



CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

## Secret police

# The Ministry of Public Security's clandestine foreign operations

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### Abstract

China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS) has a long and overlooked history of foreign intelligence operations. It is a law enforcement agency and counterpart to Western police agencies, but counterintelligence and political security are among its core functions. This is especially so under Xi Jinping, and deserves greater attention because of its implications for law enforcement cooperation, human rights and counterintelligence.

This paper makes some initial observations on the history of MPS foreign operations, describing its activities in the United States, Hong Kong and other regions. It introduces the structures behind these operations up to 1983, when most of the MPS's intelligence units were incorporated into the newly established Ministry of State Security (MSS). Even after the MSS's creation, parts of the MPS continue to operate as intelligence agencies. The MPS maintains structures for carrying out covert operations in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and neighbouring countries and has engaged in political interference efforts against Malaysia and the United States.

## 0 Introduction

As the CCP gained control over China, it added governance structures to its revolutionary core. Public security organisations were among the most important, and were primarily created from parts of the Central Social Department (中央社会部), a security and intelligence agency.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the usual duties of police agencies, counterintelligence and political security were top priorities for these new public security organs. While this included tedious tasks such as mail censorship, it was an often-violent vocation. Kuomintang agents left behind or sent to infiltrate the mainland were aplenty. During the Korean War (1950-1953), the CIA sent guerrilla units to China in search of anti-Party remnants that failed to materialise. All the guerrillas

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<sup>1</sup>For example, the Guangdong Public Security Department (广东省公安厅) was initially a nameplate for the South China Bureau's Social Department (华南分局社会部), before being separated in December 1950. The two organs were recombined in 1952 then finally separated in 1953. 广东省志 1979-2000 28 政法卷, 方志出版社, Aug. 2014, p. 25.



were apparently killed or captured, including CIA officers Jack Downey and Richard Fecteau who spent around 20 years in Chinese prisons.<sup>2</sup>

Recognising the need for offensive counterintelligence efforts, the Ministry of Public Security has long carried out foreign operations in neighbouring countries as well as North America. To this point, a declassified 1959 CIA report states that the MPS “is authorized to conduct such covert operations in Macau, Hong Kong and other border areas as may be necessary”, and that some foreign intelligence is produced as “a by-product of its work”.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, the history of MPS foreign operations remains difficult to uncover and has attracted little interest. As David Chambers writes, intelligence history was proscribed within China until the 1980s. Since then, Chinese intelligence and security agencies have compiled histories that mainly cover pre-‘liberation’ events.<sup>4</sup> Michael Schoenhals also used internal materials such as journals and training documents to analyse the MPS’s *domestic* agent handling and counterintelligence work in his 2013 book *Spying for the People*.<sup>5</sup> Overall, few resources on MPS foreign operations have been declassified or otherwise uncovered. Available materials, such as “internal circulation” documents, should be read with regard for distortions intended to improve the image of Party intelligence operations and obscure their methods.

Mindful of these limitations, I have attempted to provide an overview of the Ministry of Public Security’s foreign operations and relevant units. Memoirs, internal materials and biographical entries form the basis for most of my findings. This historical research is then used to identify and understand current platforms for covert MPS foreign operations.

## 1 Yu Qiangsheng, the CIA’s mole in the MSS, and Larry Chin, China’s mole in the CIA

MSS officer Yu Qiangsheng 俞强声 had been secretly working for the CIA since at least the MSS’s establishment in 1983, and helped identify French diplomat Bernard Boursicot as a Chinese spy.<sup>6</sup> After Yu defected to America in 1985, Minister of State Security Ling Yun 凌云 was quietly pushed into retirement after only two years in the job.<sup>7</sup> Vice Minister Zhou Shaozheng 周绍铮, the inaugural head of MSS foreign intelligence work, left the agency later that year.<sup>8</sup> Party leader Deng Xiaoping, no fan of civilian intelligence agencies, had already ordered the MSS to vacate Chinese

<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Dujmovic, “Two CIA Prisoners in China, 1952-1973”, *Studies in Intelligence*, 50:4, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>“National Policy Machinery in Communist China”, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 Oct. 1959, CIA-RDP80T00246A000100690001-5, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>David Ian Chambers, “Edging in from the Cold: The Past and Present State of Chinese Intelligence Historiography”, *Studies in Intelligence* 56:23, 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao’s Secret Agents. 1949-1967*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>6</sup>David Wise, *Tiger Trap: America’s Secret Spy War with China*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011, ch. 19.

