 1945), *GDTYS* (1937-1945), v. 2, 625; *GDD*, 183; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 425.

a certain degree deterred Chiang Kai-shek from racing against the British to liberate Hong Kong. Chiang believed that such an attempt would undoubtedly provoke the Communists into competing; and, in such an eventuality, "both he and the British would probably have lost the race to the East River Column."¹²⁸ In the end, the Communists' plan was thwarted, according to the British, first by the refusal of the Japanese garrison troops to surrender to them and, secondly, by the swift British reoccupation of the colony.¹²⁹ In any event, the East River guerrillas withdrew from the colony in October 1945. According to Communist accounts, they were allowed to leave behind their wounded and weak in the colony, and the British promised to provide them with necessary assistance. In return, the Party spared some cadres to help organise communal defence in the New Territories at the request of the British, who had insufficient troops to maintain local law and order during the early period of their retrocession of Hong Kong.¹³⁰

Immediately after the Japanese defeat, Chiang Kai-shek deployed troops to Guangdong to reinstate control over the province. By September, a force of over seventy thousand men, including the American-trained and equipped New First Army and New Sixth Army, was massed to wipe out the Communist guerrillas operating in the East River region. They easily overran the Communist bases, dissolved the resistance regimes and cancelled all its reform policies. The *baojia* system was rehabilitated, and those people who had cooperated with the Communists were forced to undergo a "self renewal program" (*zixin yundong*). Communist members were arrested and executed while the land and properties of their relatives and family members were confiscated.¹³¹ Realising that its base was defenceless, the East River Column tried to preserve its forces by breaking them up into small cells, each consisting of a few dozens to a few hundred men. Some of them went underground and others dispersed over the mountainous areas to carry on guerrilla fighting against the GMD government.¹³²

While armed conflicts were continuing in Guangdong, the fate of the East River Column was being settled in Chongqing. In the Double Tenth Agreement (10 October

¹²⁸ Steve Tsang, *Hong Kong: An Appointment with China*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 48.

¹²⁹ WO 208/318, 28 February 1944 Intercepted letter; WO 208/749 16 October 1945 CX Report.

¹³⁰ GDD, 184-6; "Lin Ping zhi Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from Lin Ping to the Party Centre] (9 October 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 529-30.

¹³¹ "Lin Ping xiang Dangzhongyang baogao dongzong gebu fenbu qingkuang" [Lin Ping's report for the Party Centre on the distribution of every division of the East River Column] (17 October 1945) and "Zeng Sheng, Lin Ping xiang Zhongyang yunwei baogao dongzong duifu Guomindangjun jingong de cuoshi" [A report by Zeng Sheng and Lin Ping to the Military Committee of the Party Centre on the policies of the East River Column in tackling the GMD's attacks] (30 December 1945), *DZS*, 349-51; *DZ*, 154-7.

¹³² *DZ*, 158-65; *Zheng Sheng huiyilu*, 431-8.

1945), Mao Zedong agreed to withdraw the Communists from eight of their southernmost bases, which included the East River valley, in exchange for GMD concessions in the post-war political reforms. However, details of the evacuation of East River guerrillas were not discussed until January of the following year. A small team composed of three commissioners representing the GMD, the CCP and the United States was despatched by the Committee of Three in Beijing to Guangzhou to investigate the Communist situation in the province. The work of investigation, however, met with great difficulties because of the “uncooperative” attitude of Zhang Fakui, the director of the Generalissimo’s Field Headquarters in Guangzhou. Zhang insisted that there was no “Communist problem” in Guangdong and that all the military deployments under way in the province were targeted exclusively against bandits. It was only as a result of the strong protests of Fang Fang, the Communist representative, that Zhang acceded to conducting the investigation. It took place only in areas assigned by him where false witnesses had already been planted to deny the existence of Communist guerrillas. Moreover, in areas where the guerrillas were once active, local people were intimidated by the GMD police not to address the Communists guerrillas as the “Red Army” but only “as bandits.” Furthermore, the GMD’s spies kept the commissioners team under close surveillance to prevent them from getting any contact with the Guangdong Communists. Finally, Zhang censored the public media in Guangzhou and suppressed any reports of Communist activities.¹³³

What followed was a vigorous war of propaganda launched by the Party simultaneously in Yan’an, Chongqing and Hong Kong to oppose Zhang’s suppression of the truth about the Communist presence in Guangdong. *Jiefang ribao* (*People’s Liberation Daily*) in Yan’an, *Xin Zhongguo ribao* (*New China’s Daily*) in Chongqing and *Huashangbao* (*China’s Commercial Newspaper*) in Hong Kong continuously published articles denouncing the GMD’s military action in the East River region as a violation of the Double Tenth Agreement. They also introduced the history of the East River Column to the public and demanded the GMD’s immediate recognition of its existence. Further, Lin Ping was asked to speak twice at international press conferences in Chongqing about the contributions of the East River Column to the war against Japan. Special emphasis

¹³³ Ye Ji, “Guanyu Dongjiang zongdui diqi zhidui de gongzuo baogao” [A report on the work concerning the Seventh Division of the East River Column] (13 March 1946?), *GGLWH*, v., 46, 260; “Yin Linping zhi Zhongyang bingzhuan Beijing Ye canmouzhang dian” [Radio message from Yin Linping to the Party Centre and Military Consultant Ye in Beijing] (31 January 1946) and “Liang Guang, Zeng Sheng zhi Zhongyang bing Chongqing Zhou Enlai Yin Linping dian” [Radio message from Liang Guang and Zeng Sheng to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai and Yin Linping in Chongqing] (29 March 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 56, 1, 56; *DZ*, 165-72.

was placed on its outstanding efforts in helping foreigners escape from Hong Kong, and the escapees' letters of gratitude were released to reporters.¹³⁴ In Hong Kong, some escapees were invited to speak publicly about how they had been rescued by the East River guerrillas.¹³⁵ The pressure of this propaganda ultimately forced Zhang to step down, and the Party's fight for evacuating the East River Column was thus won.

According to the agreement reached by both parties, only 2,400 Communist troops were allowed to retreat to the north.¹³⁶ The remaining ones had to be demobilised and the GMD government would guarantee their personal safety and freedom. The retreating guerrillas were given a month to gather in Shayuchong on the coast of Mirs Bay. This arrangement posed great difficulties to the guerrillas, for many of them were hiding in the remote parts of northern and eastern Guangdong during the strife. In spite of that, most managed to regroup at the site before the appointed date. On 30 June, the guerrillas embarked on their voyage to Yantai, Shandong, on three military vessels hired from the U.S. navy.¹³⁷ When they returned south three years later, they were no longer a small band of defeated guerrillas. Instead, they were reorganised and formed the nucleus of a much larger force, the Column of Two Guangs (Guangdong and Guangxi), and were received by the local people as heroes in liberating Guangdong.¹³⁸

V. Concluding Remarks

The argument of the last chapter has been that, before 1944, Mao Zedong refrained from transplanting the northern model of base area expansion to the East River valley because he knew that the local political-military development promised little for its successful accomplishment. This chapter further substantiates the case by demonstrating that Mao adopted there a forward policy only at the last stage of the war, when Operation

¹³⁴ There is reason to believe that these thank-you letters were intentionally secured by the Communists, who probably foresaw the letters' value for future propaganda use. Cf. CO 129/590/22 16 February 1943 Escape report.

¹³⁵ *DZ*, 168-9; *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, 453-4; also the reprint of several newspaper articles in *DZS*, 667-714.

¹³⁶ However, the actual number of troops that retreated to the north was 2,583. The American official responsible for transporting the guerrillas allowed them to board as many troops as the vessels could hold. *Zeng Sheng huiyilu*, *ibid.*, 478. For the agreement itself, see "Sanren huiyidaibiao dacheng Guangdong Dongjiang wenti xieyi" [The agreement reached by the three-man representative meeting on the East River question of Guangdong] (2 April 1946), *NDZ*, v. 4, 158-60; an English version of it is preserved in FO 371/53741 28 April 1946 Hilda Selwyn-Clarke to Sir Herbert Phillips.

¹³⁷ For details of the Column's retreat to Shandong, see Lin Huaxin and Huang Riguang, comp., *Huigu dongzong beiche* [The recollections of the northern retreat of the East River Column], (Zhonggong Guangdong Bao'anxian dangshi bangbian, 1986).

¹³⁸ For the history of the Column of Two Guangs, see Liangguang zongduishi bianxie lingdao xiaozu, comp., *Liangguang zongduishi* [A history of the Column of Guangdong and Guangxi], (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1987).

Ichigo finally brought about widespread political anarchy in Guangdong and created the basic criteria for the type of Communist expansion advocated by Mao vigorously elsewhere. Thenceforth, mass mobilisation campaigns were widely implemented in the East River Base Area, and reinforcements were sent from the north to expedite the process of local base construction. For Mao, it was unfortunate that when the Japanese resumed their offensive in South China, they did not hold on long enough for his grandiose design of erecting a "southern wing" to be realised.

CHAPTER 5

HAINAN AT WAR, 1939-1940

I. The Fall of Hainan

Just before daybreak on 10 February 1939, the Japanese army landed on the coast several miles west of Haikou, Hainan. Within a few hours, they captured Haikou and Fucheng, forcing the Chinese garrisons to retreat inland. Inside the two cities, some people militias continued resistance; but they were too inexperienced and poorly-equipped to pose any real threat to the invaders. About 132 militiamen were apparently been apprehended by the Japanese in the mopping-up campaign in Haikou, and they were summarily executed.¹ A few days after the fall of Haikou, Japanese marines landed at Sanya and took over both the Yulin harbour and Yaixian. During the remainder of 1939, the Japanese military extended their occupation to the whole of Hainan. Except for the mountainous interior, they controlled virtually all major cities and townships of the island, including the tin and rubber centre of Nada. In most incidents, the Japanese accomplished their occupation without encountering any serious resistance.²

Japan's invasion of Hainan actually violated its diplomatic agreement with France in 1907, which recognised the island as a French sphere of interest. Early in June 1938, the Japanese Foreign Office had already announced that Japan might have to take Hainan if that proved necessary for bringing the Chinese government to submission, an interesting contradiction with the Japanese Foreign Minister's message to both Britain and France three days earlier, namely that his country had no intention to invade Hainan. However, as R. T. Philips points out, the Japanese were unwilling to violate Hainan until they learnt of the British response to their military operation on the Guangdong mainland; because they believed that the British attitude was likely to be mirrored by the French.³ Obviously, the impotence of Britain to intervene in the events of South China confirmed Japan's belief that the Western powers were too involved in the rapidly deteriorating

¹ FO 371/23476, 7 July 1939 Agents, China Navigation Co. Ltd., Hong Kong to Messrs. Butterfield & Swire, Shanghai.

² Ibid., FO 371/23476, 14 February 1939 G.O.C. Hong Kong to the War Office; *South China Records*, 43-5; R. T. Philips, "The Japanese Occupation of Hainan," *Modern Asian Studies*, v. 14, no. 1 (1980), 95-6; Yun Shicheng, 111-3.

³ Philips, 95; see also Chen Qingchen, *Hainandao yu Taipingyang* [Hainan Island and the Pacific], (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1940), 103-4.

political situation in Europe, and they could not afford to take any drastic measures to challenge Japan's supremacy in Asia.

The strategic value of Hainan to Japan was immense, both as an air base for bombing the Burma Road⁴ from southwest China and as a springboard for military advancement into Southeast Asia. Further, Hainan was rich in natural resources. Soon after its control had been consolidated, the Japanese government began sending scientists to conduct a survey of Hainan's agricultural and mineral deposits. For the purpose of serving Japan's war needs, these resources, most notably minerals and forestry, were soon systematically exploited.⁵ Japanese companies also went to Hainan and invested extensively in various commercial and industrial activities. While Japanese interest in territorial conquest on the Guangdong mainland was minimal, it wanted to hold on to Hainan. Hainan was to become "the second Formosa" and be incorporated as an integral part of the Japanese Empire. Originally, the Japanese government wanted to install a civilian administration in Hainan but was unable to do so, according to the Americans, because of the opposition of the military (probably the Navy) who wished to keep Hainan under their direct control as long as possible.⁶

The swift fall of Hainan owed as much to Japan's superior military power as to the lack of interest to defend the island by the Chinese government. At the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War, there were about 15,000 soldiers stationed in Hainan. Under General Zhang Da, some preparations for war were made, such as strengthening its air defence, building air-raid shelters, digging ditches and stocking up various kinds of war materials. However, General Zhang's army was recalled to reinforce the Shaoguan garrison in late 1938. The defence of Hainan was then left to General Wang Yi, who commanded a force comprised of regular soldiers as well as militia units, some four thousand men in total. Modest in size, its fighting capability was further crippled by poor training and insufficient arms.⁷

⁴ The Burma Road was completed in the summer of 1938 and became Chongqing's most important supply line during the war.

⁵ For details about Japan's economic and industrial activities in Hainan, see Chen Qingchen, 100-9; *Hainandao jiyao*, 123-32; Li Lin, "Ribei zhanling Hainan jiqi dui ziyuan de kaifa he lüeduo" [Japanese occupation of Hainan and their exploitation and plundering of its natural resources], *Hainan daxue xuebao shehui kexueban* [Social Science Journal of Hainan University], v. 15, no.2 (June 1997), 55-9; Xing Yisen, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Rikou de jinji lüeduo he Qiongya renmin de fanjinji douzheng" [The Japanese economic plundering and the struggle of anti-economic plundering by the Hainan people during the Anti-Japanese War period], *Hainan shizhi* [The history of Hainan], no. 1 (1997), 40-1.

⁶ U.S. Office of Strategic Services, "Survey of Hainan," Second Edition, (30 June 1943), iii, microfilm; cf. WO 208/894, 4 May 1940 Hainan Island - Intelligence Summary; Philips, 98-9.

⁷ Wang Jun, "Wobixu zaijiangu shizai de hua" [I must say a few more words], Ye Danqing, "Qiongya ziwei zongdui zuozhan zhaiyao" [A summary of the battles of the Hainan Self-Defence Corps], and Qiu

Two reasons probably accounted for the GMD's reluctance to stiffen its defence work in Hainan. First, in early 1939, most senior Chinese military officials predicted that the next target of attack by Japan in South China after Guangzhou would be Beihai, and defence there should take precedence over other places.⁸ Secondly, Hainan was believed to bear little strategic significance in China's war against Japan. Chiang Kai-shek was a notable example of such a view. When asked about the consequences of the Japanese invasion of Hainan to the war in China in an international news conference held just the next day after the event, Chiang answered, "The Japanese landing on Hainan has little impact on our country's resistance. The victory of the Sino-Japanese War must be determined by the military operations on the mainland. The occupation of one island basically has no relevance at all."⁹

This negligence in Hainan obviously accounted for the almost instantaneous collapse of the GMD's defence in the island in the face of the Japanese advancement. The Communists boasted that they alone were the active opponents to the Japanese; and, despite their inferiority both in weaponry and size, Feng Baiju's guerrilla force constantly harassed the enemy. This claim might not be totally exaggerated, although the Communists were perhaps causing merely minor trouble to the Japanese. The GMD acknowledged the effectiveness of the Communists' guerrilla manoeuvring. In particular, in late August 1939, the Communists ambushed a Japanese vehicle in Luobanpu and killed about ten or more Japanese soldiers. This operation won Feng praises from the GMD authorities.¹⁰ However, before this study examines Communist resistance in Hainan, there is a need to give an account of how these Red Army remnants had been reorganised and transformed into an official anti-Japanese force.

II. From Red Army to Independent Corps

To briefly recapitulate, it was due to Zhang Yunyi's timely action in mid-1937 that the Hainan Red Army escaped the fate of being disbanded. Zhang had instructed Feng

Yuesong, "Hainan qinian kangzhan zhi jiantao" [An evaluation of the seven-year resistance war in Hainan] in Hainan kangzhan sazhounian jinianhui comp., *Hainan kangzhan jiyao* [A recording of important facts concerning the resistance war in Hainan], (no publisher, 1971), 1-2, 63-4, 246.

⁸ FO 371/23476, 7 July 1939 Agents, China Navigation Co. Ltd., Hong Kong to Messrs. Butterfield & Swire, Shanghai.

⁹ "Jiang weiyuanzhang dui Rikou zhanling Hainandao tanhua" [Chiang Kai-shek's talk on the Japanese occupation of Hainan Island], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 3.

¹⁰ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 435; Lin Ying, *Qiongya gudaoshang de douzheng* [The struggle in the lonely island of Hainan], (Hong Kong: Xinminzhu chubanshe, 1947), 5-6; Wang Qinyin, "Qiongya kangzhanji" [A history of the resistance war in Hainan], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 719, 789-90.

Baiju to approach the Hainan GMD government on reorganising his Red Army remnants. Probably in June 1937, the Hainan Special Committee sent a letter to the GMD in Haikou, stating their willingness to participate in the national resistance under the government's leadership and pleading for the termination of the civil war in favour of a mutual action against the Japanese. A few days later, the GMD published its response in a local newspaper, as requested by the Communists, and agreed to enter negotiations. Li Min was appointed as the Party's representative to deal with the government. According to Li's memoir, the Hainan Special Committee had put forward seven terms for negotiation: 1. the GMD government must stop attacking the Red Army and arresting the Communist members; 2. the Red Army had to be reorganised into an anti-Japanese force under the government; 3. after reorganisation, the whole Communist army would remain intact and independent. It would never merge with the GMD troops; 4. the reorganised Red Army would have its own territory of defence; 5. it would receive the same benefit as other government troops with regard to allowance and supply of war materials; 6. provisions for weaponry and ammunitions; 7. the Communist guerrillas would never be transferred away from Hainan, for they were all natives of Hainan and must stay at home to fight the enemy.¹¹

However, the GMD was not keen on discussing these terms unless they could ascertain the worthiness of negotiation. When meeting with Li Min, the GMD official, Lin Xudong, was interested most of all in the number of Red Army soldiers in Hainan. Apparently, if the Communists were merely a tiny guerrilla band, there was no reason to compromise with them. Well aware of this presumption, Feng Baiju had told Li in advance to lie about their strength. Although their actual number was no more than seventy, Li told Lin that the Hainan Red Army had three to four hundred men.¹² Far from ready to take the Communists' words at face value, Lin Xudong insisted that Feng Baiju must bring his troops down from the mountains where they were hiding so that the government could understand their situation and decide on appropriate arrangements. This was to be the prerequisite for further negotiation. Intending to pressurise the Communists to agree, Lin warned Li Min in a subsequent meeting that the people had been accusing the Communists of robbery and others illicit activities. If the Red Army continued to resist the condition and fail to show up as required, the government would

¹¹ Li Liming, "Qiongya geming douzheng de huiyi" [Reminiscences on the revolutionary struggle in Hainan], *GDZ*, v. 6 (December 1985), 99.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99; cf. Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 429.

have to take necessary measures to enforce law and order.¹³ Believing that what the GMD demanded represented not simply a lack of sincerity but some kind of plot to destroy the Communist guerrillas, Li refused to comply. The negotiations between the two parties then ended in deadlock.

The prospect of forging a united-front agreement was further darkened by the arrest of Feng Baiju shortly thereafter in September 1937. At that time, Feng and his wife had left their hideout in Qiongsan and lodged in a small village near Haikou. The couple was said to have moved there because Feng wanted to have a closer watch over the Party's negotiations with the GMD government.¹⁴ It is unclear whether the GMD was behind the arrest. Some sources, however, report that Feng was "accidentally caught" by a person who mistook him for the man who was having an affair with his wife. When the local militiamen, whom the husband called upon for help, recognised Feng as the leader of the Hainan Party, they turned him over to the county magistrate.¹⁵ Whatever the exact details are, the incident resulted in great panic within the Hainan Party because of the fear that the GMD would execute Feng after a secret trial. The Hainan Special Committee immediately despatched Li Min to the GMD to protest against the arrest of Feng while concurrently bringing the case to the attention of the higher levels of the Party. Zhou Enlai, on behalf of the CCP Party Centre, complained to the GMD central government concerning the arrest and detention of Feng Baiju. Ye Jianying also wrote to the GMD in Guangdong demanding the release of Feng for the sake of preserving the unity between the two parties. Due to the vigorous reaction on the side of the CCP, the case reached Chiang Kai-shek. Apparently, Chiang saw it unwise to strain GMD-CCP relations during the initial formation of the Second United Front; and he ordered personally the release of Feng in late 1937.¹⁶

When Feng was in prison, the Southern Working Committee, superseded later by the Guangdong Provincial Committee, despatched Lin Liming (alias Li Jimin; Li Ming) to take the place of Feng as the secretary of the Hainan Special Committee. Lin's appointment, however, was more than simply to stabilise the Hainan Communists by providing them a temporary leadership. Rather, it looked very much like a calculated

¹³ Li Liming, 100-1; *QZS*, 93-4.

¹⁴ *QZS*, 94; *Hongqi budao*, 221; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 162.

¹⁵ *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 163; Hu Tichun, Xu Chunhong, and Wang Huanqiu, "Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan" [A biography of General Feng Baiju], *Qiongdao xinghuo (QX)* [The sparks of Hainan Island], v. 3 (March 1981), 42; cf. Ye Danqing, 263.

¹⁶ Feng Baiju, "Wode zizhuan," 339-41; Li Liming, 101-2; Lin Ying, 3; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 165-8; *QZS*, 94-5; Ye Danqing, *ibid.*

move of the Guangdong Party to take the opportunity to tighten its control over a regional subordinate (see later discussion). For this reason apparently, Feng did not resume his secretary post in the Hainan Special Committee after he was set free. Instead, he was charged with the responsibility to negotiate with the GMD on the question of reorganisation.

The negotiation over the Hainan Red Army was reopened in 1938, but the prospect of reaching an agreement between the two parties was still remote. The Communists were unwilling to give in on the issue of a continued separate and independent organisation. As a result, they had no choice but to reject the GMD's proposals, which, for instance, tried to incorporate the Red Army guerrillas into the government army as a special service corps or to transfer them away from Guangdong to regroup with the New Fourth Army.¹⁷ Nevertheless, chances of breaking the deadlock appeared when the war atmosphere of Hainan turned increasingly tense towards the end of 1938. Many developments pointed to an imminent invasion by the Japanese. Not only were the enemy's air raids on Haikou more frequent, but Japanese battleships were also sighted several times off the coast of Yulin harbour in the south. The fall of Guangzhou in October had shocked many Hainan people. Their worry about the island's security was aggravated by the withdrawal of the majority of local garrison troops to strengthen the defence of the mainland. Wang Yi, who then shouldered the task of defending Hainan, began to consider seriously securing the Communists' cooperation.

For the Hainan Communists, their eagerness for forging a coalition with the GMD also grew as time went by. In fact, they were confronted by grave financial difficulties, which sprang from the Party's termination of its militant policy against the landlord and capitalist classes in mid-1937.¹⁸ Although this resolution was deemed necessary to show the Communists' sincerity for the United Front, it was disastrous for the Hainan Party because the Party had drawn its revenue primarily from confiscating the properties of landlords and kidnapping capitalists for ransom since the destruction of its soviet bases. At first, the Hainan Communists tried to solve the problem by soliciting contributions. However, while ordinary peasants were too poor to give, the landlords and the rich, who had been frightened by the Party's former radical agrarian reforms, showed no sympathy

¹⁷ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 182; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" [A report by Li Min concerning the situation in Hainan] (10 April 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 95.

¹⁸ Cf. "Zhongyang guanyu nanfang ge youjiqu yu gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre concerning the work in various guerrilla zones in the south] (1 August 1937), *ZZWX*, v. 11, 300.

for these Communists-turned-patriots. There were sporadic subsidies from the Southern Working Committee; but they were not substantial enough to keep the Hainan Party going, which claimed an active membership of a few hundred at that time. In the end, the Hainan Party had to adopt the policy of “professionalisation” (*zhiyehua*). It meant ejecting Party members, who were not wanted by the GMD police, to find their own jobs so that they could support themselves rather than living off the Party.¹⁹ Notwithstanding that it lightened the Party’s burden, such a policy ran the risk of relaxing Party life and discipline in the long run, ultimately loosening the bond between the Party and its followers.

Having no other better alternatives, a majority of the Communist leaders in Hainan looked upon the reorganisation of the Red Army as the one remaining solution primarily because the GMD promised them a monthly stipend. Due to this desperate need for ready cash, the Hainan Special Committee acceded to the GMD’s terms in the agreement worked out in late 1938; namely, that the GMD could appoint three of its officials as Feng Baiju’s assistants in the subsequently reorganised Communist guerrilla army. While the responsibilities of these “assistants” were not all too clear (probably one of them was the appropriation of government funds), they undoubtedly planned to keep a watchful eye on the Communists. When the Guangdong Party leaders were informed of this concession of the Hainan Special Committee, they denounced it as “unnecessary” and “rightist.” They immediately sent a telegram to Hainan to try to overrule the term, but the telegram was intercepted by the GMD. A delegate was then despatched to Hainan to deliver the decision of the Guangdong Party. However, before he arrived, the agreement had been signed.²⁰

On 5 December 1938, the reorganised Hainan Red Army, now known as the Independent Corps of the Fourteen District of the Guangdong People’s Anti-Japanese Self-Protection Regiment (hereafter Independent Corps), was assembled in the town of Yunlong of the Qiongzhan County for General Wang Yi’s inspection. Over ten thousand people were said to have attended the parade, bringing with them food and other things

¹⁹ “Liao Chengzhi, Liang Guang gei Zhongyang bing zhuan Wenbin de baogao” [A report from Liao Chengzhi and Liang Guang to the Party Centre and Wenbin] (20 November 1938), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 265; “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei gei nanwei de zonghe baogao” (23 July 1937), 18-20; Li Min, “Qiongyadang de douzheng guocheng jianlue shiji (zhailu)” [A brief record of the process of struggle of the Hainan Party], *QGGCSSX*, v. 1, 65; Wang Liqi, et. al., 81-2, 158-9.

²⁰ “Guangdong gongzuo baogao” (29 January 1939), 367-8; “Guanyu Qiongya kangri youji douzheng de yizu dianbao” [A series of radio messages concerning the guerrilla struggle in Hainan] (December 1938 to September 1939), *Liao Chengzhi wenji*, v. 1, 55; Feng Baiju, “Guanyu wocanjia geming,” 430-1; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 172-3, 178; *Hongqi budao*, 224; *QZS*, 96, 98.

for the Communists. According to the agreement with the government, the Independent Corps would consist of three hundred men who were granted, in addition to weaponry and ammunition, a monthly stipend, reaching eight thousand *yuan* by August 1939. Even though the size of the Corps was tiny, the even smaller Red Army remnants alone (numbering only sixty or so) was not able to swell its rank. To overcome this severe problem, the Hainan Party had to launch secretly an internal mobilisation campaign. Communist accounts boast that in just a month, the remaining quotas were met by recruits sent from the Party branches in various counties. These new fighters underwent intense political and military training for about two months and went into actual combat when the Japanese started invading Hainan in February 1939.²¹

III. The Political United Front in Hainan

In Hainan, the first half of the year 1939 was marked by a genuine unity and intimate cooperation between the GMD and CCP. As on the Guangdong mainland, the concern for survival had pushed the GMD towards greater political tolerance. This was even more true in Hainan where the GMD military position was particularly weak. Thus Wang Yi, said the Communists, had become very “progressive.” Aside from setting free political criminals, Wang displayed his sincerity of the United Front in two ways. First, on the suggestion of the Party, Wang established the Department for Party and Political Affairs, which was responsible for carrying out mass propaganda and political education for all anti-Japanese forces in Hainan. Four senior cadres of the Hainan Party, Wang Yaxi, Wang Jun, Liu Qiuju and Han Qinghua, were invited to serve in it. Under the direction of this department, an organisation known as the Mobilisation Committee for the Defence of Hainan was set up in different counties and districts to undertake the actual work of popular mobilisation. Again, Communist members were said to have participated actively in it. Secondly, Wang gave his consent to the expansion of Feng Baiju’s force. The war had dislocated a large number of young people from the cities who were attracted by the Communists’ nationalist appeals and joined Feng’s Independent Corps. By mid-1939, the Independent Corps had grown to more than four times its original size, consisting of three battalions and one special service unit. As a result of this expansion, more arms and supplies were needed; and they were granted by Wang Yi. In addition, Wang allowed the Communist guerrillas to seek public donations in the name of the

²¹ Feng Baiju, “Guanyu wocanjia geming,” 431; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 175-80; “Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao” (10 April 1940), 96; *QZS*, 97-9.

