



The Adjustment of Kuomintang-Chinese Communist Party Cooperation Policy After the Wannan Incident

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Abstract

Wannan Incident, as an important event significantly affecting the Anti-Japanese War and Kuomintang (KMT)-Communist Party of China (CPC) relationship during the second KMT-CPC cooperation, has promoted KMT and CPC to make significant adjustment in policy under the premise of continuing to resist Japan. The KMT-CPC relationship and their policy adjustment, from a fundamental point of view, depend on the development of the Sino-Japanese contradiction. Under the leadership of CPC Central Committee, the Southern Bureau has implemented the Party's principles and policies as the CPC delegation and Eighth Route Army office. It has taken a principled but flexible strategy to promote the democratic political process in the KMT ruled areas, and has made outstanding contributions in maintaining the KMT-CPC cooperation and the Anti-Japanese national united front.

Key words: Wannan incident; KMT-CPC cooperation; Policy adjustment

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INTRODUCTION

After the Wannan Incident, although the KMT-CPC relationship was difficult to return to the initial cooperative

situation before the Anti-Japanese War, the risks of major military conflicts and comprehensive breakdown no longer appeared. Before the Wannan Incident and the Battle of Hunan, Guangxi and Henan, under the premise of a united fight against Japan, with the development of international situation and the changes of domestic situation, KMT and CPC continued to adjust their policies to coordinate conflicts and maintain the basic Anti-Japanese cooperation. Under the leadership of CPC Central Committee, the Southern Bureau has implemented the Party's principles and policies as the CPC delegation and Eighth Route Army office, assisted to resolve conflicts and the serious negative impacts of Wannan Incident, tried to win broad sympathy and support from middle parties, and promoted the democratic political process in the KMT ruled areas.

1. WANNAN INCIDENT: THE STRONG PERFORMANCE OF KMT'S POLICY TOWARD CPC

The direct source of Wannan Incident lies in the rupture of KMT-CPC negotiation on military demarcation. On July 16, 1940, the KMT negotiators formally drawn up the "Proposal of the Central Government", and submitted to Zhou Enlai, the CPC negotiator and secretary of the Southern Bureau on February 21. The CPC Central Committee was not opposed to demarcation, but could not accept the narrow area of Chahar Province and Hebei province, proposing the five provinces in North China to be the combat zone for the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army. Jiang Jieshi completely rejected this proposal and claimed, "If the Eighth Route Army and New Fourth Army cannot move to the north shore of the Yellow River, all problems cannot be resolved".¹ On

¹ Zhou Enlai's Telegram to the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee. (1940, August 28).

November 14, He Yingqin and Bai Chongxi ordered the military office to make the “Battle Plan to Destroy the Bandit Troops at South of the Yellow River”, requiring Jiang Jieshi to approve for implementation. Jiang Jieshi approved this plan on December 7, and repeatedly told the army to “fight a guerrilla war against enemy’s weakness”, and must never affect the overall situation due to misdirection (*Jiang Zhongzheng’s Telegram to Officer Li*, 1941, pp.121-122). After January 6, 1941, when Wannan Incident broke out, except for 1,300 people who managed to break out of the encirclement, most of the 9,000 soldiers of New Fourth Army in southern Anhui province lost their lives, some were captured. The commander Ye Ting was detained.

This raised a storm of controversy in the world and CPC reacted strongly. Faced with the problem of how to solve the aftermath of Wannan Incident, disagreement occurred within the KMT.

Before and after the Wannan Incident, there were three factions within KMT on the policy toward CPC. One faction was represented by Bai Chongxi, who urged to form a stalemate with Japan and immediately implement the anti-CPC military plan, and was not afraid of breaking down with CPC. One faction was presented by He Zhonghan and Zhang Zhizhong, who opposed the military plan and advocated to resolve conflict by negotiation, proposing to take special solutions for special problems. Jiang Jieshi’s preference is the faction represented by Hu Qiuyuan, who proposed that “the best time to strike CPC is when the massive counterattack against Japan is launched”, and “fight for time to be fully prepared”. “Get close to the region of CPC, establish bunkers to prevent their expansion. This can narrow the future encirclement and push forward the strongholds, forcing CPC to have conflict with the Japanese. It may be called as shooting two hawks with one arrow”. On January 17, KMT, on behalf of the spokesman of the military committee, declared that the New Fourth Army “breached discipline, did not comply with the disposal, revolted to attack the arm in the front.” Therefore, the New Fourth Army’s designation was revoked, and the commander Ye Ting would be transferred to military tribunal for trial (Anonymous, 1941).

