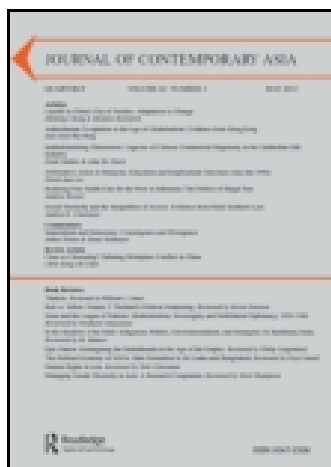


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Ho Ming-Sho^a

^a Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

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From Resistance to Accommodation: Taiwanese Working Class in the Early Postwar Era (1945–55)

HO MING-SHO

Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

ABSTRACT *This article explores Taiwan's worker activism in the early postwar era (1945–55) in the attempt to revise the received perception of labour quiescence under high authoritarianism. Rather than a passive victim of state repression, workers mounted two rounds of resistance, first in the form of factory-defending worker-militias during the February 28 Incident of 1947 and later in the subsequent clandestine communist movement. With the case of sugar industry workers, it is argued the postwar ethnic domination was the triggering factor for worker resistance, which was severely repressed. Their consecutive failures as well as the lure of the privileged status of state-owned enterprise employees eventually persuaded them to accept a subordinate role.*

KEY WORDS: Working class, colonialism, ethnicity, Taiwan, resistance

There are three main approaches in explaining Taiwan's absence of industrial conflict prior to the late 1980s. First, culturalists maintain that a Confucian ethos encouraged workers to be frugal and hardworking, laying the foundations for the economic miracle (Chen 1994; Chan 1996, 284–298). The traditional ideal of familial harmony undergirded the intra-firm interpersonal relationships for the collaborative pursuit of prosperity (Lee 2004). Basically, culturalists assuming a shared cultural heritage persuaded workers to internalise managerial authority and industrial discipline.

The second school holds that the protracted authoritarianism produced worker impotence (Hsiao 1992, 155–156; Xu 1989). Deyo (1987, 1989a, 1989b) argues against the uncritical use of the Confucianism argument because a number of anti-labour policies, such as legal control of strikes and pro-government unionism, resulted in the “political exclusion of the working class.”

The third approach looks at other social institutions that helped to channel workers' energy away from class identity. In the family-controlled businesses, patriarchy and the familial ideology perpetuated workers' subordination (Niehoff 1987; Cheng and Hsiung 1992; Hsiung 1996). Recruitment in small-and-medium enterprises was often based on the social ties of the native place, which blurred the class relationship between employers and

Correspondence Address: Ho Ming-Sho, Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University, 1 Roosevelt Road sec. 4 Taipei, Taiwan. Email: mingshoho@gmail.com

employees (DeGlopper 1995; Harrell 1982, 131–132). With the widespread practice of small-scale entrepreneurial activities, industrial work was often seen as a temporary preparation for starting one's own business (Stites 1982, 1985; Shieh 1992). Ethnic domination encouraged the native workers to place their ethnic identity over class interest (Minns and Tierney 2003; Yang 2007, 531–532).

The culturalist approach appears the least convincing because its denial of workplace tension and class discontent does not square with the upturn in labour protests in the wake of the lifting of martial law in 1987 (Ho 1990; Bello and Rosenfeld 1990; Chu 1996, 1998; Ho 2003; Minns and Tierney 2003; Lee 2006).

The last two approaches are arguably complementary in that the former highlights the preventive function of political control while the latter looks at the positive channelling of workers' attention to non-class areas. Both provide valuable insights, yet both remain insufficient in their own ways. The political control argument is certainly right about the formidable difficulties for labour activism under the martial-law regime. But were there ever incidents of class resistance? These exiting works erroneously assume labour quiescence as the automatic result of political repression and neglect the existence of class resistance prior to the consolidation of authoritarianism.

The channelling argument correctly points out the variegated nature of workers' identity, both in the past and now; yet, some of the literature implicitly adopts a rigid Marxist assumption by privileging class over other identities. Hence, workers' pursuit of non-class activities is seen as a misguided attempt of "muted class consciousness," rather than a reasonable and self-conscious choice. Speaking of East Asian workers, Perry (1996, 3) observes that they are more motivated by "a quest for social and cultural status entailing a desire to elude, rather than to embrace the ranks of proletariat." As I will argue below, Taiwan's postwar worker activism resisted ethnic discrimination instead of class exploitation.

It is true that Taiwanese workers appeared passive and disorganised by the mid-1950s, but this article will argue there was an unexpected and tortuous trajectory in the first postwar decade. For Taiwan's state-owned enterprise (SOE) workers, labour subordination was both dictated by the extraordinary circumstances as well as their deliberate choice. Following the repression experienced in the February 28 Incident and the White Terror, workers learnt a bitter lesson that their active involvement was ineffectual and costly. At the same time, the SOE employment conferred on them an envious status of "labour aristocracy" that was denied to other Taiwanese, who ended up accommodating the postwar ethnic discrimination.

The term "labour aristocracy" needs to be explained here. The original Marxist concept refers to the upper stratum in the British working class whose material embourgeoisement brought about a more conservative outlook (Hobsbawm 1984, 214–272). In the 1970s, there were some attempts to use the term to describe the privileged indigenous workers as opposed to the immigrant workers who were ghettoised in low-paying jobs in the European context (see the criticism by Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988, 26–31). As Moorhouse (1978) points out, the term itself remains insufficient to explain why workers failed to become revolutionary as Marxism predicted. Without the Marxist teleological conception of workers in a revolutionary class, one can use "labour aristocracy" differently, in the pejorative sense of "being bribed" or "bought-off." Here I apply the term to Taiwan's workers in order to highlight the fact that the better material conditions vis-à-vis other compatriots persuaded them to stay in the SOE framework in spite of ethnic discrimination.

Data and Methodology

For research data, I use the publications of the Taiwan Sugar Corporation (TSC) as well as the archival data housed in the Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History. The recently unearthed historical materials regarding the February 28 Incident and the White Terror period were consulted. I conducted interviews with 53 TSC workers from 2002–2009. I selected my interviewees by snowball sampling in southern Taiwan where the TSC sugar refineries were concentrated.