GMD government to supplement their deficit, which included the requisition of firearms from villagers.²²

By the summer of 1939, a general optimism prevailed among the Communists about the future of the GMD-CCP cooperation in Hainan. Glimpses of this optimism could be found in an article published in a Hong Kong newspaper on 23 August. It was an interview with Fu Sizhi, an underground Communist, who was also a member of the Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-going Service Regiment (hereafter Hainan Service Regiment). Having just been to Hainan to deliver the aid donated by overseas Chinese communities to the local resistance forces, Fu was asked by the reporter to comment on the United Front in Hainan. His answer obviously embodied many exaggerations but may well indicate the confidence of the Hainan Communists about Wang Yi's faithful adherence to the United Front. As Fu said:

Before the enemy had landed on Hainan, the United Front had been developed slowly since both sides were suspicious of each other and preferred to wait and see. It was only after the Japanese had attacked our home and taught us a lesson by their merciless guns and bombers that we woke up and realised who was the real enemy. We could then join together to resist the enemy and save our home. The relationship between Commander Wang and Captain Feng had become much more harmonious than before, and there was close cooperation in their work. Under their joint leadership, the United Front has been expanding and is consolidating day by day in Hainan Island.²³

This optimistic view was soon proved contrary to fact. By that time (August of 1939), the anti-Communist undercurrent had been gathering momentum in Guangdong due to the pressure and intervention from Chongqing. In Hainan, the Party's relationship with the local GMD deteriorated rapidly following the arrival of Wu Daonan. Wu was appointed the Special Inspector (*ducha zhuan yuan*) to Hainan in the summer of 1939 to implement the GMD's anti-Communist policies. His arrival is said to have triggered a power struggle between him and Wang Yi. In the first round, Wang turned out to be the

²² "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 81; "Guangdong gongzuo baogao zhailu ji tanhua jilu" (11 June 1940), 307; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 96-7; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" [A report by Li Jiming on the situation of the resistance war in Hainan] (10 April 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 65-6; "Zhang, Liao xiang nanju baogao Qiongya xingkuang" [A report by Zhang Wenbin and Liao Chengzhi to the Southern Bureau about the situation in Hainan] (April 1939), *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 55; Zeng Sansheng, "Hainan kangzhan danggong gaikuang" [An overview of party work in Hainan during the resistance war], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 149; Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 435-6; *Hongqi budao*, 234-7; *QZS*, 101-4.

²³ "Fuchenzhong de Hainandao," [Hainan between rise and fall], *Xingdao ribao* [*Xingdao Daily*], 23 August 1939; reprinted under the title "Qiongya huixiang fumutuan daibiao Fu Sizhijiu Qiongya kangzhan wenti dui jiuwang jizhe Cai Lei tanhua jilu" [A record of the talk between the salvation reporter Cai Lei and Fu Sizhi, the representative of the Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment, on the question of resistance war in Hainan], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 57-61. The quote is from pp. 58-9.

loser because he lacked both personal prestige and influential allies in the Guangdong government.²⁴ He was soon outwitted by Wu, who took over his control of the Hainan GMD. Soon afterwards, Wu nullified Wang's pro-Communist measures and replaced them by harsh ones which aimed to contain and ultimately destroy the Party.

Wu's first move was to discharge officials and county magistrates who sympathised with the Communists on the pretext of setting the war-torn government in order. Next, he dissolved the Department for Political and Party Works together with its substructure and suppressed all kinds of mass organisations. Furthermore, to curb the expansion of Feng's Independent Corps, Wu reduced their monthly stipend from eight thousand *yuan* in mid-1939 to a thousand by the end of the year. Various excuses were used to withhold the supplies of ammunitions and war materials to the Communist guerrillas. Wu even ordered Feng to cut the rank of his force back to the number prescribed in the original agreement in 1938 but met with fierce objection from the latter. Realising that Feng relied heavily on aid donated by overseas Chinese, Wu wrote on behalf of the GMD government to the Chinese communities abroad denouncing Feng's troops as bandits who forged false reports of their victory over the Japanese and requiring these communities to terminate their support for the Communists. Finally, Wu prepared for the ultimate military showdown with the Communists. On the one hand, he brought from the mainland superior firearms to enhance the equipment of the government army, especially the Seventh Peace Preservation Regiment (*baogituan*), which was under the command of his close associates Li Chunnong and Lin Huicai. On the other hand, Wu appropriated extra funds for extensive co-optations of bandit groups to enlarge the size of the GMD army. As his anti-Communist scheme gradually turned from secret to overt, Wu began preaching openly that "one must suppress the Communists before fighting the Japanese."²⁵

²⁴ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei Nanfangju bing Zhongyang shujichu baogao" [A report by the Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Southern Bureau and the Secretariat of the Party Centre] (12 February 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 20; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 68; *Hongqi budao*, 271-2.

²⁵ "Liao zhi Zhongyangju Nanfangju bingzhuan Yueshengwei dian" [Radio message from Liao Chengzhi to the Central Bureau, Southern Bureau and the Guangdong Provincial Committee] (3 July 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 36, 387; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei nanwei bing Zhongyang shujichu baogao" [A report by the Guangdong Provincial Committee to the Southern Committee and the Secretariat of the Party Centre] (13 January 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 15; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei Nanfangju bing Zhongyang shujichu baogao" (12 February 1940), 20; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 95; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 182; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 66-7, 69-70, 80; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 119; Lin Huicai, "Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi" [Reminiscences on Guomindang's anti-Communist civil war in Hainan], *GWZ*, v. 11

When examining the Hainan Party and the United Front during the period, one again encounters charges against Wang Ming's political line for hindering the advancement of the Communist movement. In his memoir, Feng Baiju cited an incident to prove that the Hainan Special Committee was plagued by Wang Ming's "capitulationism." Duplicating what had taken place elsewhere, the initial panic from the Japanese invasion created some sort of "spontaneous mobilisation" in Hainan. Communal defence forces mushroomed in the countryside for protection against outside intrusion - whether from the Japanese or marauding bandit gangs. Some of these forces, lacking skill in organisation and training, looked to the Independent Corps for assistance. Allegedly, in accord with the slogan "everything through the United Front, everything subordinate to the United Front," the Hainan Special Committee turned down these requests for fear of provoking the GMD. Feng held Lin Liming responsible for such the decision because it was Lin instead of himself who was the Party secretary at that time.²⁶

Feng's allusion to the connection between the Wang Ming Line and Lin Liming perhaps stemmed from his personal animosity. From Feng's point of view, Lin had "usurped" his position of Party secretary in the Hainan Special Committee, a post which Feng had assumed since 1929. The two men were known to engage in "quarrels over emotional matters," and each criticised the other for being incapable of leading the Hainan Party.²⁷ Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the discord between Feng and Lin went beyond merely lust for power to conflicting views on the relationship with the GMD.

When Wu Daonan began to suppress popular mobilisation, the Hainan Party resorted to persuasion, education and public opinion to counteract his hostile measures. However, its actions were useless to reverse the situation as Wu continued to harden his stand towards the Communists. A view then arose inside the Hainan Party that Hainan would be the first place in the country where the United Front split. Since military confrontation with the GMD would come sooner or later, in order to seize the advantage of the situation, the Communists should strike first and destroy the die-hards' forces. The feasibility of this plan was argued by the fact that the total strength of the Independent

(December 1963), 58-9; Zeng Sansheng, "Hainan kangzhan danggong gaikuang," 149; *Hongqi budao*, 271-3; Lin Ying, *Qiongya gudaoshang de douzheng*, 19.

²⁶ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 434-5.

²⁷ "Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (29 January 1939), 369; "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei nanwei bing Zhongyang shujichu baogao" (13 January 1940), 16; "Zhang, Liao xiang nanju baogao Qiongya xingkuang" (April 1939), 55.

Corps roughly matched the regular GMD army in Hainan (of just over 1,500 by the end of 1939). One fatal blow on the latter would give the Party swift seizure of local political control. Even if this aggressive plan was not conceived by Feng Baiju, he was almost certainly its major proponent, and he seemed to attract quite a large body of followers within the Hainan Party. Consequently, many cadres became negative or pessimistic about the prospect of restoring the mutual collaboration with the GMD and concentrated on preparing themselves militarily for the final break up. The tension was finally contained because of Lin Liming's opposition and intervention from the Guangdong Provincial Committee. The Guangdong Party leaders particularly emphasised that the Independent Corps must fight the GMD only in self-defence and any attacks without provocation were prohibited.²⁸

The above case shows that there was a real dispute over the United Front within the Hainan Party. While Lin Liming stood for a conciliatory approach, Feng Baiju opted for an aggressive one. In the previous chapters, the practice of interpreting the conflict within the Guangdong Party over the United Front as a microcosm of the national struggle between Mao Zedong and Wang Ming has already been refuted. Prior to 1940, the Guangdong Provincial Committee treated Hainan no differently from other subregions in the province and applied to it a policy which was consistent with that on the Guangdong mainland. In other words, the accommodative United Front that Lin Liming insisted upon was simply an extension of the provincial policy rather than his own creation. In fact, the provincial Party leaders had criticised the Hainan cadres of being incapable of implementing the united-front policy correctly, for they had been "living in the mountains for too long" and failed to tune themselves in to the rapid political change in China. The leaders believed that even though the war had made the cooperation of all political circles and social classes inside China mandatory, the minds of the Hainan cadres remained trapped in the experiences of armed insurrection and class warfare. For instance, until late 1937, they were still advocating a united-front policy which excluded the capitalists.²⁹ Plausibly because of that position, the Southern Working Committee

²⁸ "Xiaoliao gei Zhongyang de baogao" [A report by Liao Chengzhi to the Party Centre] (14 January 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 17; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 182-3; "Guangdong gongzuo baogao zhailu ji tanhua jilu" [Records of talks and excerpts of reports on work in Guangdong] (11 June 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 37, 306; "Zhonggong Qiongya teweì dibaci kuoda huiyi jilu" [Records of the Eighth Extended Meeting of the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee] (December 1939), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 51; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 67-8, 74; cf. "Lin Ping zhi Enlai bing Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from Lin Ping to Zhou Enlai and the Party Centre] (31 January 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 351.

²⁹ "Zhonggong nanfang gongzuo weiyuanhui gei Qiongya teweì zhishixin" (26 November 1937), 54-5, 58.

appointed Lin Liming to take over Feng's post in the Hainan Special Committee to remedy the situation. This method of reorganising the local structure had been employed frequently in the prewar period by the Guangdong provincial leadership to keep its subordinates in Hainan in line with the Party's resolutions, and here, this act reflected a continuity.

For Feng Baiju, his year-long civil strife with the GMD presumably accounted for his minimal faith in the United Front. More importantly, in contrast to the Guangdong Party leaders whose view of the whole province formulated policy, Feng based his judgement solely on the military environment in Hainan. Feng's belief of a more drastic approach for the development of the Communist movement was understandable because the GMD was weak in Hainan. He did not suffer the pressure as his superiors did on the Guangdong mainland, who were in close touch with the more powerful GMD military and had to follow a more conciliatory course. Eventually, the conflicting stances between the parties in Guangdong and Hainan over the United Front with the GMD was resolved by the Party Centre. It reckoned that both sides' concerns were sensible and decided that each should have its own approach. This brings the study to the investigation of Yan'an's design for the Hainan Communists.

IV. Yan'an and Hainan

It is necessary to examine the relations between Yan'an and Hainan by first asking how their communication was handled. The answer to this question, as shown later, had a significant bearing on the development of the Hainan Communist movement. As a subregional branch of the Guangdong Party, the Hainan Party was not supposed to have direct communication with the Party Centre but to take its orders as mediated through the Guangdong Provincial Committee. This was the practice in the prewar period and remained so during the early years of the war. After linking up with the Guangdong Party in 1937, the Hainan Communists relied on the "underground communication lines" (*dixia jiaotongxian*) to maintain contact with the Guangdong mainland. These communication lines were formed by a number of depots established in northern Hainan, the Leizhou Peninsular (Guangzhou Bay) and Hong Kong, which were usually operated under the disguise of a small business. Between these depots, Party couriers or "communication

cadres" (*jiaotongyuan*) were assigned to transfer intelligence, key personnel, money and other materials to and from Hainan.³⁰

To say that Hong Kong assumed a very crucial role in this underground network can hardly be an exaggeration. First and foremost, Hong Kong was the only link left between Hainan and the overseas communities after the fall of Haikou. It was a very important base for rallying overseas aid for the Hainan resistance, and a large portion of this aid was transmitted first to Hong Kong before being smuggled it into the island. On this aspect, more will be said in the next section. Moreover, during the early stage, it was Liao Chengzhi who was responsible for supervising the Hainan Communist movement on behalf of the Guangdong Provincial Committee. In charge also of the Eighth Route Army Office in Hong Kong, Liao had access to a clandestine radio station, which he used to keep Yan'an informed of the latest developments in Hainan.³¹ In other words, through Hong Kong, an indirect communication link between Hainan and Yan'an was initially maintained. For the interest of comparison, the same pattern can be observed in the East River Base Area. Before the local guerrillas had their own radio in 1942, contacts with the Party Centre had to be transmitted via Hong Kong. Directives from Yan'an were radioed first to Hong Kong and then despatched to the guerrilla base by Party couriers. The same process would be reversed for any requests or reports to be sent from the East River Base Area to the Party Centre.³² This pattern of communication served the Hainan Party's basic needs until the fall of the Hainan to Japan.

After their occupation of Hainan, the Japanese imposed a sea blockade which made illicit traffic between the island and the outside world extremely dangerous. As one can imagine, Party couriers encountered great risks since they had to travel frequently to keep the two levels of the Party, those on the mainland and in Hainan, in close touch with

³⁰ "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 79; Lin Shitang, "Yanfeng haibian jiaotongzhan" [The communication depot on the coast of Yanfeng], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 49-51; Zheng Fang, "Baotashan - Wuzhishan yixianqian" [Precious tower hill - the radio communication in Wuzhi Mountain], *QX*, v. 9 (October 1982), 69-70; Fu Yinghua, "Lingao Changgong haiyunzhan jiqi dixia jiaotongxian" [The sea depot in Changgong of Lingao and its underground communication line], *QX*, v. 14 (February 1985), 129-32; "Gaishu" [Overview], and Xu Ji, "Qiongya teweizai Guangzhouwan de jiaotong" [The communication work of the Hainan Special Committee in Guangzhou Bay], *QX*, v. 20 (December 1944), 1-2, 49-56.

³¹ "Wu Youheng guanyu Yuedongnan teweizai gongzuo gei Zhongyang de baogao" (13 January 1941), 126; cf. "Guanyu Qiongya kangri youji douzheng de yizu dianbao" (December 1938 to September 1939), 55-60.

³² Li Yizhuang, "'Yan'an, Yan'an, wo shi Dongjiang!' - ji zhandou zai dihou de Dongjiang zongdui diantai" ["Yan'an, Yan'an, I am the East River!" - Reminiscences of the fight of the East River Column's radio station behind the enemy lines], *Geming wenwu* [The literature and history of the revolution], no. 4 (1979), 17-21; Lin Qing, "Shiernian mimidiantai tongxun douzheng de huiyi" [The twelve-year struggle of clandestine radio communication], *GDZ*, v. 5, 181-8.

each other. Many of them were caught and killed by the enemy. As a result, notwithstanding examples of successful smuggling through enemy patrols, the whole process of communication was seriously retarded.³³ Lin Liming complained in April 1940 that, prior to the use of radio, it usually took half to more than a month for a piece of news from outside to reach Hainan.³⁴ The situation therefore required the Hainan Party to have its own radio(s) if it wanted to receive timely instructions from above.

The setting up of a radio was not as simple as one may have thought. Wireless communication equipment was strategically sensitive in wartime and strict control had been imposed on its use and circulation by both the Japanese and the GMD. Due to this restriction, the Hainan Communists had to ask for help from Hong Kong. In the summer of 1939, Liao Chengzhi brought for the Hainan Party a 15 Watt radio that used a hand roller to generate electricity. Party couriers had to dismember it into twelve parts before smuggling it into Hainan. Although the machine arrived safely, radio connection with Yan'an still could not be made because the Hainan cadres lacked the necessary information such as radio frequency, the secret code and contact time. It took them a few months to wait for the information to be brought to Hainan by a radio worker especially despatched from the Eighth Route Army Office in Shaoguan. Still, some technical problems continued to inhibit the functioning of the radio and the first signal from Yan'an was not received until January 1940.³⁵

To increase the efficiency of communication, Yan'an ordered in January 1940 that Hainan should have at least three radios, and one of them would be designated for communicating with the Party Centre.³⁶ Therefore, on Yan'an's instruction, Liao Chengzhi bought two more radios for the Hainan Party from Hong Kong. One of these radios was of greater capacity³⁷ and was run by gasoline. Feng Baiju recalled in his memoirs that Yan'an desired this larger radio to be used for propagating the Communist

³³ Interview with Chen Qingshan, 11 November 1998, Guangzhou; cf. "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 183; Xu Ji, "Qiongya tewei zai Guangzhouwan de jiaotong" [The communication work of the Hainan Special Committee in Guangzhou Bay], *QX*, v. 20 (December 1994), 56. In the same volume, a list of martyrs who died for the Party's communication work is presented in pp. 330-432. Although the list does not confine itself to the Anti-Japanese War period, nor did all who were being listed work in external traffic (between the island and the mainland), it does show some idea of the tremendous danger involved in the job of communication.

³⁴ "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 83.

³⁵ Zheng Fang, 70-1; Xu Ji, 55; Wang Lugui, "Diyibu diantai shilue" [About the first radio] and Tang Yidi, "Qiongya zongdui diantai yu Yan'an diyici lianluo de qingkuang" [The first radio contact between the Hainan Column and Yan'an], *QX*, v. 20 (December 1994), 182-7.

³⁶ "Zhongyang guanyu Qiongya gongzuo gei Yuewei de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre to the Guangdong Provincial Committee concerning the work in Hainan] (26 January 1940), *XXWZ*, v. 12, 246.

³⁷ Some sources say 75 Watt while others say 200 Watt.

resistance to the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Perhaps because this large radio was a very sophisticated machine, when it was transported to the guerrilla base in Meihe (see below), no body knew how to operate it. It had to be left aside for two months until special radio operators arrived from Yan'an to get it working.³⁸ Despite such difficulties, the Hainan Party took the radio work seriously. Feng said no one else in the Party knew the location of the radios aside from the few Party leaders and the radio operators. Every message had to be signed by him personally before transmitting. Feng even required senior radio operators to live with him, probably to ensure their personal safety and prevent any leak of secret information.³⁹

The preceding discussion highlights the difficulties that confronted the Party on the mainland in maintaining contact with its Hainan subordinates. It is true that communication problems were always present in a movement so diverse as the Communist revolution. Nevertheless, it seemed that they were particularly acute for Hainan, which was, geographically and historically speaking, never well integrated with China. The introduction of radio communication to Hainan by the Yan'an leaders, who were far away in the north, was crucially significant in overcoming the topographical barrier and better coordinate the Communist movement in the island with that on the mainland. However, in so doing, they had altered the original chain of command. Hainan was now placed under the "dual supervision" (*shuangchong lingdao*) of the Party Centre and the Guangdong Provincial Committee,⁴⁰ and could have direct contact with both of them. Theoretically, the Party Centre would be responsible for devising general policy for Hainan whereas the Guangdong Provincial Committee would take care of its concrete implementation. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine whether or not this division could work so neatly because communication between Hainan and the mainland broke down in mid-1941. Nonetheless, the system provided an opportunity for the Hainan Party to appeal directly to the Party Centre when it disagreed with the instruction of the Provincial Committee. This did happen once after the war on the critical issue of whether the Independent Corps should stay in Hainan or retreat elsewhere. The petition to the Party Centre ultimately changed the course of revolutionary movement in Hainan (see next chapter).

³⁸ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 437; Zheng Fang, 72.

³⁹ Feng Baiju, *ibid.*, 437.

⁴⁰ Interview with Chen Qingshan.

The “dual supervision” of Hainan, which found no parallel in the East River Base Area,⁴¹ stemmed from Yan’an’s desire to execute a “dual policy” in Guangdong. As mentioned earlier, the Guangdong Party leaders conceived no separate revolutionary strategy for Hainan and applied their accommodative united-front approach to the island. Nevertheless, one should be reminded that there were some among the provincial leaders, notably Liang Guang and Liao Chengzhi, who wanted to see a more confrontational policy in Guangdong. As early as in December 1938, Liao had suggested to the Party Centre the possibility of rapid Communist expansion in Hainan because of the weak GMD presence in the island. He also persuaded Yan’an to send some native cadres back to assist in the development of the local guerrilla movement.⁴² The argument continued that Yan’an refrained from taking bold measures in the East River valley until the last stage of the war. It did so because the restricted enemy occupation there forestalled the implementation of the Maoist version of base development. However, the situation was different in Hainan. By the end of 1939, the whole island had basically fallen to the Japanese. Moreover, all signs indicated that the enemy intended to stay there for a long time.

Probably after a careful consideration of the political developments in Hainan, Yan’an issued a directive on 26 January 1940 ordering the Guangdong Provincial Committee to adopt a hard-line approach to the Hainan Communist movement. The directive contended that the Guangdong leaders had to differentiate their “work style” for Hainan from that for the mainland. While they might proceed cautiously on the Guangdong mainland, they should attempt popular mobilisation “with a free hand” (*fangshou degan*) in Hainan.⁴³ In this way, Yan’an had overruled some of the more conservative instructions that the Provincial Committee had given to the Hainan Party. For instance, in the face of the GMD’s hostility, the Hainan Party was told to halt its expansion and concentrate on consolidating its organisations. The directive of 26 January, however, required that Feng Baiju and the Hainan Special Committee greatly develop the Party, expand the armed force and foster all kinds of mass movement. The

⁴¹ Until the end of the war, the East River Column was under the sole supervision of the Guangdong Party. However, in practical terms, the difference might not be so obvious as it was implied in the case of Hainan because, from 1943 onwards, the leadership of the Guangdong Party overlapped largely with that of the East River Column. See *Zuzhishi ziliao*, v. 1, 302-3, 310-1.

⁴² “Guanyu Qiongya kangri youji douzheng de yizu dianbao” (December 1938 to September 1939), 55-6; “Dong, Xijiang wuzhuang budui qingkuang” [Situation of the military forces in the East and West Rivers] (24 December 1938), *Liao Chengzhi wenji*, v. 1, 63.

⁴³ “Zhongyang guanyu Qiongya gongzuo gei Yuewei de zhishi” (26 January 1940), 245-6.

Hainan Communists should try to seize the administration of every county in defiance of the restriction and opposition from the GMD so that eventually they could expel all "traitors and reactionaries" from Hainan and, together with the progressive elements, lead the whole island in anti-Japanese resistance. This prospect, stressed the directive, was definitely possible.⁴⁴

Obviously, Yan'an held a grand vision for the Communist movement in Hainan that was not shared by the Guangdong Party. Far from treating it as simply a subordinate component of Guangdong, Yan'an viewed Hainan as a key for future Communist expansion not only in Guangdong but in the whole of South China. Hainan had to be developed into a base which would serve the Party in three ways: to rally support from the several million overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia, to extend Communist influence in South China and to be a breeding ground for Party cadres in the region. The first one certainly meant to take advantage of the island's traditional network with overseas emigrants in Southeast Asia. For the second objective to be achieved, Yan'an pointed out that the present size of Feng's Independent Corps was far from adequate. It had to expand to at least ten thousand men within a year. The third objective would be accomplished by the establishment of an elaborate cadre training school, which could take as many as three thousand students at one time.⁴⁵

In short, the directive of 26 January had amended the united-front strategy of the Guangdong Party. However, it is not a rectification of "Wang Ming's capitulationism," for Yan'an had exercised discrimination in urging vigorous Communist expansion in Guangdong. It was confined to Hainan alone, and Yan'an raised no objection to the Guangdong Party's cautious and conciliatory stance on the mainland. Nevertheless, Yan'an's directive could be read as an indirect criticism of the Guangdong Party for its ineptitude to discern the different political situations in Hainan and on the mainland and apply to them appropriate strategies accordingly. In a reply to Yan'an, while pledging on behalf of the Guangdong Provincial Committee full support of the Party Centre's decision, Zhang Wenbin shifted the blame to the Hainan Party probably for face saving reasons. Rather than acknowledging that the conciliatory stance of the Hainan Party was the extension of that on the mainland, he attributed it to the Hainan local cadres' overreliance on the GMD's financial subsidies and their lack of vision of seizing the whole island. He also cited other reasons to explain the underdevelopment of the Hainan

⁴⁴ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 245-6.

guerrilla movement. They included the inexperience of cadres in establishing an anti-Japanese government and leading large-scale warfare, the absence of a long-term strategy and the difficulty of handling communications between the Hainan Party and the Guangdong Provincial Committee.⁴⁶

It is interesting to compare Zhang's account with the petition submitted to the Party Centre by Gu Dacun in July 1940. Chapter 2 has already noted how frustrated Gu was over Zhang's attitude towards the United Front. Zhang turned down Gu's repeated plea for guerrilla work but instead appointed him to head the Party's United Front Department. Gu left his post for Yan'an in the spring of 1939. In July 1940 he had passed through Central China and had a chance to converse with Liu Shaoqi (alias Wu Fu). Liu, the principal proponent of the Maoist version of Communist expansion in Central China, showed natural sympathy with Gu's frustration. The two men then jointly petitioned Yan'an and pressed for building Hainan into a major Communist base in South China in view of the Party's advantageous position there: Gu, specifically, asked the Party Centre to rectify the accommodating policy of the Guangdong Provincial Committee. For Gu, the Guangdong Party leaders had abstained from army expansion and base construction because of the unjustified fear of stirring up international dispute and creating "friction" with the Guangdong GMD, which might inhibit its progressive tendency.⁴⁷

While Yan'an had already resolved to pursue a hard-line policy in Hainan, the petition of Gu and Liu probably prompted it to send to Hainan, alongside some radio operators, a number of military cadres and arms technicians in late summer or early autumn of 1940. These men were to assist the Hainan Party to promote its base building. Among the military cadres sent to Hainan was one called Zhuang Tian, who later became the Deputy Commander of the Independent Corps. He was charged by Yan'an with delivering two instructions to the Hainan Party. The first was the restatement of the policy of vigorous Party expansion. According to Feng Baiju, Zhuang told him that the Party Centre did not worry about it if the United Front in Hainan turned "a bit more red" (*hongyidian*). Since Hainan was an island which stood alone, there was no need to fear

⁴⁶ "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (7 March 1940), 81-3, 129; "Zhang Wenbin guanyu Guangdong gongzuo baogao" (23 April 1940), 183-4.

⁴⁷ "Gu Dacun Wu Youheng gei Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from Gu Dacun and Wu Youheng to the Party Centre] (4 July 1940); cf. "Wu Fu Gu Dacun zhi Zhongyang shujichu dian" [Radio message from Wu Fu and Gu Dacun to the Secretariat of the Party Centre] (28 June 1940), both are in *GGLWH*, v. 40, 125-8.

that the aggressive moves of the Party would create political repercussions elsewhere.⁴⁸ Secondly, on Mao Zedong's personal instruction, Feng was reinstated as the secretary of the Hainan Special Committee, with Lin Liming as his assistant.⁴⁹ The reason behind such an arrangement was not difficult to guess. If Lin was originally appointed to execute the conciliatory line of the Guangdong Party, his replacement by Feng was a necessary step to instate Yan'an's "dual policy" concerning Hainan. Feng's years long experience of leading the Communist armed struggle with the GMD in Hainan plausibly convinced Mao that he, rather than Lin, was more capable in carrying out the Party Centre's aspiration of conquering the whole of Hainan. Nevertheless, Mao did not dismiss Lin from the Hainan Special Committee. Probably, Mao thought that Lin's presence was useful in balancing any "leftist excesses" which might arise in the Hainan Party so that the Communist movement could be conducted within the framework of "struggle and unity."⁵⁰

V. Towards the Goal of Self-Reliance

During the honeymoon period of the United Front, Wang Yi adhered closely to his agreement with the Communists and remitted regularly money and war supplies to Feng Baiju's Independent Corps. Although the GMD's allowances could not completely cover its expenses, they had greatly alleviated the Hainan Party from its financial problems. Consequently, before late 1939, the question of formulating a long-term fiscal policy, which would lessen the Communists' dependency on the GMD, had never been raised in the Party. Moreover, there was no serious discussion on the establishment of a base area for future development of the Communist guerrilla movement in Hainan. Even Wu Daonan's hostility to the Party did not immediately alert the Hainan cadres of the real urgency of these issues. They still thought that they could rely on Wang Yi's sympathy and petitioned him to resume their monthly stipends.

