

Report

on the research made with the support of the Taiwan Fellowship, ROC during the grant tenure February 2019 – January 2020

Topic: “Tuapse” Oil Tanker Episode in the History of Taiwan-Russia Relations

This crucial incident not only involved the relationship between Soviet Russia and Taiwan but also touched upon the nerve of China and U.S.- however, still haven't been surveyed thoroughly in academic works to present different faces of the situation; only a few publications in the Russian world. The author investigates the case from various perspectives and materials holding by opponent countries in attempt to represent the historical truth and further reviews its meaning for Taiwan-Russia relationship.

Studying the history of Taiwan-Russia relations contributes to the formation of a positive image among population of the two countries. Important in this case is clarification of the true state of episodes that have not yet attracted the attention of researchers, such is the history of events of a half-century old, which connected to the “Tuapse” oil tanker and the fate of its crew.

Keywords: Taiwan-Russia relations history, “Tuapse” oil tanker, Russia-China-U.S. relations, foreign policy, cold war

The main goal of the research: to briefly review the contemporary history of Russia's relations with Taiwan, focusing on the episode, which happened in June 1954, when the Taiwan (R.O.C.) coast guard seized the Soviet oil tanker “Tuapse” (陶甫斯) under the pretext of violating the UN embargo against communist China.

During the research period, new materials associate with the contemporary history of Russia's relations with Taiwan were located and utilized in the Republic of China universities, libraries, and archives. A thorough review of literature was made concerning Russian policy toward Taiwan and Taiwan's policy toward Russia; the impact of the Sino-Soviet dispute on Taiwanese-Soviet relations; how deep was effect of the normalization of relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States in the 1970s on Soviet-Taiwanese relations.

Within the research tenure, presentations with the report on the Russia-Taiwan relations were delivered:

- Lecture for Chung Cheng Univ. History Dpt. 3-4 year students: “Russia’s Relations with Taiwan: Image and Reality, History and Perspectives.” (Jiayi, October 30, 2019).

Briefly reviewed the contemporary history of Russia’s relations with Taiwan, and also analyzed the current status and presumed the possibility for future prospects of bilateral relations.

- Lecture for Chung Cheng Univ. Chinese Dpt. 2-4 year students: “Vladivostok Oriental Institute in the History of Russian Sinology” (Jiayi, December 11, 2019).

The lecture highlighted the historical issues of the establishing in Vladivostok on October 21, 1899 of the Oriental Institute, which laid foundation for higher education in the Far East of Russia; created extensive library acquisition of the Institute, which became the basis not only to the scientific and practical study of languages and current situation of Far East countries, but also for diverse scientific oriental studies. Introduction about Taiwan and Russia Far East, Vladivostok oriental studies with perspective for future cooperation in the joint research of Oriental Institute Chinese collection project were made.

Besides, during the stay in ROC, information exchange and interpretations with Taiwan scholars, activities in the study of Taiwan-Russia relations, international cooperation were implemented.

- Lecture for the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica: “Two 19th Century Chinese and Korean Papers about Russia”. November 26, 2019.

Two documents - a unique 19th century *Fundamental Information about the Russian State* written by an eminent state official, scholar Lin Zexu 林則徐 (1785-1850), and a *Map of Russia* 俄國與地圖, a rare manuscript of considerable interest to those who study 19th century history of border interactions between Russia, Korea and China, were discussed. The author presented commentaries to both papers, told the story of Russia's perception from abroad which allows to trace the origins of the country’s image. It’s worth mentioning that both papers are among the first created in the Qing China and Korea and devoted to Russia, however, they have not attracted much attention from scholars yet.

Attended scientific conferences and seminars made under the auspices of the National Central library CCS, Taiwan Fellowship, and Academy Sinica.

Perspectives for future scientific work were defined. The long-term impact of the fulfilled research and its significance is to deepen the world's understanding of Taiwan, to start using of new historical resource dedicated to the China-Korea-Russia, Taiwan-Russia relations, and the history of cross border interaction in Northeast Asia.

