

## Review of an Argument on a Historical Article of Chinese Trotskyite

YANG Qiang<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Marxism, China University of Political Science and Law, Beijing, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

It is disputed whether or not the Chinese Trotskyists advocated “defeatism” on the Communist Party of China and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in the Chinese Civil War. The argument was triggered by a historical article entitled *Summary of Civil War* brought up in *The History of Chinese Trotskyists*. According to this article, the author of this book believed the Trotskyists supported the concept of defeatism, but the former members of the Chinese Trotskyite denied it because they had never seen the article and believed it was faked. After a series of investigation, this article was proven to have existed, so they acknowledge this article, but still denied the accusation about defeatism because they questioned the representative of this article. So the argument remained.

**Key words:** Chinese Trotskyists; *The Traitor*; The Communist Party of China; Defeatism

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### INTRODUCTION

In the research of the Chinese Trotskyite there are a few differing arguments, one of which is whether or not the Chinese Trotskyists advocated ‘defeatism’ with relation to the Communist Party of China (C.P.C. in abbreviation) and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (P. L. A. in

abbreviation) during the Civil War.

This question is very important, it directly relates to C. P. C.’ identification of the nature of the Chinese Trotskyite. If the Chinese Trotskyists did advocate ‘defeatism’ to C. P. C. and P. L. A., it meant that they had treated C. P. C. and P. L. A. as enemies in the Chinese Civil War, the contradiction between the two parties would no longer be an internal one in the same revolutionary camp. Therefore, It would be legitimate for the C. P. C. to put all the Chinese Trotskyite members into prison after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. However, if they had never held on this view, the C.P.C should not treated the Chinese Trotskyists as enemies, that was because, according to their consistent performance, the Chinese Trotskyists just focused on writing articles criticizing C. P. C.’ “wrong” policies and practices, such as launching peace negotiations with the Kuomintang, and implementing the policy of protecting the development of capitalist industry and commerce, etc. They hoped that the C. P. C. would defeat the Kuomintang and continue China’s revolutionary, so they supported P.L.A’s military actions toward Kuomintang army. They treated C. P. C.’ leaders as not enemies but comrades who fell into a wrong path. Therefore, it would be wrong for the C. P. C. to arrest all the Chinese Trotskyists.

This dispute occurred between the former members of the Chinese Trotskyite and a famous historian, and it came from opposing interpretations of a historical article.

### 1. THE ORIGIN OF THE ARGUMENT

*The history of Chinese Trotskyists*, written by Professor Tang Baolin, a famous historian in China, was republished in Taipei in August 1994. It was the first comprehensive study of the history of Chinese Trotskyite. In the 6<sup>th</sup> section of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, the author used the title “Implementing defeatism to C. P. C.” to describe Trotskyites’ attitude after the Campaign of Crossing the Yangtze River in the

Chinese Civil War. This opinion was based on the article entitled *Summary of Civil War* published in a Journal named *The Traitor*, which, according to the book, was established by the underground organization of “the majority”<sup>1</sup> after the liberation of Shanghai in 1949.

According to the viewpoint in the article *Summary of Civil War*, since the Campaign of Crossing the Yangtze River, the C. P. C. and its army had no longer represented workers and farmers’ interests but instead represented the bourgeoisie’s interests. This opinion was based on the C. P. C.’s policy of protecting Capitalist industry, Commerce, and Rich peasants after crossing the Yangtze River. And along with the C. P. C.’ “metamorphosis”, the nature of Civil War had changed from a progressive war to a reactionary war, it was tantamount to war between two bourgeois groups. Therefore, the author of the article decided: “we will no longer support the C. P. C. and we will change our attitude of Civil War to defeatism. However, it is necessary to make it clear that implementing defeatism to C. P. C. does not mean that we intend to help the Kuomintang win.”

After the republication of *The history of Chinese Trotskyists*. Professor Tang sent his book to Trotskyite’ elders Wang Fanxi and Zheng Chaolin, and sincerely asked them to put forward some amendments so that he could perfect it when reprinted, even though he guessed they would disagree with some critical viewpoints. After elder Zheng received it, overcoming the inconvenience caused by a serious cataract, he carefully read the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Chapters of the book, and wrote an article entitled: *A Criticism on The History of Chinese Trotskyists*. In his opinion, “according to the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, we can say that this book is the aftermath of China’s anti-Trotsky campaign brought from Moscow by Kang Sheng and Wang Ming”. In the article, he pointed out several inaccuracies, an important one of which was the view of “Implementing defeatism to the C. P. C.”.

At the beginning, elder Zheng regarded the view of “Implementing defeatism to the C. P. C.” as an unfounded nonsense, but after seeing the material of *The Traitor*, he felt so surprised that he didn’t believe Trotskyists would hold this view. As a result, he questioned its authenticity: “I don’t think those words could be used as a basis, I believed that the Majority would not say such things. Its author obviously did not understand the meaning of defeatism, the sentences were not fluent and logical. In a word, it could not represent the view of the entire Trotskyite.”

