Japanese And Chinese Immigrant Activists

Josephine Fowler

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Left-wing Chinese Immigrant Activists

Communism and the Strengthening of the Kuomintang in America

In late March 1927 left-wing Chinese activists Shi Huang, Shih Tso, and Xu Yongying wrote a “confidential” letter to General Secretary Jay Lovestone under Shi’s home address in San Francisco to inform the Party of the recent formation by the KMT in America’s Central Committee of a Committee on the Abolition of Unequal Treaties. As “communists in principle,” their “policy with the committee” was “not only to seek for the abolition of unequal treaties, but to see to it that there is any chance for the advancement of Communism in America.” They also saw “great hope both for the advancement of Communism and the strengthening of the Kuomintang in America, if the two parties can cooperate wisely and tactfully [sic]”—much as they had done for a long time now with DO Levin. Toward this end, they sought to persuade the Party to make this work “embodied definitely in the programme of the Communist Party,” in the first instance by joining “a nation-wide League” and thereby helping to “enlarge and unify our front against imperialism.” More to the point, they reminded Lovestone, it was “imperative for your Party, or rather ours as well, since we are all Communists but in name, to pay attention to this matter.”1

Given the continuing existence of a United Front in China, it is not surprising that leading left-wing members of the KMT in America who were “Communists but in name” advocated cooperation between the KMT and the American Party. Surprising, however, is the activists’ positive working relationship with Levin and their request that he “can be with us in his present capacity”; first, it reveals that during this period such a possibility existed, and second, it provides proof that left-wing Chinese activists in the United States tried to enlist American Party leaders in their efforts at the local and national scales to develop KMT “policy and tactics” in the United States from “Communist and Chinese Nationalist point of view.” Indeed, the very fact that Shi, Shih, and Xu had “not joined the Party because of technical and tactical
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reasons” suggests that they did not see their position as identical to that of like-minded activists in China where at that time CCP members also belonged to the KMT.

This raises the vexing issue of party membership. According to Chinese historian Zhang Bao, in the wake of the KMT-CCP split Chinese students such as Shi, Xu, and Shih in San Francisco and Chi in Chicago decided to join the CCP. These students served as examples for others, and, by the end of the 1930s, “there were approximately fifty CCP members in America, most of them from San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York.” Unlike the American Party, however, CCP members and the groups they formed in the United States were never made public, both to avoid persecution by American and KMT officials and to permit activists’ participation in the movement upon their return to China. Zhang notes that “all of the CCP members in America participated in all kinds of activities and struggles led by the American Communist Party,” including “routine work and political campaigns”; they understood that they did so as members of the CCP alone.2

Beginning in 1926–1927 the first cohort of left-wing Chinese immigrant activists joined the American Party, and I argue that the twin questions of leadership and direction lie at the heart of the issue of party membership. The American Party national leadership declared its adherence to the Comintern tenet that “no other Communist Party can have branches in this country,”3 yet, when questions arose regarding qualification of Chinese candidates for American Party membership or strategy on Chinese matters, Party leaders at the national and district levels turned to the Party fraction in the KMT in China and the CCP prior to the KMT-CCP split, and the CCP alone afterward, as the final arbiter. On this issue, Him Mark Lai comments, “Through contacts on the international level, CCP political directives on China issues were also passed on to CPUSA as guidelines for action. This factor greatly influenced the selection of activities and the development of the Chinese Marxist Left in the United States.”4

At the same time, as Zhang suggests, the question of party membership cannot be separated from the matter of disclosure. From the perspective of those organizing inside the United States, “openness” about one’s Communist identity not only made them subject to police surveillance and the threat of possible deportation but also foreclosed any possibility of organizing at the local or national scales among Chinese immigrant communities. Thus, publicly identifying as a Communist was a matter of intense concern and debate among Chinese members of the W(C)P.

Finally, the issue of disclosure in turn raises the question as to whether formal membership in the CCP and/or American Party constituted the single most important or sole determinant of level of involvement in the Chinese or American Communist movements.5 Certainly, Shi, Shih, and Xu’s communication suggests the flexible and contingent nature of Communist Party
membership among Chinese immigrant activists, at least during the period preceding the KMT-CCP split. Furthermore, except insofar as activists are referred to as “comrades,” the subject is rarely addressed in the extant written record to which researchers have access. In this regard, Levin reported in late April 1927 that he had gathered “from the Communication of Chi to Mr. H. Shih” that their membership was “to be [kept] secret from the rest of the party.”

This underscores two points: first, the highly sensitive and therefore difficult nature of the issue as a subject of research; and second, the fact that during the period of the late 1920s and early 1930s relations between the American Party and the CCP and their respective stances toward Chinese activists in the United States were not yet clearly defined. As a result, lines of authority cannot be determined with certainty at this time.

In this chapter, I focus on the activism of left-wing Chinese in the KMT in America and examine the Party’s relations with the same at the local, regional, and national scales. In addition, I direct attention to the Party’s initiatives on China and all matters related to the Chinese in China and the United States. This complicated set of relationships begins with the KMT Convention, held January 3–8, 1927, in Los Angeles and continues until the collapse of cooperative relations between the KMT and W(C)P following Chiang Kai-shek’s coup in April.