I need to add two caveats here. In the period which has been called “the most tumultuous in Taiwan’s history” (Phillips 2003, 140), information on worker activism remains rudimentary at present. With the lack of comprehensive statistics, my reliance on biographic data makes the narrative more anecdotal than in ideal circumstances. The author hopes that further publication of official data can address this limitation and provide a more satisfactory answer to the research question explored here.

Second, although my research conclusion is only applicable to the SOE workers, their prominent role in Taiwan’s working class in this period cannot be overstated. In 1945, the Kuomintang (KMT) regime nationalised all the economic assets left by the Japanese, creating a vast SOE sector. Since the Japanese had monopolised all the modern corporations previously, the nationalisation meant that virtually all the nascent working class in the colonial industrialisation became SOE workers, with the major exception of the 1952 privatisation of four SOEs in order to finance the land-to-tiller reform. In particular, the economic significance of the TSC cannot be overemphasised because more than half of Taiwan’s exports came from sugar before 1958.¹ Understanding that the salience of SOE workers was gradually eclipsed by the slow but steady growth of the private sector, my research focuses only on the decade 1945–55 – a formative period for Taiwan’s subsequent class politics.

Ethnicity in Early Postwar Taiwan

Rather than viewing the Han population as a homogeneous group, Honig (1996) suggests it is better to conceptualise ethnicities in Chinese societies as anchored on local origins and native-place identities. Migration and the resultant labour market segregation constitute diverse ethnic groups. Before 1949, such “politics of place” was a powerful force that structured the working class in Shanghai (Perry 1993, 29–31) and Tianjin (Hershatter 1986, 50).

Postwar Taiwan followed the pattern identified above in that there was a visible ethnic division of labour between the six million native Taiwanese people and roughly a million mainlanders, most of whom came to Taiwan with the KMT regime in 1949 after the debacle in the Chinese civil war. There was an unequal ethnic division of labour, with Taiwanese dominating the sectors of farming and private business, while mainlanders were largely concentrated in government officialdom, the military and the police (Gates 1981; Johnson 1992; Wang 2001). In her ethnographic study, Gates (1987, 227) concluded, “Taiwanese rather than Mainlander culture dominates the working class” because of the concentration of the former in the manual trades.

Nonetheless, Taiwan’s postwar ethnic relation differed from the above pattern in one significant aspect. The unequal ethnic division of labour did not emerge naturally and unplanned, but was an intended consequence of an émigré regime whose survival primarily depended on the loyalty of its mass followers. Take the consequential decision of nationalising colonial industry as an example, both Amsden (1985, 92) and Haggard

(1990, 88) explicitly argue that the purpose of this arrangement was keeping economic power firmly in the grasp of mainlanders. In 1952, the SOEs' sales and profits made up 47.6% of government revenue, whereas the share coming from taxes was only 16.4% (Yuan 1998, 151). Not being a socialist country, the abnormal significance of the state sector was characterised as "bureaucratic capitalism" with which the KMT state practiced undisguised exploitation of Taiwanese society (Liu 1992).

As I will argue below, an extreme form of ethnic domination developed in the SOEs, as mainlanders overtook the managerial positions originally occupied by Japanese employees, whereas the Taiwanese remained in the bottom tier. Following Hechter's (1975, 30) definition of colonialism as (1) a "racially" or "culturally" different group imposes their domination upon another group, and (2) the dominated society is condemned to an instrumental role to the metropolis, and finally (3) racial or cultural stereotypes are constructed to legitimate the subordination, I will characterise the situation as neo-colonialism. In this period, ethnic domination solidified Taiwanese worker unity, as evidenced by their participation in the armed struggles.²

The Privileged Minority: Taiwanese Sugar Industry Workers in the Colonial Period

By the end World War II, Japanese conglomerates had built 42 mechanised sugar refineries throughout central, southern and eastern Taiwan with the assistance of the government. In 1945, there were roughly 16,000 full-time employees in the sugar industry.³ According to an informed estimate that 75% of the workforce were Taiwanese,⁴ there were 12,000 native workers who earned their living from Japanese sugar conglomerates towards the end of the war. Compared with other Taiwanese, they were more culturally assimilated into the Japanese way of life. They were able to relish a higher living standard because they partook in the process of colonial extraction. Nevertheless, they were still treated as "racial inferiors" throughout the colonial period.

Taiwanese workers faced a clearly visible ethnic division of labour for they were largely concentrated in the rank of "factory workers" (*koin*), while only a few occupied the "staff" (*shokuin*) positions.⁵ In the Dalin Refinery at the end of the war, for example, 69% of the Japanese were hired as staff members, whereas 95% of the Taiwanese were factory workers. Not only did staff enjoy better remuneration in cash income and company welfare, but also, under the Japanese labour regime, they possessed the status respect that was denied to the majority of workers. In Japan, the status gap was so large that the pursuit for equal dignity fuelled the pre-war labour movement (Gordon 1985). But in colonial Taiwan, the situation was worsened in that ethnic inequality was superimposed upon status inequality, thus creating an almost unbridgeable cleavage.

Even though a minority of Taiwanese could attain the same positions as Japanese employees, they still faced wage discrimination. It was customary to pay Japanese a stipend for their overseas service (*gaitou kinmu*). The amount of this bonus varied; and over the years it constituted a significant portion of the ethnic differential in wages. According to a 1929 official survey, the data on sugar refineries show that Japanese employees earned as much as 2.15 times the Taiwanese average (Taiwan Governor-General 1992, 26–27, the author's calculation).

The sugar conglomerates provided residences with all kinds of facilities to accommodate Japanese managers, engineers and technicians who had ventured to this unfamiliar island. Schools, Shinto shrines, consumer co-ops and other amenities were built. Labour historians

would easily identify this feature as “welfare capitalism” – a business practice to cultivate a docile working class in the early twentieth century (Crawford 1995), but here the holistic planning was designed to meet the special needs of colonisers who preferred to be spatially segregated from their Taiwanese co-workers. A refinery started as a planned town for metropolitan sojourners, an outpost of Japanese civilisation in the tropical countryside. But over time, the company residences grew to include sizable numbers of native employees. Expectedly, ethnic segregation was reproduced in the residential area; Taiwanese employees were always assigned with smaller units located near the perimeter.