2. CPC’S FIGHT POLICY IN RESPONSE TO THE WANNAN INCIDENT

When CPC noted the occurrence of the incident, CPC Central Committee telegraphed to Zhou Enlai, the leader of the South Bureau, requiring him to make a solemn representation to KMT for an immediate withdrawal and to prove that KMT did not mean to disrupt cooperation. Zhou Enlai held an emergency meeting within Southern Bureau to study the situation and struggle policy after the incident, as well as various measures to be taken. Under

the guidance of the Central Committee, the Southern Bureau made a serious protest to KMT and revealed the truth by breaking through the blockade. They exposed KMT’s conspiracy of attacking New Fourth Army on *Xinhua Daily*, and condemned the KMT diehards’ crime through public lawful activities. Meanwhile, the provoked CPC began a positive military preparation. On January 12, Liu Shaoqi and Chen Yi telegraphed to the CPC Central Committee and proposed, “Please instruct Zhu, Chen and Luo to be ready to besiege Shen Honglie. We are prepared to besiege Han Deqin in exchange for KMT’s (cease on the siege of New Fourth Army in South Anhui Province).”² On January 13, Mao Zedong replied to Liu Shaoqi, “Agree Hu and Chen’s telegraph on January 12. Army in northern Jiangsu be ready to surround Han Deqin, army in Shandong be ready to surround Shen Honglie. The two armies shall be ready within ten days on standby to attack”. “We’re ready for an immediate massive counterattack in politics and military” “in reply to Jiang Jieshi’s annihilation plan to our one million people in southern Anhui Province”. “If our force in Southern Anhui Province is destroyed by Jiang Jieshi, we shall resolutely and thoroughly destroy Han Deqin and Shen Honglie to solve the central China problem.”³ On the same day, Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying came to Liu Weizhang to state the situation of Wannan Incident. On January 14, Zhou Enlai once again protested to Jiang Jieshi through Zhang Chong. Zhang Chong replied to him after reported to Jiang Jieshi that, Jiang Jieshi required Zhou and Ye to tell the CPC Central Committee “not to worsen the situation”. Jiang Jieshi’s attitude was very clear,

(a) New Fourth Army in North Central China shall not be obstructed. It’s heard that it’s the New Fourth Army to take the first shoot. (b) I hope that the New Fourth Army will proceed to Northern China. (c) If this route is blocked, it is also acceptable to move to Northern Anhui Province. I have ordered Li Pinxian not to put obstacles in the way. (d) I have ordered to issue one hundred thousand bullets and pay to New Fourth Army after they cross the river.⁴

Based on the considerations on the political offensive, on January 20, the CPC Central Military Commission released the command to rebuild New Fourth Army. On January 22, Mao Zedong issued a statement as the spokesman of CPC Central Military Commission and proposed 12 measures to resolve Wannan Incident: a) Stop provocations; b) Revoke the reactionary command on January 17 and announced to be completely wrong; c)

² Liu Shaoqi and Chen Yi’s recommendations on the military attack in Jiangsu and Shandong to Mao Zedong. (1941, January 12), *Wannan Incident (Selected Data)*, pp.136-137.

³ Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Wang Jiaxiang’s instructions on the military attack in Jinagsu and Shandong in reply to Wannan Incident. (1941, January 13), *Wannan Incident (Selected Data)*, pp.139-140.

⁴ Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Wang Jiaxiang’s briefing to Liu Shaoqi and Ye Ting on Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying’s negotiate with Jiang Jieshi. (1941, January 14), *Wannan Incident (Selected Data)*, p.144.