An essay on the research topic prepared as below.

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Respectfully,

Vrady Sergey

Russia Academy of Sciences

Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography

of Far-Eastern Peoples Leading Researcher, Ph.D.

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“Tuapse” Oil Tanker Episode in the History of Taiwan-Russia

Relations

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics began to conduct official ties with the Republic of China after the Russian Revolution in 1917. This relation evolved from establishing official ties, turbulences, gradually thawing of tension, and then rebuilding economic and trade relations.

Joseph Stalin's (1878-1953) policy toward Taiwan lent itself to different interpretations. While some argue that he did not oppose a possible Chinese invasion and even helped modernize the Chinese military, others maintain that Stalin feared a war with the US and rejected any direct military assistance. Taiwan loomed larger in Soviet foreign policy after Stalin's death and the subsequent end of the Korean War.

On 23 June 1954 the Taiwan coast guard with the support of the U.S. seized the Soviet oil tanker "Tuapse" (陶甫斯), which was bound from Odessa for Shanghai, under the pretext of violating the UN embargo against China (for transporting to communist China kerosene as a strategic cargo). 49 crew members were arrested. Under the mediation of France Embassy between the R. O. C. and Soviet Union, a year later, 29 of them were released and returned to the USSR. The rest opted for staying in Taiwan, and later, 9 of them would eventually immigrate to the U.S. and Germany. By the end of 1958, seven crew members were still in Taiwan, while the tanker was renamed and served for some time as a support vessel in the Taiwanese Navy, and later stayed in the port of Kaohsiung.

What caused this incident to be blown out of all proportion was that it became the subject of a Soviet blockbuster movie in the late 1950s. In 1958, a film called *ЧП. Чрезвычайное происшествие* [An Extraordinary Incident] was made in the USSR which was based on a real story. The black and white movie is full of ideological stamps of socialist propaganda; however, there starred prominent Russian actors such as Vyacheslav Tikhonov (1928-2009), and it remains popular to this day. Despite socialist stereotypes, the main theme of the film was the courage of the people who deliberately were sacrificed for ideological reasons. In 1959 the movie ranked the top of the year with 47.5 million viewers in the country.

In 2005 in Odessa port (in now Ukraine) where from the "Tuapse" oil tanker departed in 1954 for its eternal route, it was established a marble plaque in memory of the ship and its crew, most of whom have passed

away already. But their lives and destinies are not investigated thoroughly yet and worth to study.

The capture on 23 June 1954 by ROC Navy of the Soviet “Tuapse” oil tanker became one of the most dramatic episodes of the Cold War period. The Soviet ship was transporting, as indicated in the Bill of Lading, the “Kerosene”, heading from Odessa to Shanghai¹. In the international waters of the Luzon Strait, north to Philippines, a tanker was shelled, detained, the crew was arrested and escorted to the port of Kaohsiung in the southern Taiwan.

For some time, this news became an international sensation, almost provoking an armed clash between the USA and USSR². The aggravated confrontation spilled to the pages of the press, concentrated in diplomatic debates at UN meetings, during which the Soviet Russia accused Taiwan of “violating freedom of navigation on the high seas”, and the United States, respectively, of aiding the “robbery”.

Meanwhile, the events occurred in the South China Sea had

¹ According to Bill of Lading KS-55, issued for Captain Kalinin in the port of Constantza (Romania) on May 28, 1954, “luminous” kerosene grade 4/SR-26, weighing 11,702.901 kg, was loaded onto the Tuapse vessel, Black Sea Steam Ship Line carrier [物資司司長王丕承簽呈國防部總長（移送軍法局抄本）43年6月28日。№1706。國家發展委員會檔案管理局：陶普斯輪處理案A305000000C_0043_1571.6_7722].