Working for sugar conglomerates, Taiwanese were placed under an encompassing regime of ethnic subordination, both in their job and in their off-duty time. Fujiyama Raita, the ex-president of the Great Japan Sugar Company, made the following comment on ethnic relations in 1936,

There is an indelible distinction between the Japanese and Taiwanese people, just like oil and water. To expect them to cooperate whole-heartedly is like waiting for a muddy river to clean up. It is not even possible in a hundred years (Fujiyama 2007, 191).

Ye Shengji (1923–50), a medical doctor who was later executed for participating in the clandestine communist movement, grew up at the Xinying Refinery, where his foster father worked as a subsection chief – an anomalous achievement for a Taiwanese employee. Ye said his childhood was so culturally assimilated that he identified Japan as his “home country.” His successful foster father was described as hardworking and very cautiously behaved “as if he would take the effort to knock on a strong stone bridge before crossing it” (Yang 1995, 15, 17). Obviously, the lure of material well-being persuaded Taiwanese workers to swallow the bitterness of ethnic discrimination.

The Sugar Industry During the Chaotic Regime Change

During the 1947 uprising, a contemporary Shanghai reporter noted that Taiwan remained a colonial society:

The political shackles and economic bondages that were imposed on the Taiwanese people were not relieved, except that Chinese overlords came to replace the Japanese ones. The people remained the oppressed slaves (cited in Chen 1992, I, 114).

While Taiwanese experienced the unexpected *déjà-vu* of colonial domination in the postwar era, the situation of sugar workers deserves a closer look through the triple processes of carpet-bagging, corruption and extraction that they directly experienced.

Carpet-Bagging

World War II ended in August 1945, but it was in March 1946 when the government began to take actual control of Taiwan’s sugar industry. The TSC was formed in June of the same year by integrating nearly 50 sugar refineries and other production units originally belonging to four major Japanese conglomerates. Although the wartime

Table 1. Staff and Factory Workers in the TSC (1946-47)

	Staff	Factory Workers
March 1946	2,948	13,056
June 1946	4,852	14,967
December 1947	5,364	16,274

Note: The March 1946 data can be taken as the baseline before the KMT takeover. The source is based on Zhang (1958: 21).

Sources: June 1946 data is from Taiwan Provincial Government Department of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (1947: 7-8); December 1947 data is based on Xue (1995: I, 417).

bombing was devastating and sugar production in the winter of 1945–46 was unusually difficult, the personnel structure remained frozen until the transfer.

A new ethnic order based on the ethnic division between mainlanders and natives emerged with the gradual departure of Japanese. In October 1946, there was only one Taiwanese among the TSC's 46 first-rank officials and three Taiwanese refinery directors out of a total of 37 (Taiwan Sugar Corporation 1946, 81–87). On the shop-floor level, Taiwanese workers saw that their supervisors were being replaced by immigrant mainlanders who not only obtained the staff positions, but also the much coveted housing units in the residential area.

Many of my informants claimed that these newcomers were largely unqualified due to a lack of experience and training. As a result, they tended to occupy non-productive positions which ironically offered better payment and benefits. The postwar personnel statistics show an abnormal expansion of staff while the number of factory workers grew only slowly (see Table 1). The staff percentage rose from 18.4% to 24.8% in less than two years – a clear indication of featherbedding.

In 1946 the Xinying Refinery established a subsidiary school for the children of its workforce. Among the 435 enrolled students, 90% were Taiwanese, but all of its 19 teaching staff were mainlanders (National Resources Commission 1947, 105, 109, 111). Senior workers at Qiaodou Refinery recalled the differences between the two regimes in terms of factory management.

There was only one policeman in the Japanese period, but the KMT government needed 30 policemen.⁶ To manage the whole office, the Japanese hired 6 persons, but afterwards 60 persons from the Chinese mainland were not able to get the job done. Furthermore, there were many newly created units such as those that dealt with public relations...and those who came from the Mainland knew nothing about sugar-making (Zhen 1996, 78).

Another worker reported the same situation regarding farm management. In the past, one person with a dog was equal to the job; the KMT government staffed 30 persons without bringing about satisfactory results (Kio-A-Thou Culture Society 2001, 27). In fact, the KMT Central Executive Secretariat circulated a report in February 1946 that noticed the plight of rural society due to the virtual cessation of the sugar industry. The report suggested hardship could have been avoided if “the government had recruited Taiwanese technicians” (cited in Chen 1992, I, 52).

The National Resources Commission (NRC) officials who assumed the management of Taiwan industry already noted the widespread bitterness among Taiwanese workers as early as February 1946. One of their reports stated,

Waves of workers' protests have emerged since December 1945. Besides the economic causes (low pay and high prices), there were political reasons. They [Taiwanese workers] thought that the Taiwanese people had been liberated from Japanese rule and consequently should take over their role. As a result, they raise such slogans as "Taiwan is Taiwanese" (cited in Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange Center 2007, LXXIX, 101).

In spite of the perceptible frustrated aspirations, NRC officials were not ready to make concessions, as seen in their recommendation for "political training" (*zhengzhi xunlian*) in order to eradicate "localism" (*difang quannian*) as well as better liaisons with security agencies to suppress workers' protests. At the same time as the NRC officials blamed narrow "localistic" consciousness on the part of Taiwanese workers for the troubles, the extant archives revealed that the NRC received many solicitations for the jobs from mainlanders, and some were appointed to high-ranking positions.⁷

During the first TSC meeting in June 1946, although the general manager Shen Zhennan vowed to increase the Taiwanese employees, the TSC decided to recruit high-ranking staff from Japanese nationals or overseas and mainland Chinese while Taiwanese would be promoted only for farming and industrial needs. In particular, an elaborate system for remunerating mainlanders and their family dependents with a resettlement fee (*anjiafei*), travel fee (*lüfei*) and subsidy (*buzhufei*) was promulgated (Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange 2007, CXI, 325–353).

The additional stipend for expatriates was a universally hated practice among Taiwanese since the Japanese period. As a result of the extra payment, the income disparity between mainlanders and Taiwanese employees was exacerbated. From an available source on 1946 TSC Taizhong Refinery, the average monthly salary for Taiwanese staff was 112.3 Taiwan Dollars, whereas that of mainlanders was 214.4 Taiwan Dollars (Taiwan Sugar Corporation Taizhong Refinery 1946, 42).

The early impression of Taiwanese workers towards mainlanders was mostly negative; the latter were increasingly seen as new position-grabbing, self-fattening, and incompetent rulers. Consequently there were widespread demands to promote natives and privatise the sugar industry expressed in the major newspapers prior to the outbreak of the February 28 Incident (Wu 2007, 247–248).