Punish the culprits of Wannan Incident He Yingqin, Gu Zhutong and Shangguan Yunxiang; d) Set Ye Ting free and he shall continue to serve as the commander of New Fourth Army; e) Return the New Fourth Army troops and guns; f) Comfort and compensate all casualties of New Fourth Army in Southern Anhui Province; Retreat the “Communist suppression” forces in Central China; g) Demolish the blockade line in Northwest China; h) Release all arrested patriotic political prisoners; 10. Abolish one-party dictatorship, implement democratic politics; i) Implement the Three People’s Principles, obey “the prime minister’s will”; j) Arrest all the pro-Japanese faction leaders to deliver for trial.⁵ After the receipt of Mao Zedong’s talk and CPC Central Military Commission’s order, the Southern Bureau immediately organized reproduction and widely disseminated in different social circles.

Moscow was not in favor of Mao Zedong’s estimation of the situation and envisaged countermeasures. On January 4 the eve of the incident, Dimitrov, the general secretary of the Communist International, warned Mao Zedong in telegraph concerning his fierce attitude toward KMT, “should not take rupture as the starting point.” (Dimitrov’s Telegram to Mao Zedong, 1941/1988) However, the occurrence of the incident made Mao Zedong believe that Moscow’s estimation and attitude, instead of his own, were wrong. In addition, Moscow did not reply his telegraph on January 15, so he repeatedly expressed his strong dissatisfaction with Moscow. On hearing the message that the New Fourth Army was annihilated, he angrily called Zhou Enlai to ask Chuikov, “Jiang Jieshi is so lawless, please ask Chuikov what shall I do?” However, the Soviet ambassador and military officer said that the current situation needed a global observation and arrangement, in particular an exploration on whether Jiang Jieshi had a secret liaison or a new negotiation with Japan. To determine whether Jiang Jieshi intentionally repudiated the cooperation, they should not only pay attention to the KMT troops in Central China, but also the movements of Hu Zongnan or other KMT troops. Although an active military preparation was needed, “today’s work center is still to continue the anti-Japanese war”,⁶ but Mao Zedong insisted that Jiang Jieshi deliberately destructed the cooperation. On January 20, he simply told the leaders of all parties in telegram that, “the current problem is that the distant policy differs with our thoughts, which have not been resolved after three months’ repeated communication”.⁷

⁵ *Chronicle of Zhou Enlai*, p.489.

⁶ Zhou Enlai, Ye Jianying and Dong Biwu’s telegram to Mao Zedong concerning the Soviet, US and UK ambassadors’ attitudes toward Wannan Incident (January 16, 1941).

⁷ Mao Zedong’s telegram to Zhou Enlai, Peng Dehuai and Liu Shaoqi Concerning the Changes in the KMT-CPC Relation after the January 17 Command and CPC’s Countermeasures. (January 20, 1941), *Wannan Incident (Selected Data)*, pp.183-184.

On February 5 Dimitrov called to stress that it was not inevitable to break with Jiang Jieshi, and CPC should have taken all possible actions to prevent rupture. Mao Zedong re-judged the overall political situation and pointed out, “Tojo said publicly, “North China is the base area for Japan. Jiang Jieshi expelled the CPC army in Central China to North China, which destroyed the interests of Japan.” This is something that we did not estimate in the past”; “Jiang Jieshi knew that the enemy would attack in one to three months. The reason that he provoked Wannan Incident, issued the January 17 command and deployed troops to attack the New Fourth Army in the areas of North Huai River, Eastern Anhui and Central Hubei was to try to stop enemy by attacking CPC... but the Japanese thought in another way”, so his” ‘anti-CPC’ program was completely broken.” Thus, he began to restate Zhu Pengjia’s view in 1940 telegram, indicating that CPC has already seen the serious consequences of the two parties’ tussle. With regard to Jiang Jieshi, he said, “the enemy’s attack was so anxious, January 17 command lost so much public support, his plans all went ruined and political council is about to open. We have to think of a measure to put him into a more unfavorable situation.” (Mao, 1941) This determined the strategy of focusing on political offensives according to the situation.

