



CHINA IN CONTEXT AND PERSPECTIVE

Back to the Cheka

The Ministry of Public Security's political protection work

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Abstract

The PRC Ministry of Public Security's core unit's reversion to its original name in 2019 reasserted a tradition that goes back to Soviet state security. The early CCP borrowed political protection as it sought to create a 'Chinese Cheka'. It repeatedly invoked the concept to name its main secret police organ as it faced the challenges of pacifying newly seized territory. The latest invocation coincided with accelerated efforts to impose state security on Hong Kong, the party's most recent acquisition. The political protection naming signals emphasis, rather than a changing purview: throughout its history, however named, the MPS 1st Bureau has been tasked with combatting threats to party power. This classic secret-police role extends abroad, notably including influence operations. The MPS's external presentation as analogous to democratic law enforcement agencies and the 1st Bureau's use of fronts and linked units often provide cover for influence activity.

This paper presents new evidence and analysis of the recent renaming of the MPS 1st Bureau, the place of CCP political protection in the Soviet-inherited state security tradition, that tradition's renewal as the party prepared to dismantle Hong Kong's political and legal system, and the Bureau's work abroad. Once the pervasive role of the political protection bureau in MPS becomes apparent, we argue, foreign cooperation with CCP-controlled justice and law enforcement becomes inseparable from collaboration with the party's state security work.

0 Introduction: The MPS 1st Bureau and state security

Beginning in early 2019, a system of state security agencies centred at the 1st Bureau of the PRC Ministry of Public Security (MPS) replaced 'domestic security' with 'political security' in the names of its units. The renaming, first rumoured by Hong Kong media and noted by analysts abroad, indicated a renewed emphasis on the system's coercive mission, coinciding with the harshest wave of repression so far seen in Hong Kong. This initial work remained conjectural, in the absence of conclusive evidence of the renaming and its implementation at the central level and an analysis of its implications in the context of the MPS's work protecting state security domestically and from abroad.

The 1983 establishment of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) may have contributed to the illusion that the MPS is simply a police force, separate from intelligence

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agencies. This paper adds to the body of evidence showing that the MPS's history, regulatory mandate and practice identify it as the PRC's main state security organ. The MPS is a direct descendant of the secret police and intelligence units the CCP set up beginning in the 1920s. Far from disowning this tradition, the CCP under Xi is embracing it: the name change discussed in this paper restores to the MPS's core unit the name of the CCP secret police unleashing terror on the party's first controlled territory, the short-lived Chinese Soviet Republic. The 'political protection' name signalled the party's emulation of Soviet state security: it took the term from the secret police organs that evolved from Lenin's Cheka to the later GPU, NKVD and KGB. The CCP, itself arguably a creation of Bolshevik political protection, had operatives it charged with building a 'Chinese Cheka' trained in intelligence work in the Soviet Union. The renaming only reaffirms the purview of the MPS 1st Bureau and linked structures, which regulations have consistently defined as centred around classic secret police functions: fighting activities that endanger 'state security' and 'social and political stability'. Again like its Soviet models, the MPS combines this domestic repression and counterintelligence purview with external operations.

In what we call a 'good-cop act', the CCP security apparatus exploits foreign perceptions of the MPS as equivalent to their own police to further its state security mission. Foreign law enforcement agencies and the judiciary cooperating with the MPS and other organs in the CCP political and legal system become ancillary to the protection of the party's political security. This is not limited to direct exchanges between the 1st Bureau and foreign partners: the bureau also engages foreigners through front entities, as well as through its overlap with other units within the ministry. Enlisting foreign partners as unwitting helpers by masquerading as their analogous counterparts is a tactic hardly exclusive to the MPS: as argued elsewhere, such *faux amis* abound in the language of elite cooption in propaganda, diplomacy and trade.

This paper proposes frontier pacification as a common concept behind the domestic and external, cooptive and coercive activity of the CCP's political protection system now centred at the MPS 1st Bureau, as well as its Chekist legacy. This frontier of state security is understood as comprising domains where party control is unconsolidated or challenged: newly absorbed territory (Hong Kong today, Mainland China in the early PRC, the Chinese Soviet in the 1930s, the Russian Far East for the early Bolshevik state), independent behaviour within the party-ruled state (civil society, political dissent, unmanaged religion) and non-compliance beyond state borders (fugitives, dissidents abroad, foreign entities unaligned with party policy).