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1 In the early of 1940s, The Chinese Trotskyite was divided into two parts, “the minority”, represented by Zheng Chaolin, Wang Fanxi, claims defeatism to the Kuomintang’s war of resistance against Japan, “the majority”, represented by Peng Shuzhi, Liu Jialiang, stood against it.

## 2. THE FOLLOWING INVESTIGATION

Reality cannot be replaced by intuition. After all, in the appendix Professor Tang provided photocopies of *The Traitor*, on which the Trotskyite’s icon was clearly printed. The Trotskyists were shocked by this revelation. They were keen to know who wrote this article, and the relationship between its author and the Trotskyite. In order to find out the truth, an investigation was launched.

A book named *The Communist Party of China and the Chinese Trotskyite*, written in 2003 by another Trotskyist elder Liu Pingmei, provided more details about this investigation.

According to Professor Tang, the publisher of *The Traitor* was an underground organization within the Majority, elder Liu confirmed the existence of an organization of this kind, called “The Interim Committee of Jiang Zhe”. This organization was established by the Majority on the eve of the liberation of Shanghai, aiming to lead local branches for the Central committee which had left the mainland of China. In order to confirm the existence of the Journal, an investigation was launched among all the former members of this organization, focusing on the following questions: who had published the Journal of *The Traitor*? Who had ever seen it? Who had ever heard of it? However, the feedback received was that no one had ever published it, seen it, and heard of it. Furthermore, another piece of information seemed to strengthen the negation of the relationship between the Trotskyists and *The Traitor*. It was proved that the underground organization had truly published a Journal, however its name was not *The Traitor* but *Under the Banner of Marxism*. This Journal was shut down in the middle of October 1949 because the underground organization was destroyed by the C. P. C.’s public security organization. But according to Professor Tang, *The Traitor* existed from November 1949 to April 1950, so it could not belong to the “Interim Committee of Jiang Zhe”.

Based on the above, Liu Pingmei denied the relationship between the Trotskyists and the *The Traitor*. And believed it was forged and imposed upon the Trotskyite by Professor Tang. At this point it seemed that the view of ‘defeatism’ could not be established.

## 3. ACKNOWLEDGING “THE TRAITOR” BUT DENYING THE VIEW OF DEFEATISM

In 2005, Liu Pingmei published his book *The History of Chinese Trotskyite Party* in Hong Kong. It was the first time for the former Chinese Trotskyists to write their own history. However, it was puzzling that in this book there was a new statement about *The Traitor*. The author changed his view in the book *The Communist Party of China and the Chinese Trotskyite*, and acknowledged the relation between *The Traitor* and the Trotskyite.

The new book provided more details about the Journal and the article. Actually, while the Minority established its Party in 1949, they founded their Youth League at the same time, named the “Marxist Youth League”. It had its branches in Shanghai and Wenzhou. It was the Wenzhou branch that established *The Traitor* and published the article *Summary of Civil War*, in which the view of defeatism was proposed.

What caused Mr. Liu to change his view was not mentioned in the book, but soon an event provided the chance to find out the details.

In April 2006, Professor Tang published his article entitled *An Overview of Chinese Trotskyite* in the 13<sup>th</sup> Issue of the Journal *The Past*, its main idea was based on his book. After that, A Journal named *Newsletter of Research on Chen Duxiu and Revolutionary History* held by Marx’s Research Promotion Association in Hong Kong published an article entitled *Comment on Tang Baolin’s Overview of Chinese Trotskyite* in its 20<sup>th</sup> Issue. In this article the author Huang Gongyan criticized Professor Tang’s views. In response, Tang Baolin published the article entitled *Do not deny the facts of Trotskyite History with today’s idea—A Reply to Mr. Huang Gongyan* in May of the same year. It was from these three articles that the details of *The Traitor* finally emerged.

In early May 2001, at the 6<sup>th</sup> Chen Duxiu Research Conference held in Wenzhou, one of the participants raised a question relating to *The Traitor*. He asked Professor Tang that since neither the Majority nor the Minority knew about it, why not modify the view in his book. At that moment, Huang Gongyan gave an answer that surprised everyone.

According to his statement, *The Traitor* did exist, and had a certain relationship to the Trotskyite. However, it was not surprising that the Trotskyists hardly knew about it, since it was an internal publication printed by several members of the “Marxist Youth League” after the organization was destroyed. It was so secret that to a certain extent, only the editors knew of its origin and Huang Gongyan was one of them.

In 2004, the book *The Communist Party of China and the Chinese Trotskyite* was put on the website named “Chen Duxiu and Chinese Revolution” run by Marxism Research Promotion Association. After seeing the view about *The Traitor* in this book, Huang Gongyan issued a declaration on that website and explained the details of *The Traitor*. It can be inferred that this declaration promoted Liu Pingmei to change the statement in his new book.

At this point, all of the questions relating to *The Traitor* became clear. Obviously both Professor Tang and the Trotskyite elders did not know the entire story behind *The Traitor*. Professor Tang said, *The Traitor* was established by the Majority but in fact it was the Wenzhou Youth League belonging to the Minority who established the Journal. The Trotskyite elders did not believe that *The Traitor* was connected to them but in fact it was.

