

Exploring the Role and Influence of Intelligence Agencies in Taiwan's Postwar Political Development: Focusing on Surveillance Archives

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ABSTRACT

Since 2018, Taiwan's intelligence agencies have transferred a large volume of surveillance-related archives to the National Archives Administration. These materials have become an important source for research on Taiwan's postwar political development. Yet historians had already offered insightful interpretations of the processes and trajectories of postwar political development before these archives became available for public research. What, then, is the research potential of these newly accessible materials, and what additional contributions can they make to our understanding of Taiwan's postwar political history?

This article argues that existing studies of Taiwan's postwar political history have tended to focus on elite decision-making, localization of the party-state system, pressure from the United States, and challenges from Taiwanese society, while paying relatively little attention to intelligence agencies themselves and to how their activities shaped political development. Drawing on surveillance archives made accessible since 2018, this study identifies two interrelated functions of the intelligence apparatus: "surveillance" and "control." Surveillance involved gathering information on the activities and networks of political dissidents, while control involved efforts to influence dissidents in order to weaken or prevent their words and actions from challenging authoritarian rule. Through a continuing cycle of surveillance and control, intelligence agencies helped sustain the operation of authoritarian rule.

Beyond reinforcing or corroborating existing interpretations, these archival materials make it possible to reexamine the institutional formation, development, and gradual loosening of authoritarian rule from the perspective of intelligence agencies. In doing so, they open up a new analytical approach to understanding how authoritarian rule was established, maintained, and gradually transformed in postwar Taiwan.

Keywords: Surveillance Archives, Intelligence Agencies, Political Development, Authoritarian Rule, Kuomintang