

Book Reviews

Huang Zhang-jian (2007) *Er-er-ba shijian zhenxiang kaozheng gao* (二二八事件真相考證稿 [The Truth about 2-28: Assessing the Documents]) Taipei: Lianjing (聯經). 600pp. ISBN 9570-8312-86

The 2-28 Incident of 1947 has long been one of the most controversial and contested events in modern Taiwanese history. Shortly after Taiwan's retrocession to China after fifty years of Japanese colonial rule, the Taiwanese rose in protest against the provincial authority of Governor-General Chen Yi (陳儀), demanding a higher degree of autonomy from the Chinese motherland and an end to the island's economic exploitation. After a brief period of feigned negotiations, the protest was brutally suppressed by military reinforcements from the mainland.

This year, the sixtieth commemoration of 2-28, has produced a number of new contributions to scholarship, one of the most remarkable being the book under review. Huang's book offers a meticulous and extensive selection of the relevant sources on the 2-28 Incident. Few of these are new, and Huang often resorts to material that has been widely discussed since the early 1990s – such as the communications between President Chiang Kai-shek and Governor Chen Yi in early March 1947, the reports of different newspapers at the time of the Incident, and various research reports on the 2-28 Incident compiled in 1947 on behalf of the government (such as the reports by Minister of Defence Bai Chong-xi [白崇禧] and the Censor for Fujian and Taiwan, Yang Liang-gong [楊亮功]). The enormous quantity and variety of the material is impressive, and fully justifies the author's claim that the book presents the fruit of twenty years of research. For various aspects of the 2-28 Incident, the book offers a substantial compilation and a mostly competent selection and evaluation of the official sources available. The extensiveness of his research, however, while meritorious, is sometimes overwhelming, and makes the reading of Huang's book an exhausting undertaking. The major events of the 2-28 Incident, as well as Huang's central theses, are buried under an avalanche of details, whose relevance for an understanding of the Incident is not always apparent. For instance, a large part of Huang's book (200 out of 580 pages) deals with the 2-28 Incident in Gaoxiong, and Huang goes to great lengths to convince the reader that the military suppression initiated by General Peng Meng-qi (彭孟緝) on 6 March was fully justified. The first third of Huang's book, consequently, appears like one grand apology for General Peng Meng-qi – supported, amongst other things, by 'new material' provided by Peng Meng-qi's son Peng Yin-gang (彭蔭剛) (167-194).

To be sure, the 2-28 Incident in Gaoxiong was exceptional and important in many respects, since it inaugurated the massacre of Taiwanese civilians, which in

most parts of the island only started after the arrival of the military reinforcements from the mainland on 8 March, but this is a massacre which Huang denies ever took place at all.¹ Irrespective of the plausibility of Huang's claims, however, the disproportionately large emphasis he puts on the events in Gaoxiong gives the whole book a strangely unbalanced appearance.

To believe or not believe government documents?

This, however, is not the gravest objection that must be raised against Huang's research. Of far greater consequence is Huang's seemingly unshakable belief in the validity of the official documentation on 2-28. Contemporary scholarship on the Incident, which began in the late 1980s, has always been perplexed by widely diverging and conflicting statements on the unfolding of events, as derived from the official files from government agencies, the testimonies of eyewitnesses, and memoirs of leading figures involved in the 2-28 Incident. The main task, therefore, has been to evaluate and deliberate over these often contradictory sources, and to examine to what extent official account of the 2-28 massacre is misleading.

Huang, however, seems to oppose this kind of comparative evaluation. He poses serious charges against contemporary research on the 2-28 Incident – most prominently, the official 'Research Report on the 2-28 Incident' (*Er-er-ba shijian yanjiu baogao* ['二二八事件研究報告']) drafted in 1991/1992 on behalf of the Executive Yuan. As Huang states in several places of his book, the 2-28 Research Report grants an unwarranted degree of credibility to dubious reports of eyewitnesses – with the purpose of exculpating the 'rebels' and to put unjust

¹ Huang's account of the 2-28 Incident in Gaoxiong provides a good example of his selective usage of sources and his biased belief in official records on the Incident. On page 48, Huang quotes the testimony of Li Jie-xun (李捷勳), who claimed that hundreds of people were massacred by the military after 6 March. This allegation, Huang assures us, cannot possibly be true, since the archives of the Police Administration give no indication that such a massacre ever occurred. 'Mr. Li', writes Huang, 'fabricated these lies on purpose.' Huang never even considers the possibility that the Police Administration in Gaoxiong, as well as other government agencies, might have had good reasons to conceal the mass-killing of civilians.