**From Los Angeles to Seattle to New York: Relations between District Party Leadership and Left-Wing Chinese Activists**

At the adjournment of the KMT’s 1927 annual convention, *Daily Worker* Local Representative and Southern California Sub-District Organizer Paul C. Reiss wrote to Ruthenberg that “the Convention went on record in support of the Canton government.” At the same time, he reminded him “of the fact that there is a definite fight going on in the Kuo Min Tang Party and that the San Francisco branch has openly revolted against the convention.” This revolt occurred two years after a gathering in the Western Hills in Beijing in November 1925 where the right-wing faction of the KMT in China declared itself the party central committee and resolved to expel CCP members; later right-wing members of the KMT in America sided with the right-wing faction in China in opposition to the revolutionary government in Guangzhou (Canton). Conservatives controlled the central headquarters (also known as the “general branch” and “Main Office”) of the KMT in America in San Francisco. By the beginning of 1927, in the face of the open conflict between right- and left-wing factions in America the Central Committee of the KMT in China decided to withdraw recognition from the San Francisco general branch. The San Francisco group defied the orders from China and locally issued a circular that, as summed up by left-wing activist F.T.D., denounced Y.H.W. for stating that Sun Yat-sen’s
Principle of the People’s Livelihood “IS SYNONYMOUS WITH COMMUNISM.” Nonetheless the annual convention represented a triumph for the left-wing faction of the Nationalist Party in America.

Reiss also reported that he had taken the initiative in seeking to develop connections between sympathetic members of the KMT and the Party. First, he had “forwarded detailed information [about the Convention] and also the resolution to the D.O. [Levin], Comrade Engdahl, and Gomez.” Second, he had “selected two names of Chinese comrades, delegates to the convention and forwarded same to the Daily Worker to be put on the mailing list in order that they may get better acquainted with our Daily.” Last, he had made contact with “two official delegates who are returning to China,” who were “very much interested in [Party member] James H. Dolsen’s book, ‘The Awakening of China,’” and he had sold a number of copies of Dolsen’s book to the more advanced element.” Still, he admitted, he had neither made contacts prior to the convention, nor was he “informed or given the names and connections of some of the active comrades of the Chinese party of Chicago. Somehow it seems that our party is not in close touch with the Kuo Min Tang.” Apparantly, he was not aware of Levin’s ties. In his response, Ruthenberg informed Reiss that the AAAIL secretary had “arranged to have a Chinese comrade from San Francisco represent the League and address the conference” in its name: “It would have been desirable that in addition the local comrades here would be advised so that they could co-operate on the work. But evidently this was overlooked.”

It is possible that timely notification might have helped in the short-term. However, the Party’s experience to the north indicated that in the long-term far more effort was needed to produce cooperation at the local scale, let alone extend this cooperation to the regional and national scales. At the beginning of March, Levin wrote to Ruthenberg, “We are in close touch with Chinese students at Stanford and some of the Chinese” in the KMT, and in spite of the lack of definite “organizational contacts yet we have been able to create such a friendliness that I have received a letter of introduction to the branch of the Kuo Min Tang in Los Angeles as a speaker.” Indeed, after noting that he had been informed of preparations for a conference whose purpose was the formation of a League for the Abolition of Unequal Treaties in China, he pointed out, “The progressives seem to have no fear of the ‘Communist bogey’ and one of them frankly stated to me that the Workers Party is the only sincere group in America that wishes to aid the Chinese Nationalist movement.” Perhaps such a claim was exaggerated, but certainly any confidence in the Party among Chinese “progressives” was the result of Levin’s commitment to working with the same. He explained as much: “I am trying to have their Central committee issue a call to all of their branches to call similar conferences, and have promised that it will be possible for them to get in touch with comrades like myself who will cooperate with them in successfully launching these conferences.
throughout the United States. My experience with Chinese has taught me to work very carefully with them until firm confidence has been established. Once that is done then we can expect full-hearted cooperation."\[14\]

There is no question that among Party leaders Levin stood out in terms of dedication and the degree and range of his ties with Chinese activists. He not only worked closely and over a period of time with Chinese students in the Bay Area, members of the CEC of the KMT, branches of the KMT in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and the Women's Section connected to the Oakland branch, but he also represented the Party at jointly sponsored events in San Francisco.\[15\] Moreover, his efforts were successful, as suggested by Levin as well as by Shi, Shih, and Xu. Along similar lines, in February Alice Sum, representing the Women’s Section in Oakland, responded to the district's overtures by “appealing to your organization which we feel is in sympathy with this struggle for freedom and independence of and for the Chinese people, and that you will add your voice of sympathy for this great cause.” In fact, according to Gomez, it was “under our direction and guidance” that the Women’s Section thereupon sent out a resolution and letter to groups across the United States.\[16\]

