

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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A promising start in exploiting the emergency mass admission of Red China refugees to this country.

WINDFALL FROM HONG KONG

Charles F. Turgeon

In May 1962 more than 70,000 refugees streamed across the briefly opened border between Communist China and Hong Kong. When President Kennedy announced that the United States, in a humanitarian gesture, would receive several thousand of them, the intelligence community was presented with an exceptional opportunity to collect information at first hand on the most denied of denied areas.

There is often no substitute for being able to talk to a person who has lived and worked inside a country which can otherwise be approached only through external methods such as reconnaissance, technical analysis, open literature, and third-country reporting. At a minimum, a refugee group can normally contribute a substantial amount of basic intelligence in the economic, political, geographic, and even scientific fields. To a lesser degree, refugees' knowledge of persons, places, and procedures within a country are valuable for operational intelligence. Finally, if some of them have held significant positions in the society and these are interviewed promptly, they may make important contributions to current intelligence.

Peculiarities of the Program

The program that has been developed to take advantage of this opportunity, however, is quite unlike those set up for the Hungarian refugees of 1956¹ and more recently those from Cuba² whose resettlement was sponsored by the government. The President's "Emergency Chinese Refugee Parole Program" requires that the Chinese immigrants be sponsored by private individuals or groups willing to take responsibility for their

¹ See *Studies* II 1, p. 85 ff.

² See *Studies* VII 4, p. 41 ff.

transportation, accommodation, and support. This private sponsorship has a variety of critical implications for the intelligence collection program—most of them inhibitive.

When the government pays for the transportation and arranges for the livelihood of a political refugee, it has the right to ask certain things of the refugee in return. When it does not, as in this instance, it is in no position to put pressure on him to contribute to the intelligence picture of his homeland. Under a government resettlement program there is usually a single port of entry for the refugees and a single processing center, like Camp Kilmer for the Hungarians and Opa-Locka for the Cubans, which offers an ideal opportunity for intelligence screening en masse. There are no such facilities for the Chinese refugees. They come in how and when they can, through virtually every air- and seaport on both coasts, bound for a variety of destinations in all the fifty states. Thus they constitute an extremely diffuse and difficult intelligence target. Moreover, no special funds, facilities, or personnel, except for a limited number of interpreters, have been allocated to the program.

The refugees who arrived during the first year largely antedated the May 1962 influx into Hong Kong; they had escaped during the 1950's and had been waiting there for approval to enter the United States under the normal immigration quota of 100 per year. When the quota was suddenly expanded, the rules of fair play and the regulations of the Immigration and Naturalization Service required that these come first, however ill it served the interests of the intelligence community or the government of Hong Kong. Not until mid-1963, with the elimination of this backlog, did the refugee group begin to assume a current character.

The earlier refugees nevertheless turned out to have information of value, as we shall see. Recency of residence can be less important than former position and currency of communications. A merchant who has lived in Hong Kong for seven years but maintained his correspondence or travels to the mainland can be a far more valuable source than a rice farmer who got out yesterday. It is from persons such as this that a large portion of the first year's intelligence was derived.

Procedures

The methods that have been devised to reach the Chinese immigrants are unique and still developing. The first notice that one of them has entered the country comes to CIA headquarters from the central office of the Immigration Service as a copy of a form giving only his name, port of entry, and probable destination. The CIA office charged with domestic collection alerts its appropriate field office to the presence of this possible new intelligence source within its area of responsibility. The field office then sends a representative to the district office of the Immigration Service to study the refugee's Form No. FS-510, the Application for Visa he filled out in Hong Kong, which is the only source of biographic data for an estimate of his intelligence potential. Because of a lack of correlation between the jurisdictional areas of the CIA field offices and the I&NS districts, the CIA officer may have to travel hundreds of miles to an Immigration office to see the papers on a refugee living in the very city where his own office is located.