In contrast, Huang claims that the military was forced to intervene, since the 'rebels' had attacked innocent Mainlanders, taking many prisoners and using them as human shields against an anticipated military counterattack. Furthermore, the military, according to Huang, had acted with extreme caution and restraint, even to the extent of putting the lives of soldiers in jeopardy. '[General Peng Meng-qi] knew that it would be difficult to differentiate between good and bad persons. Before dispatching his troops, he therefore gave orders to "issue warnings before taking action" and to "fire warning shots in the air". But [the rebels] had machine guns, and some of Peng's troops lost their lives' (91).

This flattering description of the military's actions, which stands in sharp contrast to the testimony of countless eyewitnesses, was derived from the memoirs of military commanders at the time, such as Chen Jin-chun (陳錦春) and Wang Zuo-jin (王作金). Again, Huang's selection and evaluation of sources shows a remarkable lack of critical reflection on the possible motives behind these reports from the military.

blame on the government. All information emanating from non-official sources, Huang cautions, must be regarded with a high degree of suspicion, since:

The oral reports of some people may be used to amend the shortcomings of the official records, but sometimes the oral reports are in contradiction to the official files, and are [therefore] obviously false. Some of these falsehoods are caused by confused memories; sometimes people did not have all the relevant information – some people, however, omit, distort and lie on purpose (21).

The only reliable information on the 2-28 Incident, then, is to be found in the official files of government agencies. This assessment is surprising, for common sense should tell us that the official documentation of an authoritarian regime, which most likely committed a brutal massacre on a defenceless civilian population, might not be the most reliable yardstick for the unveiling of the ‘truth’ of 2-28. Huang, however, seldom seems troubled by this possibility. Even when faced with contradictions within the official sources themselves (such as the testimony of General Peng Meng-qi, who issued conflicting statements regarding an alleged assassination attempt in his memoirs and various interviews in the 1990s), Huang always strives to unravel these inconsistencies, and to demonstrate which of the statements are false, and which, by logical conclusion, must therefore be true (76 onwards). Quite curiously, it does not appear to Huang that General Peng Meng-qi, for instance, might have lied on all occasions.²

² On 6 March, a number of delegates from the Gaoxiong 2-28 Resolution Committee met with General Peng Meng-qi to negotiate a ‘peace settlement’ with the military forces stationed in Gaoxiong. In his memoirs, Peng Meng-qi claimed that on this occasion, one of the delegates named Tu Guang-ming (涂光明) drew a gun and nearly succeeded in assassinating him. The delegates were thereupon arrested, and most of them executed. This failed attempt on his life, wrote Peng, was one of the major reasons for his decision to order an all-out attack on the city. In a number of interviews conducted in the early 1990s, however, Peng Meng-qi went even further in his accusations against the Resolution Committee’s delegates, claiming that two of the delegates had carried hand grenades to the meeting.

Faced with these two contradictory statements, Huang concludes – quite reasonably – that the later claim cannot possibly be true: ‘I can’t see how hand grenades could have been hidden on [the delegates’] bodies and carried to the negotiations without anybody noticing. Furthermore, hand grenades are weapons used for middle-distance, and were not suited to be used in the close confinements of the conference room. It therefore stands to reason that [the two delegates] did not carry any hand grenades’ (77).

After eliminating General Peng Meng-qi’s second statement, Huang has thereby demonstrated – to his own satisfaction – that the first claim must be true, namely that Peng Meng-qi indeed barely escaped an attempted assassination, although no hand grenades were involved.

In fact, it is highly unlikely that Peng Meng-qi’s life was threatened at all – a possibility that Huang fails to consider. It seems much more plausible that Peng Meng-qi’s allegation of an attempted assassination by representatives of the Resolution Committee was no more than a thinly veiled pretext for military suppression. On the question of this alleged ‘assassination attempt’ see Zhang (張炎憲) *et al* (2006: 252 onwards).

