

Rebellion and Retribution in 228 Incident: Politics, Law, and Military System under Nationalist Government

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ABSTRACT

Shortly after the 228 Incident, which the Nationalist Government perceived as an island-wide rebellion, the authorities launched military repression supplemented with judicial persecution. This article explores how the 228 Incident became a “rebellion”, and probes into the complex relationships between politics, law, and military system under the Nationalist Government. As this study points out, the conveniently defined “228 Rebellion” was initially a spontaneous protest against the incompetent Governor-General Office, and eventually developed into a movement for political reform. Nevertheless, with the looming Chinese Civil War and influenced by the nationalist sentiment, the military/police, the intelligence bureaus, and the Governor-General Office all exaggerated the severity of the Incident and categorized it as a rebellious movement. Taking such view of the Taiwan authorities, the Nanjing Government dispatched troops to the island and launched a crackdown on the protesters.

Although the Nanjing Government later discovered the exaggeration behind the reports from the authorities, it did not cease the military repression or persecution. Instead, it was only after the accomplishment of military repressions` (so-called pacifying and cleaning the countryside (綏靖與清鄉)) did the government lifted the martial law in May, 1947, and the 228 Incident finally came under the ordinary court. Injustice of former military trials was unveiled but the central government did not rectify previous verdicts for the sake of maintaining its ruling power and reputation. Worse still, political interference cast its shadow over the legal system. Examining the retributions after the Incident revealed not only the significant roles of both the Chinese Civil War and the nationalist sentiment, but also the power hierarchy of the Nationalist Government, in which the military authorities enjoyed supremacy over both politics and law.

Keywords: 228 Incident, Rebellion, Military Repression, Military Trial, Ordinary Justice