If the refugee appears to have possibilities, the field office forwards a copy of the FS-510 or an abstract of its content to headquarters, where the feasibility of opening a case on him is determined. Permission for contact with him must be obtained from the FBI, not as a security check but in order to keep clear of any refugee under investigation by the Bureau, which has primacy of interest in resident alien affairs. If there appears to be no conflict of interest the field office is directed to make an initial contact for the purpose of obtaining more biographic data and making a surer assessment of the refugee's intelligence potential and willingness to cooperate.

If the first interview shows that the source is worth debriefing in depth, request is made for an Alien Security Check, a full-scale security investigation conducted primarily by the FBI, which establishes the classification of information that can be discussed with the refugee. This is the last procedural hurdle that has to be crossed, but there are other problems in making the contact.

The Contact

The first step in approaching a refugee is to locate him, and this may be a problem. The Chinese have proved to be a highly mobile group, often taking the stated address of their sponsor as only a starting point in their travels. Some have settled in surprisingly remote areas, but the greatest number are found in the principal Chinese communities of New York and San Francisco. There the ethnic solidarity of the neighborhood affords them a dense cover under which they may hide from government representatives out of fear of deportation.

If the refugee is still living with his sponsor, the latter may stand on his rights as the party responsible for the refugee's welfare and not allow him to be interviewed except by Immigration officials. This block is rare but does occur, and from it there is no present recourse. If the refugee is approached at his place of employment, there may be no way to arrange a secure interview, or the employer may be unwilling to give him time off for it.

More basically, the intelligence officer must decide whether to make a direct approach to the refugee himself or to seek first the cooperation of his sponsor. The direct approach can sometimes be effective because of its sudden impact: out of surprise or fear the refugee may tell more about subjects of intelligence interest than he would in the presence of his sponsor. The sponsor would at least constitute an additional party in the line of communication with the refugee and might intentionally or inadvertently restrain or reshape his responses to questions. On the other hand, an approach through the sponsor can have important advantages. Because not enough qualified linguists are available to this project, the bilingual Chinese-American sponsor may be the only means of talking to the refugee. Moreover, his presence and tacit endorsement of the interviewer may give the refugee the confidence to overcome his normal reluctance to speak to a government representative. The choice between the two approaches is not easy, but because of the helpful and cooperative attitude of most sponsors the one through them is becoming the way most widely taken.

There is also the question of how the interviewer should represent his position. If he were dealing with the sponsor

alone he could perhaps present himself as a CIA officer, but he is unlikely to do so with a refugee. To the Chinese in general, intelligence is a dirty word, and for those who have lived under the police state it is doubly bad. It is normal practice therefore for the intelligence officer to represent himself as a government research worker seeking generalized, encyclopedic information on conditions in China.

In the introductory phase of the interview the officer attempts to allay any fears about the use to be made of whatever information is offered. He assures the refugee that he has no connection with tax, investigative, or police agencies and stresses that whatever is said will be held in the strictest confidence. If the refugee seems sensitive about his own current activities he is told that there is no interest in his present affairs but only in his experiences in China.

After the interviewer has established his position, secured the cooperation of the refugee, and, hopefully, built up some rapport, he can proceed to the substance of the first interview. In this he is aided by a checklist of questions developed at headquarters to elicit the maximum amount of biographic data and reveal the subjects of intelligence interest in which the source may be competent. The first interview, however, is unlikely to take the form of a regimented march through all the many questions on the checklist; the interviewer will use them selectively and economically, having studied the refugee's FS-510 record with care, to get the most information from him and cause him the least alarm. If this interview is successful and shows the source to be of value, a second one is requested. If it is granted the Alien Security Check is initiated, as described above, and a Notice of Intelligence Potential is issued in the hope of receiving consumer requirements tailored to the source. Having obtained a full security clearance and a list of specific questions, the interviewer can then return to do a debriefing in depth.