<sup>7</sup>The timing of Ling Yun’s dismissal suggests it was driven by Yu Qiangsheng’s defection rather than Chin’s subsequent arrest. Peter Mattis & Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer*, Naval Institute Press, 2019, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup>Zhou was a former Central Investigation Department leader and became secretary-general of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference after leaving the MSS. Official biographies such as his obituary in the *People’s Daily* do not mention his service in the MSS. 中华人民共和国国务院公报 26, 1983, p. 1195; “周绍铮”, 人民日报, 9 Dec. 2007.



Figure 1: MPS officer Guo Manguo (left) and Taiwanese intelligence defector Cheng Yiming, 1964. Source: 贺越明, “台湾情报局澳门站站长的变幻人生”, 同舟共进 7, 2015.

diplomatic missions by 1985, and this embarrassing incident worsened the ministry’s standing.<sup>9</sup>

Yu’s most important revelation, however, was information suggesting that retired CIA linguist and analyst Larry Wu-tai Chin (金无怠) was an MSS asset. Chin was arrested by the FBI in 1985 and became among the earliest foreign agents in the US intelligence community to face trial.<sup>10</sup> He also had an extraordinarily long career as a spy, having been recruited by the CCP in the 1940s.<sup>11</sup>

A US jury heard that Chin’s handler was an officer of the Guangdong Provincial State Security Department, Ou Qiming.<sup>12</sup> While this ties Chin to the MSS, he had already retired from US government service by the time the MSS was established. The Central Investigation Department, a foreign intelligence agency that was incorporated into the MSS, might have been the natural agency to handle the mole before then.

In reality, Chin reported to the MPS for most of his career, and was far from alone as an overseas operative of the agency in the pre-MSS years. The MPS lost much of its foreign intelligence remit after the MSS’s creation, but has established new units for cross-border clandestine operations since then.

## 2 The South China Office

Chin’s handlers operated from the MPS South China Office (华南办事处) in Guangzhou, a little-known part of the ministry. For example, one of Chin’s case officers, Zhu Entao 朱恩涛, worked there before becoming a vice-ministerial MPS official and the

<sup>9</sup>Xuezhi Guo, *China’s Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 362 sq.; Mattis & Brazil, loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>“Year of the Spy (1985)”, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>11</sup>William Welch, “Retired CIA Analyst Accusing of Spying for China”, AP, 24 Nov. 1985.

<sup>12</sup>The Chinese characters for Ou’s name are unknown. Caryle Murphy, “Jury Convicts Chin of Spying For Chinese”, *Washington Post*, 8 Feb. 1986.



head of China's Interpol office. Zhu's involvement with the Chin case later prompted the US government to deny him a visa.<sup>13</sup>

While infiltrating the CIA was its most famous success, the South China Office focused on gathering intelligence in Hong Kong and Macau. Several of its assets worked within KMT intelligence agencies. Cheng Yiming 程一鸣, the head of a Kuomintang intelligence station in Macau, was one important agent probably handled by the South China Office.<sup>14</sup> Cheng defected to Guangzhou in 1964, where he was received by MPS officer Guo Manguo 郭曼果 (Figure 1), a future head of the South China Office who had operated in Singapore and Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup> Another historical account describes how the MPS sent two case officers to meet with an asset in Macau, who provided information on a KMT plan to assassinate Party leader Ye Jianying 叶剑英.<sup>16</sup>

The situation in Hong Kong was much the same. South China Office case officer Xu Tianmin 许天民 provided rare detail on MPS foreign operations in his *Memoirs: Reports from the Underground Battlefield*, originally an "internal circulation" monograph produced with the MSS's support.<sup>17</sup> His substantial intelligence experience during the Chinese Civil War meant he was transferred from a provincial Public Security Department to the South China Office in 1958, which then smuggled him into Hong Kong.<sup>18</sup>