However, the experience of the Party in Seattle demonstrates that Levin’s success was not unique and therefore cannot simply be attributed to his personality and background (that he had “been in China for several years”).\[17\] Beginning in January 1927, the Seattle-based leadership of District 12 reached out to left-wing Chinese students and also developed ties with the larger Chinese community by working closely with the local branch of the KMT in organizing events in support of the Chinese nationalist movement. For example, between March 26 and April 16, the two parties cooperated on a range of events, including a Party-sponsored “open-air demonstration and celebration” at which “more than 2000 were present,” two meetings at the Moose Temple at which representatives of both parties spoke, two joint meetings at the Chinese Opera House at which the house was “filled to overflow,” and finally “open air meetings etc. every night.”\[18\]

Like Levin, DO Aaron Fislerman made a personal commitment to this work; first, he did “everything possible” to convince the approximately 200 KMT members in the area to support the Left KMT in Hankow, and, second, he “worked” closely with two “very reliable” students. “Although they are not members at present because they fear they may be ousted by the Kuomintang [sic], nevertheless they are with us and Hankow.” Indeed, following the suspension of the local Chinese-language paper *The Chinese Star*, Fislerman “had a consultation with the Chinese and we decided to print a special weekly paper in Chinese,” to be called “the New Star.” In retrospect, Shi noted that “Hu Tang Te Kan was first published in Seattle by S. C. Huang (Editor) and C. T. Hsieh (manager).”\[19\] At the time, Fislerman reported that the newspaper, edited by Shih Chun Huang, was already being circulated in Seattle and “also in Vancouver BC and Portland through a few friendly Chinese to Hankow. Also
the student is corresponding with a number of Chinese students in many other parts trying to sway them for Hankow etc.” Thus, the two student activists, with the cooperation of the Party’s district leadership, had begun to extend their networks of associations from the local to the regional arena and thereby from spaces of dependence toward spaces of engagement. For its part, Fislerman claimed, the Party would do well to support the decision of the District Executive Committee (DEC) to give $10.00 weekly over the next three months because there was support to be tapped in the larger Chinese community. “There are a number of Chinese who are favorably but do not dare to voice the sentiment. There are others on the fence. If we keep the fight up for Hankow, we expect to sway them with us.”

“These Chinese comrades want to form a branch of their own.”
—William W. Weinstone, January 7, 1927

Meanwhile, at the very moment when the KMT Convention was convening in Los Angeles, ten Chinese activists in New York submitted a request to District 2 General Secretary William Weinstone “to form a branch of their own.” According to Weinstone, “They wish to be known as the Chinese Communist Party of America, a Section of the Communist International.” They had already formed a Chinese Workers Alliance and enrolled in the W(C)P. In addition, at least two among the group—Sui Peng and Ho Shin—had been active in local Party-led anti-imperialist efforts. According to New York JWA Secretary-Organizer Ogino, Sui Peng, who was “a member of the executive committee of the New York City Section of the Kuo Ming Tang, associate editor of the Mun Hey Daily, the official organ of the Kuo Ming Tang, and also an active member” of the W(C)P, had “been in contact with our Japanese comrades here and has been cooperating with us in anti-imperialist work and other activities.”

Although Weinstone thought “for a time we should permit them,” he had nonetheless “forbidden them to use the enclosed stamp which they have gotten out without permission.” His superiors approved his message; Ruthenberg responded, “I do not think there is any objection to your permitting the Chinese workers which you have brought into the Party to work as a group for the time being. But of course they cannot call themselves the Chinese Communist Party in America. No other Communist Party can have branches in this country. They can call themselves the Chinese fraction of the Workers (Communist) Party, Section of the Communist International if they desire such a high-sounding name.” For the ten Chinese activists living in New York City, Ruthenberg’s refusal may well have come as a surprise because four years earlier their compatriots in France had received permission to form a European Branch of the Chinese Communist Party (ECCP). Ruthenberg’s reaction also anticipated the differences emerging among national and district American Party leaderships, the leadership of AAAIL, and leading Chinese party members
over policies governing Chinese activists’ application for membership in the American Party.

A New Ferment of Activity in the San Francisco Bay Area

Back on the West Coast, the first months of 1927 saw a growing ferment of activity among left-wing Chinese activists in the Oakland and Los Angeles branches of the KMT, among Chinese students at Stanford University, and in the larger San Francisco Bay Area. Activity overlapped among the groups and centered on a number of endeavors. Members of the left-wing faction of the KMT established a new Party organ, *Kuo Min Yat Po*. Although Shi was a member of the founding committee and Hsu became editor of the news section when publication began in June, the paper was nonetheless subject to intense pressure from both right- and left-wing factions. Within four months, however, the continuing conflict led to the resignation of the two chief editors, whereupon Xu was promoted to the top position and former Qinghua University student and left-wing activist Xie Qitai assumed responsibility for the literary section.26 Around this time the CEC of the KMT, which was based in Oakland, began to organize the conference that led to the forming a League for the Abolition of Unequal Treaties in China. Among the proposed participants were “Chinese student clubs,” Chinese workers, merchant, and religious organizations, “Labor Unions, Workers political parties, Workers Clubs, [and] Organizations of people of oppressed nations and sections of All-America Anti-Imperialist Leagues [sic].”27