Unfortunately, when situation continued to worsen towards the end of 1939, the Hainan Party was forced to appeal to the Guangdong Provincial Committee for an increase of its subsidy. However, this request was turned down by the Guangdong Party leaders, who instructed the Hainan cadres to intensify their united-front rhetoric and petition ceaselessly the GMD for resumption of the monthly stipend. In addition, they

⁴⁸ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 438.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Zhuang Tian, *Qiongdào fengyan* [The war in Hainan], (Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1979), 9.

⁵⁰ Cf. the discussion on the Third Extended Meeting (February 1941) in the next chapter.

should try to finance their activities by soliciting contributions from both overseas Chinese and the local population. In short, regarding the raising of revenue, the Hainan Party should learn to rely on its own (*zili gengsheng*).⁵¹

The need for self-reliance was endorsed by Yan'an's directive of 26 January 1940 and continued in effect, being reiterated in another directive delivered directly to the Hainan Party dated 7 November 1940.⁵² Despite the grandiose plan of Yan'an's leaders for Hainan, they did not prepare to back it with funding. Probably because the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region itself was already financially stretched,⁵³ they declared bluntly that no money should be expected from the Party Centre. To compensate, the Yan'an leaders did order the Guangdong Party to assist Hainan by despatching to it a large number of young and competent cadres.⁵⁴ However, Yan'an disagreed with the Guangdong Provincial Committee that the Hainan Party should continue to ask for allowances from the GMD. For the Yan'an leaders, the purpose of self-reliance was to end the economic dependence of Feng Baiju's Independent Corps on the GMD. Being in thrall to the GMD would certainly hinder the growth of the Communist force and ultimately thwart Yan'an's ambition of seizing local power. While the Hainan cadres should seek donations from local people and could ask for contributions from overseas Chinese, they must, asserted Yan'an, depend absolutely on nothing from the GMD.⁵⁵

Prior to the instructions of Yan'an and the Guangdong Provincial Committee, the Hainan Party had already looked to overseas Chinese communities and the local population of Hainan for logistic support. These early attempts were basically *ad hoc* in nature and were meant to supplement rather than replace the GMD's allowances. In mid-1939, the Hainan Party despatched Xie Lisen to Southeast Asia for such fund raising purposes. Xie went first to Hong Kong to see Liao Chengzhi and discuss the matter with him. Benefiting from Liao's extensive overseas networks, Xie's subsequent trip to a number of Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore, was said to have collected forty to fifty thousand dollars.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "Zhonggong Guangdong shengwei gei nanwei bing Zhongyang shujichu baogao" (13 January 1940), 16.

⁵² "Zhongyang guanyu Qiongya gongzuo gei Yuewei de zhishi" (26 January 1940), 245; "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre on the work in Hainan] (7 November 1940), *ZZWX*, v. 12, 560.

⁵³ Cf. Chen, "The Blooming Poppy," 265-71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 245-6.

⁵⁵ "Zhongyang guanyu Qiongya gongzuo gei Yuewei de zhishi" (26 January 1940), 245; cf. "Zhonggong Zhongyang dui Guangdong gongzuo de zhishi" [Instructions from the Party Centre on the work in Guangdong] (11 March 1940), *NDZ*, v. 4, 44.

⁵⁶ "Liao zhi Zhongyangju Nanfangju bing Yuewei dian" (3 July 1939), 387; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 118.

Later in the summer of the same year, Feng Baiju wrote a letter, published in a Hong Kong newspaper, asking for aid from overseas Chinese to the Hainan resistance effort. He described that Hainan was “a lonely island” with limited natural resources and could not produce enough for local consumption even in peace time. Because the problem of material shortage was so severe, the fighting capability of his soldiers was crippled. Also, the lack of medicine had increased immensely the number of casualties. Further, to prepare for the coming cold winter, Feng pleaded for the donations of clothing and cotton blankets for the Independent Corps within the shortest time.⁵⁷ Communist sources state that Feng enjoyed quite a high prestige among overseas Chinese, and this allegedly accounted for the zealous response to his plea. Especially in Singapore, an Association for Assisting Feng (*Fengyuanhui*) was established which contributed money constantly to the Independent Corps.⁵⁸ An article also appeared in *Singapore Daily* (*Xingzhou ribao*) urging the local Chinese populace to react earnestly to Feng’s call by immediately organising all sorts of fund raising and donation campaigns.⁵⁹

It is difficult to estimate the total volume of overseas aid, that is, monetary and other sorts of war supplies, which was given to the Hainan Communists. Wartime unrest had discouraged any contemporary endeavours to document and compile such statistics. Memoirs and similar literature prove of little use because they contain mainly impressionistic accounts. Some figures cited in open Communist publications look impressive. For instance, the total amount of money (in different currencies depending on the place of origin) donated from the Chinese abroad for Hainan was listed as follows: two hundred thousand from Hong Kong, more than three hundred thousand from Singapore, and another several hundred thousand from Vietnam, Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia. In terms of material assistance, tens of thousands of items such as medicine, medical equipment, clothing, blankets, rubber shoes and stationery were said to have been contributed.⁶⁰ However, none of these figures can be verified. Moreover,

⁵⁷ “Feng Baiju zhihan haiwei qiaobao baogao qiongzhan bing qingyuanzhu” [Feng Baiju’s letter to the overseas Chinese reporting the war in Hainan and asking for assistance] (August 1939), originally published in *Gongshang ribao* [*Industrial and Commercial Daily*], reprinted in *GGLWH*, v. 40, 41-4. In some other compilations of Party documents, a later date (9 November 1939) was suggested, but the content of the document seems to favour the earlier one.

⁵⁸ “Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao” (10 April 1940), 79; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 206.

⁵⁹ Ke Chuan, “Women ying jieshou Qionggiao Zonghui ji Feng zongduizhang zhi fuyuwei nanbao jiangshi quanmu hanyi” [We should respond to the call from the Association of Hainan’s Overseas Chinese and Chief Captain Feng and solicit contributions of winter clothing for the soldiers and refugees in Hainan] (December 1939), originally published in *Xingzhou ribao*, reprinted in *GGLWH*, v. 40, 45-6.

⁶⁰ *Hongqi budao*, 263.

when these data are presented, they are vaguely lumped into the category of “aid from overseas Chinese to the Hainan resistance movement,” which might or might not go totally into the hands of the Communists. Notwithstanding these words of caution, the significance of overseas support to the Hainan Communist movement cannot be dismissed. According to the reports submitted by Lin Liming and Li Min to the Party Centre during their sojourn in Yan’an in the spring of 1940, overseas donations amounted to six thousand dollars a month, covering more than half of the monthly expenses of the Independent Corps.⁶¹

Like the East River region, Hainan is the native land of many Chinese living abroad, and many of them took their own initiatives to organise support for the island’s resistance. During the summer of 1938, when the Japanese invasion of Guangdong and Hainan looked increasingly imminent, a group of seamen and progressive youth of Hainan origins in Hong Kong initiated the Hainan’s Anti-Japanese Ambulance Corps. This organisation drew its inspiration from the call of the China Defence League to send medical units to the Japanese-occupied areas all over the country to carry out relief and nursing work. Soon after its formation, the Ambulance Corps was placed under the auspices of the Association of Hainan Natives and the Association of Hainan Merchants. Classes were held to train the members in basic medical knowledge and first-aid. The membership of the Ambulance Corps grew as more and more overseas Hainan natives went to Hong Kong and prepared to serve the resistance cause in their homeland. In late 1938, the Ambulance Corps renamed itself the Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-going Service Regiment. At this juncture, a number of leading Chinese from various overseas Hainanese communities, shocked by the fall of Guangzhou, met in Hong Kong and devised plans to assist war preparations in Hainan. They resolved to establish the United Association of Hainan’s Overseas Chinese. Based in Hong Kong, this association assumed the role of directing and coordinating anti-Japanese resistance efforts of all overseas Hainanese communities. It also took charge of the Hainan Service Regiment in Hong Kong while encouraging the founding of such similar voluntary groups in other Southeast Asian countries.⁶²

⁶¹ “Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao” (10 April 1940), 79-80; “Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao” (10 April 1940), 117-8.

⁶² Chen Kegong, “Qionqiao yu Qionqiao huixiang fuwutuan” [Hainan’s Overseas Chinese and Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment], *Hainan wenshi ziliao*, v. 2 (April 1990), 152-4; Fu Sizhi, “Qiongya huaqiao huixiang fuwutuan de huiyi” [Reminiscences on the Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment], Fan Shiru, “Qiongya huaqiao huixiang fuwutuan de zujian jiqi kangri huodong” [The organisation of the Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment and its anti-

The Japanese invasion of Haikou in February 1939 prompted the Hainan Service Regiment in Hong Kong to act immediately. Its members were divided into three bands. The first one, consisting of thirty-two people, embarked in March and went to an island off the Leizhou Peninsular. They waited there for more than two weeks before sailing to northern Wenchang on Hainan by a small junk. The remainder in Hong Kong followed the same smuggling route and also arrived in Hainan safely. Members of the other service regiments in Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam also made their way to Hainan by other routes. The majority of them were able to reach their destination, but some were killed by the Japanese during their journey at sea. By the autumn of 1939, four service regiments, composed of more than 240 people, had arrived on Hainan. In the beginning, they operated side by side with each other and remained organisationally separate. Soon, however, apparently out of the need for better coordination, they voted to merge into one Chief Regiment (*zongtuan*) in June 1940, with Fu Ke elected as the director.⁶³

The Hainan Service Regiment's contributions to Hainan Communist resistance lay in two main areas. The first was the propagation of the resistance cause. Since the majority of its members were educated, they could handle literary propaganda for the Hainan Party. This was important because the composition of the Hainan Party was predominantly of illiterate peasants. Tracts, leaflets, slogans and wall posters were composed to promote the anti-Japanese cause among the petty intellectuals in villages. Other methods such as free talks, dramas and concerts were performed for the general populace. Secondly, the Service Regiment engaged extensively in medical relief since its members were all trained in first-aids and nursing skills. Besides this, the members also brought with them modern medical equipment and western medicine, which were far more effective in curing diseases and wounds than the native herbs used by the local population. Furthermore, at the requests of both the GMD and the CCP, the Service Regiment organised basic medical classes for their respective armies. As a result, about ninety or so medical workers were probably trained for Feng Baiju's Independent Corps.⁶⁴

Japanese activities], and Zhang Yi, "Woyu Qionggiao huixiang fuwutuan" [The Hainan Overseas Chinese Home-Going Service Regiment and I], *QX*, v. 13 (June 1984), 1-3, 24-7, 195-8.

⁶³ Fu Sizhi, *ibid.*, 4-7; Fan Shiru, 27-8; *Hongqi budao*, 265-7.

⁶⁴ Chen Kegong, 156-7; Fu Sizhi, "Qiongya huaqiao huixiang fuwutuan de huiyi," 12-5; Fan Shiru, 28-9; Fang Ke, "Huiyi Xinjiapo huaqiao de kangri jiuwang yundong" [Reminiscences on the anti-Japanese salvation movement of overseas Chinese in Singapore], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 67; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 102; *Hongqi budao*, 267-8.

Although the Hainan Service Regiment was not a Communist-initiated organisation, it quickly came under the influence of the Hainan Party after its arrival on the island. The Party used the Regiment as a significant arm for the Independent Corps to reach out for outside aid when allowances from the GMD were completely withdrawn. Several times the Regiment smuggled in money, medicine and war-related supplies from Hong Kong to Hainan for the Communists.⁶⁵ Due to its active role of rendering help to Feng Baiju, the Hainan Service Regiment quickly aroused Wu Daonan's enmity. Evidently, Wu plotted the murder of several of its members, including Fu Ke in August 1940.⁶⁶ In spite of that, the Hainan Service Regiment was not intimidated and continued to cooperate with the Party and even involved itself in the establishment of the first Communist democratic regime in Wenchang County in late 1940. Not until the outbreak of the Pacific War, when no more funding could be secured from Hong Kong and the Southeast Asian countries, did the Service Regiment cease its activities. Many of its members then conveniently joined the Hainan Party.⁶⁷

Apart from overseas Chinese, the Hainan Party also sought contributions from the local population of Hainan, but most of these early attempts focused on satisfying short-term needs only. For example, in the autumn of 1939, the Party launched a fund-raising campaign to solve the financial deficit of the *Resistance News* (*Kangri xinwen*), a propaganda tool of the Hainan Party running from early 1939 to 1942. A campaign of a similar nature commenced at the beginning of 1940 with the purpose of raising money to acquire new weaponry for the Independent Corps. In some places, this campaign used the slogan of "one dollar for one bullet" (*yiyuan yidan*), calling for each person involved to donate at least one dollar for buying bullets for the Communist army. Elsewhere, it took the form of the "gun collection" or "gun donation" movement, in which villagers were asked to contribute to the Independent Corps their guns and ammunition originally stocked for self-defence or local feuds. In these two campaigns, the Party relied mostly on its members' social networks to obtain money and supplies. Many Party members themselves were said to have supported the campaigns enthusiastically by donating their own personal savings and valuables, perhaps for the sake of setting up role-models for others. Although both of these campaigns achieved much better results than the Party

⁶⁵ "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 79; cf. Fan Shiru, 28-9.

⁶⁶ Chen Kegong, 158; *Hongqi budao*, 269; Lin Ying, 18.

⁶⁷ Chen Kegong, *ibid.*, 157-9; Fu Sizhi, "Qiongya huaqiao huixiang fuwutuan de huiyi," 15-23; Fan Shiru,

expected,⁶⁸ as Li Min pointed out, similar fund raising campaigns could not be organised frequently since people's enthusiasm would gradually die down when they could no longer afford to pay.⁶⁹

In response to the declining GMD allowances, the Hainan Party established the so-called Qiongwen Economic Committee in the winter of 1939 to explore new sources of income. On the border of the Qiongshan and Wenchang Counties, the method used was to raise money through collecting toll and tax. Customs were imposed on goods and foodstuffs passing through the guerrilla zone while, inside it, taxes such as the butcher tax, were levied in market towns. However, these taxation measures were far from comprehensive and systematic since the Communists had neither a firm hold of the area nor adequate manpower to enforce their regulations. Sometimes, the Communist tax officials behaved almost no different from bandits; they would show up suddenly on the highway, stop the vehicles passing by and force the travelling merchants to pay tolls or tax for their merchandise.⁷⁰

Another method of raising income was known as the "attack and expropriation activity" (*damo huodong*; *jimo huodong*). Basically, it was a variant of the Party's policy towards the landlord and other "reactionary" classes during the soviet period, but it was now reapplied to pro-Japanese traitors. Those who served in the puppet governments would have their properties expropriated. Merchants who traded with the Japanese were also regarded as traitors, for they had committed the crime of "aiding the enemy" (*zidizui*) and their illicit goods were therefore seized. Later, the Party extended their targets to GMD bureaucrats and landlord-gentry who opposed the Communists and bullied the people. However, it was not quite clear how the Party could justify its actions in the name of the anti-Japanese cause. Perhaps, it deemed itself a genuine anti-Japanese force, so

⁶⁸ "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 84; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 118; Wang Yuebo, "Qiongya kangzhan chuqi caijing gongzuo de pianduan huiyi" [Some reminiscences on the economic and financial work during the early phase of the resistance war in Hainan], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 32; Fu Mengxiong, "Meihe geming genjudi de caijing shuishou gongzuo" [The work of finance and taxation in the Meihe Revolutionary Base Area] and Chen Qimei, "Qiongshan erqu zai kangzhan shiqi 'jiqiang' he 'xianqiang' yundong de huiyi" [Reminiscences on the "gun collection" and "gun donation" movement in the second district of Qiongshan during the resistance war period], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 379, 394; cf. Wang Liqi, et. al., 161-2.

⁶⁹ "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 118.

⁷⁰ Lin Shiyue, "Kangri zhanzheng qianqi Qiongya caishui gongzuo huiyi" [Reminiscences on financial and taxation work in Hainan during the early phase of the Anti-Japanese War], Jiang Yizhong, "Qiongshanxian Yanshan diqu caijing shuishou gongzuo huiyi" [Reminiscences on financial and taxation work in the Yangshan District of Qiongshan], and Shi Changyong, "Qiongshanxian shuishou zhengguan gongzuo gaikuang" [An overview of the levying and management of taxation in Qiongshan County], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 27-8, 56, 58-9.

anybody who went against it could be considered aiding the enemy indirectly and was thus guilty of *zidizui* too. Having said that, there is no doubt that the Hainan Party's grave financial situation accounted largely for the "attack and expropriation movement." Although the movement constituted no constant source of income, Li Min recalled that the movement could bring in as much as five thousand extra dollars for the Party in a month.⁷¹

Further, the Party tried to cover its financial deficit by engaging in business activities. The Qiongwen Economic Committee arranged exports of several native products, notably coconut oil, to sell in nearby towns. The money was used to buy medicine and daily necessities for the Independent Corps.⁷² On the other hand, in the spring of 1940, Party cadres in Wenchang County experimented with the establishment of "consumers' cooperatives" (*xiaofei hezuoshe*). The Japanese occupation had brought great destruction to trade in Hainan as the rural population was deterred from going to market towns to buy or sell its goods. In view of that, Party cadres had the idea of establishing a Mass Cooperative (*dazhong hezuoshe*), which acted as a link between buyers and sellers in the countryside. To begin with, shares were issued and sold for five dollars each to the people to raise funds necessary for running the business. Party cadres were then responsible for acquiring various goods and foodstuffs from different areas to sell to local villagers. Many rural residents seemed to have welcomed and supported the Mass Cooperatives since it made life more convenient for them. This mode of conducting business was quite successful, and it was later adopted more extensively in the Communist base in Meihe (see below) where a number of restaurants and grocery stores were run by Party members along the same line.⁷³

⁷¹ "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 118; Li Min, "Qiongyadang de douzheng guocheng jianlue shiji (zhailu)," 65; "Qiongya tewei guanyu choukuan de baxiang zhishi" [Eight instructions by the Hainan Special Committee concerning fund raising], *QGGCSSX*, v. 1, 69; Lin Shiyue, *ibid.*, 28; Guo Rupu, "Qiongshanxian minzhu geming shiqi damo huodong pianduan" [Some reminiscences on the "attack and expropriation activity" in Qiongshan County during the Democratic Revolutionary Period], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 98; Xing Yisen and Xu Zhimin, "Kangzhan shiqi Qiongya genjudi de caizheng jingji gongzuo" [The finance and economic work of the Hainan Base Area during the resistance war period], *Guangdong kangzhan shi yanjiu*, 175-6; Hainan caizheng jingjishi bianxiezu, ed., *Qiongya geming genjudi caizheng jingjishi* [The history of the finance and economy of the Hainan Revolutionary Base Area], (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1988), 81-2. (Hereafter cited as *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*).

⁷² Lin Shiyue, 28.

⁷³ Wu Kunkuan, "Chuangban dazhong hezuoshe de huiyi" [Reminiscences on establishing the Mass Cooperative], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 51-2; *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 68-9; Xing Yisen and Xu Zhimin, 179-80; cf. "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 77.

Finally, probably in late 1939, the Hainan Party introduced the “public-army grain tax” (*gongjun liang*) to its guerrilla zone in northeast Hainan. The public-army grain tax was a progressive tax which, according to the Communists, was based on the principle of rational burden (*heli fudan*).⁷⁴ However, little was heard about its collection before 1941. It is evident that unless the Communists had their own base with a relative efficient administrative system, they would have little ability to enforce such a formal taxation system.

VI. The Meihe Base Area: Its Founding and Destruction

Contrary to what Communist literature claims, base construction in Hainan predated the Yan'an directive of 26 January 1940 and owed little to the Party Centre's inspiration of making Hainan a Communist stronghold in South China. Rather, it was a response of the Independent Corps to the pressing question of preparing for a military confrontation with the GMD once the united-front alliance in Hainan was broken. In the winter of 1939, the Hainan Special Committee convened a meeting to reformulate its wartime strategy in light of the current political situation. The meeting was chaired by Feng Baiju on behalf of Lin Liming, who had left for Yan'an to attend the CCP's Seventh Plenum. It was probably at this meeting that Feng advocated his “strike-first” strategy, although no trace of that plan can be found in the official record.⁷⁵ More important, the Hainan Special Committee resolved at the meeting that a base had to be built for the Independent Corps.⁷⁶ Although the Independent Corps already had the border region of Qiongzhan and Wenchang Counties as its designated zone of guerrilla deployment, it was not a base in the strict sense. There was no administration structure in the region, by which the Party could carry out regular exaction and pursue socio-economic reforms. Further, from the reminiscences of Feng and other veterans, the resolution of establishing a base was made chiefly on military grounds. This explained why the Qiongzhan border region was not chosen even though the Communists enjoyed a certain degree of popularity there. The border region was regarded as geographically unsuitable both because it was predominantly flat and because it was too close to Haikou, the centre of

⁷⁴ “Qiongzhan tewei guanyu choukuan de baxiang zhishi,” 69; Li Dayi, “Cheng, Qiongzhan bianqu kaizhan cailiang gongzuo zhiyuan kangri zhanzheng” [The launching of finance and grain work in the border region of Cheng-Qiongzhan in support of the Anti-Japanese War], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 381; Wang Liqi, et. al., 163; “Zhonggong Qiongzhan tewei dibaci kuoda huiyi jilu” (December 1939), 50.

⁷⁵ It is not difficult to relate dropping out of this proposal from the meeting's record to its immediate rejection by the Guangdong Provincial Committee.

⁷⁶ Cf. “Zhonggong Qiongzhan tewei dibaci kuoda huiyi jilu” (December 1939), 50.

Japanese control. Once the united-front alliance crumbled, the Independent Corps would likely be exposed to attack from both the GMD and the Japanese. There was an urgent need to search for a new site, which would allow the Communists to construct a secure base.⁷⁷

The search began in early 1940. It was directed to the mountain areas in northwest Hainan both because they were farther away from Haikou and because, in November 1939, a division of the Independent Corps successfully expelled the small Japanese garrison from Nada after a two-week siege, which promised the prospect of a swift seizure of control over the surrounding countryside. At first, the Shamaoling Mountain near Nada was chosen to be the site for the new base. The Independent Corps departed from Qiongwen and headed for the west in January 1940. However, when they arrived at a place called Meihe by mid-February, the Japanese had sent in reinforcements and retaken Nada. Thus, the original plan of building a base in Shamaoling was no longer feasible. For reasons not entirely clear (perhaps just for the sake of convenience), the Independent Corps settled down in Meihe and started to develop it into a base area.⁷⁸ Communist accounts explain that Meihe was chosen because the Hainan Party had been instructed by the Party Centre to build a base in the Wuzhi Mountain. Meihe was viewed as a good stepping stone to serve this purpose since it was situated at the fringe of Wuzhi Mountain. However, it is doubtful whether the Hainan Communists had such an idea in their minds when they went to Meihe. While Yan'an did realise the strategic value of Wuzhi Mountain by ordering the Hainan Party to take seriously its propaganda work among the Li (and to a lesser extent the Miao) who inhabited the area, this instruction was not delivered to the Hainan Communists until November 1940.⁷⁹

Meihe was a mountainous area located in the southernmost part of Chengmai County. Although it was undeveloped and sparsely populated, the Communists tried diligently to cultivate mass support for their cause after they had entered the area. On the one hand, cadres went around to the village to preach the anti-Japanese message. On the other hand, free talks were conducted in the market-places nearby on dates when people

⁷⁷ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 435; Fu Rongding, "Congjianli pingyuan kangri youji genjudi dao chuangjian Wuzhishan zhongxin genjudi yiduan lishi de huiyi" [Reminiscences on the history of the establishment of an anti-Japanese guerrilla base area to the establishment of the Wuzhi Mountain Base Area], *QX*, v. 10, 31.

⁷⁸ *Hongqi budao*, 240-1, 248.

⁷⁹ "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 561. Yan'an's desire to have Wuzhi Mountain developed into a Communist base was also passed through Zhuang Tian to the Hainan Party. However, again, it reached the Hainan Communists several months after they had entered Meihe. See Zhuang Tian, 243.

brought goods and food to sell or barter. Moreover, the Party organised some traditional village leisure groups, such as *wenguan* (music club) and *wuguan* (boxing club), to reach out to the local people. Purportedly, these mobilisation efforts brought about the birth of many different mass associations, but it remains questionable how much popularity these associations really enjoyed.⁸⁰

Apparently, not all villagers were sympathetic to the Party's patriotic appeals, and some among the rural elite stood up to oppose the Communist leadership. As a result, the Party launched a struggle "to eliminate the evils and fight against the bullies" (*sujian fanba douzheng*). In Dongqingling village, for instance, a big landlord named Wang Yunhua was accused of collaborating with the Japanese and obstructing the Communists' resistance. After failing several times to silence him, the Party resorted to some heavy-handed measures. A guerrilla unit was sent to Wang's home and caught him by surprise. It defeated his personal militia and seized more than a thousand silver coins. Wang himself was perhaps subsequently executed. The incident must have sent a forceful signal to others on the price of rejecting the Party's authority, and the "prestige" of the local Communist government was said to have elevated.⁸¹

In accord with the principle of self-reliance laid down by Yan'an and the Guangdong Provincial Committee, the Hainan Communists built their base in Meihe with the goal of attaining self-sufficiency. However, they encountered enormous difficulties because Meihe's small and sparsely distributed population could not produce enough for the consumption of the Communist guerrilla force. The increase of local food production then became the Hainan Party's initial focus of base construction. Almost every one in the Party organisation, including Feng Baiju himself, had to engage in some form of farm work. Besides opening up wasteland for farming, the Party arranged to share draught animals and farm tools between local peasants. Other measures to stimulate the local economy were adopted. For example, the idea of a cooperatives was introduced for conducting business in Meihe. In addition, the base area began printing its own

⁸⁰ Fu Mengxiong, "Meihe geming genjudi de caijing shuishou gongzuo," 375; id., "Guanyu Renhouxiang kangri minzhu zhengquan he Meihe tequwei de yixie huiyi" [Some reminiscences on the anti-Japanese democratic regime in Renhouxiang and the Special Regional Committee of Meihe], *QX*, v. 17, 73-4; *Hongqi budao*, 249.

⁸¹ Fu Mengxiong, "Guanyu Renhouxiang kangri minzhu zhengquan he Meihe tequwei de yixie huiyi," 74; cf. Li Yuan, "Nianzai cangsang hua Hainan" [Twenty years of changes in Hainan], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 561.

currency.⁸² However, despite these vigorous efforts, the actual improvement of the economy of Meihe was minimal.⁸³

Two establishments in the Meihe Base Area had a more focused purpose of boosting the Communists' military and political strength in Hainan. The first one was a rudimentary arsenal. It was run by two arms technicians specially despatched from Yan'an, and they were assisted by twenty Party members particularly trained by the Hainan Party. Although furnished only with simple tools and equipment, this arsenal to some extent alleviated the Independent Corps' problem of a shortage of weaponry. The Communists claimed that their arsenal could manufacture mines, recycle used bullets and repair ordinary guns.⁸⁴ The second establishment was the Hainan Public School (*Hainan gongxue*), which was inaugurated in July 1940, following Yan'an's instruction of founding a large cadre training school to ease Hainan's shortage of them. About four hundred students were admitted at that time. A major cause of cadre shortage in the Hainan Party was its predominately poor peasant membership (constituting over eighty-five percent in 1940). More than a half of these peasant members were completely illiterate and were thus unable to handle Party work. Therefore, aside from the few intellectual members who could concentrate on military and political training, peasant students had to spend at least one third of their study time learning to read and write during their stay in the Hainan Public School.⁸⁵

The Communists' efforts of building a base in Meihe obviously alarmed the GMD. However, it refrained from taking any action until its own military power was sufficiently strengthened. As already mentioned, this was achieved by co-opting bandit gangs and local militias to enlarge the size of the GMD army and by importing arms from the mainland to enhance its fighting capability. When all were ready by the autumn of 1940, the GMD sent a directive to Meihe ordering the Independent Corps to withdraw to their designated guerrilla zone in the Qiongwen border. The Communists interpreted this order as a plot: The GMD wanted either to entice the Independent Corps out of its base

⁸² Li Dayi and Li Keshi, "Cheng, Qiong, Ding bianqu renmin shiyong huobi qingkuang" [The situation of currencies used by the people in the Cheng-Qiong-Ding border region], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 426; *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 64, 68-9; Wang Liqi, et. al., 150; Xing Yisen and Xu Zhimin, 178-80.