Official Corruption

Taiwanese workers were also alienated by corrupt behaviour among the takeover officials. In fact, during the chaotic interregnum, sugar refineries sustained heavy losses in their resources. Many Taiwanese families, for example, refused to return the "evacuated sugar" that was put into their custody in order to avoid the risk of wartime bombing. Those who were well connected could easily sneak into refineries and steal the stockpiled sugar (Zhang et al. 1995, 62).

While these acts of petty theft were undoubtedly prevalent, they paled in comparison with the predatory behaviours of KMT officials. Contemporary reports told many lurid

stories of how officials simply took public property as their own personal booty and sold it for profit (Dai and Ye 1993; Wu 2007, 85). That takeover officials demanded bribery from subcontractors without even the slightest intention of disguising their criminal behaviour was a great shock to native workers – something simply unimaginable in the Japanese era (Jiang 2001, 79).

At the Xiwu refinery, due to corrupt and predatory behaviours, takeover officials later incurred the violence of the locals during the 1947 uprising. The general section chief, Shi Xianjue, in particular serves as an illuminating case. Shi obtained this lucrative position because the director was his in-law. Whenever there was a job opening, Shi would demand a bribery from the applicants; otherwise there was no chance of being hired. During the February 28 Incident, as native resentment against corrupt mainlanders rose, Shi fled the area; angry folks discovered two suitcases of neckties and several gold bracelets – evidently loot acquired from the abuse of his managerial authority (Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History 1993, 233).

The personal story of Chen Shaoyin was also revealing. Chen went to Japan for high-school education and became a member of staff in a small independent sugar company before the end of the war. Chen was troubled by the systematic corruption of mainland officials. In preparing the inventory transfer, officials tried to hide valuable materials so that they could sell them privately. He reported these irregularities to higher authorities, only to find them equally implicated. Frustrated, Chen finally went to the TSC headquarters in Taipei and demanded a personal meeting with general manager Shen Zhennan. Shen was genuinely concerned about the corruption and instantly promoted Chen as a special agent to supervise the transfers all over the island. In spite of this, Chen found the TSC leadership persistently unable to eradicate the widespread embezzlement that took place in almost every sugar refinery (Chen 2005, 138, 144–145, 156).

Archival sources indicate that the top management personnel were equally reproachable. In 1947, Shen Zhennan managed to obtain a TSC donation of five million National Dollars⁸ for a private school project in Guizhou Province initiated by his college alumni, while a TSC deputy manager also facilitated a donation of one million National Dollars to his alma mater in Shanghai (Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange Center 2007, CLVIII, 395–397).

Whether it was for the purpose of fattening their own purses or peddling their influence, the KMT officials quickly transformed the newly nationalised industries into their private kingdoms. For them, Taiwan was little more than “a provincial backwater – to be plundered to line the pockets of party officials or to help pay for the war” (Minns 2006, 197).

State Extraction

Predatory behaviour against Taiwan’s sugar industry took place not only on an individual level, but also in an organised fashion. The KMT was then faction-ridden, and each group wanted to carve out their share of the bounty. Since Chen Yi of the Political Science Faction (*zhengxuexi*) already had control of the administrative apparatus, Premier T. V. Soong wanted his NRC allies to assert control over Taiwan’s economy. In March 1946, they reached a deal on how to divide the nationalised assets. Accordingly, the NRC owned 60% of the TSC, while the other 40% belonged to the Taiwan Provincial Government (Chen 1995, 226).

In order to meet the rising military costs of the civil war, in 1946 the government ordered a stockpile of sugar of 150,000 tons to be shipped to Shanghai and sold for revenue. Further demands were issued the next year. Taiwanese were outraged by these acquisitive seizures for many reasons. First, the local sugar supply had become insufficient even though Taiwan's production was abundant. Second, the TSC's war-fractured facilities badly needed cash to launch their recovery (Ceng 2007; Chen 1995; Wu 2007, 127). After the February 28 Incident broke out, Shen Zhennan acknowledged that the decision to commandeer sugar was among the triggering factors of the popular uprising.⁹

Before 1945, the NRC had envisioned a plan of state-led economic recovery for postwar China, in which industries of Japan-occupied territory would be relocated to support national needs (Kirby 1992, 203–204). In an initial report dating from February 1946, the NRC planned to shut down 25 out of 42 sugar refineries in Taiwan (Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange Center 2007, LXXIX, 91), and some of the facilities were to be relocated to mainland provinces to stimulate the growth of the sugar industry. Such national planning was sure to arouse opposition from local people who wanted to keep their livelihoods. In Manchuria, the NRC officials were eventually prevented from dismantling the Japanese petroleum refineries because of strong local resistance (Deng 1995, 28). However, in Taiwan, the NRC succeeded in disassembling two sugar refineries and shipping them to mainland China (Zhang 1958, 58).

Finally, the KMT party-state was involved in snatching resources from Taiwan's industry. In December 1946, the KMT decreed that the TSC, among other newly nationalised firms, should contribute a sum of 10 million National Dollars to finance party activities. In spite of its initial procrastination, the TSC met this request one year later, and soon the KMT's Taiwan Province Party Branch also demanded a contribution of 380,000 Taiwan Dollars (Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange Center 2007, CLVIII, 379–389).

With pervasive carpet-bagging, corruption and extraction, Taiwan's sugar industry was extensively exploited to service the Nanking regime and its followers. At the same time, Taiwanese workers were relocated to the bottom of the ethnic order while mainlanders assumed the privileges and positions that were previously exclusively Japanese. Much to the bewilderment and resentment of natives, their self-enthroned new rulers were much more incompetent.

To be sure, the official account of the early postwar years took a completely different angle. In the TSC record, the emphasis was on how the mainlander management strove to repair the war-damaged refineries, never mentioning irregularities. In a formal statement, the TSC leadership vowed to pursue the goal of ethnic equality. The NRC also claimed that they had succeeded in eradicating the "discrimination on origins" prevalent in the Japanese period. However, such remarks plainly deviated from the facts presented above. The proclaimed ethnic equality did not square with the practice of paying mainlanders more, under the name of "resettlement fees" and "travel fees," even when occupying the same position. The official explanation was to recruit talent to expedite the recovery (Taiwan Sugar Corporation 1971, 17). One of my mainlander interviewees echoed this view by saying that natives were not so well-educated, consequently, it was natural for mainlanders to be assigned to higher positions.