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 1 provides new, authoritative evidence for the 1st Bureau's renaming, with a mid-2019 terminus ante quem, and combines it with local-level developments to time it as a bureaucratic manifestation of a wave of stress on political security emanating from the CCP's top leadership. Section 2 presents the history of CCP political protection as evolving from Chekist emulation, with the now-reassumed bureau name becoming prominent at those junctures where party control was asserted in new domains, be they geographic or societal. Frontier pacification is then argued to explain both the 2019 renaming and a snapshot of 1st Bureau operations today. The wave of transmission that included the reversion to the Chekist name, section 3.1 shows, coincided with a feeling of urgency to enforce state security on Hong Kong, today's CCP's key territorial acquisition. In section 3.2, new evidence of 1st Bureau involvement in MPS work in areas of Myanmar controlled by CCP-backed forces establishes that bureau's 'domestic' purview extends beyond the PRC's borders.



MPS incursions into areas of Myanmar the party treats as under blurry sovereignty do not define the borders of political security: section 3.3 samples the global scope of 1st Bureau activity, reviewing its role in influence operations in the United States and establishing its control over the MPS External Liaison Office. The cooptive aspect of MPS operations abroad discussed in section 3.4, embedded into larger influence work through 'friendship'-themed fronts and *faux ami* presentations, becomes prominent in interactions with the outermost frontier of political protection.

'Law enforcement cooperation', we conclude (section 4), is a further meme providing cover for the cooption of foreign entities into the protection of the party's political security. Dropping the pretence of a 'domestic' purview, we speculate, may signal to the political protection system that its work abroad must strengthen its contribution to the global projection of CCP power.



(a) As Political Security Protection Bureau deputy chief, 2020. Source: 兴仁市人民政府. (b) As PLA senior colonel. Source: 中国作家网.

Figure 1: MPS 1st Bureau official Gu Bochong.

1 Back to political protection: Xi's MPS

In 2019, the MPS 1st Bureau, known since 1998 as the Domestic Security Protection Bureau (国内安全保卫局), reverted to its older name, the Political Security Protection Bureau (政治安全保卫局). The renaming was also reflected by the bureau's analogous units within subnational public security organs. Far from being an isolated bureaucratic triviality, the reversion to the traditional name reflected the stress on political security the party's leadership handed down to security agencies and the judiciary from the start of that year. Nor was the renaming isolated from a larger reform of MPS structures and a purge of leading personnel that claimed one of the bureau's former chiefs.



1.1 The 1st Bureau's renaming

Speculation that the MPS 1st Bureau had reverted to its old name initially appeared in Hong Kong media in June 2020, based on reports on analogous renamings at the local level.¹ Western and Taiwanese analysts discussed these claims in the context of the history of PRC political security, highlighting the implications for Hong Kong following the establishment of a new security office.²

These claims on the MPS 1st Bureau's renaming remained conjectural, as the only evidence adduced concerned local organs. Below, we present evidence conclusively establishing that the MPS bureau name change had taken place by mid-2019, with its confirmation emerging in increasingly authoritative central-level sources during 2020.

- The 1st Bureau's old 'domestic security' name appears to fall out of official use in early 2019. The most recent mention identified occurs in a Chengdu district government account of a February visit by 1st Bureau chief Chen Siyuan 陈思源.³
- In July 2019, 1st Bureau deputy chief Gu Bochong 顾伯冲 visited Lincang 临沧, a city in Yunnan. A government account of the meeting identified Gu's unit with its new name.⁴
- In August 2020, an MPS-affiliated media report on a police ceremony in Beijing used the new name to identify a 1st Bureau cadre in attendance.⁵

¹Hong Kong media referred to renamings in Naiman Banner (奈曼旗), Inner Mongolia, in February 2019, and Jiangsu Province no later than May ("「國保」或成歷史名詞 公安部建「政保鐵軍」", 星島日報, 3rd June 2020). In the Inner Mongolian case, this likely referred to a WeChat post describing the unveiling of a new nameplate on 1st February ("2019年2月3日 星期日", 活力奈曼, via 微信, 3rd Feb. 2019).

²Matthew Brazil, "Hong Kong: Chinese Security Officials Arrive", LinkedIn, 4th July 2020; idem, "Hong Kong: Much was written today...", Twitter, 5th July 2020; 梁書瑗, "北京的訊號: 駐港國安公署人事任命的意涵", 國防安全雙週報 8 (31st July 2020).

³"2019年2月大事记", 成都市武侯区人民政府, 26th Mar. 2019.