⁸³ "Feng Baiju gei Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from Feng Baiju to the Party Centre] (15 October 1940) and "Zhonggong Qiongya teweizhi Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee to the Party Centre] (2 November 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 129, 131.

⁸⁴ Chen Daxin, "Yi Qiongzong junxiechang de jianli yu fazhan" [Reminiscences on the establishment and development of the arsenal of Hainan Column], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 48.

⁸⁵ Luo Wenhong, *Zhengrong suiyue* [The Extraordinary Times], (Hainan chubanshe, 1994), 38-48; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 83, 85-6; "Li Min guanyu Qiongya budui qingxing de baogao" (10 April 1940), 99-100; *QZS*, 118-9.

and ambush it on its way back to Qiongwen or to use the Communists' insubordination as an excuse to attack them.⁸⁶ Deciding not to comply with the order, the Party asked for negotiation. The first round ended with nothing except aggravating suspicions on both sides. In October, Lin Huicai represented the GMD government and went personally to Meihe to negotiate again with the Communists. According to Lin's reminiscences, the real purpose of his trip was to spy on the topography of Meihe.⁸⁷ In early November, after this information was secured, the GMD commenced its military campaign against the Meihe Base Area.

The Communists realised that the GMD was going to assault them militarily, but internal disunity delayed their preparation for battle. Even though the GMD troops were already present in the base area's vicinity, the Party leaders still debated among themselves whether they should stay to defend Meihe or relocate back to Qiongwen. Zhuang Tian, who held the latter view, argued that the defence of Meihe would be too costly because Meihe was neither a geographically ideal base for directing the Communist guerrilla movement in Hainan nor had the Party established a firm foundation there. To Zhuang, the Independent Corps should leave a small number of soldiers in Meihe to lure the GMD army inside while withdrawing its main force covertly back to the Qiongwen region. He went on to suggest that since the "die-hards" had concentrated their attention and troops on Meihe, the Independent Corps could take the opportunity to eliminate quickly the "reactionary forces" in Qiongwen and enlarge its local guerrilla movement.⁸⁸ Zhuang's viewpoint, however, was rejected by others who believed that the GMD army was not really that strong, and it was not impossible for the Independent Corps to defeat them. Also, they worried that if the Communists fled before the GMD without firing one shot, it would damage the Party's image and create negative political consequences.⁸⁹

Eventually, the second position was adopted probably because Feng sided with it. In two radio messages to the Party Centre on 15 October and 2 November respectively, Feng demonstrated confidence in handling the possible military conflict with the GMD. Holding that the GMD was militarily weak, Feng showed no fear of confrontation but considered it necessary for reversing Hainan's adverse political situation.⁹⁰ Despite his

⁸⁶ Zhuang Tian, 76-80.

⁸⁷ Lin Huicai, "Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi," 59-60.

⁸⁸ Zhuang Tian, 81.

⁸⁹ Luo Wenhong, 52.

⁹⁰ "Feng Baiju gei Zhongyang dian" (15 October 1940), 129; "Zhonggong Qiongya teweizhi Zhongyang dian" (2 November 1940), 131.

confidence, Feng's attitude worried the Party Centre. It warned him not to underestimate the GMD, and he should step up the Party's united-front propaganda to ensure that the "die-hard forces" were properly isolated. Militarily, he should be skilful in concentrating his forces and destroying the GMD army units one by one.⁹¹ Unfortunately, Yan'an's counsel found little heed from Feng, who continued to display great confidence in beating the invading GMD troops. Instead of concentrating his guerrilla forces as advised by the Party Centre, Feng dispersed them to stand guard on the major routes to the base area.⁹² Unfortunately, Feng's optimism turned out to be ill-founded. When the fighting broke out in mid-December, it took the GMD army only two days to occupy Meihe. No deaths were reported on the Communists' side, but, in truth, many were lost while fleeing the GMD army. The defeat shocked the Hainan Party leaders. Without being able to cherish the hope of recapturing their base, they immediately withdrew to the Qiongwen region.

VII. Concluding Remarks

The Meihe incident signified the collapse of the United Front in Hainan and divided the Communist resistance in the island into two stages. As on the Guangdong mainland, the Party commenced its anti-Japanese guerrilla activities in Hainan at a time when the Second United Front was rapidly deteriorating. Although the threat of the Japanese invasion had provided an initial impetus for the Hainan GMD to enter a political alliance with the Party, this coalition was nevertheless cut short by Chiang Kai-shek's determination to curb Communist growth in the Japanese-occupied areas all over the country. However, the task of wiping out the Communists in Hainan was not as easy as that in the East River valley. The defeat of the Independent Corps in Meihe was due more to Feng Baiju's overconfidence and the tactical mistakes he thus committed than to the military might of the Hainan GMD. The next chapter will demonstrate that the GMD was far from able to eliminate the Communist presence in Hainan. Rather, it was fierce Japanese suppression that was more effective in inhibiting the consolidation of the Hainan Base Area.

⁹¹ "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 558; "Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and Wang Jiaxiang zhi Feng Baiju dian" [Radio message from Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Wang Jiaxiang to Feng Baiju] (23 November 1940), *FBYS*, 21.

⁹² "Zhonggong Qiongya teweijiu woyoudi qingkuang fu Zhongyang dian" [Radio message from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee to the Party Centre on our own situation as well as that of the GMD and the Japanese] (24 November 1940), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 135; Luo Wenhong, 53; Zhuang Tian, 82.

In contrast to the case of the East River valley, the Yan'an leaders had in early 1940 already designed an aggressive base building policy for Hainan. Evidently, the difference resulted from separate political-military situations in the two places. However, partly because the Party Centre itself was financially stretched and partly because the Communist movement in North and Central China commanded greater urgency, the Yan'an leaders could only admonish their Hainan comrades to rely on their own means to fulfil the task, notably its rich overseas linkages. In this respect, the Communist resistance in Hainan was similar to that in the East River valley; for both benefited heavily from various kinds of supplies donated by Chinese living abroad during their initial stage of development. Again, Hong Kong's contribution to Hainan's guerrilla mobilisation was immense, especially as an indispensable depot for most overseas aid transmitted to the island. It was also through Hong Kong that the Hainan Communists were able to acquire radio equipment and establish direct communication with the Party Centre in far away Yan'an. For the Yan'an leaders, this radio communication was extremely crucial in strengthening control over subordinates in the remote island of Hainan, ensuring that the local revolution could be integrated into the principal Communist movement in the north and fighting for the common goal.

CHAPTER 6

“THE LONELY ISLAND,” 1941-1945

The year 1941 marked the dividing line between the two phases of Communist wartime struggle in Hainan. The reason for such a demarcation was the Meihe incident in December 1940 studied in the previous chapter. It signified the formal debacle of the Party's alliance with the GMD. Therefore, from 1941 onwards, the war in Hainan turned into a three-way contest between the Communists, the Nationalists and the Japanese. This pattern remained unchanged throughout the remainder of the war.

Also in 1941, the radio communication between Hainan and Yan'an, which had been established just a year or so before, broke down. By late 1940, the Hainan Party had owned three radios, one large and two small. However, one of the two small radios was in fact a signal receiver whose function was for recording radio news disseminated by the GMD's and the CCP's public news agencies.¹ In other words, the Hainan Communists had only two radios for handling external communication. Because the defeat of the Independent Corps in Meihe was so sudden and the order to retreat was delivered at very short notice, the radio workers found it impossible to carry the large, very heavy radio. They therefore buried it in a cave nearby and hoped to get it back some time later. As a result, the Communists were left with one small radio when they returned to the Qiongwen border. Unfortunately, during a GMD raid of the guerrilla base in Qiongwen in June 1941, this radio was captured and destroyed. From then on, contact with Yan'an was lost. Although cadres were sent back to Meihe to dig out the buried radio, they discovered that it had already been seriously damaged by the humid soil. The Hainan Party tried several times to smuggle in from Hong Kong a replacement or parts for repairing the damaged radio, but they all failed.²

¹ However, due to the lack of proper maintenance, the performance of this radio deteriorated as time went by, making it more and more difficult for the Hainan Party to obtain the latest news about the war development. See Chen Zhongtang, “Wozai Qiongya zongdui diantai gongzuo qingkuang de huiyi” [Reminiscences on my work in the Hainan Column's radio station], Wang Yunming, “Wozai Qiongya zongdui diantai gongzuo qingkuang jishi” [A record of my work in the radio station of the Hainan Column], and Wang Guzhang, “Qiongya zongdui xinwentai” [The news station of the Hainan Column] in *Tianya hongse dianbo* [The red radio wave], ed. Hainan junqu tongxinbing bianxiezu, (no publisher, 1997), 118, 121, 175-6.

² Chen Zhongtang, 116-8; Feng Baiju, “Guanyu wocanjia geming,” 440-2; Zheng Fang, 73-4; Lin Shulan, “Qiongya zongdui diantai sunshihoude yixie qingkuang” [Situations after the loss of the radio of the Hainan Column] and “Qiongya tongxinshi jiyao” [A chronicle of important events in the history of communication in Hainan], *QX*, v. 20 (December 1994), 188-9, 233, 238-42.

While the contact between Hainan and Guangdong could still be maintained by restoring the old system of Party couriers, its deficiencies have already been elucidated (see Chapter 5). One can understand that the situation turned even worse when Hong Kong ceased to be a convenient outpost for the Party in South China after the outbreak of the Pacific War. The Guangdong Communist leaders were greatly discontented with the inadequate communication between the mainland and Hainan. However, they believed that the problem rested primarily on the fault of their Hainan comrades. If they had taken the question of communication more seriously, said the Guangdong leaders, many difficulties would have been overcome.³ How much truth this charge embodied is hard to determine; but there is no doubt that communication failure severely inhibited control from the higher levels of the Party over the Communist movement in Hainan.

This chapter examines how the two developments, that is, the three-way military contest and the loss of radio contact, shaped the course of wartime Communist struggle in Hainan. The second one, which is perhaps more difficult to elucidate with complete satisfaction, will be taken up first. As studied in the last chapter, the establishment of direct a radio link between Hainan and Yan'an in 1940 originated from Mao's desire for an aggressive base construction policy in Hainan. It therefore makes sense to investigate the impact of the communication break down on the Hainan Communist movement by searching for clues from its process of building base area. Nevertheless, there is a consensus among historians that the success of Communist base construction depended first and foremost on the ability to achieve a certain degree of military and political control. This understanding then forms a bridge to our discussion of the military situation in Hainan after the disintegration of the United Front. The discussion will demonstrate how the constant "friction struggle" with the GMD and, more importantly, the Japanese mopping campaigns seriously impeded the consolidation of the Communist position in Hainan. In addition, it highlights the significance of a geographically secure base for the Communist revolution and leads us to analyse, in the third section of this chapter, why the Hainan Party failed to follow Mao's order to establish a base area in the Wuzhi Mountain.

³ "Guangdong quwei gei Zhongyang baogao" [A report from the Guangdong Regional Committee to the Party Centre] (17 November 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 541.

I. The Communist Regime in Hainan

a. The Third Extended Meeting

After the main force of the Independent Corps had moved back to the Qiongwen guerrilla base in February 1941, the Party convened the Third Extended Meeting to review the current political situation and adjust its policies. An urgent issue was whether the Second United Front still commanded any relevance for the Hainan Communist struggle. Lin Liming, who had just returned from Yan'an in the late autumn of 1940, took the step to rectify the "leftist tendency" in the Party. Following Yan'an's instruction, Lin had stepped down from the Secretary of the Hainan Special Committee but he was then reassigned as the Committee's Deputy Secretary. As has been suggested, this arrangement was made probably because Yan'an wanted Lin to balance Feng's aggressive stance in order that the revolution in Hainan could be conducted within the framework of "unity and struggle," a role Lin seemed to realise. During the Third Extended Meeting, Lin asserted that the United Front must be upheld because it was above all the policy of the Party Centre. He criticised the prevailing misconception of some cadres that the GMD was totally corrupted and was deprived of any progressive elements who could be won over to the Party. This cast of mind, Lin believed, was a legacy of many cadres' long years experience in class struggle.⁴

Lin's argument of the continual relevance or primacy of the United Front happened to gain extra weight from Yan'an's response to the New Fourth Army Incident, which occurred at approximately the same time as the Meihe Incident. Despite Mao Zedong's initial violent reaction to the GMD's military assault on the New Fourth Army in Wannan, he gradually toned it down due to power realities. Mao finally contended that Chiang Kai-shek and the anti-Communist sections in the GMD had to be struggled against and isolated, and yet there was no doubt that mutual collaboration had to be preserved for the sake of national unity.⁵ Zhuang Tian cited this reaction of the Party Centre to support Lin's position. Other leaders, including Feng Baiju, then showed their support to the united-front policy although there were some minor disagreements concerning the application of the principle of "unity and struggle" under certain specific situations.⁶

⁴ "Zhonggong Qiongya teweì disanci zhiweihui huiyi jilu" [Records of the Third Extended Meeting of the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee] (15 February 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 156-8.

⁵ Cf. Benton, *New Fourth Army*, 591-6.

⁶ "Zhonggong Qiongya teweì disanci zhiweihui huiyi jilu" (15 February 1941), 170-4.

Nevertheless, in the Third Extended Meeting, the question of the United Front focused not on GMD-CCP relations alone. There was a serious discussion on transforming the United Front from a narrowly conceived political alliance to a broad and multi-class based mobilisation strategy. This concern rose from the Party Centre's instruction to set up as quickly as possible in Hainan the "anti-Japanese democratic governments." The instruction was delivered to the Hainan Party from a directive on 7 November 1940 as well as transmitted through Lin Liming, who had been briefed while he was in Yan'an by Mao Zedong personally.⁷ However, since the Hainan Communists were too occupied with the military crisis with the GMD over the Meihe Base Area, they could not discuss the issue until the meeting.

To the Yan'an leaders, base construction in Hainan had a major deficiency, that is, the lack of a political structure. As Mao's instruction to Lin Liming stressed, "to create a guerrilla base area is to establish an anti-Japanese political authority. A guerrilla base area must have a democratic government, and it is not adequate to have only the terrain, the Party and the masses. Otherwise, the guerrilla base area is not a complete one . . ."⁸ The democratic nature of the anti-Japanese government was to be exhibited by the adoption of the "three-third system," which would allow the Party to absorb progressive gentry and intellectuals into its political entity.⁹ According to Lin, in order to enlist non-Party personages into the democratic government, Yan'an wanted the Hainan Party to treat them favourably, even to the extent of compromising on minor details that did not go against the basic anti-Japanese and non-anti-Communist principles. Never should the democratic government be turned into a soviet government, cautioned Lin.¹⁰ The warning against "leftist excesses" had also appeared in the directive of 7 November. It laid down that the democratic government had to reconcile the interests of every class although it should also protect the poor and satisfy the needs of the masses.¹¹

While the Party Centre's urge for the implementation of the "three-third system" in Hainan sprang from its desire to broaden the mass basis of the local resistance movement, economic reasons also constituted another major impetus. In the directive of 7 November, Yan'an indicated its worry that the Japanese sea blockade would ultimately cut off all aid donated to Hainan by the overseas Chinese. The Hainan Party should

⁷ Ibid., 150-1; "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 559-61.

⁸ "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei disanci zhiweihui huiyi jilu" (15 February 1941), 151.

⁹ "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 559.

¹⁰ "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei disanci zhiweihui huiyi jilu" (15 February 1941), 151.

¹¹ "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 559-60.

therefore solve its long-term needs by levying the “national salvation public grains” (*jiuguo gongliang*) and other kinds of taxation as well as by developing the people’s production. However, these measures could not be applied without an effective rural administration, as addressed by the directive.¹²

The Third Extended Meeting was the last time during the Anti-Japanese War that Yan’an had an impact on Hainan’s policy formulation. It has been argued earlier that Yan’an desired a more aggressive policy in Hainan than on the Guangdong mainland. Nevertheless, upon examination, the pursuit of it by no means implied an abandonment of the United Front as a tactic of political manoeuvring. Truly, a bolder stance towards the GMD in Hainan was necessary for maintaining the Party’s independence and initiative within the United Front. However, before any confrontations with the GMD had happened, the Party had to ensure that it had maximised its own support and had the “die-hards” properly isolated.¹³ Therefore, Hainan must intensify its efforts of erecting anti-Japanese democratic governments and utilise the “three-third system” as the basis for multi-class mobilisation. To a certain extent, the dissemination of this knowledge to Lin Liming, in addition to the Party Centre’s directive directly delivered to the Hainan Party through the radio, further supports the conjecture that the Yan’an leaders wanted him and Feng Baiju to balance each other in order to achieve “unity and struggle” in Hainan. Neither Feng nor Lin, as the Yan’an leaders believed, possessed sufficient skills to attain such a goal alone, and they had to complement each other.

b. The Implementation of the “Three-Third System”

During the initial stage of Japanese occupation, the Hainan Communists used two methods to seize rural control. In places where the GMD’s officials had fled, the Party appointed its own people to take over their posts in local governments.¹⁴ Where the GMD’s rule was still surviving, the Party resorted to patriotic rhetoric to win over the officials and seek cooperation with them in directing local affairs.¹⁵ In either way, little was done to reform the existing political structure and open room for public participation. The only exception was the anti-Japanese government founded in Wenchang County. Its main personages, consisting of both Communists and non-Communists, were said to have

¹² *Ibid.*, 560; cf. “Zhonggong Qiongya teweì disanci zhiweihui huiyi jilu” (15 February 1941), 165.

¹³ Cf. “Zhongyang shujiqu dui Hainan junshi, zhengzhi gongzuo de zhishi” [Instructions of the Secretariat of the Party Centre on Hainan’s military and political work] (28 December 1940), *FBYS*, 26.

¹⁴ *Hongqi budao*, 299.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

been “popularly elected” by a mass assembly summoned in late 1940, which allegedly was attended by more than seven thousand people.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was true that the Party stepped up its effort of establishing anti-Japanese governments in Hainan only after the Third Extended Meeting.

A manifestation of increased attention to the political aspect of the construction of the Hainan Base Area was the inauguration of the Democratic Government of the Northeast District of Hainan (DGNDH) on 10 November 1941. The DGNDH was presumably the highest Communist governing body in Hainan. Its function was to provide unified leadership to all the Communist anti-Japanese governments in the island. The title of the DGNDH seemed to suggest that by that time the extent of Communist influence was confined primarily to the northeast region of Hainan. One Party publication, however, explains the specification of the Northeast District as a united-front tactic. It made the DGNDH sound as if it was a regional governing body subordinated to rather than opposing the Hainan GMD.¹⁷

Very little is known about the process by which the DGNDH was instituted. Party literature states that it was elected by a people’s congress, which was comprised of delegates from various local Communist governments and anti-Japanese mass associations, notable members of society, patriotic overseas Chinese and representatives of the Independent Corps. The major political organs of the DGNDH were formed according to the principle of the “three-third system.” Among the total of fifteen committee members (official and alternate) of the government were six Communists. Probably as a safeguard to keep the leadership Communist, Feng Baiju was “elected” chairman of the committee. Upon its establishment, the DGNDH issued a series of edicts which included a ruling manifesto, a set of provisional land laws and an emergency penal code concerning crimes which endangered the resistance cause. All these were purportedly enforced in areas under the DGNDH’s jurisdiction.¹⁸

¹⁶ Zhonggong Wenchang xianwei dangshi bangongshi, “Wenchangxian kangri minzhu zhengfu de chengli jiqi lishi zuoyong” [The establishment and historical functions of the anti-Japanese democratic government in Wenchang County], *QX*, v. 17, 195-7.

¹⁷ *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 262; cf. “Qiongya Dongbeiqu zhengfu kangzhan shiqi shizheng gangling” [The manifesto of rule of the Government of the Northeast District of Hainan during the resistance war period] (10 October 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 187. It seems that the correct date of the document should be 10 November 1941.

¹⁸ *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 262-3; *Hongqi budao*, 301-2; *QZS*, 146-7; Tang Kunning and Xu Bing, “Qiongya kangri minzhu zhengquan de jianshe” [The construction of democratic governments in Hainan], *GDYW*, v. 3, 289-90.

While evaluating the practice of the “three third system” practised in Hainan, Feng Baiju claimed that, by the end of the war, the Party had instituted people’s [anti-Japanese] governments in all counties of Hainan except Baoting and Ledong.¹⁹ Communist open publications assert that all these governments had adhered to the “three-third system” and were popularly elected. However, a very different picture was painted by the Guangdong Party. In its report submitted to the Party Centre on 11 November 1945, the Guangdong Party leaders criticised their Hainan comrades severely as they found that the overwhelming majority of the anti-Japanese governments in Hainan (at every level) were formed by appointment. Little enthusiasm was demonstrated in promoting “democratic election.” Moreover, the Hainan Party failed to invite participation of non-Party people in the governments, and nearly all the posts in the governing bodies were occupied by Party members. The report also pointed out that some Hainan local cadres were very keen on intervening in government administration.²⁰ To the Guangdong leaders, their behaviour proved that the Hainan Party had a very low respect for the anti-Japanese governments and treated them merely as the Party’s puppets.

It is necessary to compare these negative comments with the self-assessments of the Hainan Communists in order to gain a more balanced picture. In September 1942, Shi Dan furnished a report for the Hainan Special Committee, which evaluated the Party’s political work since the Third Extended Meeting. While acknowledging that the Hainan Party had made some progress in winning non-Party personages for the governments, he stated that there were still inadequacies in the application of the “three-third system.” This principle had to be insisted upon, stressed Shi, so as to oppose the tendency to “partify” the anti-Japanese governments (*zhengquan danghua*).²¹ A year later, another assessment of the “democratic work” was done, which commented that more attention had begun to be devoted to the “three-third system” even though it was still not sufficiently implemented. The assessment revealed that “popular election” was probably being practised on county governments, as elections were required to be carried out on time, and called for its extension to governments in *xiang* and the levels below.²² The

¹⁹ Feng Baiju, “Guanyu wocanjia geming,” 446.

²⁰ “Guangdong quwei gei Zhongyang baogao” (17 November 1945), 543.

²¹ “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei dijiuci kuoda huiyi jilu” [Record of the Ninth Extended Meeting of the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee] (September 1942), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 314, 317.

²² “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei guanyu shishi minzhu, wuzhuang liliang, lingdao zuofeng he gongzuo zhidudeng wenti de yijian” [Comments from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee on the questions of implementing democracy, preparing military strength, style of leadership and working system] (1943), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 363-4.

same requirement was retaliated in 1944 as the Hainan Special Committee demanded the whole Party to attach due importance to "popular election" at the grass-roots levels. The Committee particularly reminded cadres to discern the different conditions in their own districts. Those districts, which exhibited favourable conditions, should have the people's assemblies convened publicly whereas those which were not might have to conduct election secretly among a small pre-selected group. The Committee strongly denounced the attitudes of some cadres who were either completely indifferent to the formation of the anti-Japanese governments or disregarded the rules and stipulations passed by them²³

Two months before the Japanese surrender, the Hainan Party intended to establish a new governing body for the entire island. Party branches in different areas were instructed to organise local elections and get ready for the subsequent general election for the new governing body. Adherence to the "three-third principle" was again emphasised. Two-thirds of the representatives, stated the directive, should be reserved for non-Party personnel who were "upright," "trustworthy" and "loved by the people." It had exhibited an accommodating spirit with the reminder that, as far as these candidates were firm in the resistance cause and supported democracy, it would not be a problem if they were a bit "rightist" in their thinking.²⁴ Although the conclusion of the war aborted this attempt to erect a new Communist regime, it shows that the Hainan Communist leaders did try to implement the "three-third system" throughout the war period.

In spite of the persistent efforts of the Hainan Party, it seems quite puzzling why so little progress was attained in the application of the "three-third system." The Hainan Communists left behind no detailed records concerning the problems or difficulties which they encountered. One can do no more than make some intelligent guesses on the basis of passing comments made in their political reports. It seems that the major difficulty was caused by the apparently contradictory ideals of the "three-third system," which aimed to give non-Party personnel a chance to participate in the governments while concurrently to guarantee Communist leadership. In Hainan, cadres were not only told to avoid appointing their followers to government posts but also to forestall any "evil elements" sneaking into the resistance regimes;²⁵ for fear that they would then submerge Communist rule. However, besides traitors and anti-Communist "die-hards," other types

²³ "Zhonggong Qiongya teweierqi gongzuo jihua" (24 May 1944), 393-4.

²⁴ "Zhonggong Qiongya teweier gexianwei de zhishi" [Instructions from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee to every county's committee] (20 June 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 458.

²⁵ "Zhonggong Qiongya teweier guanyu shishi minzhu, wuzhuang liliang, lingdao zuofeng he gongzuo zhidudeng wenti de yijian" (1943), 364.

this perspective, the Hainan Party did not seem to fare exceptionally badly in contrast to what the Guangdong Party leaders had evaluated.

c. Economic Measures

For Yan'an, the establishment of a formal political structure was meant to furnish the Hainan Party with legitimate ground to levy taxes and devise a long-term production plan to support its resistance mobilisation.³² The DGNDH had stipulated a series of measures to strengthen the economy of the base area. Above all else was the "unified progressive tax system," which was allegedly introduced to replace all the existing extortionate levies and miscellaneous taxes (*kejuan zashui*).³³ Although the Independent Corps had attempted to raise revenue from taxation before, the institution of tax measures by the DGNDH signified the Party's intention to transfer this responsibility from the army to the anti-Japanese governments. By so doing, the formerly rather incidental fiscal efforts would gradually be transformed into regular and coordinated practices.

The most significant component of this new "unified progressive tax system" was the "public-army grain tax." It was a variant of the "national salvation public grains" that had been levied in Communist bases in northern China as early as late 1938. Probably, it was introduced to Hainan sometime in 1940 but had not been widely implemented until late 1941. At first, the public-army grain tax was composed of two separate taxes, the public grain tax and the army grain tax. The former was for raising funds to meet the expenses of the governments whereas the latter was for the army. Theoretically speaking, every resident in Hainan was liable to pay the public grain tax. The wealthy, however, were required to pay the additional army grain tax. Such an arrangement was to comply with the principle of rational (or fair) burden, by which the relatively well-off should shoulder a greater share of the taxation burden. These two taxes were originally collected separately, but that practice was found to cause many inconveniences. The Party therefore decided that they should be collected together, which virtually merged the two taxes into one.³⁴

The methods of calculating and collecting the public-army grain tax varied from place to place and with regard to the degree of Communist control. In the "liberated" or

³² "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 559-60.

³³ "Qiongya Dongbeiqu zhengfu kangzhan shiqi shizheng gangling" (10 October 1941), 189.

³⁴ "Qiongya caizheng jingji gongzuo de baogao" [A report on the work of finance and economy of Hainan] (May 1948), *GGLWH*, v. 47, 465-6; *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 79.

“democratic” zones, it was levied twice a year. A specific tax scale was set for calculating the amount, and there were three different methods to determine it. The first one was based on household income per crop. The following figures show how the tax scale was applied to Wenchang County, which was based upon the calculation of household income. For the exceptionally wealthy households, their tax quotas were assessed individually.

Figure 5.

<i>income (per crop)</i>	<i>tax</i>
below 1 <i>dan</i>	nil
above 1 <i>dan</i>	2 <i>sheng</i>
// 2 <i>dan</i>	5 <i>sheng</i>
// 3 <i>dan</i>	9 <i>sheng</i>
// 4 <i>dan</i>	1 <i>dou</i> 4 <i>sheng</i>
// 5 <i>dan</i>	2 <i>dou</i> 7 <i>sheng</i>
// 7 <i>dan</i>	3 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i>

100 catties = 1 *dan* = 60.45 kilograms

1 *dan* = 10 *dou*

1 *dou* = 10 *sheng*

Public-Army Grain Tax in Wenchang County³⁵

The second method to determine the tax was by the size of landholding. In Lingshui County, for instance, those who held land more than two hundred *mu* had to pay ten *dan* of grain. Between two hundred *mu* and one hundred *mu* the rate ranged from four to five *dan*. Below one hundred *mu*, the rate was about two to three *dan*. The landless were generally exempted though they were encouraged to donate voluntarily to the resistance governments.³⁶

The third method was said to have been introduced because not a few tax collectors complained that the two foregoing methods involved too much calculation. Consequently, in some areas, especially those where the anti-Japanese governments had recently been established, the Party devised a tax scale based upon class differentiation. Under this scheme, the population was classified into different classes (*dengji*) and were taxed accordingly. As many as eight classes were established in Nanbao *xiang* of the Ling'ao County and their different tax rates were as follows:

³⁵ *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 80; Li Guangbang, “Yingming de juece, guanghui de qizhi” [A brilliant decision and a shining flag], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 39.