This is one major problem that runs through the whole book: From the outset, Huang is equipped with a yardstick of ‘truth’ as depicted in the government’s pronouncements, and any claim that runs counter to these ‘truths’ is, in his opinion, patently false.

The main theses of Huang’s book may be summarised as follows:

1. The local authorities under Governor Chen Yi, while initially seeking a peaceful solution to the 2-28 Incident, were finally compelled to appeal for military reinforcements from the mainland on 5 March. This became unavoidable because the 2-28 Resolution Committees, initially set up by Taiwanese notabilities for a peaceful settlement of the Incident, were infiltrated by ‘rebels and thugs’, mostly consisting of Communists, members of the underworld (*Liumang* [流氓]) and Taiwanese youths formerly serving in the Japanese army.
2. To a large extent, the Taiwanese only had themselves to blame for the harsh reaction of the central government. They had plotted to disarm the military forces on Taiwan (which, in Huang’s eyes, was equivalent to high treason) and had appealed for US intervention to achieve national independence for Taiwan.
3. The armed forces dispatched from the mainland succeeded in restoring law and order to the province, and the loss of human life was kept to a minimum.
4. Although some innocent people did suffer during the incident, this was mainly due the inappropriate handling of the incident by Governor Chen Yi, who had initially failed to implement the virtuous policy of forgiveness and leniency set down by President Chiang Kai-shek.

Negotiations failed – Governor Chen Yi, the 2-28 Resolution Committee, and Wang Tian-deng (王添燈)

After the outbreak of the 2-28 Incident, local Taiwanese leaders, with the consent and support of Governor Chen Yi, established various ‘2-28 Resolution Committees’ (*‘er-er-ba shijian chuli weiyuanhui’* [‘二二八事件處理委員會’]) with the aim of negotiating a peaceful settlement and restoring local order. After a few days, however, the central Resolution Committee in Taipei issued a number of demands for far-reaching reforms of Taiwan’s political and economic structure. Chen Yi feigned agreement with these continued negotiations, while secretly appealing for military reinforcements from the mainland. Those are the facts, which are generally accepted amongst contemporary 2-28 scholarship, and Governor Chen Yi has been widely criticised for his deceitful manoeuvrings.

Huang does not deny that Chen Yi had secretly asked the central government for military reinforcements. After analysing the fragmentary and inconclusive communications between Chen Yi and President Chiang Kai-shek as preserved in the Daxi Archives, Huang concludes that this request for military reinforcements

was made on 5 March (209-212).³ However, Huang claims that the blame for this development must be ascribed exclusively to the Taiwanese representatives.

During the first stage of negotiations, writes Huang, the 2-28 Resolution Committee was under the influence of responsible and moderate delegates headed by Jiang Wei-chuan (蔣渭川).⁴ The Resolution Committee made substantial contributions to the restoration of public order, and the moderate nine-point demands of 6 March (most importantly, the abolition of the extraordinary powers of the Governor-General, the transformation of Taiwan into a regular provincial government, and the increased employment of local Taiwanese within the political structure) could find the support of Governor Chen Yi (414). A peaceful settlement of the incident, consequently, was just within reach.

After 6 March, however, the situation changed dramatically. The 2-28 Resolution Committee, Huang claims, came to be dominated by 'radicals and Communists' under the leadership of Wang Tian-deng, while the moderate delegates under Jiang Wei-chuan were ousted. Those radicals proceeded to issue a number of outrageous demands (the famous '32' or '42' demands, presented on 7 March⁵) that were equivalent to high treason and forced the government's hand:

³ The precise date of Chen Yi's request for military reinforcements is still disputed. A crucial document that Huang also refers to is a 5 March telegram from President Chiang Kai-shek to Governor Chen Yi, in which Chiang specifies the identity of the military units to be dispatched and their expected arrival date on Taiwan. This telegram, however, reveals that the military units were already being assembled by 5 March. It can therefore be speculated that Chen Yi's request for reinforcements might have been issued a considerable amount of time before, although no conclusive proof for this assumption has so far been discovered.