⁴朱清然, "公安部政治安全保卫局副局长顾伯冲到临沧调研指导工作", 临沧长安网, 1st July 2019. Gu Bochong was 1st Bureau deputy chief at least between late 2017 and mid 2020 (顾伯冲, "党的思想理论之树常青的根脉支撑", 学习时报, via 宣讲家网, 22nd Nov. 2017; "公安部一局顾伯冲率队赴新龙场镇民裕村调研指导脱贫攻坚工作", 兴仁市人民政府, 30th July 2020). He was previously with the ministry's 23rd bureau (顾伯冲, "究竟是什么蛀空了苏共的理想信念大厦", 人民论坛, 30th Sept. 2016). Gu's earlier career was in the military, from 1997 at the PLA General Political Department ("顾伯冲", 中国作家网; for the identification, see fig. 1). He was a senior colonel by the late 2000s (江天光, "总参、总政调研组来校调研国防教育工作", 南昌航空大学, 20th Oct. 2008). Gu Boping 顾伯平, another soldier later employed by the MPS, is conceivably Gu Bochong's elder brother: to the somewhat parallel careers one may add their birth in locations in or near Nantong 南通, Jiangsu, and their given names' shared first character ("顾伯平辞去云南省政协副主席职务", 中国经济网, 23rd Jan. 2014; cf. "顾伯冲"). The older Gu spent the 2000s in Yunnan, where he held senior roles in the province's Propaganda Department and at the former 610 Office ("顾伯平辞去云南省政协副主席职务"; on the now abolished 610 system, see section 2.2). He later became a deputy chair of the Association for Yan-Huang Culture of China (中华炎黄文化研究会), a front with a formal affiliation in the propaganda system and further links to civilian and military intelligence (Livia Codarin, Laura Harth & Jichang Lulu, "Hijacking the mainstream: CCP influence agencies and their operations in Italian parliamentary and local politics", Sinopsis, 20th Nov. 2021, pp. 25 sq., 50).

⁵The report, published on a news website run by the MPS newspaper *People's Public Security* (人民公安报), named Hao Yunhong 郝云宏 as deputy party secretary of the Political Security Protection Bureau (辛闻, "铭记训词精神 坚决完成党和人民赋予的使命任务", 中国警察网, 27th Aug. 2020). On the website and newspaper, see "联系我们", 中国警察网; "赵克志在人民公安报社调研时强调: 高举党的旗帜, 坚持守正创新, 为公安工作提供强大舆论支持和精神力量", MPS, via 湖南省公安厅, 7th Dec. 2019. A *Guangming Daily* story published two days later confirms Hao was with the 1st Bureau at the time (彭景晖, "打造党和人民满意的高素质过硬公安铁军——习近平总书记在中国人民警察授旗授旗仪式上的训词引发公安干警学习热潮", 光明日报 [29th Aug. 2020]).



- The most authoritative acknowledgement of the restored name occurred in the latest version of the *MPS Regulations on Jurisdiction Division of Labour for Criminal Cases*, published in September 2020.⁶
- The new name is copiously attested in later authoritative central-level sources. An MPS university's website used it in November 2020.⁷ Two months later, a *Guangming Daily* report on the "sweep away pornography, strike illegal publications" (扫黄打非) campaign again used it to identify ministerial units and cadres that excelled at such striking and sweeping away.⁸ Local public security organs' accounts of interactions with the ministry yield further attestations.⁹

The renaming was slow to spread to the subnational level, even though it was attested in low-level units as early as February 2019.¹⁰ Out of six province-level 1st Bureau analogues in an August 2019 list of model individuals and units promoting ethnic unity published in the *People's Daily*, only one used the new name.¹¹ At least one province and one city district renamed their respective units only in late 2020.¹² The reform did, however, spread throughout the country: by December 2020, at least five provinces and two major cities had applied the change.¹³ The odd county-level public security organ persisted in the old 'domestic' nomenclature as late as 2022.¹⁴

⁶公安部关于印发《公安部刑事案件管辖分工规定》的通知, 公通字 [2020]9 号, via 新疆维吾尔自治区公安厅. For the dating, see, e.g., "公安部关于印发...", 中国刑事法律网, 21st Nov. 2020.

⁷The website of the People's Public Security University of China (PPSUC, 中国人民公安大学), a unit of the MPS, used the bureau's new name as the affiliation of an attendee of a university event ("我校成功举办第三届"国家安全博士论坛", PPSUC, 10th Nov. 2020). We are grateful to Alex Joske for calling our attention to this item. The 1st Bureau affiliation of this official around that time is confirmed by a local government source dated a month later ("公安部一局局领导、一级巡视员王学恩来义调研政保社会调查工作", 义乌市人民政府, 14th Dec. 2020). On PPSUC's subordination to the MPS, see "学校简介", PPSUC; "People's Public Security University of China", ASPI China Defence Universities Tracker.