The official rationalisation did not fit well with the contemporary observation that many educated Taiwanese were summarily dismissed to make way for less-qualified mainlanders (Chen 1992, I, 131). As one Huwei local historian revealed,

Our sugar refinery relied on sugarcane for its source. However, the KMT sent us an official to head the farming section, and he had never seen sugarcane and did not know how to plant it... There was another guy from mainland China who had never taken a train ride, and yet he was assigned with the task of dispatching trains. Therefore, Taiwanese people harbored grudges. My grandfather had the highest education credentials and longest experience in the farming section, but he was never promoted to section chief in his whole lifetime (Chen 2008, 167–168).

Shaoyin (2005, 166) was undoubtedly right in stressing the fact that mainland China had only a single modern mill for processing sugarcane, and consequently it was impossible to produce sufficient “capable persons” to manage Taiwan’s whole sugar industry.

Hence, the official rationalisation that Taiwanese were “uneducated” and “exploited” under Japan’s colonialism functioned as what Hechter (1975, 30) called “cultural stereotypes” to justify minority rule. Likewise, later on, the TSC management used the same cultural stereotypes to explain the outbreak of the February 28 Incident on the narrow-minded “territorial consciousness.”

A Cautious Middle Course in the February 28 Incident

The escalating ethnic tension exploded with the February 28 Incident of 1947. During the first week of March, natives rose in spontaneous, yet island-wide assaults on governmental units as well as mainlanders. The attempt to find a peaceful solution by Taiwanese politicians was undermined by the regime-supported agent provocateurs that continued to instigate the natives’ violence and recalcitrance on the part of Chen Yi administration. The tragedy took place when Chinese soldiers disembarked at Keelung on March 8 and launched a bloody campaign of suppression. Until the end of martial-law rule in May of the same year, thousands of Taiwanese were arrested and massacred. As I will show in this section, Taiwanese sugar workers sought to maintain a neutral stance between the two warring camps.

The well-supplied sugar refineries scattered throughout central and southern Taiwan were strategically critical for the natives’ uprising. Weapons, vehicles and even cash were the vital materials required to sustain armed attacks against the KMT army. The native rebels sought to commandeer the resources, and their attempts came with varying degrees of success (Executive Yuan February 28 Incident Research Group 1994; Du 1997, 77). Aside from these military manoeuvres, unorganised vandalism or theft against refineries by neighbouring residents soared as public order broke down.

Moreover, just like other government institutions, sugar refineries were places where mainlanders were concentrated and it followed that the wave of ethnic violence would not spare refineries. In Huwei, a protracted armed conflict took place. Taiwanese civilians occupied the District Office and used the weaponry taken from the police station to mount a successful battle with the Chinese soldiers that guarded the local airport. Later on, they turned to assault the refinery and threatened to vent their anger on mainlander staff present there, only to be halted by the intervention of Taiwanese workers (Yang 2003, 91–93).

In Xihu, unorganised violence against mainlanders broke out on March 2. When Township Office officials arrived at the refinery, mainlanders had already fled for the protection of their Taiwanese co-workers and an angry mob vandalised their housing in revenge (Lü 2004; Ou and Li 2003, 469). One day later, a local militia was formed under

the leadership of a young schoolteacher Lin Caishou, who forced a “loan”, under his name, of rifles, bullets and trucks from the refinery. With these resources, Lin led his men to join the Taiwanese volunteers that had taken control of Taizhong City (Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History 1993, 222–223).

At this critical moment, mainlanders were mortally intimidated. The flight of numerically inferior factory guards left many sugar refineries virtually defenceless. Interestingly, Taiwanese workers largely took a neutral stance by siding neither with the Taiwanese insurgents nor with the beleaguered mainlanders. In a number of refineries, workers organised self-defence teams to shield against the outside violence. Under their command, mainlanders were gathered and confined in the secured buildings within the refinery compound as a protection measure. In Huwei, a likely massacre was averted in this fashion and the same scenario took place in the Xihu Refinery. With the township under the control of young radicals, it was the Taiwanese workers who struggled to secure the refinery and protect the threatened mainlanders (Shi Jinsan Foundation 2002, 346–347). My interviewees at the Dalin Refinery told a similar story with an explanation of the workers’ motives. According to them, it was a well-crafted measure designed to bet on both sides. As chaos reigned all over Taiwan, sugar industry workers were not sure about the final outcome of the conflict. Given their resentment of system-wide predation, they chose not to risk their privileged positions vis-à-vis other Taiwanese with any rash behaviour against mainlanders. Therefore, they steered a self-consciously cautious course in the 1947 uprising.

The above scenario was mostly reconstructed with oral history literature and my interview data with natives. The TSC official records revealed how mainlanders experienced this great upheaval from their own perspective. There were several noticeable discrepancies. First, at least in some places, workers’ self-defence teams were formed at the request of their mainlander leaders who had already lost command of factory guards. The existing document showed that the TSC general manager Shen Zhennan indeed suggested that local subsidiaries could make a request to Taiwanese staff to organise a committee to maintain order.¹⁰ Second, some mainlanders resented their temporary custody which they deemed as “imprisonment” against their own wills. Last, some plundering of the sugar refineries was allegedly the result of collusion between native workers and outside “bullies” (Chen 2008a, 2008b).

While these disparities were more or less the result of subjective interpretations – an unavoidable corollary at a time when rumours and fears reigned, mainlanders and Taiwanese reacted in extremely different ways upon the arrival of the KMT army. For the former, Chinese soldiers were their saviours who delivered them from threat of the angry mobs. But the TSC official records said nothing about the fate of the Taiwanese workers who were murdered and arrested by the army – a very curious omission here. In the “country-cleansing” campaign, workers’ self-defence teams that guarded sugar refineries were disarmed, and their members were arrested. In Pingdong, two Taiwanese staff who led the effort to preserve the refinery and protect mainlanders were captured by the soldiers (Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province 1991, 142–143). In Dalin, mainlander leaders negotiated with the military commanders and finally secured their release.