Xu claims his mission in the British territory was to handle a high-level asset within KMT intelligence, "Agent 2019" (Figure 2).<sup>19</sup> Entering Hong Kong under the pretence of visiting relatives, Xu donned the alias Lu Shihua 卢石化 and began his three years as a case officer. According to Xu, Agent 2019 provided him with hundreds of pieces of intelligence, information on numerous front companies, the identities of dozens of KMT agents, and four sets of cryptographic keys.<sup>20</sup> Agent 2019 began working for the CCP in 1950, when he was captured in mainland China, turned, and then sent back into the KMT. However, Xu complained that his asset had "mingled in the enemy camp for too long" and had been "too deeply corrupted by the old society". Despite believing Agent 2019 was reasonable, frank, and straightforward, Xu felt that a core part of his job as a case officer was to carry out ideological work on his asset. Xu himself was not knowledgeable about Hong Kong and didn't speak English, but was selected for the mission because of his ability to operate independently, informed by

<sup>13</sup>The exact dates of Zhu's time in the South China Office are unclear. "朱恩涛同志逝世", 新华, 27 Oct. 2015; Ronald Ostrow, "U.S. Bars Chinese Interpol Official: FBI Ties Him to Former CIA Translator Who Sold Secrets", *Los Angeles Times*, 12 July 1988.

<sup>14</sup>In his memoirs, Ministry of Public Security Wang Fang described how intelligence gathered on another KMT spymaster in Macau was handled by the South China Office. 王芳, 王芳回忆录, 浙江人民出版社, 2006, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup>"光亭: 真实的风筝——由最高层直接掌握的最隐秘卧底", *Guancha*, 16 Jan. 2018; "台湾情报局澳门站站长的变幻人生", Guangdong Committee of the CPPCC, 10 Feb. 2017. It was the MPS's Masses Publishing House that released Cheng's memoirs. 程一鸣, 程一鸣回忆录, 群众出版社, 1979. Guo's biography can be found in 郭仁勇, 海南郭氏人物传, no publisher, 2004, p. 152.

<sup>16</sup>凌辉, 共和国的"公安大臣" 杨奇清的故事, 湖南少年儿童出版社, 1999, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup>许天民, 回忆录: 来自地下战场的报告, 1997, p. 422.

<sup>18</sup>The following four paragraphs are based on 许天民, op. cit., pp. 363-384. Another South China Office cadre worked in Hong Kong as the general manager of Sanlian Bookstore (三聯書店). "赵振山同志逝世", Sina, 31 July 2007.

<sup>19</sup>Note that specific details from Xu's memoirs, such as names and locations, are likely to have been censored and altered.

<sup>20</sup>许天民, op. cit., pp. 368 sq.



Figure 2: Undercover MPS officer Xu Tianmin in Hong Kong, 1959.

sound ideological foundations. Politically educating Agent 2019 also helped Xu turn down his requests for larger payments.<sup>21</sup>

Xu demurs on what happened after Agent 2019 was arrested by British colonial authorities and then deported to Taiwan around 1961. The CCP certainly maintained clandestine networks in Taiwan, but Xu wrote that he failed to effectively “arrange relief measures” and provide sufficient financial support to his asset. Xu was particularly embarrassed that, when Agent 2019 visited the PRC in 1989, he was only able to offer US\$1 for his travel expenses.<sup>22</sup>

For Xu’s part, he was promoted to deputy director of the South China Office in 1966, but his appointment was overturned by Party officials who questioned the lack of information about his pre-war intelligence work – a common problem given the frequency with which records were lost, chains of command confused and case officers died.<sup>23</sup> Like many South China Office cadres, Xu was transferred to the Guangdong State Security Department upon its creation.<sup>24</sup>

While Xu was denied promotion within the South China Office, other officials from the unit graduated into the highest levels of the intelligence and security community. For example, Hui Ping 惠平, the original MSS vice minister in charge of counterintelligence (1983–1990), spent much of his career working in the MPS South China Office.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Zhang Youheng 张友恒, the final head of the South China Office, was chosen as the first director of the Guangdong State Security Department.<sup>26</sup> Many South China Office personnel also worked in the MPS 1st Bureau, arguably the ministry’s most important and secretive bureau because of its responsibility for ‘political security’ work such as counterintelligence and suppression of anti-Party activit-

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 370 sq.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Xu retired in 1984 and was eventually awarded the administrative rank of 10 and treated as a deputy provincial-level official. Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>25</sup>“国家安全部原副部长惠平逝世享年 79 岁”, 新华网 via Sina, 25 Aug. 2008.