In addition, a group of university and high-school students in the San Francisco Bay Area, which included some Chinese Americans as well as students from China, formed a local chapter of the national Zhongguo Xueshenghui (Chinese Students Alliance), to be known as the Sanfanshi Zhongguo Xueshenghui (San Francisco Chinese Students Alliance, SFCSA). Although nationwide membership of the Chinese Students Alliance represented a range of political beliefs, the members nonetheless shared a general interest in helping China become a strong and independent nation. Furthermore, under the direction of left-wing activists Fee and Xavier Dea the San Francisco chapter demonstrated strong, public support for the Chinese Revolution and the left-wing faction of the KMT. As Fee later recalled, in 1927 the group “mobilized a thousand participating students and entered a float depicting the triumph of the Chinese people over imperialism in a Chinatown demonstration commemorating the May 30th massacre.” Later that year, members of SFCSA began publication of a mimeographed periodical titled *Resonance*, which openly sided with the left-wing faction. When word of this action reached the school administration, “the students were expelled and the publication banished from the school.” At the same time as a result of the Party’s efforts to attract Chinatown’s workers, Fee and Dea joined the W(C)P.28
Meanwhile, when the San Francisco branch of SASYS began in the second half of 1926 to issue a monthly publication titled *Geming* (Revolution) that was openly critical of Chiang Kai-shek and the conduct of the KMT in America, the organization was quickly drawn into further battles with the conservative San Francisco branch and the KMT party organ, *Young China*. Undeterred, however, in early 1927 “six Stanford students,” including the editor of *Geming* and Xu, met with the DO to study “Party organization and principals [sic] in order to help keep the Chinese movement in America to the Left.”

Finally, “a small group of Chinese [sic] students and Chinese residents in Oakland and San Francisco” began publication, under the editorship of Stanford student Tsiang Hsi-Tseng (also known as H. T. Tsiang), of a new Chinese-language weekly, *The Chinese Guide in America*. Tsiang arrived in the United States in 1926 as a student and became editor of the KMT organ *Young China*; in a shift that provoked much controversy among left- and right-wing activists, Tsiang quickly became radicalized and changed allegiances. Indeed, as recounted by historian Leong Gor Yun, “Tsiang, a self-styled Communist, was ejected bodily from his office by a group of right-wingers. Shortly afterward the left-wingers would have nothing to do with him.”

Owing to a lack of sufficient funds, the paper was initially “printed on a Mimeograph.” With the publication of the eleventh issue on February 12, 1927, however, an English-language Supplement was printed. On the upper left-hand corner of the front page, the editor noted, “The other side of this page will be used for the Chinese Edition of the ‘The Chinese Guide in America’ as soon as enough funds can be raised.”

This raises the dual questions of funding and control. According to Wu Fook Zoo, member of the executive committee of the KMT in Chicago, the paper was funded “from subscriptions.” However, according to Levin, “The Editor is under our direct guidance and direction.” There was no question in Levin’s mind regarding the Party’s interest in the paper: “The chief aim, organizationally, as far as the Party is concerned, is to pick out those Chinese who are in sympathy with the policy of the paper, both the Chinese and English edition, for the purpose of bringing into the Party. We are also trying to get those elements within the Kuo Min Tang who are particularly interested in this paper. If we can make such connections we will have a group within the Kuo Min Tang so that we have a real fraction there.”

For his part, in forwarding copies of the Supplement to “Comrades & Fellow Workers,” Tsiang raised the banner of interracial solidarity and challenged his fellow Chinese workers to do the same: “It is quite necessary that the Chinese workers in America and the American workers establish a close relationship, so that the imperialists will not be able to use one against the other. We will bring these facts to the attention of the Chinese workers in America through our Chinese and English supplement . . . Hoping that this paper will be brought to the attention of your organization.” At the same time, in his
FIGURE 5 “Leaders of Chinese protest meeting here [in Philadelphia].” Philadelphia Daily News, March 28, 1927. “Left to right: P. T. Lau, who just came from Canton; P. H. Ho, local representative of Kuo Min Tang, followers of Dr. Sun Yat Sen and Sherman Chang, Chairman. They ask that China be left alone to solve its own problems.” Local representatives of the KMT right-wing denounced the protest. (Daily News photo.)
letter to “HIS READERS,” he affirmed the interests of the community to which he belonged and to which the paper was responding:

This supplement meets an urgent need for the Chinese in the United States as well as for the Americans who are in close sympathy with the liberation movement of China and the Chinese . . . There has been no weekly presentation in English in America of the crisis in China from the point of view of the Chinese and edited by us. (“The Daily Worker,” printed in New York City, presents the news from a most favorable point of view, but is not edited by the Chinese). The publishing of news of China and the interests of the Chinese in the United States in this manner is necessary for the many American friends of China and also for the native born Chinese who are accustomed to read the general press of America which does not at all times present accurately and reliably the news and points of view of China and the Chinese.36

Clearly, Tsiang’s understanding of what was at stake in producing The Chinese Guide and its English-language Supplement went far beyond any narrow interpretation of “Party” interests. In a much broader appeal, Chinese Americans and “American friends of China” would for the first time have access to an accurate and reliable presentation of “the news and points of view of China and the Chinese”—the first progressive English-language paper to be “edited by the Chinese.”