³⁶ *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 80.

Figure 6.

<i>class (dengji)</i>	<i>tax rates (grain)</i>
poor peasants	8 <i>sheng</i>
middle peasants	1 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i>
upper-middle peasants	2 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i>
rich middle peasants	3 <i>dou</i> 5 <i>sheng</i>
rich peasants	5 <i>dou</i>
small landlords	6 <i>dou</i>
middle landlords	8 <i>dou</i>
big landlords	1 <i>dan</i>

Public-Army Grain Tax in Nanbao Xiang³⁷

No information is available on how the classification was defined. The classes themselves seemed to suggest a criterion based on income status, property holding or something similar. However, it is doubtful whether "detailed investigations" were conducted before such classifications were made, as some veterans have claimed, if the purpose of adopting this method of determining the tax rate was to simplify the tax collection procedure.³⁸ It is more likely that the classification was done by impressionistic means; and, as a matter of fact, in most cases where this method was employed, only five (or less) classes were differentiated.

The Communists also collected the public-army grain tax outside their immediate sphere of influence. Because the political situation was rather hostile in either the Japanese- or the GMD-controlled territories, a very different method for tax collection was devised. It targeted a whole village rather than individual households. To begin, the Party undertook some investigations about the size, living standard and landholding pattern of a village. Based on the information obtained, it calculated an estimate and then assigned a tax quota to that particular village. Usually the Party would write to the village heads, the *baojia* heads, or the elders demanding them to levy the tax on behalf of the anti-Japanese government. They were required to transport the grain collected to a pre-selected spot and hand it over to the government representatives. If they refused to pay the tax, the Communist guerrillas would deploy to the village at night to collect the tax themselves. In that case, the village heads or the elite, who were always the chief organisers behind the tax resistance, would be punished, very often with their properties confiscated by the Communists. Tax collection outside the base area was very dangerous,

³⁷ Wang Junmin, "Nanbaoxiang renmin chouji liangshi zhiyuan kangzhan de huiyi" [Reminiscences on how the people of Nanbao *xiang* gathered grain to support the resistance war], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 81.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*; "Qiongya caizheng jingji gongzuo de baogao" (May 1948), 465.

for the Communist guerrillas could easily be ambushed by the Japanese-puppet or GMD forces, who received intelligence from the rural elite. To facilitate fast deployment of their troops, the Communists preferred tax-in-cash rather than tax-in-kind when collecting tax outside their base area.³⁹

The “unified progressive tax system” consisted of a number of other taxes. They included goods tax (import and export), butcher tax, salt tax, business tax, license tax (for cars and boats), native product tax, sea product tax, hawkers’ tax (*xingshangshui*), fishing tax and gambling tax. Despite the Communists’ claim that their tax system was enforced uniformly in the base area, not all the anti-Japanese governments had the same tax lists nor the same tax rates.⁴⁰ Certainly, it was the hope of the DGNDH to unify the taxation policy of its subordinate governing organs, but that was never achieved throughout the war period. A major problem arose from the variations in economic conditions of different regions in Hainan. Very often, local cadres were compelled to adopt some “adjustments,” such as the introduction of new tax items or increase of tax rates, to the system in order to make up for any deficit. For instance, since inland trade was comparatively more prosperous in the northeast region of Hainan where major cities were concentrated, the local anti-Japanese governments could profit sufficiently well from the goods and commercial tax. The same situation was not found in southern Hainan. There, the Communists had to impose instead taxes on traditional industries like salt production and fisheries for extra money.

Aside from taxation, the DGNDH also undertook other measures to strengthen its fiscal situation such as issuing currency, setting up consumer cooperatives and organising production movements. Apparently, even with these various economic policies, the resistance regime was still unable to erect a sound financial foundation. That was why the Hainan Communists continued to engage intensely in the “attack and expropriation activity.” By the end of the war, the Party had set up in every county an economic corps

³⁹ “Zhonggong Qiongya tewe guanyu shishi minzhu, wuzhuang liliang, lingdao zuofeng he gongzuo zhidudeng wenti de yijian” (1943), 372; “Qiongya caizheng jingji gongzuo de baogao” (May 1948), 466; Zhan Lizhi, “Huiyi Dongbeiqu minzhu zhengfu de caishui gongzuo” [Reminiscences on financial and taxation work of the Northeast District Government] and Wu Hua, “Changganxian Chanerqu Haishaxiang shuishou gongzuo huiyi” [Reminiscences on the work of tax collection in Haishaxiang, Chanerqu of Changgan County], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 30, 45; Fu Mengxiong, “Meihe geming genjudi de caijing shuishou gongzuo,” 378-9; Zhan Lizhi, Wang Zhisai, Fan Zechuan and Wang Zhuangxing, “Wenchangxian caijing shuishou gongzuo de huiyi” [Reminiscences on financial and taxation work in Wenchang County], and Pang Lin, “Lingshuixian kangri zhanzheng he jiefang zhanzheng shiqi caishui gongzuo de huiyi” [Reminiscences on financial and taxation work in Lingshui County during the Anti-Japanese War and the Liberation War periods], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 409, 430.

⁴⁰ *Qiongya caizheng jingjishi*, 76-9; cf. “Zhonggong Qiongya tewe guanyu shishi minzhu, wuzhuang liliang, lingdao zuofeng he gongzuo zhidudeng wenti de yijian” (1943), 363-4.

to carry out the “attack and expropriation” both on land and at sea. A veteran summed up succinctly the methods in three phrases: “stopping cars on land, intercepting boats at sea, and searching for the ‘die-hards’ in villages.” (*lushang jieche, haishang lanchuan, xiangcun souwan*).⁴¹ It was suggested in the last chapter that the Party might justify its “attack and expropriation” action by denouncing any person who took up the anti-Communist stance as “traitors” since it viewed itself as the genuine anti-Japanese force. The establishment of the DGNDH, which offered some quasi-legitimate status to the Communists’ fiscal laws, provided an even more convenient pretext for the Party to confiscate the wealth and goods of those who refused to pay tax to the anti-Japanese governments.⁴²

While many veterans acknowledge in their memoirs that the “attack and expropriation activity” constituted a source of income for the Communist regime as a whole, few venture to comment explicitly on its importance to the economy of the Hainan Base Area. One plausible reason is that such income was rather unstable and was therefore difficult to estimate. However, the silence might also be a deliberate one, for the veterans realised that the Hainan Party’s reliance on the “attack and expropriation activity” revealed how far the local revolution was from the much vaunted “Yan’an model” of economic reconstruction.⁴³ Nevertheless, the persistence of the movement throughout the Anti-Japanese War and, indeed, its extension into the civil war period indicated that its contribution to the revenue of the Communist regime in Hainan was in all likelihood considerable.

d. A Possible Case of Non-Development

When examining the economic policies of the Hainan Base Area, one cannot escape the impression that they were devised solely to raise funds for the armed struggle. Little attention was given to meeting the needs or improving the livelihood of the people,

⁴¹ Li Gaotai, “Qiongsanxian caijing shuishou gongzuo pianduan huiyi” [Some reminiscences on financial and taxation work in Qiongsan County], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 55.

⁴² See, for example, Zhan Lizhi, 30-1; Zhan Lizhi, et. al., 409-10; Zhou Guangdao, “Gangbei zhengshuizhan de huiyi” [Reminiscences on the tax station in Gangbei] and Zhou Minfeng, “Nanqu yanhai caijing gongzuo ji dui douzheng de huiyi” [Reminiscences on financial and economic work as well as the struggle against the enemy on the coast of the southern district], *QGGCSSX*, v. 2, 75, 90; Chen Liangru, “Wanningxian Rui’anxiang caijing gongzuo de huiyi” [Reminiscences on financial and economic work in the Rui’an *xiang* of Wanning County], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 447.

⁴³ The positive image of Yan’an’s economic reforms depicted by Mark Selden has been challenged by Chen Yung-fa who argues that the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region had to rely on the opium trade to alleviate its financial difficulties. Chen, “The Blooming Poppy”; cf. Selden, 144-219.

a fact that the Hainan Communists themselves acknowledged.⁴⁴ While the Party abolished the GMD's "extortionate levies and miscellaneous taxes," it replaced them by new items even though the Party stressed that its tax rates were generally lower than those of the GMD. On the other hand, the rent and interest reduction campaigns, the chief means by which the Party offered the peasantry concrete gains and brought about social changes during the war, existed on paper alone in Hainan. (The policy of rent and interest reductions was stipulated in the ruling manifesto of the DGNDH and its details were spelled out in the "Provisional Land Laws" issued on the same day of the manifesto.⁴⁵) This negligence of the rent and interest reductions was cited by the Guangdong Party leaders to criticise their Hainan comrades for alienating themselves from the masses. They strongly denounced the Hainan Communists for not implementing the Party's policies, reducing the local anti-Japanese governments to merely tax-levying organisations, which had done nothing to organise and mobilise the masses nor to relieve them from their sufferings.⁴⁶

To a large extent, the criticism unleashed by the Guangdong Party was valid, but the question at stake was why the Hainan Party made almost no effort at all to launch the reduction campaigns. The few Chinese Communist historians who ventured to reflect upon the question tell that it was because the Hainan Base Area was so unconsolidated and thus could not attain to a sufficient level of military security necessary for the implementation of the campaign.⁴⁷ This answer certainly embodies quite a lot of truth and prompts a look into Hainan's military situation in the next section. Perhaps, the question does not simply alert us to the harsh environment in which the Hainan Communists carried out their struggle but also reveals something about the overall process of base construction in Hainan, particularly in relation to the loss of radio contact between the island and Yan'an.

By 1941, the year that communication between Yan'an and Hainan was terminated, the development of the Communist movement in Hainan was not lagging far behind other late established base areas, for example, in Shandong and Central China. In

⁴⁴ "Zhonggong Qiongya tewe dijiuci kuoda huiyi jilu" (September 1942), 268; "Qiongya caizheng jingji gongzuo de baogao" (May 1948), 469.

⁴⁵ "Qiongya Dongbeiqu zhengfu zanzheng tiaoli" [The provisional land laws of the Government of the Northeast District of Hainan] (10 October 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 181-5. As with the manifesto, the correct date of this document should be 10 November 1941.

⁴⁶ "Guangdong quwei gei Zhongyang baogao" [A report from the Guangdong Regional Committee to the Party Centre] (17 November 1945), *GGLWH*, v. 38, 543.

⁴⁷ Wang Liqi, et. al., 134-5.

these regions, various levels of anti-Japanese governments had been founded for about one year. The problems of enlistment and logistics still constituted the Party's primary concerns, although initial attempts at mobilising the masses through socio-economic measures had been made. Returning to the policy of rent and interest reductions, it was stipulated in Hainan in 1941. By that time, the movement had not yet achieved any significant progress in Central China⁴⁸ while in Shandong, it stopped primarily at the "propaganda stage."⁴⁹ As Carl E. Dorris observes, except in the Jin-Cha-Ji Border Region, "few base areas, even in North China, reached a stage of development conducive to the introduction of rent and interest reductions drives on the scale and magnitude of the border region in the first four years of the war."⁵⁰

Hence, the marked differences between Hainan and the Communist bases in North and Central China set in only during the later stages of the war. What was absent in Hainan was that the United Front had not been transformed into a "framework for struggle." As Chen Yung-fa's study illustrates vividly, the Party's seizure of rural control was accomplished by means of a series of mass mobilisation strategies (including rent and interest reduction campaigns). On the one hand, they systematically divided the traditional elite and undermined their power. On the other hand, they successfully roused the peasantry and built up the superiority of the basic masses.⁵¹ No doubt, military consolidation such as that of the Communists in North and Central China, provided the precondition for the application of these mobilisation strategies. Nevertheless, equally indispensable was Yan'an's role. Although Yan'an was not the place where these mobilisation strategies originated; nevertheless, it was through Mao Zedong's persistent efforts that they were refined and disseminated to Communist bases throughout the country.⁵² Liu Shaoqi was known to be the agent of promoting the Maoist version of expansion in Central China⁵³ and, to a lesser extent, in Shandong.⁵⁴ Liu contributed to Communist growth in the two regions by rectifying the "rightist tendency" of the local

⁴⁸ Chen, *Making Revolution*, 156.

⁴⁹ David M. Paulson, "War and Revolution in North China," 175; cf. Elise A. DeVido, "The Survival of the Shandong Base Area, 1937-1943: External Influences and Internal Conflicts," in *North China At War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945*, eds. Feng Chongyi and David S. G. Goodman, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2000), 173-88.

⁵⁰ Carl E. Dorris, "Peasant Mobilisation in North China and the Origins of Yen'an Communism," *The China Quarterly*, 68 (December 1976), 706.

⁵¹ Chen, *Making Revolution*, 121-405.

⁵² Although Carl E. Dorris disputed about whether or not such kind of "mass line methodology" originated from Yan'an or other North China bases, he nevertheless did not deny Yan'an's role in setting this methodology as the model for Communist bases elsewhere. See his article, 718-9.

⁵³ Chen, *Making Revolution*.

⁵⁴ David M. Paulson, "War and Revolution in North China," 206-31.

Parties, feeding the cadres with successful base building experience from elsewhere, and intensifying the struggle within the United Front on both the military and social levels.

From the beginning, the Hainan Base Area suffered a geographical disadvantage. Unlike the Communist bases in Central China, which Mao viewed as a potential escape hatch for the Party in the north and was long eager to link up the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, the development of Hainan held no similar potential. Although Hainan was regarded as holding the key for the Communist expansion in South China, to the Yan'an leaders, this role would have its real significance probably at the very last stage of the war. As a result, they were not prepared to back up their design for Hainan by offering substantial supplies of funding and cadres. In reality, topographical difficulties meant that no military reinforcements could possibly be despatched from the north to Hainan to assist the local base building, in the way it had taken place in Central China.⁵⁵

Already in such an unfavourable position, the Hainan Base Area suffered more with the communication failure in 1941. It was particularly detrimental for it deprived the Hainan Communists of the last resources they could expect from Yan'an; that is, continual guidance and advice on base expansion. If the introduction of radio communication to Hainan was originally made out of Yan'an's desire to supervise directly the island's resistance efforts, its sudden breakdown frustrated the transplantation there of the Maoist version of base expansion. The local base building process was consequently interrupted or, from another perspective, "frozen" at the stage of 1941. The preceding analysis of the political and economic policies of the Hainan Base Area shows that they were still dominated by the concern of mobilisation for armed struggle without a vision of achieving a realignment of the rural power structure that characterised the later development of the Communist bases in North and Central China. To a certain extent, due to its loss of contact with the Party Centre, wartime Hainan became in a real sense a "lonely island" (*gudao*). Instead of assimilating into the Maoist model, it fell outside Mao's overall strategic perimeters and took its own revolutionary path.

Of course, the communication issue alone was not responsible for the Party's failure to transform Hainan as a Communist stronghold. Other factors also contributed, such as the intense Japanese mop-up attacks and the traditional Li-Han ethnic suspicion. Their importance will be underscored in later discussion. Nevertheless, due to the unique wartime situation of Hainan, the lack of continual inspiration and challenge from above

⁵⁵ Chen, *Making Revolution*, 56-7.

were significant factors in thwarting the Party's dream of seizing the island. Lacking a higher vision, the Hainan cadres were unable to transcend their immediate experience and elevate the local resistance movement to a new stage that would work towards the common goal of the national revolution.

II. The Three-Way Contest in Hainan

After the Meihe incident, the war in Hainan turned into a three-way contest between the CCP, the GMD and the Japanese. The survey of the Hainan military situation after 1941 in this section, to some degree, substantiated the argument that military insecurity had prevented the Hainan Party from implementing its socio-economic reforms. Especially true was the series of Japanese mopping-up campaigns from 1942 to 1944, which had virtually extinguished Communist presence in the Qiongwen region.

a. "Friction Struggle" with the GMD

The success of driving the Independent Corps from Meihe had greatly bolstered the spirit of the GMD. Eager to capitalise on this success, it launched another anti-Communist military operation in the spring of 1941. Under commander Li Chunnong, the GMD troops pressed near the Qiongwen region and prepared to strike a fatal assault on the Independent Corps. In the face of the GMD's renewed attack, Feng could hardly minimise the risk involved as he had last time. He, together with other military leaders Zhuang Tian, Li Zhenya and Wu Kezhi, took several trips to observe the terrain around the Qiongwen region and then carefully devised a battle plan for self-defence. Feng also delivered a number of speeches to his fellow soldiers to boost their confidence and morale, which ostensibly elicited from them plenty of pledges to defeat the intruders.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, nothing seemed to enhance the position of the Independent Corps in a more tangible way than the Communists' seizure of a big load of GMD arms just before the battle broke out. That occurred in early January 1941, when the Hainan Party received a piece of intelligence from Yan'an, which said that a load of arms was being shipped from Guangzhou Bay to Hainan to equip the GMD for anti-Communist purposes. Based on the intelligence, the Hainan Communists successfully captured the arms when they passed through Wenchang County.⁵⁷ This supply of new arms greatly increased the fighting

⁵⁶ *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 250-1; Zhuang Tian, 92-4.

⁵⁷ "Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Wang Jiexiang zhi Feng Baiju, Li Ming, Zhuang Tian dian" [Radio message from Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Wang Jiexiang to Feng Baiju, Li Ming and Zhuang Tian] (7 January 1941),

ability of the Independent Corps and contributed immensely to its successful defence of the Qiongwen region against the GMD attack.

In the early morning of 12 March 1941, under the cover of the mist, the GMD army invaded the Qiongwen base from two sides. They met stiff resistance from the Independent Corps. Commanded by Zhuang Tian, the Communist guerrillas skilfully outmanoeuvred the two invading troop corps and thwarted their attempts to combine. This time, the GMD soldiers had underrated the combat capability of the Independent Corps and fought less cautiously than they had previously in Meihe. In a place called Luofengpo, Zhuang managed to lure a company of GMD's troops there and annihilated them after they had been completely isolated. Fearing more casualties, Li Chunnong decided to pull out.⁵⁸ The victory in Luofengpo was reported to have had a profound psychological impact on the Independent Corps. Feng Baiju emphasised that it elevated tremendously the morale of his soldiers.⁵⁹ Also, Zhuang Tian claimed that the victory won more support for the Party from the populace of the Qiongwen base, many of whom now sent their sons to join the Independent Corps.⁶⁰

In any event, the GMD was far from totally defeated, and it resumed its offensive quickly. From March 1941 to early 1942, frequent fighting broke out between the two sides. The Independent Corps was able to repulse the GMD intruders each time, but it also suffered heavy losses. Feng had to recall a division of troops from the Ling'ao-Danxian region to reinforce the defence of the Qiongwen base. On the other hand, the Party resorted to negotiation for relieving the mounting military pressure and buying time for regrouping and redeployment. In order to reach this point, the Party utilised patriotic appeals to mobilise the "progressive gentry" and, through their connections, sought a cease fire with the GMD. Some negotiations did take place, but deep-rooted mutual suspicion and hostility forestalled any possibility of reaching an agreement. Consequently, the GMD-CCP relationship during this period was characterised by a pattern of alternations between "fight" and "talk" (*dada tantan*).⁶¹

FBYS, 474; "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei, Qiongya junwei zhi Zhongyang bing junwei dian" [Radio message from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee and the Hainan Military Committee to the Party Centre and the Military Committee] (14 March 1941), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 179; cf. ; Lin Huicai, "Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi," 67.

⁵⁸ *Hongqi budao*, 286; Lin Huicai, *ibid.*, 67; Zhuang Tian, 95-8.

⁵⁹ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 441.

⁶⁰ Zhuang Tian, 98.

⁶¹ Interview with Chen Qingshan; *Hongqi budao*, 287-90; *QZS*, 136-7; Zhuang Tian, 98-103.

Three incidents happened in late 1941 and early 1942 that began to alter the scene. First, Wu Daonan, the chief anti-Communist proponent in Hainan, was transferred to the mainland in November 1941. It was not entirely clear what caused Wu's departure. As mentioned before, Wu had been involved in a factional struggle with Wang Yi, who had lost in the first round of the power game. Wang was very displeased with Wu's anti-Communist activities which, not only far from eradicating the Communists, but brought heavy casualties to his army. It may have been that Wang exploited the GMD's recent setbacks to strike back and eventually outmanoeuvred Wu. Support for such a conjecture is that Wu was replaced by Qiu Yuesong, Wang's "foster brother" (*yixiongdi*).⁶²

Secondly, according to Lin Huicai, after Wu Daonan had left, Li Chunnong took over Wu's position as the leader of the anti-Communist camp in the Hainan GMD. Li was the field commander of the Seventh regiment (*baogituan*), allegedly the best equipped GMD force in Hainan, which spearheaded all major battles with the Independent Corps. Twice the Party sought to reach a truce with Li but failed.⁶³ Li's ascendancy in the Hainan GMD, however, was short-lived. In the winter of 1941 (some sources say early 1942), while on his way to the coast of Wenchang to receive another load of weaponry and ammunition from Guangzhou Bay, Li and his troops were ambushed by the Independent Corps.⁶⁴ Li was shot in the fighting, and his death weakened the anti-Communist force of the Hainan GMD.

Thirdly, even though Li Chunnong had died, his troops continued to push their way to the coast to collect the military supplies. While escorting these supplies back to their headquarters, the GMD army was again caught by surprise by the Independent Corps. About a thousand GMD soldiers were besieged in Dashui village. It was not until five days later that a reinforcement of three thousand troops came to their rescue. A fierce clash subsequently broke out. No information is available regarding the total number of Communist guerrillas involved. Communist accounts record that more than ten thousand local people had been mobilised to participate in the battle, but their support probably took the form of logistics rather than of actual combat.⁶⁵ In any event, the military strength of the GMD and the CCP must have been closely matched. Both sides employed

⁶² Cf. "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei, Qiongya junwei zhi Zhongyang bing junwei dian" (14 March 1941), 180; Lin Huicai, "Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi," 74.

⁶³ *Hongqi budao*, 289-90.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 290; Lin Huicai, "Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi," 72; Zeng Sansheng, 153; Huang Jingyu, "Lifusiling Chunnong jiangjun zhuanglüe" [A short biography of Deputy Commander General Li Chunnong], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 574.

⁶⁵ *Hongqi budao*, 290.

their main forces and appear to have expected a final showdown. As it turned out, they inflicted serious casualties on each other, figures vary from several hundred to over a thousand.⁶⁶ Chinese Communist historians generally assert that the battle of Dashui basically quelled the “anti-Communist” high tide in Hainan. The GMD army was said to have been significantly beaten and was thus unable to raise any more large-scale offensives against the Independent Corps. Moreover, Lin Huicai revealed that the GMD’s setback in Dashui served the Communists by aggravating the conflict between different factions inside the Hainan GMD. Several capable military officers, including Lin himself, fell victim to the power struggle and were transferred out of Hainan. Their departure further crippled the GMD’s ability to put up decisive measures against the Independent Corps.⁶⁷

b. The Japanese Mopping-Up Campaigns

Compared to the GMD’s repression, the Japanese mopping-up campaigns proved a lot more difficult to cope with for the Communists. This was especially true from 1942 onwards when the Japanese intensified the pacification operations in their rear. The immediate context was Japan’s objective to consolidate Hainan as the base for its military advancement into Southeast Asia. It was said that Japan wanted to transform Hainan into a huge and “unsinkable aircraft carrier” to assist its war efforts in the southern Pacific. At first, the Japanese mop-up actions did not target the Communists specifically but also the GMD troops as well as the local irregular forces. Nevertheless, the Communists felt themselves shouldering most of the pressure since their guerrilla base in the Qiongwen border region was located close to Haikou where the Japanese commanders’ headquarters in Hainan was established.⁶⁸

From late 1942 to 1943, the Japanese increasingly focused their attacks on the Communist guerrillas. Party sources almost unanimously attributed the development to the “secret dealings” between the GMD and the Japanese, by which both demarcated their own sphere of defence and collaborated in an anti-Communist front. Perhaps there might be some substance in the Communists’ assertion; but a more reasonable explanation is

⁶⁶ Lin Huicai, “Guomindang zai Hainandao jinxing fangong neizhan de huiyi,” 72-3; *Hongqi budao*, 290; *QZS*, 138; Zhuang Tian, 115.

⁶⁷ Lin Huicai, *ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁸ Chen Qingshan, “Yi fan ‘canshi’, fan ‘saodang’ de jianku douzheng” [Reminiscences on the difficult ‘anti-nibbling’ and ‘anti-mop-up’ struggle], *QX*, 15 (September 1985), 103; *Hongqi budao*, 322; Luo Wenhong, 115; Qiu Yuesong, “Hainan qinan kangzhan zhi jiantao,” 69.

that, by 1943, the Communists were the only active anti-Japanese force left in Hainan. The Seventh Y operation, which commenced in November 1942 and lasted until mid-1943, was a campaign designed to retaliate against the Communists' sabotage activities in northeast Hainan such as destroying Japanese vehicles, disruption of communication lines and attacks on isolated Japanese forts.⁶⁹

It was not until the latter half of 1944 that the Japanese army began to scale down the frequency and intensity of its mop-up operations. By that time, as will be evident, the Japanese had accomplished their intended task of eliminating the Communist presence in the Qiongwen region. As a consequence, the Communists had to abandon their base and dispersed themselves among the mountainous areas in southeast and northwest Hainan. However, due to the imminent anticipation of an Allied landing, the Japanese redirected their attention to the coast. Also, in early 1945, more army units were transferred from the mainland to stiffen Japan's defence posture in Hainan, but they were prepared to fight against the American, not the Communists.⁷⁰

In many aspects, Japanese repression in Hainan demonstrated significant similarities, except the timing, with operations in North China.⁷¹ Prior to 1942, Japan's pacification work usually started with a general sweep of the designated areas, which drove out the local resistance forces, both Communists and non-Communists. After towns and market centres were occupied, roads were built to link them facilitating rapid deployment of troops. Concurrently, the Japanese instituted puppet governments in the pacified areas to maintain local order. With them, a number of measures were introduced to deprive the Chinese guerrillas of popular support. The most notable one was the issuing of the "good citizen's certificate" (*liangminzheng* or *shunminzheng*). The Chinese were required to carry with them this certificate when travelling around. Any one who failed to show the certificate on demand could be executed by the Japanese right away. For a certificate to be issued, a person had to meet the criterion of obeying Japanese rules and regulations which, above all else, forbade absolutely any contact with the Chinese guerrillas and any supplies for their bases.⁷²

⁶⁹ Chen Qingshan, *ibid.*, 103-4; *Hongqi budao*, 324-5; Philips, 97-8; Wang Bofu trans., "Ribei qinlütejün zai Qiongdào de chuisi zhengzha" [The final struggle of the Japanese invading army in Hainan Island], *QX*, 14 (February 1985), 206-7.

⁷⁰ Cf. Philips, 98.

⁷¹ See Hartford, "Repression and Communist Success."

⁷² Chen Qingshan, "Yi fan 'canshi', fan 'saodang' de jianku douzheng," 109; "Li Jiming guanyu Qiongya kangzhan qingkuang de baogao" (10 April 1940), 62-3, 71; Jiang Yizhong and Chen Qimei, "Liangshi zhanxianshang de duidi douzheng" [The struggle with the enemy over the battle line of food], *QGGCSSX*, v. 3, 428; Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan qinan kangzhan zhi jiantao," 68.