<sup>26</sup>李时雨, 敌营十五年 李时雨回忆录, 南海出版公司, 2015, p. 186.



ies.<sup>27</sup> This indicates that the South China Office's practices and experiences have been highly influential within the MPS and the MSS.

### 3 Organisation and administrative cover

Despite its importance (or perhaps because of it), little is known about the structure and development of the South China Office. It probably grew out of the Intelligence Division of the CCP South China Bureau's Social Department (社会部情报处), which was likely involved in sending agents across Southeast Asia until its disbandment in 1955.<sup>28</sup>

Within the MPS, the South China Office had bureau-level status, according to an unverified source.<sup>29</sup> The same source claims that, internally, it had a "materials team" (perhaps to analyse and disseminate reporting or provide analytical assistance to case officers), a liaison division (probably to coordinate with other Party-state organs), an administrative division, and operational units including a "Taiwan team" and an "America and Soviet Union team". (It almost certainly had a United Kingdom team too.)<sup>30</sup>

Highlighting the covert and clandestine nature of its work, the MPS South China Office was referred to by a range of names depending on the setting. The lack of sources sometimes makes it difficult to trace the evolution of these names and hard to tell which were designed for internal use or as cover. I propose a rough overview below.

#### MPS South China Office (公安部华南办事处, ?–1983)

This appears to be the official name used by the MPS for their station in Guangdong. It was distinct from the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Bureau and functioned as part of the central bureaucracy.

#### Guangdong Provincial Committee Political-Legal Research Office (广东省政法研究室, 1959–1966, 1975–1983)

This was another name for the South China Office, and was probably used for Guangdong provincial government purposes rather than within the MPS.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup>On the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau, see Filip Jirouš and Jichang Lulu, "The Ministry of Public Security and Chekist political protection", forthcoming. MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau Deputy Director Li Xilin 李溪林 also spent time in the South China Office. 杜导正, 廖盖隆主编, 政坛高层动态, 南海出版公司, 2006, p. 60; 许天民, op. cit., p. 368. South China Office deputy director Ding Zhaojia 丁兆甲 later became a deputy head of the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau. 大江南北年代 3, 2020, pp. 24 sq.

<sup>28</sup>A 1952 CIA report claims that twelve agents of the Social Affairs Department had been sent to Guangdong that August, before departing for Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia. The report claims the group of agents were led by "Hsueh Ch'iao", who may be the same as the CID open-source intelligence pioneer Xue Qiao 薛樵. "Departure for Canton of Chinese Communist Agents of Central Social Affairs Department", Central Intelligence Agency, 3 Nov. 1952, CIA-RDP82-00457R014500390010-2. Guo Manguo previously worked in the South China Bureau Social Department's Intelligence Section. 广州工革联《两陈案件》专案组 & 中山大学红旗公社星火燎, eds., 罗谭黑帮泡制骇人听闻的全国第一大案—“国际间谍案”两陈案件内幕, p. 33; 广东省志 1979-2000 28 政法卷, 方志出版社, 2014, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup>“于顺纲同志简介”.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>According to official histories, the Guangdong Provincial Committee's Political-Legal Research Office was established in 1959 and disbanded in 1965, re-established in 1975 and disbanded in October 1983. 中共





### Guangdong Provincial Committee 1<sup>st</sup> Office (广东省委第一办公室, October 1978–)

The CCP Guangdong Provincial Committee's 1<sup>st</sup> Office was a public-facing nameplate for the MPS South China Office. The nameplate was used by the Provincial Committee's Hong Kong and Macau City Work Committee (港澳城市工作委员会) until 1978, when leadership of underground Party organisations in Hong Kong was taken over by the State Council in Beijing.<sup>32</sup> After this point, the 1<sup>st</sup> Office nameplate began to be used by the MPS South China Office, and later by the Guangdong State Security Department.<sup>33</sup>