Tsiang’s failure to mention the Party does not necessarily indicate an absence of Party ties, especially because the paper was aimed at the broad audience of Chinese in the United States and sympathetic Americans. Both non-Chinese Party leaders and Chinese activists in the district agreed that The Chinese Guide was “owned and controlled by our party [W(C)P].”37 Still, his repeated reference to the significance of the paper’s being edited by “us”—that is, Chinese in America, suggests that as editor Tsiang did not view himself as being under the Party’s “direct guidance and direction.” Indeed, Tsiang was not one to toe any line.

“Long Live the Friendship and Solidarity of the American Workers and Farmers with the Chinese Workers and Peasants!”
—CC of W(C)P, 1927

Although district leaders such as Levin and Fislerman understood that to develop individual and organizational ties with the Chinese left in the United States the Party must demonstrate a commitment to working simultaneously at the local, regional, and international scales, there is little doubt that the national leadership’s sights were trained almost exclusively overseas. Toward the beginning of 1927 both the leadership of District 2 and the Party’s National Office threw their energies into launching a nationwide Hands Off China
(HOC) campaign. First, “the organization of the broadest possible mass movement around the demand for Hands Off China and defense of the Chinese liberations [sic] movement,” was to be extended to defend the Soviet Union and transform in the long-term the HOC Committees “into a broad permanent anti-imperialist war movement.” As such, the Program of Action emphasized the need “to draw in and stimulate action by the trade unions in behalf of the Hands Off China demand and in direct and open support of the Chinese labor movement against American imperialism and Chinese War. [sic] militarism.” The same policy should also apply to “all honest socialist elements.”

For all the emphasis on appealing to as broad a range of groups as possible, the campaign literature and correspondence made no mention of Chinese in the United States. Rather, the standard refrain was: “LONG LIVE THE FRIENDSHIP AND SOLIDARITY OF THE AMERICAN WORKERS AND FARMERS WITH THE CHINESE WORKERS AND PEASANTS!”

The omission was all the more surprising insofar as “Kuomintang comrades” were, so Weinstone informed the National Office, “taking the initiative in this work” in New York. Similarly, Vivian M. Wilkerson, secretary of the HOC Committee in District 2, wrote to Acting General Secretary Max Bedacht in early June that “a number of Chinese students of New York sympathetic toward the Party who have been working with me in the H.O.C. Committee here, are available to speak and help the work for H. O. C. throughout the country.” But the students were not prepared to wait on the Party’s decision. Wilkerson urged, “Please rush this information care of Party office, N. Y. as the school semesters are over, and these students will soon begin to travel through the country.”

Likewise, left-wing Chinese in the KMT on the East and West Coasts were cooperating with the Party in efforts to raise support for the Chinese nationalist movement among Chinese- and English-speaking communities. For example, in Philadelphia, in late March, at a multilingual mass meeting and march jointly sponsored by the Party, YWL, and KMT calling for “Hands Off China” and commemorating the second anniversary of the death of Sun Yat-sen, speakers included Party organizer Albert Weisbord, YWL representative Irving Green, KMT member P. T. Lau, who was “a former member of the city government of Canton” and “who just came from Canton,” and P. S. Ho, representing the Philadelphia branch of the KMT. P. T. Lau spoke in English and P. S. Ho in Chinese.

As left-wing activists Shi, Shih, and Xu explained, raising support for the Chinese movement should be seen as an integral part of the “advancement of Communism in America,” and matters of concern to Chinese in China should be of concern equally to Chinese Nationalists and Communists in the United States and indeed all Communists in America. Thus, the Huaqiao Gonghui (Chinese Workers’ Club), which was formed in San Francisco in the mid-1920s and continued to exist until 1930, “aided and educated Chinese workers and especially gave aid to the Chinese Revolution.” It was also reputed to be one of
The Chinese Guide in America, published by a small group of Chinese students and residents in Oakland under the editorship of Stanford student Mr. H. T. Tsiang (Tsiang Hsi-Tseng) and probably first appearing sometime in November 1926. Upon publication of the eleventh issue of the weekly The Chinese Guide, the editor H. T. Tsiang added a printed English-language supplement. First issued on February 12, 1927, it was also edited by H. T. Tsiang. As soon as enough funds had been raised, the publishers decided to use the opposite side of the front page for the Chinese edition of the Guide.
the first organizations of the Chinese left “to fly the Kuomintang’s national flag in San Francisco’s Chinatown.”