By 1942, the Japanese had basically put down all effective resistance in Hainan, except in the northeast region of the island where the Communists' Independent Corps and the GMD's Seventh Peace Preservation Regiment were still active. The Hainan GMD government also survived in the interior, but the sparsely populated Wuzhi Mountain areas under its control seemed to have attracted little interest from the Japanese. Then, in 1942 and 1943, the Japanese targeted their mopping-up campaigns on the northeast region. The new phase of pacification works was characterised by certain features. First, the construction of fortifications was intensified. After a village or a *xiang* was pacified, the Japanese would establish "base points" (*judian*) where "blockhouses" were built. The interval between these base points seldom exceeded three miles. From "points" the Japanese army proceeded to "lines," which meant linking the base points by highways and bridges. Much of the construction work was forced upon the villagers by the Japanese military. When a point-line network was erected, the Japanese would move on to pacify the nearby area until a "surface area" was completely clear of opposition. By repeated employment of this point-line-surface strategy, the Japanese carved up the region and systematically reduced the room for guerrilla deployment so that, in the end, the resistance forces would be pinned down and exterminated. To the Communists, the new Japanese mop-up strategy had in effect destroyed their base area section by section. They hence designated it by a special name known as *canshi*, which described the Japanese pacification action as similar to a silkworm nibbling at a mulberry tree leaf.⁷³

Secondly, the infamous "three-all" (kill all, burn all, loot all) policy was employed to strike any village which was suspected of rendering aid to the Chinese resistance forces. Where the Japanese troops swept through, local inhabitants were slaughtered, houses burnt down and grain and livestock completely removed. Due to these fierce extermination campaigns, a large stretch of territory on the border of Qiongsan and Wenchang Counties was said to have turned virtually into a "no man's land" (*wurenqu*). Aside from the "three-all" policy, the Japanese also carried out "forced emigration" to deprive the Chinese guerrillas of aid from the rural populace. Residents of several *xiang* in the Qiongsan border had to move their home involuntarily to areas within the sphere

⁷³ Chen Qingshan, "Yi fan 'canshi', fan 'saodang' de jianku douzheng," 105; Luo Wenhong, 116; cf. Philips, 97; Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan qinan kangzhan zhi jiantao," 70; Lin Ying, 11-4.

of Japan's military control to ensure that they were beyond the reach of the "hostile forces."⁷⁴

Thirdly, more severe political and economic controls were applied to the "pacified areas." The *baojia* system was installed, with every five families forming a mutual guarantee (*wujia lianbao*). If one family was found violating the rules, the other four were liable to the same punishments. Moreover, puppet organisations were expanded and penetrated to the grass-roots levels. In some places, the Japanese instituted the "Japanese family members" (*Rijiaren*) and "anti-Communist youth corps" to undertake surveillance efforts in villages and prohibit strangers from approaching the villagers. Restriction on working hours in the fields were also imposed, and peasants were not allowed to leave their homes early in the morning or late at night.⁷⁵

The GMD army and its affiliated local defence forces were the first victims of this wave of the reinvigorated Japanese pacification. From late 1941 to June 1942, the Japanese launched the Fifth Y (between 25 November to 25 January) and Sixth Y (between 8 to 25 June) operations in the northeast region of Hainan. GMD sources acknowledge that these operations broke their resistance in the region. Owing to heavy injuries, many GMD-affiliated local defence corps disintegrated while the remaining few were driven underground. Even the comparatively better-equipped Seventh Regiment was forced to retreat from northeast Hainan into the interior. Furthermore, the Japanese army occupied the GMD's food supply bases in Qiongliuqu (Tunchang, Nankun) and Dingsiqu (Nanlu, Niaopo). This strategic move of the Japanese, claimed Qiu Yuesong, was designed to destroy the GMD's troops by starving them to death.⁷⁶

The Independent Corps was able to survive the first wave of the Japanese mop-up operations partly because they were not yet the prime target of the enemy and partly because they enjoyed better local support than the GMD. Rather than retreating, the Communist guerrillas responded initially by mobilising the masses extensively for sabotage activities. In late May of 1942, Party cadres organised numerous "sabotage squads" to disrupt communication between Haikou and Wenchang and between

⁷⁴ Chen Qingshan, *ibid.*, 106-9; Wang Shanping, "'Wurenqu' li de douzheng" [The struggle inside "no man's land"], *QX*, 14 (February 1985), 172; Lin Ying, 12-3.

⁷⁵ Chen Qingshan, *ibid.*, 105, 109; Luo Wenhong, 167-9; Li Chunchu, "Zai fan 'canshi' douzhengzhong Wanerqu jiceng zhengquan gongzuo de yixie huiyi" [Some reminiscences on work at the grass-roots levels of the political authority in Waner district during the "anti-nibbling" struggle], *QX*, 17 (July 1987), 94-5; "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei baogao" [A report from the Hainan Special Committee] (12 April 1944), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 386.

⁷⁶ Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan qinan kangzhan zhi jiantao," 70, 113.

Wenchang and Jiayi. Between these cities, telephone lines were cut while roads and bridges were blown up. Also, during the three months from May to August, the Independent Corps actively ambushed the Japanese soldiers who were despatched to the region to repair the communication line and construct fortifications. Chinese Communist historians hailed these vigorous efforts as bringing "great victories" to the Independent Corps since they defeated Japan's goal of "eliminating the Hainan Communist guerrillas within three months." However, the reality was different; far from deterring the Japanese, these disturbances only drew their attention to the Communists. In November 1942, the Japanese army launched the Seventh Y operation, which was specifically targeted on the Communist guerrillas. It underwent three phases; it commenced in the Qiongwen border region between 1 November 1942 and 19 April 1943, and then extended to the wider area where Communist presence was noted between 20 April and 25 May and, finally, between 5 and 24 June.⁷⁷

On 17 October 1942, the Hainan Special Committee issued a directive on "anti-nibbling" tactics. These tactics were apparently based on the rationale of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." As reprisals against the "three-all" policy, the Communists used the tactic of "fortifying the walls and clearing the fields" (*jianbi qingye*) to prevent the Japanese from obtaining supplies and services from the local populace. Like the Japanese, the Party carried out involuntary migration and required all villagers of the Qiongwen base who resided within three miles of the enemy's base points to move out. The anti-Japanese governments promised to relieve the migrants but condemned traitors those who refused to conform. Doubly, these people were prohibited from travelling outside the Japanese forts. On the other hand, the residents of the base area were not allowed to go to the Japanese-garrisoned market towns nor perform any type of labour for the enemy. The imposition of these drastic measures aimed to empty all the villages around the Japanese base points so that "not one person nor one thing could be used by the enemy."⁷⁸

The Party also hardened its stance towards the puppet organisations. Puppet village heads had to choose either to end their connection with the enemy and side with the Communists or to be eliminated. The directive of 17 October emphasised that this

⁷⁷ "Zhonggong Qiongya tewe baogao" (12 April 1944), 383; Luo Wenhong, 116-117; *QZS*, 150-2; Philips, 97.

⁷⁸ "Zhonggong Qiongya tewe guanyu fensui diwan canshi zhengce de jueyi" [Resolutions of the Hainan Special Committee concerning the smashing of the "nibbling" policy of the enemy and the "die-hards"] (17 October 1942), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 332-3.

task had to be fulfilled immediately because it would help shatter the compromise attitude of the masses and push them towards the route of determined struggle. In line with that rationale, the Party announced the confiscation of all “good citizen certificates” held by the residents of the Qiongwen base.⁷⁹

Finally, the Independent Corps stepped up its military actions against the Japanese. Although Feng had avoided head-on military confrontation with the Japanese, he instructed his guerrilla troops to wander around the outskirts of the Japanese base points and search for every opportunity to harass them. For example, active interceptions of enemy vehicles were encouraged, especially for seizing grains transported from outside to supply the troops stationed in these base points in order to increase the hardship in defending their forts.⁸⁰

It did not take long for the Party to realise that whatever success its ambitious “anti-nibbling” tactics accomplished, they also led to declining popular support for the Communists. On 7 January 1943, two months after the Japanese had launched the Seventh Y operations, the Hainan Party issued another directive for the “anti-nibbling” struggle. Although the Party still insisted that the Japanese mop-up had basically failed since it could neither destroy the main forces of the Independent Corps nor subjugate the masses of the base area, it nevertheless admitted that the populace had begun escaping to the enemy’s base points. Undoubtedly, the Party’s drastic measures had made life unbearable for the rural population, and some of them considered capitulating to the enemy a desirable alternative. As a result, the Party was compelled to readjust its strategy to win them back.⁸¹

In the 7 January directive, the Hainan Party toned down the radical nature of the previous measures. It was summed up in the phrase “one step backward, two steps forward” (*tuiyibu jinliangbu*). The directive suspended the involuntary migration and the confiscation of “good citizen certificates.” These two measures were probably the most unpopular among all the “anti-nibbling” tactics, for the former greatly disrupted village life and the latter exposed the inhabitants to enemy retaliation. Moreover, compromise with the Japanese was, to a certain degree, tolerated by the Party. Old people and children, who provided least-desired manpower for the base area, were permitted to move

⁷⁹ Ibid., 333.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 333-4.

⁸¹ “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei guanyu fancanshi douzheng de zaisan zhishi” [Another instruction from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee concerning the “anti-nibbling” struggle] (7 January 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 340; cf. “Zhonggong Qiongya tewei baogao” (12 April 1944), 386.

back to their original villages. It was intended that their return would, on the one hand, lessen the Japanese hostility to the people and, on the other hand, serve the Party in gathering intelligence. Furthermore, the Party exercised greater discrimination concerning the elimination of traitors and spies. It was confined to “the incurable,” “the most active” and “the most wicked.” For “the ordinary,” cadres should resort to persuasion to win them over or transform them.⁸²

These adjustments, however, were unable to rehabilitate the Communist struggle in the Qiongwen region, perhaps because they were introduced too late or because the mass support they generated was still insufficient to counteract the Japanese repression. By the time another new “anti-nibbling” instruction was given on 18 March 1943, which called for more attention to infiltration into puppet regimes as well as the consolidation and restoration of various organisations of the Qiongwen base, the Hainan Special Committee had adopted a new strategy known as “persistence in the inner line, advance to the outer line” (*jianchi neixian tingchu waixian*).⁸³ It decided to relocate the Independent Corps and the Party’s headquarters elsewhere from the Qiongwen base and leave behind only a small guerrilla force to continue the struggle. Although the Communists did not regard such a decision as a sign of defeat or an abandonment of their base under enemy pressure, it remains the fact that after 1943, the Qiongwen border region ceased to be a Communist stronghold in Hainan. The Japanese repression had made life almost impossible for the guerrillas and they found no choice but to look for new sites for base building.

From the spring of 1943 onwards, the main divisions of the Independent Corps began to withdraw one by one from the Qiongwen region. Beforehand, a heated debate had broken out among the Party leaders about where they should settle. Feng Baiju argued for southwest Hainan because of the light Japanese presence there, but the majority of the members in the Hainan Special Committee voted for the southeast. The latter based their argument on the consideration that the region had once been a Communist hotbed in the prewar period, where the Party could expect ready support from the local people. Further, a small Communist contingent was already operating in Liulianshan area. Nevertheless, the plan to advance into the southeast was soon

⁸² “Zhonggong Qiongya tewe guanyu fancanshi douzheng de zaisan zhishi” (7 January 1943), 340-1.

⁸³ “Zhonggong Qiongya tewe guanyu fancanshi douzheng de xinzhi” [New instructions from the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee concerning the “anti-nibbling” struggle] (18 March 1943), *GGLWH*, v. 40, 351-52; Luo Wenhong, 128; “Zhonggong Qiongya dangshi jishi” [A chronicle of events in the history of the Chinese Communist Hainan Party], *QX*, 19 (March 1992), 144.

abandoned according to Feng because the Communist encountered fierce Japanese repression there. As a result, the Hainan Special Committee and the commanders' headquarters of the Independent Corps were relocated to western Hainan, purportedly following what Feng had originally advised.⁸⁴

Feng's reminiscences, however, do not correspond exactly to the subsequent development of the Communist resistance in Hainan as now known. While the Hainan Special Committee transplanted itself to the Liuqinshan area of Chengmai, the Communist guerrilla forces concurrently dispersed to the mountainous area in the west, southwest, and southeast parts of Hainan. In late 1943, the Party initiated for each of these areas its own command body known as the Committee for Military and Political Affairs (*junzheng weiyuanhui*) to take charge of the local resistance activities on behalf of the Hainan Special Committee and the Independent Corps' central command. It seems therefore that, initially, the disagreement between the Communist leaders revolved around the site for building a new "central resistance base" (*zhongxin genjudi*) to replace the Qiongwen base. However, the setback in the southeast moved the majority's opinion towards another strategy. This strategy was to spread out the resistance movement and base building throughout the whole island instead of concentrating on one particular location so as to make it impossible for the Japanese to smash the Communist guerrillas by one stroke. Rather than an endorsement of Feng's view, as he espoused, the new strategy only incorporated Feng's aspiration to develop the Communists' strength also in western Hainan.⁸⁵

To summarise, though emerging out of different historical contexts, the Japanese mop-up operations in Hainan, as their counterparts in North China, plunged the Party into an unprecedented crisis. As a result of the Japanese repression, the whole political and economic infrastructure of the Qiongwen base was dissolved. Moreover, the Independent Corps suffered heavy casualties. The actual number would likely be no less than a few thousands although no reliable figure was available.⁸⁶ The Hainan Party was in disarray too. During the two-year mop-up operations, about three thousand members were said to have forsaken the Party.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 443-5; cf. *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 278-81.

⁸⁵ Cf. Fu Rongding, "Congjianli pingyuan kangri youji genjudi dao chuangjian Wuzhishan zhongxin genjudi yiduan lishi de huiyi" [Reminiscences from the history on the establishment of an anti-Japanese guerrilla base area to the establishment of the Wuzhi Mountain Base Area], *QX*, v. 10, 34, 36-7; Zhuang Tian, 172-3; Luo Wenhong, 155; *Hongqi budao*, 339-40; *QZS*, 159-70.

⁸⁶ Cf., *QZS*, 183.

⁸⁷ "Guangdong quwei gei Zhongyang baogao" (17 November 1945), 542.

The Hainan Party did survive eventually; but unlike North and Central China, the Communists did not emerge as the superior force in the resistance camp after the Japanese repression subsided. Rather, Japanese sources estimate that by July 1944, the GMD had a total army strength of 7,373 in Hainan while the number of the CCP was 4,408.⁸⁸ Much of this should be attributed to the fact that the main GMD forces, which were stationed at the Wuzhi Mountain benefited from the natural shelter and encountered few direct attacks from the Japanese. The Hainan Communists had long understood the disadvantages of their Qiongwen base in terms of terrain and geographical location. The military hardships of 1943 to 1944 only highlighted the strategic significance of the Wuzhi Mountain to the Communist resistance in Hainan, a fact that had already been emphasised by the Party Centre early in 1940. However, why did the Hainan Communist take no serious effort to construct a base in Wuzhi Mountain which, if successful, would have provided them a relatively secure base area to fare better during the Japanese repression? The discussion in the next section hopes to provide an answer.

III. The Road to the Wuzhi Mountain Base Area

Earlier, on 7 November 1940, the Party Centre had emphasised to the Hainan Communists that they must take seriously the work among the ethnic minority groups (the Lis and the Miaos) because it was fundamental to the survival and ultimate success of the resistance movement in Hainan. The Hainan cadres should respect their social customs and win their trust so that these minority people would join the resistance camp rather than serve the Japanese. The significance of these ethnic minorities lay not so much in their sheer number but rather the place where they resided, that is, the Wuzhi Mountain. Since the Japanese had occupied the coastal area, the Hainan Communists must have the mountainous interior, blessed with the support of the local minorities, as their secure rear to carry on long-term resistance.⁸⁹

The Party Centre had also charged Zhuang Tian with transmitting the order of building the Wuzhi Base Area to the Hainan Party. In May 1940, while on his way to the south, Zhuang was briefed personally by Zhou Enlai in Chongqing. In their conversation, Zhou warned Zhuang about the extreme adversity which he and the Hainan Communists would be facing in the anti-Japanese struggle. In consequence, it was necessary to have a

⁸⁸ Quoted in Philips, 98.

⁸⁹ "Zhongyang dui Qiongya gongzuo de zhishi" (7 November 1940), 562.

consolidated base erected in the Wuzhi Mountain. Zhou's words clearly alluded to Mao Zedong as the originator of the idea of establishing the Wuzhi Base Area.⁹⁰

According to Luo Wenhong, the crucial role of the projected Wuzhi Base Area was again asserted during his meeting with Zhang Wenbin. In mid-1941, about two months after the communication between the Hainan Party and the mainland had broken down, Luo went to southern Guangdong (Nanlu) to report Hainan's recent developments to Zhang, who was there inspecting local Party activities. When talking about the question of base area, Luo was told by Zhang that the Qiongwen base was far from an ideal one since it was located on the plain and thus provided little shelter for the Communist guerrillas against attacks by the Japanese and the "die-hards." He urged the Hainan cadres to develop the Party's strength in the Wuzhi region so that they could have a consolidated base for long-term struggle.⁹¹

It is not hard to understand why repeated emphasis was given to base building in Wuzhi Mountain. Even though Mao had insisted that base areas could be built on plains, he nevertheless acknowledged that mountainous areas offered the best condition for guerrilla operations. In his "Problems of strategy in guerrilla war," Mao had named five mountainous ranges, four in North China and one in Central China, for base development.⁹² Nothing was mentioned regarding South China because, at the time of Mao's writing, the Japanese had not yet invaded there. By 1941, however, Mao believed that the Wuzhi Mountain would be the best possible location to effect Communist expansion in South China. This aspiration perhaps persisted until the autumn of 1944, when the changing political situation in South China made the Wuling mountainous region a more preferable and feasible choice to than Wuzhi.

Given that Yan'an had already attached such paramount importance to the Wuzhi Base Area in late 1940, it was rather incomprehensible why the Hainan Party made no attempt at all to fulfil the task until 1944. One major difficulty that obstructs the inquiry is the paucity of substantial and relevant materials. In particular, owing to the loss of radio contact, there were no more instructions from the Party Centre to the Hainan Party concerning building the Wuzhi Base Area after 1941. Also, it is puzzling that the documents by the Hainan Party are almost completely silent on this aspect. Only occasionally does one come across one or two passing comments calling for greater

⁹⁰ Zhuang Tian, 10.

⁹¹ Luo Wenhong, 103-4.

⁹² Mao Zedong, "Problems of strategy in guerrilla war against Japan" (May 1938), 94.

attention to *liyun* (the mobilisation of the Lis).⁹³ What is left with is only a handful of memoirs in which to look for clues. At the same time, one has to consider the insights from the secondary works of Chinese Communist historians, who may have access to sources not available to researchers outside China. Finally, one cannot avoid relying on circumstantial evidence to deduce the answer.

a. Reason for the Delay

The Chinese Communist literature unanimously asserts that the Hainan Communists took Yan'an's order to construct the Wuzhi Base Area very seriously, but they executed it according to Hainan's "real situation." Before 1944, the objective conditions for fulfilling the task had not been matured because the GMD government had made the Wuzhi Mountain their base. During its early years, the Independent Corps lacked the military power to displace the GMD, nor did it want to do so because of the concern to maintain the United Front. In response to the criticism against the Hainan Party for not commencing base building in Wuzhi earlier, a veteran defended the Party's position by saying that, "it is because during the early period of the Hainan resistance, the military strength of the GMD reactionaries was seven to eight times stronger than ours. They made the Wuzhi Mountain interior their main refuge, the hideout they relied on for survival . . . since the United Front had yet to break up, our army should not and could not intrude into the Wuzhi Mountain to seize the area from the GMD reactionaries for base construction."⁹⁴

This argument is untenable because, first and foremost, it is flawed in the historical sequence. So far as known, Yan'an's instruction concerning the Wuzhi Base Area, transmitted either through radio communication or Zhuang Tian, reached the Hainan Party not earlier than the winter of 1940. There is no evidence to suggest that the Hainan Party had ever contemplated such a notion by itself before. Further, by 1940, the military position of the Independent Corps had been strengthened. At least, as the Communists themselves thought, they closely matched the GMD's army and consequently demonstrated little fear of a military showdown with it (see previous discussion). In addition, the CCP-GMD relationship in 1940 had been deteriorating, and

⁹³ See, for instance, "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei dibaci kuoda huiyi jilu" (December 1939), 57; "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei dijiuci kuoda huiyi jilu" (September 1942), 311-2.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Zhong Yuanxiu, "Baisha qiyi yu Wuzhishan genjudi" [The Baisha Uprising and the Wuzhi Mountain Base Area], *QX*, 18 (September 1989), 151-2.

the United Front was virtually dissolved after the Meihe Incident. To say that the Hainan Party refrained from moving into Wuzhi Mountain because of military inferiority and the united-front concerns contradicts the historical realities. Perhaps, one may say that some people such as Lin Liming, who favoured a more conciliatory stance towards the GMD, might have exerted some restraint on the Party. However, if the Wuzhi Base Area was so crucial to the Communist struggle in Hainan, and its idea came directly from Yan'an, it is hard to imagine why Feng did not push for a bolder approach, which was very much consistent with his own aspiration. The absence of conflict between Li and Feng over this question might indicate that the major issue at stake was beyond the concerns of the harmony with the GMD.

Based also on the premise of military impotence, Zhuang Tian explained that the precarious military position of the Communists from 1941 to 1943 posed the major obstacle to the execution of the plan of constructing the Wuzhi Base Area. According to Zhuang, the escalating armed conflicts, first with the GMD during the "anti-Communist high tide" in 1941 and then with the Japanese during the mopping-up campaigns from 1942 to 1943, had consumed nearly all of the energy of the Party and the Independent Corps. No spare manpower was thus able to be devoted to develop work in the Wuzhi area. As he went on to say, "it was only in the later period of the 'anti-nibbling' struggle in the Qiongwen region, when our main forces had advanced to 'the outer line' and established several new anti-Japanese base areas on the peripheral of the Wuzhi Mountain in Chengmai and Ling'ao in the west and the Liulianling district in the east respectively, that we could consolidate our position and concentrate our strength to develop the central base area in the Wuzhi Mountain."⁹⁵

Zhuang's explanation looks persuasive at first glance especially in light of the earlier discussion, which revealed how the serious destruction of the Japanese mop-up operations had inflicted the Communists' base in the Qiongwen region. However, this military crisis might not have necessarily deterred the Communists from exploring the possibility of erecting the Wuzhi Base Area. From another perspective, the crisis should have placed greater urgency on the task due to the pressing need for survival. Zhuang's interpretation that the dispersion of the Communist forces to the eastern and western parts of Hainan in the latter half of 1943 as preparation for base building in Wuzhi Mountain represents nothing more than hindsight. To say as he does that those base founded on the

⁹⁵ Zhuang Tian, 243.

periphery of the Wuzhi Mountain facilitated subsequent base development in Wuzhi is one thing; whether or not it was the Communists' original intention is quite another. The analysis in the last section showed that the Communists' diffusion from the Qiongwen border region represented more of a counter-measure to cope with the Japanese repression than a coordinated scheme to pave the way for penetration into the Wuzhi Mountain.

The third explanation proposed in Chinese Communist literature is that the Wuzhi Mountain was inhabited by the Li minorities, who were deeply suspicious about the Han Chinese. A veteran recalled a popular phrase which vividly summed up the mutual hatred between the Lis and the Han: *hanbu shili jibu shigu*, meaning that if the Han Chinese don't "eat" (exploit/ill-treat) the Lis (as they usually do), then chicken wouldn't eat grain (but they would surely do so). During the prewar period, the Communists had tried to mobilise the Lis for the revolutionary cause. The initial mobilisation work was made possible through the small number of Li students, who had been studying in Guangzhou and other Chinese cities. Having been exposed to radical ideas in late 1910s and early 1920s, these Li students participated in the revolutionary movement after returning home. However, despite some isolated attempts, the Communist revolution in prewar Hainan was predominantly a Han movement.

For reasons not yet clear, the Hainan Party during the early years of the war was composed almost exclusively of Han Chinese. Feng Baiju recalled that there were originally no fighters from a minority background in his Independent Corps.⁹⁶ Without the assistance of the Li natives to overcome the age-long ethnic prejudice and mutual distrust, many Party cadres found the task of organising and mobilising the Lis a formidable one. In fact, while the Communists were in Meihe, they confined their activities solely to the areas of Han population although they knew the region was inhabited also by a number of Lis and Miaos.⁹⁷ Chapter 1 pointed out that the Lis' traditional exploitation by Chinese central governments did not make them a natural ally of the Party. The best example is the Hainan Party's betrayal by Wang Zhaoyi, which occurred mainly because the Party lacked a well-conceived mobilisation strategy for the Lis as well as it was insensitive to the ethnic tension within the revolution. The prewar setback continued to haunt those senior Party cadres who had experience dealing with the

⁹⁶ Feng Baiju, "Wuzhishanjian wuduohongxia" [Five red clouds hanging over the top of Wuzhi Mountain] (December 1957), *FBYS*, 364.

⁹⁷ Fu Rongding, "Congjianli pingyuan kangri youji genjudi dao chuangjian Wuzhishan zhongxin genjudi yiduan lishi de huiyi," 32.

Lis. They doubted the feasibility of winning the Lis' trust and involving them in the resistance movement.⁹⁸

This third argument seems to bring us closer to the truth and makes better sense in view of the later development. The Hainan Communists took more positive action to build up the Wuzhi Base Area only after the Baisha Uprising. This revolt by the Lis provided the Communists a convenient solution to their problem of how to approach the Lis because the Lis took the initiative to approach them. Completely alienated by the GMD government, the Lis began to look to the CCP as their "father and mother party," its army as their "father and mother army" and its cadres their "father and mother officials," who came to rescue them from the tyranny of "the GMD robbers" (*guozei*)⁹⁹ (see later discussion on the Baisha Uprising).

Probably owing to their ineptitude for mobilising the Lis, the Hainan Communists considered the military problem involved in the establishment of the Wuzhi Base Area particularly acute. The Communists commonly asserted that their guerrillas could oust a more well-equipped and powerful enemy because they enjoyed support from the local people. However, in the Wuzhi Mountain area, the Party lacked any solid mass basis. Without Li popular support, penetration into the region would have been much more dangerous than simply confronting the GMD army that was stationed there (although it did not command an overwhelming superiority over the Independent Corps.) In no way could the Party expect a ready flow of intelligence and logistics, which were crucial to its guerrilla deployment.

Even if the Communists could outmanoeuvre the GMD militarily, it was still doubtful whether they could survive in the Wuzhi Mountain. The region was undeveloped and sparsely populated. The local inhabitants, whether the Lis or the Miaos, relied primarily on their traditional cultivation methods and hunting for subsistence. Outsiders like Qiu Yuesong had complained about the difficulty of obtaining food for the GMD, which had the Wuzhi Mountain as its base. Qiu lamented that it was absolutely impossible for his government to rely on the local minorities for food since they used "old ways to cultivate" and could produce enough only for four months of consumption every year. For the other eight months, "they went to the mountain to look for natural food for

⁹⁸ Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing" [Wang Guoxing - the leader of the Li people], *QX*, 6 (December 1981), 55.

⁹⁹ Fu Rongding, 32-3; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Baisha qiyi yu Wuzhishan genjudi," 152-3; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuan*, 293.

subsistence.” As a result, the GMD had to rely on food imported from the occupied areas.¹⁰⁰ That is why the Japanese mop-up operations from 1942 onwards had created tremendous food shortages for the GMD government in Wuzhi. In summary, the seclusion of the Wuzhi Mountain might be ideal from a military point of view; it brought great problems in terms of nourishment and supply, which clearly caused the Communists, who were struggling on the plain below, to think twice before moving ahead into it for base construction.

The preceding discussion tries to provide some plausible explanations about why the Hainan Party paid only lip-service to Yan'an's order on building the Wuzhi Base Area. This is not to say that the Communists had not made any contact with the ethnic minorities prior to 1944. Nevertheless, those few incidents were all parochial in nature and had nothing related to the subsequent military conquest of Baisha by the Party.¹⁰¹ As the following discussion will show, the first real Communist penetration into the Wuzhi area took place mainly as a consequence of the Baisha Uprising.

b. The Baisha Uprising

The Baisha Uprising in the Communist literature refers to the Li armed revolt against the Hainan GMD government which took place in August 1943. Erupting first in Baisha, it spread quickly to the bordering counties. In Baisha, thousands of Lis raided the government organisations and besieged the local GMD garrisons (the Second Defence Regiment) forcing it to retreat from the county. By late August, it was said that not even one GMD soldier could be seen in Baisha.¹⁰² The Lis' success was, nevertheless, short-lived. A month later, the GMD fought back with more than one thousand troops. Bloody fighting went on for another month. Due to Li inferiority in firearms and shortage of ammunition, their casualties were mounting to a level that worried the Li chiefs. In the end, the majority of them submitted to the GMD's pacification, which promised no retribution to those who surrendered but relief for the sufferers. However, a small number

¹⁰⁰ Qiu Yuesong, “Hainan kangzhan huiyi” [Reminiscences on the resistance war in Hainan], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 16.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Fu Yeyuan, “Zai kangri zhanzheng shiqi Baoting diqu kaizhan tongzhan gongzuo de huigu” [Reminiscences on the development of the united-front work in Baoting district during the Anti-Japanese War period], *Baoting wenshi* [The culture and history of Baoting] 3 (June 1988), 1-12; Huang Daguang, et. al., “Women suozhidao de Lizu touren Wang Shaoyi” [The Li chief Wang Shaoyi whom we know], *Tongshi wenshi* [The culture and history of Tongshi] 2 (August 1991), 123, 125-6; Li Wangjian, “Heimeicun Lizu renmin geming douzheng pianduan” [Some reminiscences on the revolutionary struggle of the Li people in Heimei village], *QX*, 9 (October, 1982), 125-7; Luo Wenhong, 190; Zhuang Tian, 238-9.