⁴ Jiang Wei-chuan (蔣渭川), a leading member of the influential 'Society for the Political Construction of the Province of Taiwan' (*Taiwansheng zhengzhi jianshe xiehui* ['台灣省政治建設協會']), played a controversial role in the 2-28 Incident, which could not be completely clarified until today. Jiang was often portrayed as a 'traitor' to Taiwanese interests, since he apparently attempted to undermine the authority of the 2-28 Resolution Committee, and establish his own society as the leading representative body of the Taiwanese's demands *vis-à-vis* the provincial authorities. Huang's claim that Jiang Wei-chuan struggled to strengthen the Resolution Committee (390) is therefore not completely convincing. It should be further noted that in his memoirs, Jiang Wei-chuan claimed that he had never actually been a member of the 2-28 Resolution Committee, and that he had always regarded the Resolution Committee with contempt and suspicion. See Jiang (蔣渭川) (1996: 33).

⁵ The first draft of the final demands of the 2-28 Resolution Committee contained 32 points. However, in the course of deliberations on these demands in the plenary meeting of the 2-28 Resolution Committee on 7 March, ten further demands were added. It is very likely that those additional ten demands – which included, amongst other things, the pardoning of war crimes committed by Taiwanese formerly serving in the Japanese army, and which were certain to encounter strong opposition from the central government – were introduced by the local authorities' *agents provocateurs*, with the aim of creating a pretext for military intervention. In her dissertation, Chen Cui-lian (1995) conducted extensive research on the government's possible attempt to intentionally effectuate an escalation of 2-28. Unfortunately, Huang does not refer to these interesting findings, although he quotes Chen Cui-lian's book in other contexts.

Chen [Yi] had already accepted the proposals of Jiang Wei-chuan [...], for these proposals did not contravene the central government's military and civil-judiciary authority. [...] Unfortunately, the first article of Wang Tian-deng's draft of the 32 demands of 6 March [...] asked for the disarmament of the military. This was in excess of what the government could tolerate (229).

At this point, a few questions deserve attention. First of all, it seems implausible that the 32 demands of 6 March were the decisive factor in the government's decision to suppress the incident by force. As Huang himself concedes, the dispatch of military forces had already been decided upon by 5 March (at the latest). It follows logically that after this date, all tactical manoeuvring on the side of the Taiwanese delegates in the 2-28 Resolution Committee was completely meaningless, and without any consequence for the decision-making of the central government. These continued negotiations, which lasted until the very day of the arrival of military forces on 8 March, were merely a sham devised by Governor Chen Yi to buy time for the military reinforcements to arrive, and to 'settle' the situation in his favour.

Furthermore, Huang does not ponder the reasons why the demand to disarm the military was raised at all.⁶ Huang appears to assume (although he never explicitly states so) that the 'radicals and Communists' within the Resolution Committee were seriously considering an armed conflict with the battle-hardened troops from the mainland, which seems far-fetched, to say the least. He does not give sufficient attention to the rationale given by the Resolution Committee at the time: namely, that since 28 February, soldiers and members of the Special Police Brigade had been running amok in the city, randomly shooting civilians. When seen in this light, the demand to put all weapons under the supervision of the Resolution Committee in order to avoid further bloodshed does not seem quite so preposterous.

Finally, Huang's allegation that the 2-28 Resolution Committee was infiltrated by Communists is not supported by historical evidence.⁷ True, the allegation of 2-28 as a Communist plot to overthrow the government had long served as the regime's justification for military suppression. Recent 2-28 scholarship, however, has utterly refuted this claim.

⁶ It should also be noted that it is not clear if the '42 demands' did indeed ask for the disarmament of the military. It appears that several versions of those demands were in circulation on 7 March; a factor that Huang also addresses in his research.

⁷ As a proof for the alleged Communist infiltration of the 2-28 Resolution Committee, Huang notes that the 32 demands of 7 March were suspiciously similar to a 'working paper' of the Communist 'Working Committee Taiwan', dated November 1946 (286). In my opinion, the reliability of Huang's source is very questionable. Furthermore, the economic and political hardships facing Taiwan after retrocession to the Chinese mainland were very obvious. Any similarities should therefore not be surprising, and should certainly not be considered as 'proof' for a connection between these two documents.

The 2-28 Incident as a call for Taiwan's Independence?