In a promising move, on April 22, 1927, Lovestone informed Levin that the political committee had decided his district would “receive an appropriation of $200 to help you in your anti-war, Hands Off China work,” to be given “little by little upon receipt of your budget.” In his response four days later, Levin immediately broadened the focus and called attention to the larger context of nationalist politics and to the absolute necessity for supporting the Chinese fraction: “You ask for budget for the Two Hundred Dollars. The money was at first need for the emergency purpose to prevent a sabotage of the Central committee of the Kuomintang reactionaries . . . It is also needed for our fraction, (Chinese communist [sic] fraction),” in the amount of “thirty Dollars a week for administrative help.” In this regard at stake was not so much the fraction’s survival but rather the Party’s legitimacy among the larger Chinese left in the United States.

If the work is hampered because of lack of clerical and administrative help, we will all look like a lot of sick kids. The Chinese fraction are being exposed to a bitter attack and if we cannot assist in that much they will have good reason not to have over confidence in our ability. Our fraction can stand it they are a remarkable courageous and clear-headed group, but if they cannot get their machiner working the left wing, not the communists but who are supporting them will have little confidence in them.

The next day, Levin sent off another letter regarding the finances of the district as a whole, as reported at the DEC meeting held on April 20. Because the district did “not receive enough stamps either to pay the salary of the DO or any additional help” or any funding for the current “Membership Drive” and Hands Off China campaign, the DEC was recommending “to the CEC that the National Office either subsidize District 13 with about $80. per month . . . or permit this district to tax its members $1.00.” To garner support of the national leadership, Levin added, “This will mean, of course, that the CEC will be in closer touch, and more frequent and regular communication with this district than it has in the past.” Having engineered approval from the political committee at a meeting held on May 1 at his request, Levin illustrated this very point by traveling to Chicago to attend the Party Plenum. Upon receiving news of Levin’s departure, the DEC of District 13 declared his action “uncommunistic and detrimental to the best interests of the Party” and sent a telegram to Chicago “condemning Comrade Levin’s presence there as illegal.” In spite of the proffered opportunity for maintaining tighter control over this distant and notoriously independent district, Lovestone declared the request for a monthly subsidy was “impossible” and instead approved a “district assessment . . . providing that it is not more than one dollar monthly. We suggest a fifty-cent assessment.”
Not three weeks later, Levin appealed to Bedacht, once again calling attention to the fact that the “work with the Chinese is being greatly hampered because of lack of funds.” Apparently, the district had not yet received the promised $200. On this occasion, however, Levin underscored the benefits to be gained by the Party as a whole in supporting the left-wing Chinese activists’ united front efforts: “On this point if our party will be able to be mobilized for active participation, I am quite sure it will have a very healthy reaction upon all the members of the Party, and it will tend to bring us closer together on the basis of active participation in the real dangers the American workers are facing in this Chinese situation.” Meanwhile, he closed, “our comrades and friends amongst the Chinese” had already mobilized a “left wing” locally and were extending their networks to the regional scale by “forming similar groups in several sections of California and are now waiting for our assistance to help them spread their work throughout the United States.” Yet, by mid-June, Levin had yet to receive either funds or a reply, a situation that endangered launching the campaign of Hands Off China conferences and prevented sending for Gertrude Haessler from District 2. Apparently, Levin had requested that she serve as “secretary for the left wing among the Chinese, of the C. P. Fraction and other Chinese work which would be too dangerous for our leading comrades to come out openly in the front.”

Bedacht’s belated response was brief. Although he acknowledged “the importance” of Levin’s work in “the Hands Off China matter” and the political committee’s earlier vote to send a subsidy to his district, he nonetheless reaffirmed that the “state of finances” made it “absolutely impossible to comply with the decision.” By its actions the national leadership made clear that it did not consider the work undertaken by left-wing Chinese within their communities in the United States as vital to either the conduct of anti-imperialist work in general or the Hands Off China campaign in particular.

The “Chinese Question” and “relations with H. T. Tsiang”

Meanwhile, even as he wrestled at the national level to secure funds for left-wing Chinese activists’ united front work and the Hands Off China campaign; Levin was simultaneously embroiled at the district level in the struggle over “relations with H. T. Tsiang.” Toward the end of March, Levin wrote to Lovenstone to apprise him of where things stood, in particular with regard to the matter of helping Tsiang to rejoin the KMT. At the KMT in America’s convention in January “a resolution was passed instructing the various branches not to aid” Tsiang, now “an expelled member” of the KMT in China, but Levin believed that he had “thoroughly realized his past mistakes and it is felt that he can be relied upon to carry on good constructive work for the Kuomintang and can be guided in his work.” For that matter, if Tsiang was “to be of any use in the Kuomintang movement he must be in that Party.” At the same time,
Levin advised, before making a decision the Party “should consult with our Connections in China.”