3. THE SOUTHERN BUREAU HAS FULLY IMPLEMENTED THE POLICY OF WINNING OVER THE MIDDLE FORCES AND ISOLATING THE STUBBORN FORCES

The CPC Central Committee was very concerned about the security of Zhou Enlai and other members of the South Bureau, called Zhou Enlai and Southern Bureau twice to retreat himself, Ye Jianying, Dong Biwu, Deng Yingchao and other important cadres of the office and newspaper office from Chongqing the earliest, and retreat non-Party cadres rapidly to abroad or Southeast Asia, destruct important documents, telegrams and passwords, and carry out revolutionary integrity education to the personnel staying in the office to prepare for the worst. According to the instruction of CPC Central Committee, Zhou Enlai carefully arranged and timely conveyed the instruction to the organizations at all levels, hid, transferred and withdrew all Party and non-Party cadres under the direct leadership of Southern Bureau and all sympathizers in contact.

Zhou Enlai and Southern Bureau’s prompt disclosure of Wannan Incident’s truth made more and more people recognize that responsibility for the conflict was entirely on Jiang Jieshi, so more people became sympathetic to CPC and disappointed about KMT, and the necessity of solidarity has been reinforced. The results of Wannan Incident completely broke KMT’s expectation, promptly extinguished the anti-communism fuse negative to CPC,

completely reversed the direction of the situation, began to trap KMT into a deepening isolation, and managed to maintain the anti-Japanese national united front in struggles.

Wannan Incident spurred adjustment in the KMT-CPC relationship, leading to the differentiation and reorganization within the anti-Japanese national united front. CPC Central Committee and the Southern Bureau no longer put the focus of united front onto KMT, but turned to win over the middle forces, introduced third parties to help adjust the KMT-CPC relation, and increased the weight to cooperate and fight with KMT. This led to the major change in its future policy development.

On the eve of Wannan Incident, middle party leaders had held secretly meetings to discuss the current situation and planned to set up a third party political alliance. After Wannan Incident, middle parties' requirement for alliance became more intense, and the pace of alliance has been greatly accelerated. They made more active planning with each other as well as with the Southern Bureau. The middle parties expected to establish a closer relationship with CPC, which has been supported and greatly assisted by the Southern Bureau. Zhou Enlai reported to the CPC Central Committee that, small parties wanted to set up a democratic union outside KMT and CPC and invited CPC to participate in the leadership. The Bureau made much efforts on its establishment and hoped it would not incline toward KMT but truly remain neutral. The Bureau seized the opportunity of Wannan Incident to demonstrate the intention to strengthen the United Front: Currently, strengthen propaganda and explanation to middle parties, turn the unfavorable factors of Wannan Incident into favorable factors; in the long run, make every effort to promote middle parties to be allied and neutral, strengthen the checks and balances in China's political arena, consolidate and promote the united front.

Because of the efforts of Southern Bureau, China Democratic Political League has been secretly established in Chongqing. The CPC Central Committee made a report on Yan'an *Liberation Daily* and published an editorial to express strong support for the League. Southern Bureau gave active and effective supports and assistances in the practical work. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Southern Bureau represented by Zhou Enlai, the middle forces began to turn from the previous right position to the real neutral position. The Southern Bureau has shown the strength and will of CPC, established a certain degree of

solidarity to middle parties, provided conditions for the development of the subsequent democratic movement centered by CPC, and created a good environment for the united front and close cooperation with the middle parties in the KMT controlled areas.

CONCLUSION

The KMT-CPC relation during the Anti-Japanese War was still constrained by the overall war situation. Regardless of how many conflicts of interest between KMT and CPC, how KMT despised the outfits of CPC or how CPC despised KMT, the two parties eventually gave up their own interests to comply with the interests of the Anti-Japanese War. Therefore, even if a considerable part of the KMT leaders long had the intention to "exterminate" CPC, whether before or after the incident, they ultimately refrained their actions after weighed the pros and cons. Similarly, after suffered the heavy losses, CPC could have taken more drastic measures for retaliation, but their leaders always took into account the fact of continuing to fight against Japan, thus limited the intensity and range of their retaliation policy. The Southern Bureau represented by Zhou Enlai has made maximum efforts to create favorable conditions for the northward movement of New Fourth Army, supplying good conditions to dissolve the unfavorable factors after Wannan Incident. It can be seen that during the war, national conflict was always higher than the contradiction between the two parties. No matter how intensive the conflicts became between KMT and CPC, they moved towards the compromises and maintained the contest always along the direction of Anti-Japanese national united front.

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