¹⁰² Zhong Yuanxiu, “Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing,” 38.

of them, among whom was Wang Guoxing, continued to resist and sought refuge in the dense forest of the mountain. The Communist accounts state that, at its height, the Baisha Uprising involved over twenty thousand Lis and was responsible for the deaths of more than seven hundred GMD soldiers.¹⁰³ Although these figures cannot be verified by GMD sources, some GMD officials admitted in their reminiscences that the revolt had seriously undermined their strength.¹⁰⁴

Concerning the cause of the Baisha Uprising, the GMD officials generally believed that the revolt was incited either by the Communists or the Japanese, who tried to shake their base in Wuzhi. According to this view, the Lis, being naive and lacking in national consciousness, became easily enticed to material lure and acted against the GMD government.¹⁰⁵ Loaded with strong racial prejudice and unsubstantiated by any evidence, this argument carries little weight. On the other hand, Wang Bi, the commander of the Second Defence Regiment, maintained that the revolt in Baisha arose out of the Lis' hatred of the rapacious Han merchants who wandered around the Li settlements. In doing business with the Lis, these merchants cheated them, such as using inaccurate measurements, to make financial gains.¹⁰⁶ While such kind of economic exploitation had always generated ill feeling of the Lis towards Han settlers,¹⁰⁷ it sheds little light on why the tension exploded in the wartime period. Moreover, Wang's argument cannot explain satisfactorily why the Lis' enmity eventually bore the form of an anti-GMD insurrection. A more illuminating clue was given by Wang Zhaoguang, who was the deputy commander of the GMD guerrilla forces in Baisha from 1942 to 1946. Although Wang also held that the Communists were behind the Li revolt, he acknowledged that they could achieve their plot because the Lis, to some extent, had been alienated by the GMD government's heavy levies during the war.¹⁰⁸ Since Wang's observation corresponded with the information from the Communist sources, it deserves further examination.

Judging from the previous reconstruction of the Communist wartime struggle in Hainan, the notion that the Baisha Uprising was a Communist plot seems largely

¹⁰³ Zhonggong Hainan shengwei dangshi bangongshi, "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyì" [The Baisha Uprising of the Hainan Li people] in *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao zhuanji yanjiuji - kangri zhanzheng shiqi*, v. 1, 220. (Hereafter cited as "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyì.")

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, Chen Youxi, "Ledongxian kangzhan huiyi" [Reminiscences on the resistance war in Ledong County], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 472-3.

¹⁰⁵ Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan kangzhan huiyi," 26-7; Wang Qinyin, 777.

¹⁰⁶ Wang Bi, "Qiongya shoubei diertuan zuozhan jiyao" [A chronological record of the battle of the Hainan Second Defence Regiment], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 222.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Xu Chonghao, 73-4; 95-6.

¹⁰⁸ Wang Zhaoguang, "Baishaxian kangzhan huiyi" [Reminiscences of the resistance war in Baisha County], *Hainan kangzhan jiyao*, 449.

implausible. Prior to 1944, the Hainan Party simply lacked any strong organisational arm in the area to achieve such a large-scale mobilisation of the Lis. If there was any organisation work going on before the revolt, it came most plausibly from the Lis themselves. What motivated the Lis to fight against the GMD, according to the Communist accounts, was the extortionate levies and extremely heavy corvée laid upon them. It was said that when the Japanese had landed on the coast of Hainan, the GMD's officials and troops, together with their family members, who numbered above five thousand in total, rushed into the Wuzhi Mountain like "locusts" descending on the land. To cater for their needs, the government levied various public grain taxes from the local populace. Added to these were numerous incidental taxes which supplemented the GMD's military expenses. Besides taxation, young Li males had to perform corvée service for the GMD. Manual work included the building of government houses, road construction, digging ditches, transportation of food, carrying sedan chairs and planting food crops. One source even accused the GMD officials of exploiting the disputes among the Lis for their own material benefit. It intervened frequently in Li affairs for the purpose of imposing penalties on the wrong side in the form of money or cows. In Baisha, the GMD's economic exploitation also took the form of monopolising the export trade of major products such as beef, antlers, venison, deer's sinews, animal skins and tea. Private transactions were prohibited; and all these products had to be sold to the government at an "official rate," which was very much lower (usually one third) than the market price.¹⁰⁹

Notwithstanding their bias and exaggeration, the Communist accounts do contain some truth. It was natural to suppose that the GMD government, being forced to take refuge in the Wuzhi Mountain, could hardly avoid living off the inhabitants of the land. Even so, as Qiu Yuesong said, the GMD relied on food imported from the occupied areas, and much of the transportation work would have probably fallen upon the Lis. Since there was no highway leading to the interior highland, many Li males were hence recruited as porters by the GMD government.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, if what Qiu recalled was the fact, that the GMD in Wuzhi drew upon material support from outside rather than

¹⁰⁹ Lin Ying, 27-8; Wang Chang, "Baisha Lizu renmin qiyi ji jianchidouzhen de huiyi" [Reminiscences on the uprising of continual struggle of the Li people in Baisha], *QX*, 4 (June 1981), 105-6; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 13-5; Zhongong Hainan Lizu Miaozu zizhi zhouwei dangshi bangongshi "Baisha qiyi" bianxiezu, "Baisha qiyi" [The Baisha Uprising], revised edition, *QX*, 12 (October 1983), 25-6 (hereafter cited "Baisha qiyi"); "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyì," 213.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan kangzhan huiyi," 16.

locally, then the initial burden of exaction it imposed on the Lis would be moderate or at least tolerable.

However, things began to change in late 1941 and early 1942. Food prices in the interior went up rapidly as supply became scarce. The main cause for that was the intensified Japanese pacification effort. The Fifth Y operation, which took place between 25 November 1941 and 25 January 1942, had struck at the supply bases of the GMD army in Qiongliuqu and Dingsiqu.¹¹¹ This brought great problems of provisioning for the GMD. The Japanese blockade of the interior during the subsequent mop-up operations further aggravated the situation. Although Qiu claimed that food shortage was alleviated to a certain degree by the determined cooperation of the army and the people, who continued to smuggle grain from the occupied areas to Wuzhi at the risk of their lives,¹¹² there is no doubt that the GMD looked more and more to the local inhabitants for provisions. Thus, levies were increased while new taxes were introduced. Efforts to organise the Lis for farm production were also stepped up. All these measures, intended to enhance the GMD's ability to survive the Japanese mopping-up campaigns, added unbearable burden to the Lis and seriously disrupted their usual way of life. Tremendous discontentment, possibly intensified by traditional racial hatred, pushed the Lis onto the road of armed revolt.

The principal organiser of the Baisha Uprising was Wang Guoxing. Wang was the Li chief of Hongmaodong, the largest *dong* (Li village) in the second district of Baisha County, which had three districts in total. He was addressed by the local people as chief superintendent (*dazongguan*) apparently because his village had exerted dominion over the neighbouring smaller and less powerful ones. When the GMD troops moved in to Baisha, Wang was appointed head of his *dong*, which was renamed Hongmaoxia *xiang*. Due to Wang's influential and prestigious status, other Li chiefs went to him to express their grievances about the GMD's oppression. One reminiscent account states that Wang had once been beaten nearly to death by the GMD officials for his failure to supply grain and porters on time.¹¹³ Regardless whether Wang's hostility towards the GMD arose from his personal animosity or his comprehension of his fellow Li sufferers or both, by July 1942,¹¹⁴ he had made up his mind to rise against the government.

¹¹¹ Philips, 97; Wang Bi, 232-3; Qiu Yuesong, "Hainan qinan kangzhan zhi jiantao," 70, 113.

¹¹² Qiu Yuesong, *ibid.*, 70.

¹¹³ Wang Chang, "Baisha Lizu renmin qiye ji jianchidouzheng de huiyi," 106.

¹¹⁴ June in lunar calendar.

In that month, Wang held the first secret meeting with a number of Li chiefs. They agreed that an armed insurrection was necessary to free the Lis from their oppressive state. During subsequent meetings, the resolution was passed on to other leaders of the Lis as well as the Miaos residing in Baisha, and their acquiescence to revolt was secured. The date 17 August 1943 was chosen for the beginning of the revolt, in part because it was after the Lis' Ghost Festival in which sacrificial rites were performed to the deities. The Lis could then expect blessings from them in return. More importantly, the Lis needed ample time for coordination work and preparing weaponry. One major problem at that time was to obtain gunpowder because the GMD had imposed tight control of its flow for war reasons. The Lis had to acquire gunpowder from areas outside Wuzhi and then smuggle it bit by bit at night back to Baisha.¹¹⁵

However, things did not unfold as planned. One source says that, in early August, 1943, the GMD magistrate of Baisha suddenly ordered the Li leaders of the first district to hand in before the middle of the month a certain amount of foodstuff as special levies and to draft able-bodied men for corvée service. Knowing that it was impossible to satisfy the quotas on time, the local Li leaders decided to take up arms ahead of schedule.¹¹⁶

Another source says that the Lis' plan of revolt had somehow been revealed to the GMD, perhaps by some Li chiefs who objected to Wang's plot. The Lis of the first district therefore struck first for fear of being arrested.¹¹⁷ For whatever reason, on 12 August, several hundred Lis stormed the GMD organisations in the first district of Baisha. Four days later, the unrest spread to the third district. Living in the second district, Wang was not informed of the situation and was caught unprepared by the GMD who suspected that he was also involved in the insurrection. Wang was fortunate to escape soon from prison with the help of his old friend Wang Yugan and his "dare-to-die corps." The two Wangs then joined others and successfully pushed the GMD out of Baisha. Nevertheless, by October, the GMD was able to turn the tide and, in the end, defeated the Li rebels. Unwilling to submit to the GMD, the two Wangs sought refuge in the mountains.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ "Baisha qiyi," 27-31; "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyi," 215-7.

¹¹⁶ "Baisha qiyi," 31-2; "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyi," 217; Fu Youxiang, "Huiyi Baisha yiqu de kangbao fanwan douzheng" [Reminiscences on the anti-oppression and anti-"die-hards" struggle in the first district of Baisha], *QX*, 12 (October 1983), 70.

¹¹⁷ Wang Chang, "Baisha Lizu renmin qiyi ji jianchidouzheng de huiyi," 108; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 27-8; cf. Zhuang Tian, 246.

¹¹⁸ Wang Bi, 219-20; Wang Chang, "Baisha Lizu renmin qiyi ji jianchidouzheng de huiyi," 108-111; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 28-46; "Baisha qiyi," 33-45; "Qiongya Lizu renmin Baisha quyi," 217-21.

After the Baisha Uprising was suppressed, Wang Guoxing and his associates were desperately in need of an ally to continue their struggle against the "GMD robbers." Interestingly, the first choice being proposed was the Japanese, not the Communists. Those who put forth this option reasoned that since the GMD was forced to retreat to the interior by the Japanese, the latter must be more powerful and therefore could help them expel the GMD. Wang Guoxing and Wang Yugan, however, objected to appealing to the Japanese for help. They argued that the Japanese were foreigners, who came to China to plunder and loot. It was very unlikely that they would be interested in delivering the Lis from the GMD's oppression. Both of them then recalled some hearsay that they had learned in the past about the Red Army, which was said to be good and treated the Lis kindly. The two Wangs thereafter suggested that they should seek help from the Communists. It seemed that their view did not at first convince the others, not least because the Communists were also Han Chinese. How could one be sure that they would not treat the Lis in the same way as that of the "GMD robbers"? Moreover, no one among them knew where the Red Army was. The Japanese, however, were just around the bend and could be called in anytime.¹¹⁹

According to the Communist accounts, Wang Guoxing insisted on his view and wanted to go by himself to search for the Communists, but he could not do so because he was wanted everywhere by the GMD government. At this point, Wang claimed that he had a dream in which he saw five red clouds hanging over the top of Wuzhi Mountain. Inside the clouds, five red flags were flying and pointing towards the northeast. Suddenly, an army bearing a red flag passed through in front of him. When Wang tried to go and ask who they were, he awoke.¹²⁰ The truthfulness of this dream is, of course, dubious. It is highly probable that Wang forged such a story and pretended that his dream was a revelation from the gods so as to persuade the other Li leaders to seek assistance from the Communists. It was indeed what happened afterward. In any event, several delegates were hence despatched down the mountain purportedly in the direction where the flags in Wang's dream were pointing. After more than a month of search, three of them finally got in touch with the Communist guerrillas operating in the Ling'ao-Danxian areas. The

¹¹⁹ Feng Baiju, "Wuzhi shanjian wuduo hongxia," 369; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 46-7; "Baisha qiyi," 46-7; Ji Youli, "Shesheng wangsi zhao jiuxing" [Seeking fearlessly the saviour], *QX*, 12 (October 1983), 46-7, 88-9.

¹²⁰ Feng Baiju, *ibid.*, 369-70; Zhong Yuanxiu, *ibid.*, 48-9.

local cadres then led them to Meihou of Chengmai (the Liuqinshan Base Area) where they met Feng Baiju.¹²¹

Feng Baiju reckoned that only after the Baisha Uprising did the Hainan Party pay serious attention to works among the minorities.¹²² Presumably, he was referring to the beginning of the Party's active mobilisation of the Lis in response to Wang Guoxing's request for cooperative action against the GMD. Nevertheless, the progress was slow. Although Feng, in view of the long-standing mutual dislike between the two ethnic groups, was quite amazed that the Lis would approach them, the Han Communists, on their own initiative, he did not think that this fact by itself could warrant immediate Communist military deployment in the Wuzhi area. Having listened to the plea of the Li delegates, Feng sent a small working team with them back to Baisha to find out more about the local situation. When the team appeared in the mountain where the Li insurgents were hiding, it stirred excitement among the latter who thought the Communist army was coming to their rescue. However, the excitement turned quickly into an enormous disappointment when the Lis realised that there was no army except four Party cadres. To prevent the Lis, especially Wang Guoxing, from losing faith in the Party, the working team repeatedly assured them that the Communist main forces would arrive soon. Nevertheless, prior to that, some necessary ground work had to be done, including the arrangement of provisions. It was only after the cadres' patient explanation that Wang recovered from his initial despair and frustration.¹²³

In May 1944, having completed some mobilisation groundwork, the Party deployed a detachment of more than a hundred men into Baisha to bolster the spirit of the Li insurgents and carry out sabotage work against the GMD. Unfortunately, for some reasons, its operation was betrayed to the GMD garrison, who ambushed the Communist guerrillas and inflicted on them heavy losses. As a result, much to the disappointment of Wang Guoxing, the Party had to recall the detachment. Even worse, greatly alarmed by the Communist presence in Baisha, the GMD intensified the suppression against Wang's insurgents after the retreat of the guerrilla detachment to eliminate all Communist collaborators among the Li tribes. This put Wang and his followers into a very critical situation. By winter, Wang found himself no longer able to hide in Baisha, and he fled to

¹²¹ Feng Baiju, *ibid.*, 364-5.

¹²² Quoted in Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 55.

¹²³ Wang Chang, "Chujin Baisha" [Initial arrival at Baisha], *QX*, 12 (October 1983), 106-8; Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 57-60; Zhuang Tian, 249-51.

Danxian where he managed to contact the local Party and urged it to send an army to Baisha to rescue the Lis. When he was told that nothing could be done without the order from above, Wang requested to see Feng Baiju immediately.¹²⁴

During their meeting, Wang presented his plea again to Feng for military action to deliver the Lis from the GMD's tyranny. In reply, Feng reassured Wang that the Communists were always on the side of the Lis. To confirm his words, Feng drank with Wang wine mixed with chicken blood, a Li custom signifying the sealing of their bond. However, nothing definite had been arranged, for instance, concerning when the Communists would commence military operations. All Feng did was to send Wang back to Baisha and entrusted him with the responsibility of establishing a Li guerrilla force.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, from the spring of 1945 onwards, Feng gradually amassed his troops on the border of Baisha. How far this move was due to Feng's fulfilment of his pledge to Wang cannot be ascertained. However, it seems to have had more to do with the arrival in March of a special delegate from the East River Column, who passed on to the Hainan Party instructions from the Party Centre as well as the Guangdong Provincial Committee. In the autumn of 1944, Yan'an had resolved to expand Communist influence in South China by erecting a large base in the Wuling area. It was Yan'an's original design that Feng Baiju's Independent Corps¹²⁶ should coordinate with the East River Column and play a supportive role in that plan (see Chapter 4). The Hainan Party was required to complete its conquest of the whole island of Hainan as soon as possible and extend its sphere of guerrilla movement to southern Guangdong (Nanlu). The two tasks were reiterated with more specifications by another East River delegate who arrived in Hainan in June. To complete the Communists' domination of Hainan, the Hainan Party was ordered to attack and destroy the GMD on the island. This finally prompted Feng to establish a strong expedition force and to prepare for eliminating all the GMD troops in the Wuzhi Mountain.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Zhong Yuanxiu, "Lizu renmin lingxiu Wang Guoxing," 64-9; "Baisha qiyi," 52-3.

¹²⁵ Zhong Yuanxiu, *ibid.*, 70-2; *Feng Baiju jiangjunzhuàn*, 295-7.

¹²⁶ Chinese Communist historians state that by the end of 1944, the Independent Corps had officially renamed itself as the Hainan Column following "the Party Centre's instruction." Such a claim, however, cannot be verified by any documentary sources. For the sake of clarity, I continue to use the title "Independent Corps" in the main body of the text for Feng Baiju's guerrilla force in Hainan.

¹²⁷ "Zhongyang guanyu fazhan Guangdong youji zhanzheng deng wenti gei Lin Ping de zhishi" (26 October 1944), 388; "Zhongyang guanyu Dongjiang, Qiongya gongzuo gei Lin Ping de zhishi" (14 November 1944), 399; "Zhonggong Qiongya tewei changwei huiyi jilu" [Records of the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Hainan Special Committee] (16, 18 June 1945), 449; Zhang Shiyong, "Qiongzong tingjin zhidui" [The "Advance Division" of the Hainan Column], *GDZ*, 7 (February 1986), 84; *Hongqi budao*, 358; Luo Wenhong, 197; *QZS*, 177-8.

Once established, the expedition force underwent a short special training course aimed to enhance both its combat skill and its political consciousness. A class was particularly designed to increase the Communist guerrillas' understanding of the Li people's suffering. This was necessary because, before that, some Party cadres were found jeering at the Lis and thought that they wore tree leaves and rotten cloth because they were "uncivilised." However, in the class, their wrong attitude was rectified. They were taught that the poor living of the Lis was not a result of underdevelopment but exploitation. It was the Party's responsibility to fight for justice for the Lis.¹²⁸ In late July, the expedition force, led by Li Zhenya, advanced into Baisha. Within two weeks, it defeated and expelled the local GMD garrisons. On 8 August, the Baisha Democratic Government was established. On 23 August, Li Zhenya launched a surprise attack on the GMD's Sixth Peace Preservation Regiment, which was deployed to recapture Baisha, and forced it to retreat. So far the conquest of the Wuzhi area seemed to have gone well for the Communists until they suddenly learned from a captured GMD document that Japan had already surrendered on 15 August.¹²⁹ This news compelled the Hainan Party to reorient its strategy. As a result, by the end of the war, the construction of the Wuzhi Base Area, proposed by Yan'an in 1940, had not yet been completed.

IV. The Question of Stay or Withdraw

Because of the communication failure, the Hainan guerrillas did not know that the Communist armies all over the country had been racing against the GMD in seizing cities and towns from the Japanese. It goes without saying that the Hainan GMD had rushed ahead of the Communists to northeast Hainan to resume control over the island's major cities, such as Haikou-Fucheng. In fact, the departure of GMD's main forces from the Wuzhi area might in part explain why the Independent Corps did not encounter stiff resistance during its last stage of the conquest of Baisha. When the Communists deployed in early September their troops to Naida, one of the largest Japanese strongholds in Hainan, to demand the local garrison lay down its arms, they were rejected instantly on the ground that the Japanese army was ordered by its superiors to surrender only to the GMD government. The Independent Corps tried to besiege the city but eventually failed because of insufficient forces. In the end, the guerrillas had to turn to some minor

¹²⁸ Zhang Shiyong, 89-90.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 91-9; Luo Wenhong, 198-202.

Japanese base points, which were mostly garrisoned by the poorly-equipped puppet troops.¹³⁰

Whatever the Hainan Communists did recover from the Japanese, they could not keep for long. Strictly speaking, the Independent Corps, unlike the East River Column, was reorganised by the GMD as an official anti-Japanese force. However, similar to its counterpart on the Guangdong mainland, the presence of this Communist-led army in Hainan was denied by the GMD government. From mid-October onwards, the GMD continued to deploy troops into Hainan to pacify local "bandit" activities. They decimated the Communist resistance regimes and pushed the Independent Corps back to the island's interior. By February 1946, the Communist base in Baisha was encircled. Perhaps the minimal connection between the Hainan Party and Yan'an was somehow realised by the GMD, and it tried to take advantage of that. Communist sources reported that the GMD army lied to the masses that the Independent Corps was not a genuine Communist force but merely a bandit gang and, as a result, the government action to eradicate them had received authorisation from Mao Zedong.¹³¹ How far this tactic actually worked, however, cannot be ascertained.

After the Japanese surrender, the sea blockade of Hainan was lifted. Communication between the Hainan Communists and their superiors on the Guangdong mainland was gradually resumed through the employment of Party couriers. Originally, the Guangdong Party leaders intended to withdraw the Independent Corps to North China, just as the East River Column, in order to preserve these armed forces for the future conquest of South China. A proposal similar to that of the East River Column was adopted that the nucleus of the Independent Corps, numbering around two thousand, would be transferred north while the remainder would be demobilised or work underground. To help discussing the terms with the GMD, the Guangdong Party ordered Zhuang Tian to leave Hainan for Guangzhou in April 1946 as the representative of the Independent Corps to participate in the CCP-GMD cease fire negotiation.¹³²

When the proposal of northern relocation first reached Hainan, Feng tried to contain its circulation to only the senior Party cadres. He believed that before anything concrete had come out of it, such news might produce bad effects on the Hainan Party's

¹³⁰ Feng Baiju, "Guanyu wocanjia geming," 447; Luo Wenhong, 210-1.

¹³¹ "Liang Guang, Yin Linping guanyu Qiongya dili zongdui qingkuang baogao" [Report from Liang Guang and Yin Linping concerning the situation of the Hainan Independent Column] (April-May 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 56, 71.

¹³² Luo Wenhong, 240-1.

self-defence struggle against the GMD suppression. Feng's worry was soon born out by events. Somehow this news had been leaked out and caused widespread unrest within the Party. Desertions were reported due to cadres' reluctance to be transferred from Hainan. There were some who feared the GMD's retaliation after demobilisation and decided to capitulate to the GMD before it was too late. On the other hand, there were others who had already tired of the war and wanted to be demobilised as soon as possible. Still, more considered the relocation proof of their defeat and questioned the point of continuing the fighting.¹³³ In short, pessimism and frustration prevailed throughout the Party, which, if allowed to linger on, would very likely lead to its destruction. To rectify the situation, Feng carried out intense internal education and repeatedly emphasised the need of continual struggle for securing a satisfactory and lasting cease-fire agreement with the GMD. They must stay vigilant and keep a wary eye on the development of the negotiation. Apparently, this effort could not completely resolve the problem, and Feng eventually had to prohibit any discussion or chats about the question of the northern retreat within the Party.¹³⁴

Meanwhile, in Guangzhou, negotiations concerning the future of the Hainan Communists bore no fruit. Although the GMD had acceded to the evacuation of the East River Column, it was not prepared to make the same concession regarding Hainan. Chapter 4 studied one main reason why the Party could have its way on the East River Column was the Column's outstanding rescue works in Hong Kong and its provision of intelligence to the Allied forces. Through the vigorous propaganda war, not least by Communist-affiliated sympathetic media in Hong Kong, the Party successfully aroused international attention and compelled Zhang Fakui to give in. In fact, in Hainan, the Communists also rescued a number of foreign prisoner-of-war from the Japanese concentration camps¹³⁵ but, due to inconvenient communication and, above all, the lack of an international outpost in a vicinity like Hong Kong to the East River valley, the Hainan contributions to the Allied powers remained largely invisible and were therefore unable to alter the destiny of the Hainan Communist guerrillas.

¹³³ "Kefu keneng chansheng de buzhengque qingxiang" [Overcoming the possible wrong tendency] (March 1946) and "Qiongya teweì guanyu zhixing shangji zhishi jixu jianchi ziwei douzheng de gongzuo jueyi" [The resolutions of the Hainan Special Committee concerning the execution of the instruction on continuing the self-defence struggle] (14 June 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 47, 11, 46.

¹³⁴ "Qiongya teweì guanyu zhixing shangji zhishi jixu jianchi ziwei douzheng de gongzuo jueyi" (14 June 1946), 50.

¹³⁵ *Hongqi budao*, 360-1; *QZS*, 179-81.

By the end of June, the Guangdong Party leaders had virtually given up all hope of reaching an agreement with the GMD for the northern relocation of the Independent Corps. With the departure of the East River Column, most of them predicted that Guangdong would undergo “ten years of a dark age” and the local revolutionary situation would turn from bad to worse. Another plan was then put forward to withdraw the majority of the Hainan cadres to Vietnam where, allegedly, they could seek refuge under the protection of Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh and wait for the opportunity to fight back to Hainan.¹³⁶ When the Guangdong Provincial Committee’s instruction of “southern retreat” reached Hainan in late September, Feng objected to it right away and refused to endorse it even at the risk of Party discipline. In addition, fearing that the retreat issue would again stir up undesirable political wavering among his followers, Feng ordered it to be concealed.¹³⁷

At this rather critical moment, the radio contact between Hainan and Yan’an, which had been terminated since mid-1941, was restored. Feng appealed directly to the Party Centre to resolve his conflict of opinions with the Guangdong Party leaders. On 26 October 1946, Feng radioed the Party Centre to explain his objection to “southern retreat.” He began by pointing out the practical difficulties involved. The Communists controlled no ports in Hainan, he explained, and had only a small number of boats at their disposal. This implied that the retreat of over a thousand cadres to Vietnam was not only practically impossible but also extremely dangerous since the GMD troops could attack them at great convenience while they were boarding. Moreover, Feng reiterated the Party’s experience during the negotiation of the “northern retreat” and argued that the unrest that resulted could well destroy the whole Communist movement in Hainan before the cadres actually embarked for Vietnam. While Feng expressed his willingness to submit if the Party Centre really thought that retreat was appropriate, he also assured it that he and his comrades were confident of upholding the revolutionary cause in Hainan if they were allowed to stay. Feng further suggested that the current position of the Hainan cadres would be strategically important since they could synchronise with the Communist struggle presently being undertaken in the whole country.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Interview with Chen Qingshan; “Yin Linping zhi Zhongyang zhuan Nanjingju dian” [Radio message from Yin Linping to the Party Centre and the Nanjing Bureau] (23 June 1946) and “Fang Fang, Yin Linping zhi Liu Shaoqi bingzhuan Zhou Enlai dian” [Radio message from Fang Fang and Yin Linping to Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai] (11 August 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 56, 82-3, 94-5; Luo Wenhong, 249-50.

¹³⁷ Feng Baiju, “Guanyu wocanjia geming,” 452-3.

¹³⁸ “Feng Li Huang zhi Zhongyang dian” [Radio message from Feng Baiju, Li Ming and Huang Kang to the Party Centre] (26 October 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 47, 106-7.