If we were sure that he would be accepted back under the same conditions as the others of his group have been re-admitted or any other condition we [sic] which they thought was advisable, we then would prepare the ground work for the removal of the objections in this country. Intimation of favorable action in China, especially if there [sic] representative in America would be informed of it, would simplify the question of his return to the Kuomintang. It would save the more active members here from exposure of attack because of their attempt to change the decisions of the Convention in the U. S. and in China.52

In a second letter of the same date, Levin was more specific about whose opinion mattered and what was at stake. First, Levin sought “to win over” Mr. Dong, member of the CEC of the KMT, who in spite of “becoming inactive” supported “the progressive group” and who “was also and still is very sympathetic towards Tsiang and has helped him financially in his paper.” Levin had already “won over Mr. Dong to a certain extent and he is now quite active.” In fact, he was appointed as chairman of the Committee on the Abolition of Unequal Treaties “because of his long residence in the Chinese [sic] community. He gives it a good [sic] deal of prestige and with this committee is better able to meet the opposition on the Executive Committee of the Kuomintang.” At the same time, the question of Dong aside, the Party “must consider carefully how we should take this matter up with the Centre and the C. P. of China . . . If we make too strong a plea for him it might indicate a lack of knowledge of the danger [sic] the right wing to the party fraction in the Kuomintang in China. It might also appear that we were giving objective support to the Tai Chi-tao or [sic] right wing ideology.” Therefore, their “best” strategy was to recommend that Tsiang be permitted to rejoin the KMT under “probation” and that Lovestone “specifically inform our connections that this is done to win over some of the members of the Kuomintang who . . . are tending to weaken the efforts of our left wing.” This last point was crucial because at stake here was ensuring that the Party did not jeopardize its relations with “our connections” in China. Levin warned, “It should also be pointed out that if there should be very serious objection to Tsiang for them to please forward them immediately so that I may use that in influencing some of his friends not to support him or even to break with him.” Above all, he concluded, the larger lesson to be drawn from “this matter” was that “we should have actual organizational contact with the Party fraction in the Kuomintang of China.”53

In the weeks that followed, the DEC discussed all matters related to the “Chinese question,” including the policy to guide the DEC in its work with The Chinese Guide, the committee on the Abolition of Unequal Treaties, and the committee’s newly formed English-language organ, the Abolitionist. When
the DEC convened a “special meeting” to vote on various motions and amendments, a firestorm erupted between “majority” and “minority” factions, whereupon both groups appealed to the CEC of the Party.\(^54\) Whereas the “minority” supported using the *Abolitionist* to serve broad united front work and *The Chinese Guide* for advancing “progressive measures” in the KMT and mobilizing “a definite Communist group” among Chinese in America, the “majority” advocated strictly limiting the scope of the *Abolitionist* to “issuing the call for a United Front conference” because it “can, at best, serve only a narrow Nationalist policy.” *The Chinese Guide* alone should be “the Left Wing organ, under Communist control, in our Chinese work.”\(^55\)

The fact that the “majority” judged the merits of the publications in terms of “Communist control” did not set it apart from the “minority,” whose leader Levin had expressed the very same concern in relation to *The Chinese Guide*. What distinguished the “majority’s” position, however, was the group’s pitting of the American masses and “our Party” against the KMT in America and the Chinese struggle. The group charged,

They [the “minority”] seem to be obsessed with the idea of building up the KMT in America without realizing that the basis of our work must be to arouse THE AMERICAN MASSES AGAINST IMPERIALISM, and gain organizational contact from such a growth, and thus strengthen our influence with the American masses. The result is that our party is being neglected in order to build up the KMT . . . The way in which we can best assist THE CHINESE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE is to gain contact with the American workers thru mass labor organizations and such organizations as the KMT and lead them in the struggle against Imperialism in the U. S. This can best be done, not by a large KMT in America . . . but by an aroused working class here . . . Our ultimate objective should be the utilization of the KMT and the Chinese struggle for the massing of the workers of America against Imperialism and the building of a COMMUNIST PARTY here.\(^56\)

By omitting either the subjects that gave body and direction to the KMT in America or the Chinese masses that waged the struggle in China the majority spoke with clarity: the leadership was most interested in advancing the cause of full-bodied “American workers” and of “our Party” “here.”

None of the above deliberations involved Chinese activists, but five days later Shi intervened and redirected attention to the subject of Tsiang. At the outset of his letter to Lovestone on behalf of “comrades here,” Shi emphasized the group’s privileged perspective: “We know Mr. Tsiang since his coming to the United States. We are sure that we are in a better position to estimate his personality than anybody else, because we all study in the same university and often work together along the same line of activities.” Indeed, it was by reason of this long and close association that Shi could provide an account of
Tsiang’s entire political trajectory up to the “present period.” For the same reason, the group could furnish “evidences to prove that he is working against us in the dark. He dissuades our friends to attend the committee meetings in Oakland and turned them into his personal use. He destroys our united front against the right wing and the reactionaries. He purposely discredited the central in Oakland and creates impression that nobody in the party is capable of revolutionary work.” By the same token, long familiarity with “his personality” had bred mistrust: “He is very unscrupulous and practically all people here consider him a too dangerous person to work with.” Indeed, so dominant was the “dangerous” side of his character that even such qualities as being “a hard worker and his courage” were suspect.

