

# A fishing expedition?

Taipei leaders view Peking's offers on reunification as little more than bait on an angler's hook

By David Jenkins

**Taipei:** In a section of the library of the Institute of International Relations on the outskirts of Taipei there is a room which contains almost every major newspaper and periodical published by China, a treasure trove of research materials in a place where the mere possession of a communist tract could result in a stiff jail sentence.

What jars the senses, however, is not so much the existence of such a library — the Kuomintang (KMT) on Taiwan prides itself on its knowledge of mainland affairs, and selected scholars are given the freedom to delve through communist publications — but the sign above the library door. In keeping with the fiction of KMT sovereignty over all China, it refers to the publications of the world's most populous nation as "materials on the situation of the bandits."

While Taiwan has made major advances on the economic and social front and modest advances on the political front, its relations with the mainland are frozen in time. A visitor to Taipei enters an Alice-Through-the-Looking-Glass world in which the civil war is still very much in play. The residue of distrust arising out of that conflict continues to dog all efforts at reunification.

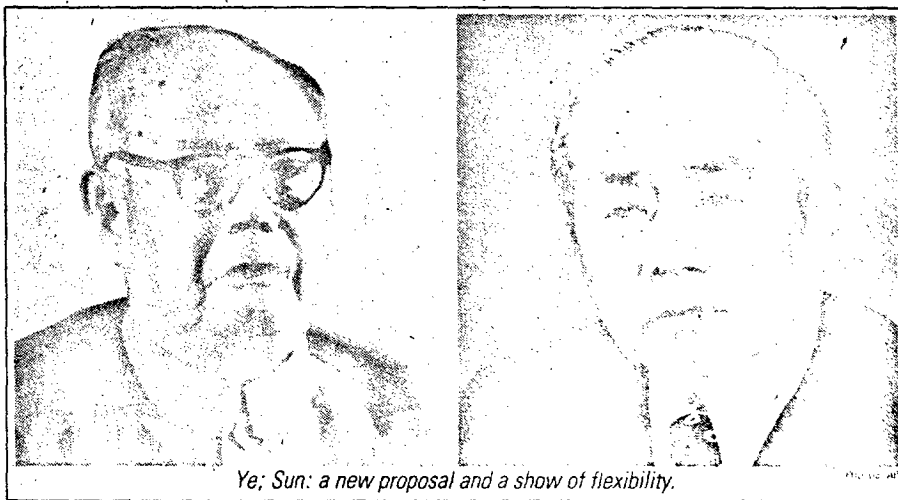
For three decades after their victory over the KMT in 1949, the communists called consistently for the liberation of Taiwan, linking the call with harsh invective against the late president Chiang Kai-shek and, later, his son and successor, Chiang Ching-kuo. However, with the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States in 1979, Peking launched a major drive for negotiations with KMT leaders and for a return of Taiwan to "the embrace of the motherland at an early date."

Although it refused to rule out the use of force if the KMT proved obstinate, Peking abandoned its calls for the liberation of Taiwan and called instead for a process of reunification, saying that it would "take present realities into account . . . and respect the status quo on Taiwan."

This new approach, which found its earliest expression in Peking's 1979 New Year's Day message to Taiwan compatriots, was replete with assurances that China would not "cause the people of Taiwan any loss" nor "change the society by force." Instead, Peking would allow Taiwan to "maintain its present economic and social systems after its return to China." Significantly, nothing was said at this time about Taiwan's political status after its return to the fold. Criticism of Taiwan's leaders fell away and calls were made for the establishment of postal, air, Red Cross and trade relations.

These overtures amounted, in the view of some analysts, to a now-or-never attempt to resolve the long-standing differences with the mainland-born leaders of Taiwan, Peking's fear being that a new generation born on Taiwan would be more inclined to settle into some sort of de facto independence for Taiwan. As a result, Peking is in the odd position of putting its main hopes in its long-standing enemies in the KMT.

Peking, analysts note, has a nagging worry about who or what may emerge after Chiang, a concern which has been openly alluded to. In an interview with Tokyo's *Sankei Shimbun* early last year, Liao Chengzhi, the top Chinese official concerned with Overseas Chinese affairs, said: "We want to settle while Chiang Ching-kuo is alive. Some are concerned



Ye; Sun: a new proposal and a show of flexibility.

about his health . . . I want Chiang to live to 100 years of age." None of China's overtures has elicited a favourable response, however, so Peking has found it necessary from time to time to warn that it may have to resort to means other than peaceful.

The latest reunification proposal came in September 1981 when Ye Jianying, the chairman of the standing committee of China's National People's Congress, put forward Peking's nine-point proposal for a settlement of the outstanding issues confronting China and Taiwan. These provided, among other things, for talks between the Chinese Communist Party and the KMT, the exchange of mail and trade, visits by relatives, autonomy for Taiwan, guarantees that Taiwan could retain its armed forces and its social and economic system, and assurances that private property would still be permitted. The proposal cut no ice in Taipei. Indeed, the no-

tion that anyone could trust Peking's word on such a matter was greeted with scorn and derision. KMT officials make the point tirelessly that they are well-versed in the ways of communist duplicity, having twice allowed their ideological foes into their fold and having twice lived to regret it.

The first such occasion was in the 1920s when the KMT agreed to admit communists into the party as individual members. That effort came unstuck in 1927 when the KMT was obliged to "expel" the communists "in order to save the national revolution," the party's rather euphemistic way of describing the ruthless purge of leftwingers that was carried out in that year. Talks were held again in the 1930s as part of an effort to forge a united front against the invading Japanese. However, as the KMT likes to tell it, the communists promised to fight the Japanese but never did; all they did was husband their resources for an eventual showdown with the KMT.