There is, however, one further charge of betrayal that Huang poses against the Taiwanese. During the 2-28 Incident, Huang claims, the Taiwanese had appealed to the US and British consulates on Taiwan, and asked for the intervention of foreign powers. The key document for this alleged attempt to achieve Taiwan independence is a petition signed on behalf of 800 citizens, which appealed for a joint administration over Taiwan by the United Nations, with the ultimate aim of achieving independence from the Chinese mainland. This petition constitutes, in Huang's opinion, the key issue of all 2-28 research:

This [petition] is the core issue of the research on the 2-28 Incident, it [...] is essential for an understanding of why Chen Yi resorted to a policy of severe repression. The people of Taiwan believe that they have done nothing wrong [during the 2-28 Incident]. However, through this petition [...] they committed the gravest error of all (532).

This claim runs counter to the assessment of the mainstream of contemporary scholarship on the 2-28 Incident. Most authors agree that the movement for Taiwan Independence only developed as a result of the traumatic experience of the 2-28 Incident, leading to the formation of the Taiwan Independence Movement overseas that first took root in Japan in the early 1950s. During the incident itself, according to the general line of argument, this demand for Taiwan independence had not played any significant role.

To be sure, there were scattered voices that asked for Taiwan's separation from China, which should be hardly surprising considering the fact that Taiwan, during the preceding 18 months of Chinese rule, had experienced an unprecedented level of economic decline, widespread corruption, and social unrest.⁸ Furthermore, it appears that several petitions were presented to foreign representatives on the island, although information on these alleged petitions is scarce. Quoting a report from Chen Yi to the central government, Huang assumes that there were at least seven of these petitions in early March 1947 (525), whose content is, in most cases, obscure.

Be that as it may: these petitions, to the extent that they existed at all, were certainly only supported by a tiny minority of Taiwan's population. The petition that Huang refers to was, by his own account, signed on behalf of no more than 807 individuals (with a total population of six million at the time, less than 0.02% of the inhabitants). Furthermore, the identity of the signatories of these petitions is, to date, completely unclear.⁹ Huang's conclusions that 'the Taiwanese people' had

⁸ It would exceed the scope of this book review to discuss the question of whether an appeal to foreign embassies (even with the aim of pursuing independence for Taiwan) should indeed be regarded as 'high treason', which the central government was justified to put down by force. It should be noted that the issue of China's sovereignty over Taiwan was still contested at the time of the 2-28 Incident, and some authors argued that the United Nations had both the justification and the responsibility to intervene.

⁹ In his book, Huang originally deduced that the petition presented to the US consulate on 3 March was most probably drafted with the cooperation of Lin Maosheng, who, according to

appealed to General Douglas MacArthur to create an independent Taiwan (583) is therefore unjustified.

The 2-28 Incident and the 'virtuous policy' of Chiang Kai-shek

Since the beginning of independent 2-28 scholarship in the late 1980s, the role of Chiang Kai-shek and his responsibility for the 2-28 massacre have stood at the centre the controversy. Some scholars (mostly with a certain political affiliation with the Taiwan Independence Movement) have claimed that President Chiang Kai-shek intentionally used the 2-28 Incident to dispose of Taiwan's social and political elite, in order to 'teach the Taiwanese a lesson' and to facilitate future domination of the island. Although no decisive proof for this allegation can, so far, be uncovered, even the most conservative circles of Taiwanese historians generally concede that Chiang Kai-shek was not completely without blame. Chiang Kai-shek did not make the effort to gain an accurate picture of the situation in Taiwan, and naively trusted the exaggerated and sometimes hysterical reports of the provincial authorities. Chiang Kai-shek, according to this historical evaluation, neglected his duty as Head of State, and rashly endangered the lives of many innocent civilians¹⁰.

In Huang's account, both the charges of wilful murder and of neglected duty are invalid. Ever since the beginning of the uprising on 28 February, says Huang, Chiang Kai-shek had urged the provincial authorities to handle the 2-28 Incident with caution and leniency, and to give due consideration to all reasonable demands of the Taiwanese representatives. This enlightened policy of goodwill, however, had initially met with stubborn disobedience from Governor Chen Yi:

After declaring Martial Law [on 28 February], Chen Yi was concerned for his own power, and did not instantly abide by Chiang's instructions. [...] Chen Yi failed to stop the 2-28 uprising at its source. He did not apologise and admit his mistakes; he did not take the blame on himself and resign from office. Therefore, the 2-28 uprising aggravated, and spread [...] over the whole island (223-224).