They were the luckier ones who were allowed to live, but such was not the case for the workers at the Nanjing Refinery. On March 6, four Taiwanese workers were on a ride from Nanjing to Chiayi City in a local merchant’s car. They decided to take a mainlander

with them and escort him to the downtown area for better protection. On their fateful trip, they encountered troopers. Apparently, the escorted mainlander saw himself as being kidnapped and urged the soldiers to avenge him. Five of the escorting Taiwanese were tortured and executed on the spot in a merciless way. In the end, their families had to bribe the army in order to retrieve their remains (Zhang et al. 1994, 141–143). The TSC archival data indicated that the escort trip was carried out with the approval of refinery management.¹¹ In the aftermath, the Nanjing Refinery was regularly searched by the trigger-happy soldiers who detained anyone who failed to please them. Workers were too scared to stay in the company residence.¹²

In the aftermath, the government sought to stabilise the workplaces of nationalised industry that had been torn apart by violence and military suppression. But a closer look at these measures disclosed the same differential treatment of ethnic groups. After the incident, many mainlanders wanted to leave Taiwan. To persuade them to stay, the TSC raised the staff salaries, but not the workers' wages. The NRC promulgated a rule to compensate the property damages and personal injuries for its mainlander employees. But only a small group of Taiwanese workers were rewarded for their service in protecting sugar refineries. As for those who were murdered and arrested during the military suppression, the TSC leadership simply ignored their existence.

The Failed Revolution

In the wake of the incident, the KMT blamed the outbreak of island-wide rebellion on the instigation by communist insurgents, and this explanation was widely accepted by the NRC officials who had first-hand experience of the communist infiltration in their mainland careers. Nevertheless, prior to the incident, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had only recruited roughly 70 members in Taiwan, and the numerical and organisational weakness prevented it from playing a significant role in the incident. Ironically, the bloody suppression of Taiwanese demands for autonomy ended up facilitating the growth of the clandestine revolutionary movement. At the end of 1947, the CCP already had more than 300 members in Taiwan (Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province 1998, II, 60). Obviously, how the KMT dealt with the 1947 uprising further alienated Taiwanese people and a significant portion of them became so disillusioned that they became a congenial audience for the CCP's revolutionary message.

Initially, the CCP's organisational strength was primarily limited to the remnant communists who had survived the colonial red purge in the early 1930s and a small group of Taiwanese who had joined the party on the mainland prior to 1945. Afterwards, the CCP's Taiwan Province Work Committee (*taiwansheng gongzuo weiyuanhui*) was finally able to build its mass basis among Taiwanese, including industrial workers. The communists were especially successful in organising Taipei City bus drivers and the workers of the Post and Communication Bureau. Under their leadership, the former staged a strike in the winter of 1948, whereas the latter held a protest demonstration in March 1949.

The case of the Post and Communication Bureau was particularly indicative of the fact that ethnic inequality became a co-optable social grievance for the communists. According to official sources, two mainland CCP cadres, Ji Meizhen and Qian Jingzhi, infiltrated the labour union in September 1946, under the guise of Mandarin teaching, and were able to establish an underground cell the following year. But how did

mainlander cadres manage to win the support of Taiwanese workers given the fact that ethnic relations were tense then? According to the court-martial verdict,

[They] made use of the differential treatment of Mainlander and Taiwanese workers and encouraged the latter to struggle for equality and for better treatment. In so doing, they searched for the activists, evaluated them, and encouraged them to join the party. They directed activists to campaign for union directors and supervisors in order to use legal positions to serve the needs of employees (Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province 1998, II, 98–99).

Ji and Qian were executed in 1950. The surviving workers who had served between 7 and 15 years in prison during the White Terror period corroborated the account quoted (Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province 1998, II, 114). A person recalled that he tried to study Mandarin initially because he was bothered by unequal pay. He thought things could be improved if he could learn how to speak the “national language.” Another person recalled he began to read the communist literature because of the discovery that mainlanders received five times more in wage adjustments. At that moment, Ji encouraged him to play a more assertive role in the labour union because it was legitimate to struggle for equality (Taipei City Archives Committee 1999, 356).

The exposure of the communist organisation in the Post and Communication Bureau in 1950 eventually led to the arrest of 35 persons. It was clear that a contingent of frustrated state workers became CCP sympathisers or supporters. Sugar industry workers were no exception in this regard. During the incident, they organised defence teams to protect their refineries against the outside violence. Later, some of them were ready for a similar attempt in order to secure the industrial facilities to prepare for the communist takeover. In May 1950, the KMT government discovered a communist organisation in Madou Township. Among the 36 arrestees, 17 worked at the TSC sugar refinery. The official verdict stated that these involved workers claimed to “defend workers’ positions and raise wages.” And they “mobilized workers to protect factory property for the peaceful transfer to the CCP army” (Xu 2003, 382). The available oral-historical record from the survivors confirmed the existence of worker resentment and the attempt to protect the factory (Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province 1998, III, 59; Jiang 2001, 77–80). Another communist cell in Yujing Township was rounded up in August 1950. Employees at the local refinery made up five out of the 20 suspects. Among three death sentences, two were dealt out to refinery policemen who were reported as having sabotaged from within on the occasion of the communist invasion (Jiang 2001, 151–152). In February 1952, the security agents raided the Xinying Refinery and arrested six employees. This was a case with 29 communist suspects involved. One Xinying refinery worker was put to death, while two others were sentenced to five years in prison (Jiang 2001, 208–211). There were other TSC workers individually implicated in the underground communist organisations that were mushrooming all over Taiwan in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Nevertheless, the cases of Madou, Yujing and Xinying indicated that the workplace in nationalised industry had become a fertile ground for recruiting revolutionaries.

It should be noted that the historical investigation of Taiwan’s White Terror period is just beginning, with many lacunae and puzzles remaining to be filled. There is an established consensus that quite a number of innocent victims were wrongly accused, persecuted and even executed in that confused era. However, the above descriptions of

underground worker activism are confirmed by the surviving participants' own accounts after they were released from prison. Triangulating official archives and various participants' personal accounts, we can reconstruct a picture of revolutionary working-class activism in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, as follows:

The suppression of the February 28 Incident radicalised the Taiwanese working class. Previously workers avoided confrontations with the government, and instead they worked to protect mainlanders and industrial facilities during the great upheavals. Since the reform demands were ruthlessly crushed by the recalcitrant KMT regime, workers became further disillusioned. The most conscious workers were ready to embrace a whole new ideology by voluntarily joining or aiding the revolutionary movement led by communists.