According to Taipei, the nine-point proposal is no more than yet another communist ploy to undermine the KMT. "This is absolutely a propaganda gimmick," Chiang told the REVIEW. "They could make a number of gestures but the aim is

the same — they want to annex us." The nine-point proposal, Chiang said, could be said to be a trap. "Once we get into it, we will not be able to get out. The nine points are like the bait that an angler uses to catch a fish."

At the senior levels of government in Taipei, unhappy memories of past encounters with the communists are never far from the surface. "I have known communism for a very long time," said Chiang, "and I know for a fact that they have their United Front tactics which they use if they don't have the force to solve a problem."

Minister of Defence Soong Chang-chih expresses a similar sentiment. "We never trust the communists because of our past experience," he said. "We have had many, many bitter experiences with them . . . What they call peaceful reunification is United Front warfare . . . against us." According to a recent government publication, the nine-point proposal is not the

offer of one equal to another "but the calculated effort of an aggressor to get his victim in his sights so he can pull the trigger." The nine-point proposal, it is said, is no more than a device adopted by people who have never swerved from their basic goal. "If, having been cheated twice, you allow yourself to be cheated a third time you are stupid," said government spokesman James Soong. "We may be very stubborn but we're not stupid."

When Peking promises autonomy, Taiwan points to the fate of Tibet, which was also offered autonomy. When Peking promises Taiwan people freedom of movement and freedom of trade after reunification, Taiwan asks that the people of the mainland be given those freedoms first. In short, Taiwan's rulers have no trust in communist promises and no inclination to trade Taiwan's present way of life for what they see as a drab and vastly inferior life under communism.

"Many of our young people who have heard of the [nine-point] proposal say, 'Why not have peace talks,'" KMT Secretary-General Tsiang Yien-si told the REVIEW. "But the communists have conditions. They say we must take down our flag and stop using the words Republic of China. These are two preconditions; it amounts to surrender." Taipei, however, has some preconditions of its own. Only when Peking gives up Marxism-Leninism, it says, can there ever be discussions. Even if the aging mainland-born KMT leaders were prepared to bury their differences with the communists — an unlikely enough eventuality as things stand — there is little prospect that most ordinary people on Taiwan would support such a move.

Despite all this, there have been recent signs that Taiwan might be prepared to modify its previously inflexible line on reunification, a development that is being closely watched by diplomatic observers. At a reception in Taipei on June 10, 1982, Prime Minister Sun Yun-suan repeated a number of the standard objections to the nine-point proposal but spoke about eventual reunification in a tone which a number of analysts described as reasonable and flexible. "If the political, economic, social and cultural gaps between the Chinese mainland and free China continue to narrow," Sun said, "the conditions for peaceful reunification can gradually mature. The obstacles to reunification will be reduced naturally with the passage of time."

Sun, it was noted, did not say that Taiwan would never negotiate. Instead he said that Taipei would negotiate only from a position of strength. And though he still demanded that the Chinese leaders abandon communism, he did so in an oblique and low-key manner, calling on Peking to give up its "four fundamental principles," one of which stresses the need always to retain communist party leadership.

Sun's speech, drafted by a prominent member of the Prime Minister's Department, is said to have been cleared by a senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the secretary-general of the

KMT and by Chiang, though it is possible that it was only given a quick once-over by some of those who saw it. However, someone in the armed forces seems to have read it very carefully indeed and been deeply disturbed by the tone and tenor of the document. According to a number of sources in Taipei, the powerful political warfare department of the Ministry of Defence felt that it would have difficulty explaining the new soft line to the troops; talk of a closing gap between the two administrations, it was said, would be harmful to morale. Sun, on having this case put to him, is said to have recognised the need for the government to clarify what had been said.

The government did not issue a clarification in so many words. But when James Soong was questioned about the speech by reporters he took the opportunity to explain just what the prime minister had meant to say and what had prompted the new approach. "When I was asked if the prime minister's June 10 speech indicated a departure in policy, I said no," Soong told the REVIEW. "In the speech he tried a different approach and in a sense explained the reasons why we cannot [negotiate] . . . he said there is still a gap."

The basic aim of Sun's speech, Taipei says, was to counter the propaganda gains which Peking had reaped as a result of the nine-point proposal. Although KMT leaders put no store by Peking's alleged flexibility on this issue, seeing it essentially as a device to weaken support for Taiwan in the US, they admit to a growing concern over the impact the campaign was having. The Peking leaders were being portrayed as flexible and accommodating, they felt, while Taiwan was increasingly seen as stubborn and intractable.

Sun, whose speech was delivered before a gathering of foreign scholars, had wished to make the point that Taiwan was equally flexible. This explanation, if accepted, implies a certain amount of cynicism on the part of the Taiwan Government; Peking was merely playing to the American gallery so Taiwan would do so too. There may, of course, have been more to the speech than this. Certain younger members of the government are thought to take a less rigid approach to reunification, and the drafters of the speech may have tried to move towards a more flexible posture. However, if that were the intention it seems to have come to nought.

According to an old Chinese proverb, there can be no two suns under heaven and no two kings inside the kingdom. But as the conditions for peaceful reunification do not exist at present, it seems inevitable that there will continue to be two suns, albeit of vastly different size and importance, under the Chinese heaven for some time to come. "The reality is that we are already separate," said Wei Yung, a senior official in the Prime Minister's Department, "but we preserve the possibility of reunification. This is a question of overlapping claims of jurisdiction but actually there are two jurisdictions."