This tendency to hold Chen Yi responsible for the 2-28 Incident, while at the same time absolving Chiang Kai-shek from any wrongdoing, is by no means a very

Huang, was one of the few Taiwanese dignitaries who had a fluent command of the English language (488). However, in a postscript to the chapter, Huang concedes that this original suspicion could not be maintained in light of recent findings (525), and he now claims that this petition was drawn up by Huang Ji-nan, who later became a prominent member of the early Taiwan Independence Movement in Japan (533 onwards). Although these speculations are of a certain interest, they are, as I argued above, not relevant for an understanding of 2-28.

¹⁰ This understanding of Chiang Kai-shek's role was reflected, for example, on the memorial plaque of the 2-28 memorial in Taipei, where it is claimed that Chiang Kai-shek dispatched the army without sufficient verification (*wei ji xicha*). This languid description of Chiang's errors was heavily criticized by different organisations of 2-28 victims, who demanded a much more robust reproof of Chiang's crimes. The memorial plaque was destroyed only hours after its unveiling on 28 February 1997.

original notion. In fact, Chen Yi had served as the scapegoat for the government's misdeeds since the early 1950s, when he was executed in Taipei for his alleged surrender to the Communist enemy.¹¹ This simplistic view does not take into account that 2-28 was not an isolated event, but rather the culmination of developments that had begun in 1945. The policy of economic exploitation and political suppression, which had been enacted with the full support of the central government, had led to grave frictions within Taiwanese society, and a violent outburst of these tensions was probably unavoidable in the long term. A discussion and evaluation of the central government's (and Chiang Kai-shek's) responsibility for the 2-28 Incident, therefore, would have to comprise a much larger spectrum of analysis than Huang allows for.

Further, we are once again confronted with the question of the trustworthiness of the official documentation on the Incident. It is true, as Huang reminds us, that Chiang Kai-shek issued strict orders to his troops to maintain discipline, and specifically to refrain from any acts of 'revenge' against Taiwanese civilians (548). However, Huang does not reflect on whether these orders were actually carried out, or were even meant to be carried out. Consider this statement by George Kerr, the US Vice-Consul on Taiwan at the time of the 2-28 Incident:

Obviously Chiang's remarks were not prepared for the Formosans (he could not care less what they might think, now that his troops were firmly in control) but for the public at Nanking, and for the historical record – the wonderful Chinese historical record of benevolent acts piously undertaken by paternal government and carefully set down for posterity to admire (Kerr 1965).

After digesting Huang's book, the reader is left with the impression that 2-28 was no more than an instance of local unrest of limited scale, handled with caution and competence, and might very well start to wonder what the fuss concerning 2-28 is all about in the first place. The only misconduct of the provincial government, according to Huang, was Chen Yi's insistence on charging the criminals of the 2-28 Incident through military courts instead of civil courts (again, in contradiction to Chiang Kai-shek's orders), with the effect that some people served rather harsh prison terms:

Chen Yi did not comply with the instructions of the central government to handle [the incident] with leniency, that was his mistake. He arrested too many people. These people were later released by the government. Still, Chen Yi caused a lot of unrest and anger amongst the people (584).

¹¹ After the 2-28 uprising, Chen Yi was transferred to the Mainland, where he served as the governor of Zhejiang until 1949. Chen was later arrested on charges that he had secretly plotted with the Chinese Communists for a peaceful surrender of the province, and was executed on 18 June 1950. Although Chen Yi's execution was not immediately connected to 2-28, the official propaganda of the time made it very clear that Chen was to be regarded as the true culprit of the 2-28 massacre.

The 2-28 Incident, one of the most traumatic episodes in modern Taiwanese history, appears to be no more than a slight procedural mistake of the local judicial authorities.

The victims of the 2-28 Incident – what victims?