² A prominent political and public figure in Taiwan, who played a significant role in the development of Taiwanese democracy in the early twentieth century, Lin Xian-tang 林獻堂 (1881-1956), referring to the incident, wrote in his diary of 27.06.1954: “A few days ago, a Soviet tanker, while passing through the Taiwan Strait, was detained by the Kuomintang government ... Nobody knows what the Soviets can take in revenge, a war may begin.” [translated from 灌園先生日記（二十六）一九五四年 *The Diary of Lin Hsien-tang*, vol. 26, 1954.台北:中央研究院近代史研究所, 2013. P. 221]. Lin Xian-tang gathered information about the events from the Taiwan press, which covered the situation in its own way: «聯合報» 民國43年06月26日第一版, 民國44年07月26日第一版, 民國45年05月29日第二版.

their own background, which were described and explained in their own way by the parties to the conflict.

Having been defeated in battles with the PLA on the mainland and preparing to evacuate for Taiwan island, the Nationalist government on 18 June 1949 issued a Decree that according to which, starting from zero hour on June 26, the territorial waters of China from the mouth of the Liao river 遼河 in the north to the mouth of the Min river 閩江 in the south were declared closed. All Chinese and foreign ships and aircrafts were prohibited from entering to designated areas, as well as to ports located there³.

This decree announced the “closure of ports in territorial waters,” which presupposed an economic blockade of areas controlled by the communists, i.e. almost the entire coast of mainland China, and it was regarded by the adversary as robbery on sea transport routes.

In this regard, a number of questions arouse. Firstly, why it was not announced as the blockade of territories controlled by the Communists, which in practice was carried out by the ships of the ROC Navy? The answer to this question can be found in the comments of senior government officials of the nationalist government: the term “blockade” is used in description of hostilities conducting between warring parties. If to declare the blockade of the CCP controlled areas, then the intra-state conflict between the GMD and the Communists, which in the nationalist press was traditionally called as “suppression of rebellion and pacifying of unrest,” would receive a status and begin to be perceived as a civil war. At the same time, foreign states, according to the international practice, should maintain their neutrality without

³ Executive Yuan Decree (38 穗五字) No. 4896 of 18 June 18 1949. *An Official Message from the President Office* No. 229 (Guangzhou: The 5th Directorate of the President Office, 1949). L. 4. 〈行政院令（卅八穗五字第四八九六號）〉（1949年6月18日），《總統府公報》第貳貳玖號（廣州：總統府第五局，1949），4版。

interfering into internal affairs of the country which would have made impossible for foreign states to supply the Chiang Kai-shek regime, and the communist “bandits” would be equated with the government of the ROC.

This was how officials of the nationalist government reasoned, and introduced the term “port closure” into practice. This was written in an appeal to Chiang Kai-shek by a prominent political figure, diplomat George Ye Gong-chao 葉公超 (1904–1981), who, being a Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty in 1952, and in December 1954 US-China Defense Treaty ⁴.

Using the naval and air forces, the Kuomintang government prevented the entering of ships to seaports and areas of mainland China. In practice, an economic and military blockade was carried out to the territories of China which were under the control of the Communists. Thus, the government of the Republic of China, acting as a “sovereign state that closed ports in inland waters for some reason,” explained the seizure of ships of foreign states bound for areas controlled by the PRC.⁵

The capture of “Tuapse” was one of several incidents related to the interception of the merchant ships of the countries (including socialist one)

⁴ Ye Gong-chao's memorial to Chiang Kai-shek for various sectors suggest that thorough consideration shall be put on turning a closure policy into a real blockade. Historical Archive. *Materials of President Chiang Kai-shek*. Archive No. 002020400051177. “Revolutionary Heritage”. 〈葉公超呈蔣中正各方建議將關閉政策改為正式封鎖似仍應慎重考慮〉，國史館藏，《蔣中正總統文物》，典藏號 002020400051177，「革命文獻」。