The fact that he is not a government student, that he has been dismissed from Stanford University, that he has to find some means to maintain his livelihood, and that he has to struggle for existence makes him work like a real horse. He has radical views, but we are not sure whether he is sincere about the proletarian revolution. Practically all articles published in the English edition of the Chinese Guide are written by some comrades of District 13. He cannot express himself in the English language. If you read carefully his Chinese articles you can easily ascertain that they are simply a show of radicalism. But radicalism does not necessarily mean Communism.\textsuperscript{57}

The claim that Tsiang could not “express himself in the English language” strikes a particularly false note because that fall Tsiang enrolled in Columbia University and in January 1929 he self-published an English-language collection, Poems of the Chinese Revolution.\textsuperscript{58}

At the same time, it should not be assumed that the above statement reflected the views of all left-wing members of the KMT. In fact, in a conversation with Lovestone, Wu Fook Zoo, a non-Communist but left-wing member of the CEC of the KMT, offered a somewhat different perspective. Although it was true that Tsiang was “an able man” as editor of The Chinese Guide, according to Wu, “we never accepted him.” Therefore, at that time Wu counseled that “we should not accept him unless we get information from Executive Committee because he is under orders of arrest.”\textsuperscript{59}

From the perspective of the district leadership, Tsiang’s case placed the Party in an impossible situation. Whereas Tsiang would not simply “fall in line,” at least two leading “Chinese comrades” in the district believed “that the Guide is necessary for our work and they unreservedly declare that they are for its maintenance.” Moreover, they emphasized, “at this time the Guide cannot be maintained without Tsiang . . . but that he must be controlled and not pushed to the front on account of his past record, and the estimate of the left wing Chinese towards him for his past activities.” To further complicate matters, Tsiang himself was “firmly convinced that Levin is
After a weekend of chasing after and heatedly discussing Tsiang, DEC members Edgar Owens and Manus, Chang, and another Chinese activist from Stanford who came “to town” for that purpose, the Party appeared to have achieved the impossible. The “agreement” with Tsiang on The Chinese Guide stipulated that Owens “was the Party representative . . . [and] that the policy would be determined by the Party; that their [the three Chinese activists’] discretionary power was limited merely to the best means of carrying out the policy . . . and finally that in case of a difference of opinion between the three of them, that I as the representative of the Party would decide the difference.” In closing, Owens affirmed his “firm conviction that Tsiang can be handled and that he will respond to frankness.” In the weeks that followed, however, resolution of the case remained elusive. At the DEC meeting on May 7, a motion “that under no circumstances should T. H. [sic] Tsiang be sent on tour for the purpose of raising funds for the Guide” lost by a vote of three to four, while a countermotion “that Tsiang be sent out on tour to raise finances and secure subs for the Guide” won by a vote of four to three. Eleven days later, a “special meeting” of the DEC was called “to inform DEC of telegram sent DEC by the secretary of the CEC dated May 11, referring to tour of THTsiang [sic].” Even after being informed “that Tsiang was already on tour, [and] had raised $60.00,” the group voted three to two on a motion “that Tsiang is not to speak before organizations in behalf of the Guide until the Receipt of the letter referred to in the telegram of the national secretary, excepting on [this] Sun at the Labor College.”

In fact, the end only arrived at the hand of the authorities. Two months later on the evening of July 20, 1927, Tsiang “was detained in the City Jail by orders of the federal government. The following day he was shown warrant for arrest by the immigration department.” The first to intervene were “some Chinese Friends” who got Tsiang “out on Bail” by furnishing the requisite $3,000. In informing Bedacht of the news, Levin advised that the case would necessitate “close co-operation” because it might “involve not only the Chinese but also [the] party.” He also noted that the DEC had already held “a special meeting” at which it was decided, “that case itself should be held by [American] Civil Liberties and ILD jointly or in close cooperation with each other.” At the same time, Levin warned, the case had “in it all of the elements” of what he suspected was “the beginning of campaign for support of Chiang Kai Shek [sic] interests,” adding, “To say the least the Chinese stu [sic] students in America will be in great danger.”

Whereas Shi, Shih, and Xu had earlier alerted the Party’s national leadership to the vulnerability of their position as Chinese in America who were both Communists and Nationalists, now in the wake of the KMT-CCP split Levin drove home the point with news of left-wing Tsiang’s “arrest by the
immigration department." Placed side-by-side, the two moments capture well the outlines of the period of cooperation between the KMT in America and the American Party. For left-wing Chinese activists, cooperation entailed a fragile and risky balancing act. They worked not only inside the organization but also through nonorganizational and sometimes “confidential” channels with district and national Party leaderships in an effort to strengthen the progressive wing of the KMT in America, advance Communism in the United States, and support the anti-imperialist and Chinese Nationalist movements in China. For the Party, except individual district leaders who forged close ties with left-wing Chinese in their districts and developed an understanding of the specific contours of their lives and political activism, cooperation involved enlisting the KMT in America in the Party’s nationwide Hands Off China campaign with the aim of building a broad anti-imperialist antiwar movement.