### Guangdong Provincial Committee Investigation Bureau (广东省委调查局, December 1972–November 1975)

This organisation existed briefly during the last years of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>34</sup> It was renamed as the Guangdong Provincial Political-Legal Research Office in November 1975.<sup>35</sup> Several of its personnel have also been described as MPS South China Office cadres.<sup>36</sup>

## 4 Other MPS bases for foreign operations

If the MPS South China Office handled operations through Macau and Hong Kong, were there similar MPS units in other border regions? Three more are attested, and together with the South China Office they point to a substantial yet previously unidentified infrastructure for MPS foreign operations.

The MPS Yunnan Office (云南办事处) may have focused on operations in nearby Burma, Thailand and Indochina. KMT refugee communities in Burma and Thailand might have also been a target of its efforts.<sup>37</sup> Like the South China Office, it was also known as the Provincial Committee 1<sup>st</sup> Office before being subsumed by the provincial State Security Department.<sup>38</sup>

广东省委组织部, 中共广东省委党史研究室 & 广东省档案馆, eds., 中国共产党广东省组织史资料 下, 中共党史出版社, 1996, p. 32; 广东省志 1979-2000, 25 党派·群众团体卷, 方志出版社, 2014, p. 114.

<sup>32</sup>The State Council Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office was established at the same time as the Hong Kong and Macau Work Committee appears to have been disbanded and the 1<sup>st</sup> Office nameplate handed over the South China Office. “国务院港澳事务办公室召开庆祝成立四十周年座谈会”, 人民日报, 14 Sept. 2018. Hong Kong and Macau Work Committee Secretary Chen Nengxing 陈能兴 is described in an official history as the head of the Guangdong Provincial Committee 1<sup>st</sup> Office. 中共广东省委组织部 et al., op. cit., p. 140; “广东省总工会第三任主席陈能兴”, 广东省总工会, 31 May 2013.

<sup>33</sup>广东省志 1979-2000, 25, p. 114. An official history describes Guo Manguo as having headed the 1<sup>st</sup> office from 1978 to June 1983. 广东省志 1979-2000, 28 政法卷, 方志出版社, 2014, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup>It was established at the end of 1972 together with re-establishment of the Provincial Political-Legal Commission and the Public Security Bureau. “1972年”, 中共广东省委党史研究室.

<sup>35</sup>中共广东省委组织部 et al., op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>36</sup>South China Office Deputy Director Guo Peizhen 郭佩珍 was described as head of the Investigation Bureau from 1977 to 1978. 广东省志 1979-2000, 28, p. 30; 许天民, op. cit., p. 365. South China Office cadre Han Shusheng 韩树声 was assigned to the Investigation Bureau after leaving a May 7 Cadre School in 1972. 广州市黄埔区人物纪略 1949-2007, no publisher, 2013, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup>Wen-Chin Chang, “From War Refugees to Immigrants: The Case of the KMT Yunnanese Chinese in Northern Thailand”, *The International Migration Review* 35:4, 2001.

<sup>38</sup>Separate documents describe Guan Shixin 管世新 as head of the MPS Yunnan Office and head of the Yunnan Provincial Committee 1st Office. 韩绿林, ed., 广西政法年鉴(2010)创刊号, 广西人民出版社, 2010, p. 135; 潘贵存, ed., 唐山市丰润区志 1978-2005 下, 方志出版社, 2010, p. 1095. He Guowei 和国伟 of the Yunnan Office subsequently became head of the Yunnan State Security Department's Political Department.



The MPS Northeast Office (东北办事处) existed as early as 1956. A deputy director of the Northeast Office in 1956 subsequently became deputy director of the South China Office, suggesting they may have been involved in similar kinds of operations.<sup>39</sup> The Northeast Office had an intelligence station in Dalian, but it's unclear where the office was headquartered.<sup>40</sup>

Historically, Shanghai has been another important staging ground for the Party's foreign operations. Even though it has no land borders, it had established expatriate communities, elite universities, diaspora connections, and intelligence networks left behind by several countries. One unverified source claims that the MPS maintained a Shanghai Office (驻上海办事处), which was outwardly known as the Municipal Government's 6th Office. One biographical reference exists to an individual covertly sent abroad by the Shanghai Office.<sup>41</sup>