Feng's petition coincided with the reorientation of the Party Centre's strategy towards South China. When the proposal of retreat was first raised in Guangdong, it was designed in accord with the spirit of the Double Tenth Agreement by which Mao Zedong intended to extract GMD political concessions by withdrawing Communists from eight of their southernmost base areas. However, by late 1946, it was clear that Chiang Kai-shek had resorted to military measures in solving the Communist problem and an all-out civil war was already underway. This in turn nullified any further relevance to the Communist retreat.¹³⁹ The Party Centre then held that the Hainan Communist guerrillas would be of great strategic value in the civil war. They, together with other Communist survivors in the south, could assist the armed struggle in North China by harassing the GMD's rear. This concern came close to Mao's original aspiration concerning the guerrillas left behind in the south at the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War.¹⁴⁰ In any event, owing to the new concerns of national politics in mid-1946, the Party Centre found Feng's argument persuasive. Four days after Feng's radio message was sent to the central leadership, his wish was granted.¹⁴¹

V. Concluding Remarks

The Yan'an leaders' original intent was to develop Hainan into a Communist stronghold in South China. This chapter examined how their grandiose plan was thwarted by the communication failure and the three-way military contest in the island. For the first issue, its nature makes any search for a satisfactory answer difficult. The lack of interaction between the Hainan Party and Yan'an means not simply the absence of related documentary evidence from which historians can construct their arguments but, more importantly, the uncertainty about the role that Yan'an would have played in Hainan's base construction if there had been a radio link. By drawing a general comparison of base development between Hainan and North as well as Central China, the discussion tries to highlight one possible function that Yan'an might have performed, that is, as an inspirational centre. In that sense, Yan'an was important because it supplied the local

¹³⁹ Cf. Luo Wenhong, 264-5.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Benton, *Mountain Fires*, 458-61. In fact, the subsequent historical development also bore out the validity of Feng's strategic concerns. In 1950, Feng's forces played a useful supportive role in speeding up the Communist conquest of Hainan.

¹⁴¹ "Zhonggong Zhongyang gei Feng, Huang, Li de fushi" [Reply from the Chinese Communist Party to Feng Baiju, Huang Kang and Li Ming] (30 October 1946), *FBYS*, 67; cf. "Yin Linping zhi Zhongyang bingzhuang Zhou Enlai dian" [Radio message from Yin Linping to the Party Centre and Zhou Enlai] (9 November 1946), *GGLWH*, v. 56, 152, note 1.

revolutionary movement with a concrete goal, reasons for doing it, ideals to inspire its followers, guidance and useful experience for its ultimate fulfilment. Although these factors by themselves might not have been able to bring about a successful revolution, they were, as the case of Hainan suggests, indispensable for moving it towards its designated end.

On the other hand, the study of Hainan's military history reinforces scholarly recognition of the power of efficient repression in altering the course of the revolution. The Communist resistance in Hainan was at the brink of disintegration in the face of the intense Japanese mop-up operations. Nevertheless, besides increasing the appreciation of the effectiveness of the Japanese security apparatus, military repression in Hainan also alerted one to the ethnic dimension of the local Communist movement. To a large extent, the inability to overcome the Lis' distrust and hatred of the Han explains why the Hainan Party took no serious effort before 1944 to prepare for themselves a geographically secure base in the Wuzhi Mountain. The reason was that, without Li support, it was difficult both to displace the GMD and to survive in the harsh environment of Wuzhi. Ultimately, the Lis sided with the Hainan Party not so much because they were attracted by the Communists' policy but because they were alienated by the GMD's economic exploitation. Nevertheless, the Baisha Uprising did mark the beginning of intimate CCP-Li cooperation, which developed more maturity during the civil-war period.

CONCLUSION

Just before the end of the Anti-Japanese War, Mao Zedong revealed his concern that Chiang Kai-shek might wrest the fruits of victory from the hands of the people. He warned his comrades to prepare for a fierce military-political offensive by the GMD, which would plausibly reverse the gains made by the Party between 1937 and 1945.¹ There is an academic consensus that the fate of the CCP had already been sealed in the war period. However, as Steven I. Levine rightly argues, "this is wisdom after the fact." In 1945, "few observers possessed sufficient clairvoyance to predict either the rapidity or the totality of the CCP victory."² Even Mao was not an exception, for he obviously did not possess the confidence that the Communist strength developed during the war in North China alone would be adequate for the Party to rise to national power. It was out of such consideration that in 1944, he and other Yan'an leaders, deeply troubled by the imminence of an all-out civil war, decided to launch an ambitious operation to extend the Communist territorial conquest to South China. As this dissertation has elucidated, Yan'an's introduction of the notion of a "southern wing" had brought the revolutionary movement in Guangdong to a new phase. Unfortunately, it was a turning point which eventually failed to turn because of Japan's surrender. Nevertheless, if only hindsight can tell that the CCP could still defeat the GMD without this southern wing, it is not irrelevant to claim that Mao's worry of losing wartime gains to the GMD was due, in part, to his inability to combine the base areas in Central and South China into one big Communist sphere.

In explaining Mao Zedong's failure of reduplicating the Communist success in Guangdong, this dissertation refuted the common contention of Party historians that the "erroneous" political line of Wang Ming was responsible for the late and underdevelopment of both the East River and the Hainan Base Areas. Perhaps, such an argument has some substance in regard to Central China, where Wang Ming and Xiang Ying initially posed obstacles to Mao's pursuit of guerrilla expansion in the region. However, several reasons render its applicability to Guangdong extremely doubtful. First, it has been shown that the province's guerrilla movement was developed at the time when

¹ Mao Zedong, "The situation and our policy after the victory in the War of Resistance against Japan," (11 August 1945), *SW*, v.4, 11-26.

² Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 4.

Wang Ming's political power began to wane. After the Sixth Plenum in the autumn of late 1938, the Communist resistance in Guangdong was directed by Zhou Enlai's Southern Bureau, which had superseded Wang's Yangzi River Bureau. In other words, Wang simply lacked the administrative arm to interfere with Mao's policy even if he had wanted to. Moreover, there is no figure in Guangdong who, like Xiang Ying in Central China, can be satisfactorily victimised as an agent of Wang Ming.³ The charge against Zhang Wenbin is unpersuasive, and even the Party historians themselves cannot arrive at the same conclusion. Thirdly, and most importantly, there was no major clash between Mao and the Guangdong Party leaders over the policy of base construction, unlike the clashes that had taken place in Central China. Instead of encountering local opposition, what actually prevented Mao from pushing forward vigorous Communist expansion in Guangdong until the final stage of the war were the province's military situation and the Party Centre's preoccupation with other higher priorities.

Viewing the issue from the local perspective, each of the two southern bases had suffered its own problems, which accounted for its inability to imitate the Communist growth in the north. For the East River Base Area, the major problem was the limited Japanese occupation. Chen Yung-fa remarks that successful Communist base construction had to start in areas where enemy suppression was the least likely.⁴ This point was confirmed by the case of the Guangdong Communist movement. As shown in Chapter 1; one major reason soviet bases in the prewar period could not stand against Chen Jitang's "bandit-suppression campaigns" is because they were all located within the confines of the Guangdong Province. Hence, they could not exploit the resulting administrative confusion in the provincial borders to prolong their survival as their counterparts elsewhere did. During the war, Mao had a specific definition for areas which were least likely to encounter suppression. They referred primarily to the vast countryside which was occupied nominally by Japan and was beyond the reach of the GMD. However, prior to 1944, political development in the Guangdong mainland hardly matched Mao's definition. The Japanese invasion had not effectively undermined the GMD rule in the province and thus did not create a power vacuum for the Party to fill.

³ In his recent work, Benton argues convincingly that Xiang Ying's resistance to Mao Zedong's vision of guerrilla expansion derived not from conflicting political ideologies but from Xiang's own experience of the Three-Year War as well as from the particular wartime situation in Central China. In fact, Xiang was nothing but a scapegoat in the "loyalists'" desire to protect Mao's infallibility. See Benton, *New Fourth Army*, 645-704.

⁴ Chen, *Making Revolution*, 510.

The Party was, therefore, deprived of an essential precondition for a rapid growth of power.

In addition to imposing objective constraints on guerrilla mobilisation, the absence of widespread political anarchy in Guangdong, rather than the conflict over different political lines, accounted for much debate over policy formulation within the Guangdong Party. Again, as Chen Yung-fa observes, the Party's wartime success in seizing rural power required sound judgement of the intention and capability of its two enemies, the Japanese and the GMD. The Party would need to know the precise location of anarchy before it could successfully construct a base for expansion, and this knowledge was first determined by Japanese military moves and secondarily by GMD countermoves.⁵ Many studies on wartime Communism in North China simply assumed the Party had the ability to make such a judgement because the Communists there commenced their guerrilla resistance chiefly by infiltrating rural areas which had already witnessed GMD disintegration. However, compared to North China, the war situation in Guangdong was more fluid. Not only were the Communists unable to foresee when the war would spread to the province, but they also could not determine the extent of Japanese territorial interest in the province when the invasion began. Thus, policy formulation for the Guangdong Party was much more difficult, and internal disputes over the conduct of guerrilla warfare consequently arose. Some, like Zhang Wenbin, preferred to "wait and see" in order to avoid a premature break with the GMD while others, such as Liao Chengzhi and Liang Guang, were too anxious to seize every opportunity for launching an overt Communist-led guerrilla movement.

Unfortunately, Yan'an was unable to clear the confusion of the Guangdong Communists by devising for them a definite and consistent policy for guerrilla mobilisation in the East River valley. In contrast to Hainan, where Mao Zedong had ordered the construction of a base in the Wuzhi Mountain, there was no similar instruction for the East River base until late 1944 when the Wuling area was chosen as the site for erecting the "southern wing." Before that, Yan'an's attitude towards the East River's guerrilla movement is best described as ambiguous. While it gave consent to Liao Chengzhi's request for launching guerrilla warfare, it also raised no objection to the cautious approach of Zhang Wenbin (except in respect to Hainan). Historians have long identified Mao with the vigorous Communist expansion in the Japanese rear. However,

⁵ Ibid., 511.

the case study of the East River Base Area provides an exception to this general depiction, in which Mao felt the need to tame his aggressive instinct. It was because Mao realised that the restricted Japanese occupation on the Guangdong mainland had brought a clash between his political consideration for base construction, that is, base areas must be built in the enemy rear, and the Party's desire for territorial expansion. Since the former had worked well for the Party's growth in the north, Mao saw no reason to sacrifice it for the power struggle in Guangdong. Therefore, he deliberately remained as vague as possible in his position towards the East River guerrilla movement and intervened only to forestall any "deviant practice," like the "eastward retreat" to Hai-lu-feng, to avoid possible political repercussions. By leaving the matter to the judgement of the Guangdong cadres, Mao probably wanted to free the Party Centre from making any unwise commitment and yet, at the same time, without suffocating local activism. Mao was finally released from his self-restraint when the Japanese commenced the Ichigo offensive, but the war was concluded earlier than he had expected to allow his plan of erecting a "southern wing" to be realised. In that sense, the Party's failure in Guangdong was mainly because extensive enemy occupation came in too late and was too short. Moreover, contrary to the claim of Party historians, the underdevelopment of the East River Base Area reveals not the failure to adhere to Mao's version of base construction but rather the limits of its applicability.

It is interesting to compare the Communists' experience in the East River valley with that in Hainan. From the beginning of its occupation, Hainan met the basic criteria for the Maoist mode of base construction. The whole island was under Japanese domination by late 1939, and the local GMD forces were relatively weak. In addition, the Hainan Party had the command of its own armed force, which was developed from the Red Army remnants and was led by Feng Baiju. However, given these advantages, Yan'an's aspiration of turning Hainan into a Communist wartime stronghold in South China still became no more than a theoretical construct. One reason is that although Yan'an wanted a forward approach in Hainan, it was not prepared to devote the necessary resources for its implementation. Rather, the Hainan Party was ordered to rely on its own efforts, such as soliciting overseas aid and imposing taxation on the local populace, to finance the base construction programme. This seemingly self-contradictory attitude of Yan'an is not inexplicable, for Hainan's geographical remoteness to the Party Centre in Yan'an implied from the outset its strategic inferiority. Whatever role Hainan might serve in the Party's strategy in winning national power, it would belong to the later stage of the

war. To Yan'an, the development and consolidation of Communist strength in North, and to a lesser extent, Central China had to assume greater urgency and, for the time being, deserved more of the Party's attention and energy.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that Yan'an therefore played no role at all in the Communist struggle in Hainan. On the contrary, this dissertation argues by way of a negative example that the communication failure between Yan'an and Hainan had impeded the development of base construction in the latter. While Yan'an did not make available any financial aid and reinforcements to Hainan, it could still have made other valuable contributions to local base building, for instance, by planting a vision, laying out a blueprint, giving constant guidance on general policy formulation and feeding native cadres with successful experiences from elsewhere. Unfortunately, the loss of radio contact deprived Hainan of all of these supports. In some sense, the Hainan case calls for a systematic and perhaps a more positive evaluation of Yan'an's role in directing the programme of constructing bases throughout the enemy's rear in the country. Although Yan'an might not be the place where the so-called Yan'an Communism originated,⁶ its role in synthesising this mass mobilisation programme, establishing itself as a model and disseminating the model to other Communist bases should be more appreciated.

Current scholarship on the Communist revolution probably over-reacts to the earlier historiography, both in the west and in mainland China, which placed Yan'an at the centre of wartime Communism. As a result, it tends to emphasise how microsocietal factors could greatly alter the results of the revolution and focuses solely on glorifying the significance of native cadre flexibility, creativity and knowledge in making instructions from above work in specific localities. Truly, the Hainan Communist movement in the prewar period confirms the importance of these factors. The defeat of the local revolution was, to a certain extent, due to too much intervention from higher leadership, which demanded dogmatic application of central policy. Nevertheless, the wartime experience reveals the problem of another extreme. No local Party branches could afford to separate themselves from the larger Party entity and rely on their own to bring about a revolution. As this study has shown, a major reason why the Hainan Party failed to deepen its impact at the grass-roots level and complete the seizure of local power during the war is its inability to benefit from Yan'an's strategies and guidance on achieving mass mobilisation. In sum, the experience of Hainan is an important reminder that the Communists' success

⁶ Cf. Carl E. Dorris, "Peasant Mobilization in North China."

required a dynamic balance between policy input and constant supervision from above on the one hand, and creative adaptation and indigenous initiative on the other. Neither one could do without the other.

One unique feature of Hainan Communism was its ethnic dimension. The Party's experience in Hainan made it interesting to consider whether or not ethnicity/sub-ethnicity⁷ could function as an asset for the Communist revolution. As the historical reconstruction of this dissertation has suggested, ethnicity as a mobilisational factor was very difficult to harness. Despite the Lis' age-long discrimination and oppression by the Han governments on the mainland, this fact made them no ready ally of the Communists. For one thing, the Communist movement was principally a Han enterprise. In the Lis' eyes, the Communists' self-claim as the Lis' liberator did not instantly make them appear more trustworthy than other Han Chinese. It is true that in the prewar period, the Party succeeded initially in mobilising the Lis for the revolution through the connections of some Li students and its vigorous propaganda. However, the Lis' loyalty to the Party faded quickly once their Han comrades failed to show sensitivity to their needs. Moreover, to many Li people, ethnic liberation was only one among many considerations which drew them to the Party. Some, like Wang Zhaoyi, could easily turn against the Party when they found it no longer promised material gains and satisfied ambition for personal power. This prewar setback in mobilising the Lis continued to haunt the Hainan Party and deterred many cadres from taking active measures to overcome the traditional Li-Han animosity. In the end, the Party's collaboration with the Lis became possible not because of the efficacy of the Party's mass mobilisation strategy but largely because of the GMD's economic exploitation of the Lis, which pushed some Li chiefs, such as Wang Guoxing, to the Communists for an anti-GMD alliance.

On the other hand, a number of studies have examined the relationship between the Hakkas' rebellious nature and the Communist movement and argued whether the Chinese revolution can be appropriately identified as "a Hakka enterprise."⁸ Unfortunately, this present dissertation contributes little to the debate. Although the East

⁷ The term ethnicity is used here to denote the difference between, for example, the Chinese and the Japanese, or the Indians and the British. Sub-ethnicity, on the other hand, is primarily determined by the dialect a particular group of people speak. For instance, there are sub-ethnic groups in China such as the Cantonese, the Hakka and the Hokkien; but they are all Han Chinese.

⁸ See, for example, Stephen C. Averill, "Ethnicity and Revolution in South China: The Case of Jingtangshan," *Republican China*, 22.2 (April 1997): 41-92; Mary S. Erbaugh, "The Secret History of the Hakkas: The Chinese Revolution as a Hakka Enterprise," *The China Quarterly*, no.132 (December 1992): 937-68.

River region is heavily inhabited by Hakkas and not a few local Communist leaders, such as Gu Dacun, Liao Chengzhi, Lin Ping and Zeng Sheng, are Hakkas, the present historical material only supports the conclusion that the Communists made no conscious effort to achieve mass mobilisation through the Hakkas' sub-ethnic bond. One plausible explanation is that during the Anti-Japanese War, the Party was very concerned to project itself as the prime moving force behind a national united-front. Owing to that reason, one can imagine that the Party would suppress as much as possible any instinct to single out one sub-ethnic group in formulating its policy and organising its resistance efforts. Perhaps, one cannot dismiss completely the possibility that Hakka sub-ethnicity may have assisted the Communists' mobilisation in the East River region in some ways even if the Party did not intend to exploit it. However, there is no means to prove it until other relevant sources appear.

No doubt, there were occasions in which the Party appealed to kinship ties in raising manpower and financial aid for the resistance cause, but these undertakings were never confined exclusively to the Hakkas and were always subordinated to the larger context of national salvation. In fact, kinship ties most facilitated the Communist wartime mobilisation, both in the East River valley and in Hainan, as effective channels for the Party's patriotic appeals to the overseas Chinese communities. The importance of overseas Chinese support to China's war against Japan is generally acknowledged. Nonetheless, three main factors combined to account for the substantial impact of the overseas Chinese on wartime Communism in Guangdong. Firstly, the Party's presence in South China was extremely slight on the eve of the war compared to North and Central China. Overseas support was crucial for counteracting the Party's frailty. In fact, without aid from abroad, the initial efforts of guerrilla mobilisation, especially those in the East River valley, were almost impossible. Secondly, Guangdong is one of the two greatest senders (the other is Fujian) of Chinese overseas among all provinces of China. Wang Gungwu has observed that "for those overseas, the occupation of their home provinces of Fujian and Guangdong highlighted the extent of the disaster to national pride. The willingness of these Chinese to participate in patriotic activities grew."⁹ Historians have long debated the relationship between peasant nationalism and the Communist victory. In this case, Guangdong witnessed little peasant nationalism. Rather, the Communist bases there owed their early existence to another type of nationalism, that of overseas

⁹ Lynn Pan ed., *The Encyclopedia of Chinese Overseas*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press & Landmark Books, 1998), s.v. "Nationalism among the Overseas Chinese," by Wang Gungwu.

Chinese.¹⁰ Thirdly, Hong Kong, located at the coast of Guangdong, functioned as a vital bridge between the Party and overseas Chinese. Not only did Hong Kong, as a traditional emigration depot, enjoy an extensive web of connections with overseas Chinese communities, its status as a British colony also allowed the Party to collect overseas aid and distribute it efficiently to the two southern Communist bases until late 1941.

While overseas Chinese were deeply involved in the Communist resistance in Guangdong, interestingly, they were also crucial to the eventual excavation of this long-forgotten chapter of Party history. The value of overseas Chinese to Deng Xiaoping's reform programmes, both in terms of capital investment and technological expertise, formed one major impetus for Party historians to edit and publish historical materials about the southern bases from late 1979 onwards. The fact that the earliest "special economic zones" were established in Guangdong revealed the PRC's (the People's Republic of China) desire to rally overseas Chinese support for its modernisation. Guangdong was chosen because the province is the homeland of so many Chinese living abroad. However, during the Cultural Revolution, many local officials and people of Guangdong were discriminated or even struggled against because of their "overseas connection."¹¹ For Party historians, there was a necessity to rectify this previous anti-overseas Chinese stand of the "Gang of Four" and furnish the basis for a reappraisal of the economic and social contributions of the overseas Chinese to the PRC. The history of Communist resistance in Guangdong suddenly gained much political currency since it serves as a persuasive example of the long and glorious patriotic tradition of the overseas Chinese, who had once cooperated closely with the CCP in striving for a better future for China.

During the Anti-Japanese War, the Communist movement in Guangdong was in every sense a marginal one in relation to the principal movement that developed in the north. In the south, one witnessed no large-scale peasant mobilisation, no systematic pursuit of socio-economic reforms nor a sustained state-building process. Since the experience of the two southern bases was so atypical, one should be careful not to draw

¹⁰ Although there is a danger of over-generalisation, it may still suggest that overseas Chinese on the whole have a relatively higher national consciousness than the Chinese living in China. Much of it can be attributed to their constant contact with non-Chinese, greater exposure to modern political ideas and, in a majority of cases, their low status in host countries. For a case study of how nationalism developed among overseas Chinese in Malaysia, see Stephen M. Y. Leong, *Sources, Agencies and Manifestations of Overseas Chinese Nationalism in Malaya, 1937-1941*, (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1976.)

¹¹ Cf. Theresa Chong Carino, *China and the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia*, (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985), 41-5; Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 167-9.

too many generalisations from it. Nevertheless, the findings of this dissertation reinforce one basic tenet of recent "base area studies," that is, the CCP's wartime success can never be taken for granted as the logical outcome of certain predetermined structural factors. Even some very intangible things like timing, in the case of the East River base, and radio communication, in that of the Hainan, could easily thwart the strategic plan of the Party. Such a recognition, in turn, further undermines the omnipotent and omnipresent images of the Party or, more specifically, of Mao Zedong. Much against Mao's own aspiration, he was unable to assimilate the southern bases to his pattern of Communist expansion throughout the war, despite the vigorous efforts of Party historians to try to portray the contrary. What is more, apart from the few thousand East River guerrillas, who eventually relocated to Shandong and merged with the main Communist army, the other southern guerrillas who were left behind had to struggle on their own for survival until 1950. The long years of isolation had nurtured among them an entrenched localism, which later became a thorny problem for the Party during the first decade of its rule of China.¹²

¹² See Vogel's *Canton under Communism*.

GLOSSARY

<i>aimin gongyue</i>	愛民公約
<i>baojia</i>	保甲
<i>baoqituan</i>	保七團
<i>bigongxin</i>	逼、供、信
<i>canshi</i>	蠶食
<i>dada tantan</i>	打打談談
<i>Dajia tuanjie</i>	大家團結
<i>dan</i>	石
<i>damo huodong</i>	打沒活動
<i>dazhong hezuoshe</i>	大眾合作社
<i>dazongguan</i>	大總管
<i>dengji</i>	等級
<i>dixia jiaotongxian</i>	地下交通線
<i>dong</i>	峒
<i>dong zhu</i>	峒主
<i>dou</i>	斗
<i>ducha zhuan yuan</i>	督察專員
<i>fangshou degan</i>	放手的幹
<i>fanzheng</i>	反正
<i>fazhan liangyi</i>	發展兩翼
<i>Feng Baiju</i>	馮白駒
<i>fengyuanhui</i>	馮援會
<i>Fuxingshe</i>	復興社
<i>ganbu</i>	幹部
<i>Gang'ao tongbao</i>	港澳同胞
<i>genjudi</i>	根據地
<i>gongjunliang</i>	公軍糧
<i>Gu Dacun</i>	古大存
<i>guanmen zhuyi</i>	關門主義
<i>gudao</i>	孤島
<i>guobi</i>	國幣
<i>guoshi zuotanhui</i>	國事座談會
<i>guozei</i>	國賊
<i>Hainan Gongxue</i>	海南公學
<i>hanbu shili jibu shigu</i>	漢不食黎、雞不食穀
<i>He Sijing</i>	何思敬
<i>hefa panhao</i>	合法番號
<i>heli fudan</i>	合理負擔
<i>hezuoshe</i>	合作社
<i>hongyidian</i>	紅一點
<i>hongmen</i>	洪門
<i>Huaqiao</i>	華僑
<i>Huang Xuezheng</i>	黃學增
<i>Huang Zhenshi</i>	黃振士
<i>Huashangbao</i>	華商報
<i>huixiang fuwutuan</i>	回鄉服務團
<i>huise, waiwei wuzhuang</i>	灰色、外圍武裝

<i>jianbi qingye</i>	堅壁清野
<i>jianchi neixian tingchu waixian</i>	堅持內線、挺出外線
<i>jianmiezhàn</i>	殲滅戰
<i>jiaotongyuan</i>	交通員
<i>Jiefang ribao</i>	解放日報
<i>jimo huodong</i>	緝沒活動
<i>jiuguo gongliang</i>	救國公糧
<i>Jiuwang husheng</i>	救亡呼聲
<i>Jiuwang ribao</i>	救亡日報
<i>judian</i>	據點
<i>junzheng weiyuanhui</i>	軍政委員會
<i>kangdi bufen dangpai,</i>	抗敵不分黨派、
<i>chujian wulun qinyou</i>	除奸無論親友
<i>kangri gongliang</i>	抗日公糧
<i>Kangri xinwen</i>	抗日新聞
<i>kejuan zashui</i>	苛捐雜稅
<i>lafu zhuyi</i>	拉夫主義
<i>Li Chunnong</i>	李春農
<i>Li Min</i>	黎民
<i>liangminzheng</i>	良民證
<i>Liao Chengzhi</i>	廖承志
<i>lieshi</i>	烈士
<i>lijin</i>	利金
<i>Lin Huicai</i>	林蒼材
<i>Lin Liming</i>	林李明
<i>liyun</i>	黎運
<i>lushang jieche, haishang lanchuan,</i>	路上截車、海上攔船、
<i>xiangcun souwan</i>	鄉村搜頑
<i>mimi dayingjiu</i>	秘密大營救
<i>moca</i>	磨擦
<i>mofan zhuangdingtuan</i>	模範壯丁團
<i>mu</i>	畝
<i>Qianjinbao</i>	前進報
<i>qu</i>	區
<i>rijiaren</i>	日家人
<i>sandianhui</i>	三點會
<i>sheng</i>	升
<i>shengchan jianshehui</i>	生產建設會
<i>shengchan jiujiuhui</i>	生產救濟會
<i>shuangchong lingdao</i>	雙重領導
<i>shuike</i>	水客
<i>shunminzheng</i>	順民證
<i>Shou Li</i>	熟黎
<i>Sheng Li</i>	生黎
<i>sujian fanba douzheng</i>	肅奸反霸鬥爭
<i>tongfeizui</i>	通匪罪
<i>Tongmenghui</i>	同盟會
<i>tongyangxi</i>	童養媳
<i>tuiyibu jinliangbu</i>	退一步進兩步
<i>tuizu tuixi</i>	退租退息
<i>Tujinshe</i>	突進社

Wang Guoxing	王國興
Wang Jungyu	王均予
Wang Wenming	王文明
Wang Zhaoyi	王昭夷
Wang Zuoyao	王作堯
wenguan	文館
Wu Daonan	吳道南
wuguan	武館
wujia lianbao	五家聯保
wurenqu	無人區
xiang	鄉
xiaofei hezuoshe	消費合作社
Xin baixing	新百姓
Xin Zhongguo ribao	新中國日報
Xinghua ribao	新華日報
xingshangshui	行商稅
xingshi zhuyi	形式主義
xingying	行營
Xingzhou ribao	星洲日報
Xue Shangshi	薛尚實
yiduo bushao	以多補少
yi qi zhizheng	意氣之爭
yixiongdi	義兄弟
yiyou buwu	以有補無
yi yuan yidan	一元一彈
yongzheng aimin	擁政愛民
Yu Hanmou	余漢謀
yuan	元
yuba	漁霸
Yuehua	粵華
yulanzhu	漁欄主
Yun Guangying	云廣英
Yuxian yueshe	餘閒樂社
zapaijun	雜排軍
Zeng Sheng	曾生
Zhan Xiaocen	湛小岑
Zhang Wenbin	張文彬
Zhang Yunyi	張云逸
zhengquan danghua	政權黨化
Zhengxuexi	政學系
zhiyehua	職業化
zhongxin genjudi	中心根據地
zhuang ding	壯丁
Zhuang Tian	莊田
Zhongguo qingnian tongmeng	中國青年同盟
zidizui	資敵罪
zili gengsheng	自力更生
zixin yundong	自新運動
zongtuan	總團

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