One of the most controversial and puzzling topics regarding the 2-28 Incident has been the question of how many people perished during the Incident and its aftermath. To date, scholars have been unable to provide an even approximate estimation of the death toll, with numbers still ranging from between just over 2000 up to a staggering 100,000, although most authors tend to agree on a figure somewhere between 18,000 and 28,000 victims. However, it is a largely undisputed fact that the military committed unspeakable acts of violence and 'revenge' on the Taiwanese population. On 1 April 1947, for example, various representative Taiwanese groups on the mainland issued a public statement, decrying the unspeakable brutality of KMT soldiers, who were torturing, raping, and killing Taiwanese by the tens of thousands (Taiwan lü Hu liu tuanti [台灣旅滬六團體] 2002: 261-265)

In his book, Huang takes note of these allegations. However, he counters the accusations raised against the military with apparent ease:

On 23 March, [Minister of Defence] Bai Chong-xi reported [to Chiang Kai-shek] in a telegram: These statements by the representatives of Taiwanese groups are merely based on rumours [...and] for that reason, Chiang Kai-shek did not further investigate (579).

Again, one must be astonished by Huang's seemingly unshakable belief in the credibility of the government's official statements. Any large-scale massacre of civilians, according to Huang, cannot possibly have happened – because the KMT's Minister of Defence said so in a telegram to President Chiang Kai-shek!

Only in a very few instances does Huang concede that some innocent Taiwanese might have suffered. One prominent case in question is the famous Taiwanese scholar Lin Mao-sheng (林茂生), who, together with Chen Xin (陳忻) and Song Fei-ru (宋斐如), was executed by order of Governor Chen Yi without proper authorisation (571 onwards). Huang's focus on these individual cases, however, rather results in obscuring the suffering of the Taiwanese population, since the reader might get the misleading impression that these isolated incidents had been the only cases of the authorities' abuses.

How many people, then, did die as a consequence of the Incident? Huang does not give an explicit number for the total death-toll. In the case of Gaoxiong, Huang puts the number of victims at around 120, based on a March 1947 estimate of the KMT's local Secret Service Bureau. Furthermore, Huang reminds us that these victims were not necessarily killed by government forces, but 'people in the town [of Gaoxiong] may just as well have been shot by rebels – this fact should be particularly considered in regard to the specification of the Secret Service Bureau' (200).

Huang concedes that after the arrival of the military reinforcements, some innocent Taiwanese were indeed abused by the military and police. In the first

stage of the incident, says Huang, the local military and police forces had been confined to their barracks on Chen Yi's orders, and they had to stand by helplessly while countless of their fellow countrymen from the mainland were abused and murdered by a Taiwanese mob. Consequently, 'the rage in their hearts had no outlet. When the reinforcement army arrived, therefore, [the soldiers] took revenge on innocent Taiwanese. Chen Yi, in accordance with the strict orders from Chiang Kai-shek, put an end to these [excesses]' (548).

According to Huang, these 'excesses' against Taiwanese civilians (which, furthermore, were largely limited to beatings and insults, and did not lead to many fatalities) were therefore understandable from a psychological point of view, and should be judged with leniency.

This assessment stands in stark contrast with countless eyewitness reports. Take, for example, the testimony of Xu Cao-de (許曹德), who witnessed the military's arrival in Gaoxiong:

Through a crack in the door of our shop, I could see terrible scenes: soldiers raised their weapons against anybody who seemed suspicious to them. Grown-ups and children were shot. All through the night, I could hear the terrible sound of gun-shots, and the screams of innocent people dragged away by soldiers. [...] The next day, the terror became even worse. Whoever moved on the streets or showed the slightest sign of disobedience was shot down instantly. On the streets, we could see piles of corpses. [...] People were killed like ants. Any Taiwanese over the age of twenty who stepped out of the house could not hope to come back alive (Xu 1990: 117).

In his foreword, Huang expresses the hope that his book will be conducive to an easing of the 2-28 victims' pain:

If this book can help the family members of the 2-28 victims to clearly understand the truth of the Incident, reduce their hatred against the ROC government and [thereby] diminish the resistance against a future unification between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, then it might be said that I have made a contribution for the Chinese people (10).

It is very doubtful that Huang's negligent treatment of the victim's suffering will realise this expectation.

The remaking of the old KMT's 2-28 history

The historiography of 2-28 has always been a highly politicised matter, and the Incident, a hallmark of Taiwanese identity, has been at the core of heated debate. 2-28, therefore, could hardly present itself as a topic of detached and unemotional research. The beginning of a free and independent 2-28 scholarship in the late 1980s developed as a protest and countermovement against the KMT's strategy of denial and repression. The mainstream of contemporary 2-28 scholarship, which strove to force the KMT into admitting its historical guilt and doing justice to the victims of 2-28, has been characterised by a high degree of criticism towards the KMT; a tendency that can still be observed today.