Further hints about MPS foreign operations in Shanghai come from Ding Li 丁立, an officer of Shanghai Public Security Bureau in the first half of the 1950s. Ding worked in the Bureau's Political Security Division, where he was under the dual leadership of his division head and a Soviet expert advisor, "Keliukefu" 柯留可夫 (Kryukov?). Ding explained the Soviet advisor's seemingly unusual leadership role as a product of China's inexperience with foreign operations:

*"Under the direction of the Soviet expert Keliukefu, I carried out international intelligence work. My primary mission was to investigate and clean out consulates of capitalist and imperialist nations in Shanghai, and their cultural and religious organisations and forces. The second mission was, under the right conditions, to send 'spies' abroad. To New China, this was a topic to learn about from Soviet experts."*<sup>42</sup>

## 5 The post-MSS MPS

The MSS absorbed much of the MPS's counterintelligence personnel upon its creation in July 1983. The MPS, in principle at least, had lost much of its remit in the spy-catching game. The South China Office was no exception, and may have been entirely incorporated into the Guangdong State Security Department later that year.<sup>43</sup> Even though the new agency also subsumed the Guangdong Investigation Department, a foreign intelligence agency, South China Office head Zhang Youheng was chosen to lead the State Security Department.<sup>44</sup>

郭大烈, ed., 中国少数民族大辞典 纳西族卷, 广西民族出版社, 2002, p. 470. According to one source, the Yunnan Provincial Committee 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Offices were incorporated into the newly created State Security Department in early 1984. Little is known about the 5<sup>th</sup> Office, but the fact that it was subsumed by the State Security Department implies that it may have been cover for the Yunnan Investigation Department (云南省委调查部). 王汉文, ed., 开国将士风云录, vol. 1, 中国工人出版社, 2005, p. 438.

<sup>39</sup>中国人民政治协商会议河北省临西县委员会文史资料委员会, ed., 临西文史, 第4辑, 山东省聊城地区新闻出版局, 1997, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup>王佩平, ed., 大连市志 公安志, 方志出版社, 2004, p. 767.

<sup>41</sup>"印象中'他在六办做的'", BackChina, 14 Mar. 2014. Baidu claims that an individual named Zheng Guolong was sent abroad by the MPS Shanghai Office as a clandestine agent. I was unable to access the original source but a preview of the book on Duxiu confirms that Baidu is accurate. "郑国龙", Baidu Baike; 丁洪章, ed., 共和国功勋人物风采, 中国科学文化出版社, 2011.

<sup>42</sup>岷江读书社, ed., 岷江情深 岷江读书社回忆录, publisher unknown, p. 30.

<sup>43</sup>"于顺纲同志简介".

<sup>44</sup>李时雨, 敌营十五年 李时雨回忆录, 南海出版公司, 2015, p. 186.





In fact, the MPS's responsibilities still include "state security" work and it continues to carry out foreign operations. The recently established Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, for example, includes deputy directors from the MPS and MSS.<sup>45</sup> Notably, the MPS sends officers abroad to harass corruption suspects and enemies of the state under Operation Fox Hunt.<sup>46</sup>

Today's MPS Southern Research Institute (南方研究所) and the Guangdong Office of the MPS External Liaison Office (对外联络办公室驻广东办事处) may serve similar functions to the South China Office. There is no evidence that either have direct links to the South China Office, but some information points to their involvement in clandestine operations and intelligence gathering.

One source describes the Southern Research Institute as an MPS "think tank", but the fact that it has an "intelligence division" (情报处) and offices in both Shenzhen and Zhuhai, respectively the cities adjacent to Hong Kong and Macao, suggests some involvement in intelligence operations.<sup>47</sup> Until 2005, the institute owned half of a trading company in Shenzhen, further suggesting operational activity.<sup>48</sup> Like the old South China Office, the Southern Research Institute has links to the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau: a former head of the Southern Research Institute was recently described as the political commissar of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau.<sup>49</sup>