⁵ Understanding to the necessity to do so revealed among the nationalist government as early as 1948. [See: He Yao-guang. A study of the policy of closing the ports of mainland China by the naval forces: an almost forgotten episode of the fighting to suppress the rebellion. *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of the Military History of China*. Vol. 7. April 2002. Page 56-57. [何耀光，〈海軍關閉大陸港口政策之研究——戡亂作戰中一個幾乎被遺忘的部分〉，《中華軍史學會會刊》第 7 期（2002 年 4 月），頁 56-57].

that delivered goods to China. On 4 October 1953, the Navy of the Chinese Nationalists captured the Polish tanker “Praca”. On 13 May 1954, the Polish merchant ship “President Gottwald” was intercepted, and on June 23, happened the detention of Soviet tanker “Tuapse”. The Polish and Soviet governments protested against illegal seizures in neutral high sea waters and blamed the United States in notes of the United Nations General Assembly dated 12 October 1953; 15 May, 24 June, and 2 July 1954.

In a note to the US government dated 24 June 1954, published on June 25 in the Soviet “Pravda” newspaper, the following was reported: “It is clear that the capture of a Soviet tanker by a military vessel in waters controlled by the US Navy could only be carried out by the US Navy. The Soviet Government expects that the US government will take measures to immediately return the ship, its cargo and crew in connection with this attack on a Soviet merchant ship on the high seas. At the same time, the Soviet Government insists on strict punishment to the American officials involved in organizing this illegal act, and on taking measures that would preclude the possibility of a repetition of such actions that grossly violate freedom of navigation on the high seas. The Soviet Government considers it necessary to declare that it will be forced to take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of navigation of Soviet merchant ships in this area.”⁶ On the other hand, the United States rejected all the allegations in notes dated 12 October 1953; 20 May, 26 June, and 4 July, 1954.⁷

Meanwhile, present-day researchers, without any doubt, indicate that information about the vessels was transferred by respective American services, which thoroughly monitored the movements of foreign ships in the immediate vicinity of China for the Taiwan authorities. Despite of proclaiming the policy of neutrality in the Taiwan Strait, the US even contributed to the activities of the Nationalists Navy to detain foreign ships bound for mainland China.⁸

⁶ Translated from Pravda: Polnyy elektronnyy arkhiv gazety, 25.06.1954, No. 176, p. 2 (In Russ.). East View Information Services URL: <https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21715610> (accessed 13.02.2020).

⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957. Eastern Europe. Vol. XXV. Washington, 1990, p. 729. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25> (accessed 13.01.2020).

⁸ John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia*, p. 117; 張淑雅, 〈臺海危機前美國對外島的政策（1953-1954）〉, 《中央研究院近代史研究所集刊》第23期（下）, 1994年6月, 頁298.

However, the United States, which was no less interested than the nationalist government in preventing the supply of strategic materials to the Communists, rejected in every possible way its involvement into the subsequent actions of the ROC government, in which Taiwan officials undoubtedly helped them.

Here are the notes of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek made in the diaries on the eve of Tuapse's detention: “[Command] of the 7th Fleet [of the USA] at first expressed a desire to assist us, but ultimately declared that they would not be able to participate, [since] the government ordered to halt. I personally ordered to carry out the detention... according to a plan. If the tanker renders armed resistance, decisively do enter the battle. This will be the first seizure in the ten years that the Russian Communists have been supplying the bandits [of China], and the first revenge for the Russian aggression in China”.⁹

On 30 September 1954, the Soviet delegation to the United Nations demanded that the issue entitled “Violation of freedom of navigation in the region of the Chinese seas” be included into the agenda of the IX General Assembly of the United Nations. The discussion was concerned to the capture of “Tuapse”, “President Gottwald” and “Praca”, including a statement of that the guilty parties are “not only Chiang Kai-shek forces, but also those who encouraged them”¹⁰.