The Chinese refugee is not an easy person to talk to. Beyond the language barrier, which is often monumental because of the diversity of dialects with which the extremely limited interpreter force is confronted, there is that of his native character. If not "inscrutable," the Chinese is naturally reticent, and he manifests in particular all the family-

protective instincts of his long tradition. One of the quickest ways to quash an entire interview is to ask him questions concerning his relatives on the mainland which he feels may bring them into jeopardy. As compared with other refugees, moreover, these more frequently left China for economic than political reasons and therefore lack the volubility of men with blood stirred high by a Cuban or Hungarian revolution. Finally, there is the dominant fact, of which most of them are quite aware, that they have no legal obligation to aid the U.S. government in any way.

The Product

Despite this multiplicity of difficulties, the product of the first year's collection activity was good. In this period, according to field office records, 6,510 refugees arrived in this country, 3,133 of them adults who could be regarded as potential intelligence sources. The field forwarded biographic data on 838 of these as the most likely prospects, and headquarters opened 207 cases. 170 were actually interviewed, and 397 intelligence reports were published, an average of more than two per source.

The quality of these reports, relative to the great dearth of information on Communist China, has been uniformly high. They contain new data on such varied subjects as the state of medical treatment, the cost of basic commodities, the political climate, the numbers and kinds of newspapers published, the production of electric power, biographies of important officials, security procedures employed by border guards, town plans, travel regulations, construction projects, farming practices, dental care, research in medicine, physics, and biochemistry, and many others.

But if the quality of information elicited from these new sources is heartening, the rate of production is not. The first-year tally of 170 refugees interviewed, out of 3,133 adults available and 838 rated as having good potential, means that only 6% of the raw resource, or only 23% of its top fraction, was exploited. The production lag appears to be more directly a function of manpower shortage than of any other difficulty. The sudden introduction of several thousand new potential contacts into the case-load of the field offices has been too

much for their existing staffs. It was expected that a total of 12,000 refugees would be in the country by the end of 1963. The field officers must not only find time to see the refugees but also arrange for interpreters; and here the manpower shortage is even more critical. At the New York office, for example, only two part-time interpreters were available for the 1,961 Chinese refugees in its area.

Efforts are being made to enlist the aid of the military services, who might furnish reservists to serve as interpreters in the program. ~~Other ways to improve exploitation have been considered—identifying refugees of high potential and making initial contact in Hong Kong, subsidizing transportation and so controlling some of the refugees, and establishing one or two interviewing centers which refugees already here would visit voluntarily. But none of these measures seems feasible at the present time.~~

Future Sources

The limited and admittedly select group of refugees on whom cases were opened in the first year included scientific and technical personnel (18%), other professionals (9%), executives in banking, industry and commerce (3%), and students (20%). The other half were farmers, merchants, salesmen, clerks, miscellaneous craftsmen, and housewives. 41% had finished college, and 20% had done graduate work. The great majority, as expected, came from Kwangtung Province, but nine other provinces and major cities, including Shanghai and Peking, were well represented.

This statistical picture will probably not hold true for the second year; the likelihood is that it should even improve, at least with respect to the currency of the information potential, as immigrants from the 1962 cross-over replace those who had left China earlier. Even the last months of the first year saw a marked improvement in the current and operational information obtained.

At the same time plans are being laid for the long-term, systematic utilization of the Chinese in this country. The sponsors of the refugees have unexpectedly emerged as persons with substantial intelligence potential, sometimes greater than that of their protégés. Their value lies in the fact that

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Hong Kong Refugees

as important heads of families, businesses, or Chinese associations they have maintained extensive contacts with the mainland, and in general they are cooperative in making available their knowledge and these communications to U.S. intelligence. A second group with similar potential consists of the refugees who have now settled in this country and taken up correspondence with family and friends still on the mainland. Their letters are nearly always of intelligence interest, and in some especially cooperative and favorable cases questions pertinent to particular intelligence requirements may be introduced into the correspondence. Both the sponsors and the refugees can serve to alert intelligence to new and valuable sources coming out of China.

Thus the Chinese refugee program promises to continue as a unique and productive means of extracting information from a country which is both the most bellicose Communist power at the present time and perhaps our most difficult intelligence target.