Business information websites describe the Guangdong Office of the MPS External Liaison Office as "carrying out investigation and research on matters relating to the Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan region" and managing MPS front companies in the province.<sup>50</sup> This is borne out by information on the office's personnel. Ma Xiaopi 马小奇 worked as the general manager of Guang Xing Hua Enterprises (广兴华实业总公司) and deputy general manager of Beijing Xinhua Enterprises (北京新华实业总公司) while heading the Guangdong Office.<sup>51</sup> Both companies are controlled by

<sup>45</sup>"我校李江舟校友 2020 年 7 月 4 日 国务院任命为驻港国安公署副署长", 中国人民公安大学, 9 Nov. 2020; "Alias of Beijing national security official in Hong Kong unmasked by latest US sanctions list", *Apple Daily*, 17 Jan. 2021. See also Peter Mattis, "Informatization Drives Expanded Scope of Public Security", *China Brief* 13:8, 2013.

<sup>46</sup>Sebastian Rotella & Kirsten Berg, "Operation Fox Hunt: How China Exports Repression Using a Network of Spies Hidden in Plain Sight", *ProPublica*, 22 July 2021.

<sup>47</sup>海丰县地方志编纂委员会编, 海丰县志 1988-2004 下, 方志出版社, 2012, p. 1116. Its Shenzhen address is recorded as 南山区华侨城荔园新村甲 1 号. Its Zhuhai address is 翠微东路 11 号. 姚林, "新型公安智库建设: 概念、现状、建议与展望", 北京警察学院学报 3, 2018, p. 71; "公安部南方研究所: 2017-12-25 合同\_1", 千里马, 25 Dec. 2017>; "公安部南方研究所珠海办事处", 11467.com.

<sup>48</sup>"深圳市南安实业有限公司", 启信宝. Jiang Zemin ordered political-legal system organs such as the Ministry of Public Security to decriminalise in 1998, but intelligence agencies were able to maintain some companies for nominally operational purposes. See Michael Chase & James Mulvenon, "The Decriminalization of China's Ministry of State Security", *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 15:4, 2002.

<sup>49</sup>Yin Zhitian 殷治田 was head of the Southern Research Institute until 2001. He was described as the political commissar of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau and 26<sup>th</sup> Bureau in 2017. 国家民委人事司, 中国民族博物馆 & 中国西藏杂志社, eds., 丰碑-对口支援西藏十年回顾, 红旗出版社, 2004, p. 16; 唐雪娇, "学校组织收看中央四部委民族班教育管理服务工作视频会", 中南大学, 24 Apr. 2017.

<sup>50</sup>Business records use the term "double-ised companies" (两化企业) to refer to these companies. According to a Liaoning provincial government document, the term is short for "socialised and professionalised companies" (社会化、职业化企业) and refers to companies established by state security organs to assist in providing cover for operations. "公安部对外联络办公室驻广东省办事处", 爱企查; 地方税政策法规汇编 1997.7 - 1997.12, 辽宁省地方税务局沈阳分局, 1998, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup>海丰县志 1988-2004 下, p. 1116. Xiao Chenggang 肖成钢 from the Southern Research Office also moved to the Guangdong Office in 1999 where he was the assistant general manager of Guang Xing Hua Enterprises. "肖成钢", Sina.



the MPS.<sup>52</sup> Chinese business records show that the MPS External Liaison Office also owns 90% of a joint venture with a company controlled by the family of Marshal Ye Jianying, which has been closely associated with military intelligence agencies and Guangdong province.<sup>53</sup> Nothing is known about activities carried out by the office in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

Highlighting its covert nature, the MPS External Liaison Office is probably a name-plate used by the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau to obscure its activities. Several 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau officers have concurrently held positions in the Liaison Office. For instance, MPS officer Tan Songqiu 谭松裘 may have headed the External Liaison Office while serving as 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau chief in the 1980s.<sup>54</sup> Li Wenda 李文达, a head of the External Liaison Office in the 1970s, was also a senior 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau officer.<sup>55</sup>

The same pattern exists at local levels: the Guangxi Public Security Department's 1<sup>st</sup> Division (the local counterpart of the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau) is outwardly known as both the Guangxi People's Government 9<sup>th</sup> Office and the Public Security Department's External Liaison Office.<sup>56</sup> This kind of numbered local government cover was also used by the South China Office, and remains in use by civilian and military intelligence agencies. It therefore strongly indicates that the 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau and related units function as intelligence agencies.<sup>57</sup>