In recent months, however, it appears that a certain conservative backlash is forming. A number of authors write with the assumption that the demonising of the KMT has gone too far, and seek alternative approaches to 2-28, while at the same time justifying the government's actions in 1947.¹² These approaches should not be discredited outright. It is, of course, legitimate and even necessary to challenge the mainstream of modern 2-28 scholarship. As the saying goes, it all depends on who has the better argument.

One should not, however, completely ignore the findings of the last 20 years of KMT-critical 2-28 research, as Huang clearly does. Through his chosen point of departure, namely the assumed 'truth' of the incident as depicted in the regime's documentation of 1947, his path is firmly set from the beginning, and his point of arrival is predictable. Any research which is mainly based on the documentation of an authoritarian regime will never be able to find any indication of that regime's wrongdoing. How could it be otherwise?

Huang's research certainly has its merits. His book offers a comprehensive compilation of important material on the 2-28 Incident, and should certainly be consulted by any serious student of that period. Huang's conclusions as well as his general understanding of the incident, however, are not much different from the regime's propaganda of the authoritarian period.

In 1988, Premier Yu Guo-hua (俞國華), when confronted with the question of 2-28 in parliament for the first time, explained that 2-28 had been a plot by Communist elements to overthrow the government and achieve Taiwan independence. Although the provincial authorities under Chen Yi, according to Yu, had committed a number of serious mistakes in the handling of the incident, the central government had acted with extreme caution, and kept the loss of human life to a minimum (*Lianhe bao* [*United Daily News*] 2 March 1988: 3).

In regard to Huang's book, it seems that the KMT's old history of 2-28 is on the rise again.

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¹² Another interesting recent attempt to relieve the KMT of its responsibility for 2-28 can be found in a book by Qi (2007). Qi assumes that the 2-28 Incident was, to a large extent, caused by the willful destruction of Taiwan's economy by the Japanese at the end of the Second World War.

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Shao-li Lu (2005) *Zhanshi Taiwan: quanli, kongjian yu zhimin tongzhi de xingxiang biaooshu* (展示臺灣 權力 空間與殖民統治的形象表述 [*Exhibiting Taiwan: Power, Space and Image Representation of Japanese Colonial Rule*]). Taipei: Maitian (麥田 [Rye Field Publications]). 455pp. ISBN 986-7252-86-1

Visitors to contemporary China will be familiar with the exoticised depictions of 'minority nationalities' – whether Zhuang, Tibetan, Mongol or Uighur – that are common currency in the media, in the promotional literature of a burgeoning tourism industry, and in the rapidly multiplying array of museums and theme parks. The minorities in question are generally depicted in 'traditional' costume (which nowadays seldom reflects the garb of the average 'Tibetan on the street'); images of beautiful women singing and dancing predominate (and song-and-dance shows are a standard feature of package tours in minority regions); the natural beauty of the scenery and the bountiful production of local agricultural 'specialities' are celebrated; harmony between Han and the local minorities is promoted; and a historical narrative emphasising the benefits bestowed by the more 'advanced' Han supplies the inescapable subtext.

Lu Shao-li's meticulous and fascinating study of the uses made of exhibitions as tools of colonial governance by the Japanese rulers of early twentieth-century Taiwan cannot but remind the reader of the strikingly similar strategies deployed by the twenty-first-century Chinese Communist Party to legitimise and reinforce their control of ethnic 'autonomous regions' on the vast periphery of the People's Republic (PRC). Indeed, this study might well make more than it does of such a glaringly obvious parallel – particularly given the exquisite irony in the way in which the incorporation of the Taiwanese aborigines within the official PRC (and the old Kuomintang) narrative of 'multi-ethnic' nationhood (as *Taiwan gaoshan zu*, they have been designated one of China's 55 minorities) appears to mimic Japanese representations of the relationship between the 'advanced' centre (i.e. the home islands), and the 'backward,' though exotic and picturesque, periphery. The difference, of course, is that in the early twentieth-century Japanese vision of