Following its battleground success in northern China in late 1947, the CCP envisioned a military strategy to conquer Taiwan, rather than a political revolution from within. Its operatives were instructed to expedite the construction of guerrilla bases in remote areas and to control the crucial transportation industry (Hu and Lin 2003, 113). For factory workers, the CCP directive was mainly to secure the production facilities, rather than class struggle. As a result, communist workers in Taiwan were not armed combatants, and neither did they launch a campaign to seize power within the workplace. Their activities were mostly restricted to recruiting, organising and preparation – a fatal strategic error once the anticipated military invasion failed to materialise.

The KMT came to be aware of the alarming presence of communists in Taiwan only in the latter half of 1949. An energised effort to round up communist suspects then began. Following the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the KMT had secured the water-tight isolation of the island. One by one, communist organisations were destroyed, leaders captured and followers jailed. By 1953, the KMT was already able to declare the virtual elimination of communist operatives in Taiwan. With the decimation of their leadership stratum, Taiwanese workers were given no choice but to accept the ethnic domination.

The security regime imposed by the KMT following the incident played a critical role in suppressing underground activity. The NRC decided to reorganise their police force, and in September 1947 the Taiwan Industry and Mining Police Brigade was set up, and its 2,500-plus men were recruited from retired soldiers of the mainland. The officials were clearly determined to build up an exceptionally large security force to prevent the recrudescence of native revolts. Thus, among the 27 central-level NRC staff stationed at the Taiwan branch at that time, 10 were police officers (Xue 1995, II, 8). In 1950, the TSC employed 4,493 staff, 16,440 factory workers and a further 1,346 policemen (The Second Work Team of Shanghai City Committee Chinese Communist Party 1950, 68–69, 93, 111–112, 134). In other words, more than 6% of the personnel on the TSC payroll were hired with the specific purpose of controlling their co-workers.

Postwar ethnic domination gave rise to two rounds of worker activism. The first one involved the majority of workers, and was largely peaceful and cautious, whereas the second one was undertaken by a small minority of revolutionary vanguards. Despite the difference in tactics, workers' aspirations were twice brutally crushed, and their defeat eventually cemented the ethnic rule in the years to come.

A quick view on distribution of top managerial positions within the TSC revealed how the ethnic inequality was consolidated (see Table 2).

Table 2. Ethnic Composition of the TSC's First-rank Supervisors

	1950	1965	1984
First-rank Supervisors	(53) 90	(63) 123	(51) 118
Taiwanese First-rank Supervisors	(0) 5	(2) 12	(7) 38
Ratio of Taiwanese	(0%) 5.6%	(3.1%) 9.8%	(13.7%) 32.2%

Note: The so-called "first-rank supervisors" (*yijizhuguan*) here include the managerial positions both in the company headquarters and local subsidiaries. The figures in the parentheses denote the number in the company headquarters only.

Sources: 1950 data is based on "The TSC (June 1950)." The Taiwan Sugar Corporation documents (file number 35-25-01a-061-001-01), Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica; 1965 data is based on "The Staff List (February 1965)," The Taiwan Sugar Corporation documents (file number 24-20-02-026-02), Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica; and 1984 data comes from Ministry of Economic Affairs (1984).

Table 2 indicates the persistent under-representation of Taiwanese among the TSC's upper echelons. Prior to 1965, Taiwanese still constituted less than 10% of first-rank supervisors and even in 1984 the figure did not rise above one-third. As a matter of fact, if one looked at the TSC headquarters only, the ratio was even more skewed. Among the 53 first-rank positions in 1950, not one of them was occupied by a Taiwanese. By 1984, they were only able to occupy 13.7% of available positions. Even when Taiwanese were promoted, they were more likely to be assigned regional authority, and rarely to the commanding centre.

The Choice of Taiwanese "Labour Aristocrats"

How did Taiwanese workers become settled with the new ethnic order? The costly defeats had dampened the willingness among the working class to undertake activism. For those discontented workers who did not identify with or join the communist movement, the fear of being involved in the regime's red purge was a powerful force to silence them. To use Hirschman's term, the "voice", or the open expression of dissatisfaction to facilitate a change (Hirschman 1970), was no longer possible by the mid-1950s. Nevertheless, discontented workers still had the option of "exit" by leaving the TSC permanently. Since mainlanders' dominance was mainly restricted to the state-controlled sector of the economy, getting one's career restarted in private business implied no less than a refusal to be allocated inferior status. Such drastic choices took place very rarely. Only a few interviewed workers had witnessed their co-workers voluntarily choosing to quit, and this move was frowned upon as unwise.

Instead of voice or exit, the majority of Taiwanese workers opted for "loyalty," that is, staying patiently in the hope that the situation would ameliorate. Why was loyalty the most popular response? Many of my interviewees explained that they were simple and humble kids from the countryside and were taught the lesson of not complaining for something one did not possess. However, this rural virtue explanation did not easily square with the above-mentioned workers' activism prior to the mid-1950s. Moreover, many sugar refinery workers were second generation workers. If there was nothing inherently attractive in TSC jobs, why did fathers encourage their children to take on

the same career path? The plain truth was that the TSC offered a secure and easy job with perks that were unavailable in the private sector, if one could swallow the nuisances of ethnic discrimination and political surveillance.

The TSC was a monopolistic business, and like many other SOEs, it did not have to squeeze its employees for more profits. Poor performances were tolerated and seldom resulted in dismissal (Ho 2010). Sugar refineries were not a demanding workplace so many TSC workers were able to moonlight for extra income with the connivance of their superiors. Many of my interviewees had prior work experience and finally chose the TSC for its job stability.

A TSC job also came with better education opportunities for workers' children. Before 1967, the TSC maintained up to 16 primary schools exclusively for the offspring of its employees. Since these schools operated on TSC funds, they provided better quality education than regular public schools. While Taiwan's compulsory public education was never free of charge, the TSC schools not only waived the tuition fee, but also provided free lunch. For secondary education, the TSC established a high school at Xinying in 1947. In the beginning, it provided free and universal admission to the children of TSC employees – an enormous advantage given that Taiwan's compulsory education did not extend to junior high school until 1968. For college students, the TSC provided free dormitories in Taipei and Tainan.