According to the analysis of the events that took place, the detention and arresting of the “Tuapse”, same as of the two Polish ships before, was carried out in international waters, which did not comply with the proclaimed policy rules of “closing” (blockade) of territories controlled by the Communists, and was adopted by the nationalists themselves. In reality it was a pre-planned action to seize a ship that delivered strategic cargo to the PRC, which was participated together by the United States (observation, collection of information about the ship) and Taiwan (direct execution of the action to detain).

⁹ 蔣中正日記（未刊本）民國 43 年 6 月 22、23 日，呂芳上主編《蔣中正先生年譜長編》第十冊（臺北：國史館，2015 年 12 月），頁 339-340。

¹⁰ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. China and Japan. Vol. XIV, part 1. Washington, 1985, p. 679. URL: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25> (accessed 13.01.2020).

Further Fate of the Crew Members

20 Soviet sailors signed in 1954 a request for political asylum in Taiwan. The Soviet government, which did not have a representative office in Taiwan, asked the French leadership to take care of the fate of the “Tuapse” crew. A similar request was made to the Swedish Red Cross Society. As a result, 29 “Tuapse” crew members who did not apply for a political asylum were released. On 30 July 1955, they returned to Moscow.

N. I. Vaganov, V. A. Lukashkov, V. M. Ryabenko, A. N. Shirin, M. I. Shishin, V.S. Tatarnikov, M. Ivankov-Nikolov, V.P. Eremenko and V. Soloviev in October 1955 left Taiwan for the USA. N. Vaganov made a live broadcast on the Voice of America radio station and said: “We perfectly understand the situation in which our comrades who returned to the Soviet Union are in, so they spoke the truth that they expected to. They told that during the detention of the ship, the Chinese beat us, tortured us and even threatened to throw grenades at us. There was none of this. In fact... in Taiwan we were not driven to any concentration camp. We lived first in a hotel, and then in a country cottage. And no one starved us with hunger, forced us to stay in Taiwan, nor to refuse to return to our homeland. We have chosen freedom by ourselves, but this does not mean that we forgot our Motherland. We will return home, but we will return when there is complete freedom and democracy...” V. Tatarnikov spoke in a similar way to the Svoboda (Liberty) Radio.

In April 1956, N. I. Vaganov, V. A. Lukashkov, V. M. Ryabenko, A. N. Shirin, M. I. Shishin came to the Soviet embassy in the US and returned to the USSR. N. Vaganov was arrested in 1963 and sentenced by the Court to 10 years in prison for a “treason to Motherland”. He served 7 years and in 1970 was pardoned. In 1992, N. Vaganov was rehabilitated by decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.

V.P. Eremenko and V.S. Tatarnikov joined the US Army, and in New York settled V.D. Soloviev. In 1959, the Odessa Regional Court sentenced in absentia those sailors who never returned to the USSR - V. Tatarnikov, M. Ivankov-Nikolov, V. Eremenko and V. Solovyov - to death penalty for treason. M.V. Ivankov-Nikolov got mentally sick in the United States and transferred in 1969 to Soviet Russia. After return he was placed in a psychiatric hospital, where he spent over 20 years.

L.F. Anfilov, V.I. Benkovich, V.P. Gvozdik and N.V. Zibrov in 1956 left Taiwan for Brazil and then to Uruguay. There in 1957 they came

to the Soviet consulate and were sent to the USSR. But after a pompous press conference, they were arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison for treason. Later, V. Gvozdk and L. Anfilov were reduced to 12 years. In 1963, they were all released by pardon. In 1990, they were rehabilitated.

V.I. Kniga, V.V. Lopatyuk, V. A. Sablin and other seven people spent almost 35 years in Taiwan. In 1988 they were released and returned to Moscow. Zh. M. Dimov (1933–1975) committed suicide, M.I. Kalmazan (1927–1984) and A.V. Kovalev (1925–1986) died in Taiwan.

The *Tuapse* tanker was included into the Navy of the Republic of China and renamed *Kuaiji*. Subsequently, she was withdrawn from the Navy and presumably is still in the Taiwan port of Kaohsiung.