#### 4. DISAGREEMENTS REMAINED

It was proved that the article *Summary of Civil War* in *The Traitor* did exist and its author was a member of Trotskyite’s Youth League, so the dispute should have been over. However, that was not actually the case. Disagreements still remained concerning the view of defeatism.

In the opinion of the Trotskyite elders, this view could not be regarded as one of the central ideas of the Trotskyite. Neither the Majority nor the Minority had made a decision of this kind.

In early 1995, Zheng Chaolin had expressed this opinion. In the article *A Criticism on The History of Chinese Trotskyists*, he believed that even if the Journal of *The Traitor* had been proven to exist, the view of defeatism could not reflect their attitudes.

At the 6<sup>th</sup> Chen Duxiu Research Conference in 2001, Huang Gongyan also denied this view. In his opinion, on the one hand, very few people knew about *The Traitor*, on the other hand, the view expressed in *Summary of Civil War* just represented the ideas of a few members. In accordance with democratic principles of the Trotskyite organization, members of the Party and Youth League had the right to express their personal views in internal publications. The article *Summary of Civil War* was just of this kind. The Wenzhou Branch Committee of the “Marxist Youth League” did not express its attitude toward it, let alone made an official resolution. In this case, it was ridiculous of Professor Tang to treat this article as evidence that the Chinese Trotskyite advocated “defeatism” on C.P.C and PLA in the Civil War.

However, Professor Tang defended his view. He made a direct response to the Trotskyists’ question.

After seeing Zheng Chaolin’s article, he wrote *An Open Letter to Zheng Chaolin and Trotskyite Friends*. He defended that there existed a fallacy within the Trotskyists’ logic. That was, from establishment in 1931 to disbandment in 1952, disagreements had always existed within the Trotskyite organization, which led to several periods of division. Even in the same faction, it was always difficult to reach an agreement. In this case, “if materials which did not represent the views of the entire Trotskyite should not be used, there would be no description in history of the Chinese Trotskyite, because materials of this kind were hardly found”. To deal with this situation, he took an analytical approach describing the respective points of view within different factions. The reason for using this piece of material in *The Traitor* was, “after all it was a kind of typical things appeared in the history of Chinese Trotskyite”. In the article of responding to Huang Gongyan in 2006, he also emphasized the typical meaning of the material.

## CONCLUSION

Above is a summary of the argument on the material of *The Traitor* and the question whether the Chinese Trotskyists had advocated defeatism on C. P. C. and P. L. A. during the Chinese Civil War. Finally the original disagreement still remained.

As mentioned above, this question is very important, because it is directly related to Trotskyists' attitude to C. P. C. and C. P. C.'s judgment on the nature of the Chinese Trotskyite.

How shall we judge the argument between the two sides? The author of this article favors the Trotskyists' view. The reasons are as follows:

Firstly, personal opinion cannot be regarded as the will of the organization. It has been made clear that the article *Summary of Civil War* was published as personal opinion in the internal publication *The Traitor*, and this personal opinion was put forward not by a veteran Trotskyist but by a young member of Youth League. This alone may be enough to provide people a reason to doubt the representative of the view in that article. Furthermore the Wenzhou Youth League Committee had never made a decision containing a similar view. So this personal view cannot be representative of the will of the Youth League, let alone the Chinese Trotskyite Party.

Indeed, just as what Professor Tang said, there were always quarrels between members of the Chinese Trotskyite. And it was reasonable for him to take an analytical approach describing the respective points of view within different factions. But in this point, there was no quarrel on the view of 'defeatism', neither the Majority nor Minority agreed with this view, they did not even know the existence of the article *Summary of Civil War*. In this case, it would not be reasonable to tie this view to the Chinese Trotskyite.

Secondly, no other materials from both the Majority and the Minority can support the view of defeatism. So in accordance with the principle of the solitary syndrome, this view cannot be established. Furthermore, more materials show the tendency of negating this view. Actually, during the Civil War, the Chinese Trotskyists' attitude toward the C. P. C. and its army experienced a process of change. At the beginning, they expected C. P. C.'s turn to Proletarian Revolution and clearly expressed their support, although they continued their criticism. After learning more about the C. P. C.'s policies, they

were disappointed with it and treated it as a barrier on the way to revolution, because, in their eyes, the C. P. C. had been keened on the "class compromise" and had no intention to defeat the Kuomintang. However, when the P.L.A won a series of victories in the Three Major Campaigns and the Campaign of Crossing the Yangtze River, they finally admitted the C. P. C.'s decisive victory toward Kuomintang and support all the progressive policies of the C. P. C. In this process, it can be easily found that, in a short period, the Trotskyists did hold a hostile attitude toward C. P. C., but it was far from the extent of implementing defeatism, and they had changed their attitude soon after the big victory.

In summary, the author believes that the viewpoint of the Chinese Trotskyist is more persuasive.

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