⁸"全国"扫黄打非"工作小组关于表彰 2020 年全国"扫黄打非"先进集体和先进个人的决定", 光明日报, 16th Jan. 2021. On the campaign, coordinated by a body anchored in the Central Propaganda Department, see Andrew Mertha, *The Politics of Piracy: Intellectual Property in Contemporary China*, Cornell UP, pp. 141 sqq.; "关于我们", 中国扫黄打非网.

⁹"甘肃省公安机关迅速传达学习贯彻落实赵克志部长来甘调研时的讲话和指示精神", 甘肃省公安厅, 22nd Sept. 2020; "甘肃省公安机关迅速传达学习贯彻落实赵克志部长来甘调研时的讲话和指示精神", 嘉峪关市公安局, 25th Sept. 2020. The latter item names an official whom an earlier source identified as being with the 1st Bureau ("刘须群个人简介", 江西警察学院, 19th Jan. 2017).

¹⁰See n. 1.

¹¹"全国民族团结进步模范集体和模范个人推荐名单公示", 人民日报, 30th Aug. 2019.

¹²关于任免吕伟东等工作人员职务的通知, 鲁政任 [2020]106 号, 山东省人民政府, 30th Dec. 2020; "郑州公安系统改革: 撤销 29 个分局新组建 11 个分局", 澎湃, 20th Oct. 2020.

¹³"全国民族团结..."; "沈亚平", 浙江省人民政府, 7th Nov. 2019; "坚守岗位主动担当 严格管理堵塞漏洞 吉林省公安厅政治安全保卫局政委方保仁率队深入梅河口督导检查国庆中秋"双节"安保工作", 梅河公安发布, via 微信, 7th Oct. 2020; "鼓楼区委中心组学习研究民宗工作", 南京统一战线, 16th Dec. 2020; 关于任免吕伟东... 市政府关于张季峰等同志免职的通知, 苏府人 [2020]24 号, 苏州市人民政府, 15th May 2020; "中共成都市公安局委员会关于巡察整改阶段进展情况的通报", 成都市公安局, 21st Oct. 2020.

¹⁴"马山县公安局国内安全保卫大队大队长、一级警长黄惠多接受审查调查", 中共广西壮族自治区纪律检查委员会, 12th Jan. 2022. For examples from 2021, "国内安全保卫大队", 梅州市大埔县公安局, 21st Oct. 2021; "景洪市公安局 2021 年预算公开说明", 景洪市人民政府, 10th Mar. 2021.



Figure 2: MSS infographic for State Security Education Day 2021. In this tree of state security, political security appears at the top, at the end of a stem from which all other securities (economic, territorial, cyber, cultural, military, nuclear...) branch out. Source: 四川电影电视学院实验中学.

1.2 Xi's revival of political security and its transmission to the MPS

The 1st Bureau's renaming cannot be dismissed as a display of bureaucratic nostalgia at the ministerial level. It reflected the higher CCP leadership's emphasis on political security as a principle guiding legal and security work.¹⁵ These directives reached the ministry in early 2019, as it underwent a purge and reorganisation that affected the 1st Bureau as well.

The bureau name change followed a renewed stress on political security handed down from high levels of the party to the political and legal system, a network of party-state agencies that comprises justice and security agencies. The last Politburo meeting of 2018 approved new *CCP Political and Legal Work Regulations*.¹⁶ They enshrined into party doctrine the duty of political and legal organs' party organisations to tackle "major issues or incidents affecting the state's political security and social stability", seeking Central Committee guidance on state security matters, "especially political security, centred in the security of political power and system security".¹⁷ In mid-January, Xi's speech to the Central Political and Legal Work Conference hailed his Central Committee's measures to "protect political security, social stability and the people's peaceful life".¹⁸ The day after the conference closed, MPS minister Zhao Kezhi

¹⁵For a fuller discussion of political security in CCP political-legal work under Xi and its role in external engagements, see Matthew D. Johnson, "The east rises, borders fade: China's political-legal extrusion in Europe", forthcoming.

¹⁶"中共中央政治局召开会议 审议《中国共产党政法工作条例》 中共中央总书记习近平主持会议", 人民日报, 28th Dec. 2018.

¹⁷"中共中央印发《中国共产党政法工作条例》", 新华社, via 中国政府网, 18th Jan. 2019.