Recent revelations about the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau's role in the 1MDB corruption scandal surrounding then-Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak illustrate the unusual foreign operations it engages in. A *Wall Street Journal* investigation found that in 2016, then 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau Chief Sun Lijun 孙力军 informed Malaysian officials that the Chinese government was deploying "full operational surveillance" on *Journal* reporters in Hong Kong in response to their coverage of 1MDB. Sun also promised to persuade other countries to drop their investigations into the corruption case.<sup>58</sup> The US Department of Justice has since alleged that Sun instructed the deputy national finance chair of the Republican National Committee, Elliott Broidy, to lobby the Trump

<sup>52</sup>Beijing Xinhua Enterprises is recorded in Chinese business records as wholly owned by the MPS Police Support Businesses Management Office, an MPS organ that manages some of the agency's companies. Unconfirmed sources claim that the MPS Business Management Office is part of the MPS 1<sup>st</sup> Bureau and internally known as the double-used company management office (两化企业管理办公室, see n. 49). "北京新华实业总公司", 爱企查; 葉茂之 & 劉子威, 中國國安委: 秘密擴張的秘密, 領袖出版社, 2013. Strangely, Chinese business information websites do not record the ownership of Guang Xing Hua Enterprises, which was established in 1984. However, financial records filed by a company partnered with Guang Xing Hua Enterprises indicate that it is controlled by Beijing Xinhua Enterprises. A job advertisement by the same partner company also describes Guang Xing Hua Enterprises as "directly led by the MPS". "深圳市广道高新技术股份有限公司公开转让说明书", 企查查, Sept. 2016, p. 63; "深圳市广道高新技术有限公司", 应届生, 31 Oct. 2008; "广兴华实业总公司", 爱企查.

<sup>53</sup>"深圳市国叶实业有限公司", 爱企查. On the Ye family and its relationship to military intelligence, see Mark Stokes & Russell Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics", Project 2049, 14 Oct. 2013.

<sup>54</sup>江迅, "黄雀行动背後港人捨命救危內情", 亚洲周刊 23, June 2009. See also Geoff Wade & Jichang Lulu, "The China Association for Friendship and its links with the Ministry of Public Security", unpublished draft, 13 Dec. 2020, n. 37.

<sup>55</sup>李文达, ed., 中国当代公安题材文化作品选 1949-1989, 中国人民公安大学出版社, 1992, p. 72; "李文达 (1918-1994)", 中国作家协会.

<sup>56</sup>"公安志", 广西壮族自治区地方志编纂委员会办公室.

<sup>57</sup>On the use of numbered cover by PLA intelligence agencies, see Stokes & Hsiao, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup>Tom Wright & Bradley Hope, "China Offered to Bail Out Troubled Malaysian Fund in Return for Deals", *Wall Street Journal*, 7 Jan. 2019.



administration to end US investigations into 1MDB and deport the outspoken Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui 郭文贵.<sup>59</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Much remains unclear about contemporary MPS structures for clandestine foreign operations, but the South China Office's traditions appear to live on. Though it may no longer run a mole inside the CIA, today's MPS maintains cover organisations for carrying out "investigation and research" on Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and neighbouring countries. Its role in the 1MDB scandal also saw it interfere in Malaysian and US politics. Clearly, the MPS continues to involve itself in state security work and function as an intelligence agency.

Together with the MPS's deepening politicisation, involvement in high-level struggles within the Party, and perpetration of human rights abuses, its ongoing foreign intelligence operations show how unlike a regular police organisation it is.<sup>60</sup> This should give pause to law enforcement agencies around the world as they enter agreements with the MPS, poorly informed about their partner's nature.

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<sup>59</sup>Aruna Viswanatha & Rebecca Ballhaus, "New Details Revealed of RNC Fundraiser's Lobbying for China", *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Aug. 2020.

<sup>60</sup>Jirouš & Lulu, op. cit.; "公安部原党委委员、副部长孙力军严重违纪违法被开除党籍和公职", CCDI, 30 Sept. 2021.