Finally, company welfare did not terminate with the end of tenure. Factory workers were legally required to retire at the age of 60, but their entitlements continued. Retired employees remained living in the company residence until it fell into disrepair in more recent years. The TSC even subcontracted some of its operations to a nominally independent company (*tangfu*, or Sugar Welfare), which hired ex-TSC workers exclusively. Literally, a TSC worker was allowed to live off the company as long as he liked.

So back to the question of why the majority of Taiwanese workers chose to be loyalists: the answer was the exit cost, or more precisely the opportunity cost of giving up the TSC's cradle-to-grave welfare, was personally too high. Therefore, by collaborating with neo-colonialism, Taiwanese workers joined the rank of "labour aristocrats" whose enviable living standard set them apart from the rest of the working class. By this calculation, ethnic discrimination was but the necessary membership fee to join this exclusive club; it was certainly not pleasant, but affordable nonetheless.

Conclusion

Kirby (1989, 1992) argued that there existed an often neglected continuity between republican and communist China. By focusing on the NRC elite officials, he was able to prove that a cohort of pre-1945 technocrats continued to manage the critical economic affairs on both sides of the Taiwan Strait in spite of the great political separation and regime change.

In this study, I discover another pattern of continuity across the 1945 divide, but not in the lineage of elite Chinese economic officials, but rather in the rank-and-file Taiwanese workers. Furthermore, my findings contradict the overtly positive picture of the NRC officials in their postwar behaviour. Rather than personifying technological rationality, they were directly or indirectly responsible for installing a highly discriminating regime. Despite their comparatively incorruptible reputation in the mainland period, they were involved with a number of predatory practices, cronyism and nepotism in Taiwan.

Furthermore, as Phillips (2003) points out, Taiwanese political elites faced the traumatic dilemma between assimilation and independence during the sea change of regime. With their attempt for autonomy ruthlessly crushed, they had to settle for collaboration or withdraw from public involvement. My study finds a parallel development among native working-class members. In addition, this article demonstrates the profound similarity regarding the Taiwanese workers' subordination in the sugar industry in the period of Japanese colonialism and the postwar era. In both eras, ethnicity was one of the principal cleavages that structured the inequalities in life chances. Taiwanese workers were largely confined to the bottom tier of the job hierarchy; they had to follow the commands of their Japanese masters first and then mainlanders. Taiwanese workers did not voluntarily choose the role of collaborators. Instead, two rounds of bloody suppression of their activism rendered them virtually helpless and disorganised. Attracted to secure employment and enviable benefits, they finally accommodated themselves to the labour regime based upon ethnic difference.

By highlighting the class resistance in 1945–55, I challenged the conventional picture of worker submissiveness. Their activism, both during the February 1947 Incident and the subsequent clandestine communism, indicated that they had a clear consciousness of their collective interest, as distinctive from mainlander neo-colonisers and other Taiwanese. And this awareness of their particular status led them to choose a cautious approach during the escalated ethnic conflict. Furthermore, martial-law repression was often cited as an explanation for worker quiescence before the mid-1980s. My research added a necessary qualification of this conventional wisdom. Prior to the consolidation of authoritarian control in the mid-1950s, worker insurgency posed a real threat to the KMT regime. Finally, repression alone was not enough; the privileged status of "labour aristocracy" helped the state workers to accept the subordinate position. In short, a closer look at the early postwar era revealed that Confucian culture and political repression were insufficient or even wrong answers to the puzzle of industrial peace in Taiwan.

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Notes

- ¹ The author's calculation of the data in Council for International Economic Cooperation and Development (1973, 178).
- ² This research focuses on the ethnic relations in the immediate postwar era only. Later on, the significance of ethnicity as a social cleavage still remained, but its primacy has been eclipsed by subsequent developments. Hence my observation is not applicable to present-day Taiwan.
- ³ According to the statistics provided by the outgoing Japanese management, there were 16,004 Japanese and Taiwanese employees (see Zhang 1958, 21). The March 1946 figure already reflected the postwar change, especially the influx of Chinese, but it remained the closest one available to grasp the situation at the end of colonial rule.
- ⁴ This estimate was based on two available sources. First, there was an extant copy of the transfer inventory at Dalin Sugar Refinery, which documented a list of 528 employees, including their positions and salaries. The second source came from Xinying Sugar Refinery. There were statistics about the personnel structure as early as December 1945 (National Resources Commission 1947, 5). The ethnic ratios of Dalin and Xinying were very close, with an average of around 75% of the workforce being Taiwanese.

- ⁵ In the postwar period, the status distinction between staff (*zhiyuan*) and factory workers (*gongyuan*) was kept until the personnel reform in the early 1960s, which replaced them with “classification position” (*fenlei zhiwei*) and “evaluation position” (*pingjia zhiwei*). The new system did not abolish the previous two-track job ladder, nor did it alter the public perception of the hierarchical difference. Despite the change in terminology, everyday conversation continued to use “staff” and “factory worker” even though these terms ceased to be official designations. In this article, I followed the popular usage of the terms.
- ⁶ Since the colonial era, sugar refineries were guarded by policemen to prevent the theft of sugarcane. Yet, after suppressing the 1947 uprising, the government enlarged the policing force to avoid a possible second revolt; thus, workers also became the target of surveillance.
- ⁷ For example, a son of a National Taiwan University professor, a mainlander, was hired as a deputy engineer (*fujishi*) by the TSC on the basis of his father’s recommendation to the NRC. See Cross-Strait Publication and Exchange Center (2007, CV, 305–312).
- ⁸ In 1946, the official exchange rate was one Taiwan Dollar for 30 National Dollars, the currency circulating in mainland China.
- ⁹ “The Telegraph of the TSC General Manager to the NRC (March 3, 1947).” The Official Documents Concerning the TSC’s Subsidiaries during the February 28 Incident (file number 228-B-5-2), The Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.
- ¹⁰ “The Telegraph of the TSC General Manager Shen Zhennan to the NRC (March 5, 1947).” The Official Documents Concerning the TSC’s Subsidiaries during the February 28 Incident (file number 228-B-5-2), The Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.
- ¹¹ “The Nanjing Refinery in the Taiwan Incident (March 1947).” The Official Documents Concerning the TSC’s Subsidiaries during the February 28 Incident (file number 228-M-5-2), The Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.
- ¹² In other state-owned enterprises, there were reports of soldiers looting and robbery as they carried out their mission of suppression. See Ho (2007, 167).

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