¹⁸"习近平出席中央政法工作会议并发表重要讲话", 新华网, 16th Jan. 2019. That quote from the speech would serve as the title of a commentator article on the front page of the *People's Daily* at the closure of the conference, as well as of the speech's Xinhua summary reproduced in the anthology *On the Governance of China* ("人民日报评论员: 更好维护政治安全社会安定人民安宁", 人民日报, 17th Jan. 2019; 习近平谈治国理政, vol. 3, 外文出版社, 2020, pp. 352 sqq.).



赵克志 admonished assembled subnational public security chiefs to prevent “colour revolutions” by “firmly wielding political security protection”.¹⁹ Within weeks, local public security organs began to implement the ‘political security’ renaming.²⁰ Law enforcement officials heard the party leadership’s demands on political security again that year, less than a month before the Tian’anmen anniversary, at the first National Public Security Work Conference held in 16 years. Xi reminded assembled provincial and city public security chiefs of the need to uphold the “total state security outlook” to “create a secure and stable social and political environment”, forging the “iron-like discipline” and “firm and correct political orientation” of a force “on which the party centre can rely”.²¹

The renaming took place as the 1st Bureau changed leadership, amid bureaucratic reforms and a purge of political-legal cadres.²² In late 2018, MPS vice minister and Interpol chief Meng Hongwei 孟宏伟 was detained by the party’s disciplinary organs.²³ The bureau’s chief until 2018, Sun Lijun 孙力军, remained deputy minister through 2019 until his arrest in 2020.²⁴ The earliest recorded renamings of domestic to political security structures roughly coincided with the appointment of a new 1st Bureau chief, Chen Siyuan 陈思源.²⁵

¹⁹“赵克志：防范抵御“颜色革命”，打好政治安全保卫仗”，新京报，18th Jan. 2019.

²⁰See n. 1. The political security emphasis was also visible at the local level in early-2019, with public security officials stressing the need to “create a secure and stable political and social environment” ahead of the PRC’s 70th anniversary (“[固始] 县召开全县公安工作会议”，Root in Henan, 4th Apr. 2019).

²¹“习近平：坚持政治建警改革强警科技兴警从严治警履行好党和人民赋予的新时代职责使命”，新华网，8th May 2019. Guo Shengkun 郭声琨, secretary of the party’s Central Political and Legal Commission, repeated Xi’s “protect political security” dictum at the meeting. On Xi’s “total state security outlook” (总体国家安全观), see Matthew D. Johnson, “Safeguarding socialism: The origins, evolution and expansion of China’s total security paradigm”, Sinopsis, 16th June 2020, pp. 23 sqq. On the 2003 conference, “五条禁令 非典 银行劫案 2003 年公安工作回眸”，新华网，via Sina, 21st Jan. 2004.

²²Early 2019 MPS structural reforms included units transferred to and from the ministry (“公安部内设机构大调整：多部门整合做强办案部门，设情报指挥中心”，南方都市报，via 搜狐，13th May 2019; 付静 & 石杨，“忠诚之师担当神圣使命 公安铁军书写崭新篇章”，人民公安报 [10th May 2019]，via 中国警察网；“公安边防、警卫部队举行集体换装和入警宣誓仪式”，新华社，1st Jan. 2019). We are grateful to Tobiáš Lipold for drawing our attention to these sources.

²³“公安部副部长孟宏伟涉嫌违法接受国家监委监察调查”，CCDI, 7th Oct. 2018. Meng had already lost his post on the MPS party committee in early 2018, while staying on as vice minister (岳怀让，“公安部副部长、国际刑警组织主席孟宏伟不再担任部党委委员”，澎湃新闻，8th Apr. 2018). Meng was subsequently expelled from the party and received a prison sentence for bribery (“公安部原党委委员、副部长孟宏伟严重违法违纪被开除党籍和公职”，CCDI, 27th Mar. 2019; “公安部原党委委员、副部长、中国海警局原局长孟宏伟受贿案一审宣判”，中华人民共和国最高人民法院，21st Jan. 2020).

²⁴“公安部党委委员、副部长孙力军接受中央纪委国家监委审查调查”，CCDI, 19th Apr. 2020; “国务院任免国家工作人员”，人力资源和社会保障部，8th May 2020. Sun was expelled from the party in 2021 (“公安部原党委委员、副部长孙力军严重违法违纪被开除党籍和公职”，CCDI, 30th Sept. 2021).

²⁵Chen’s appointment was made public in February 2019, the date of the earliest known renamings (see n. 1). He was previously at the Beijing Public Security Bureau (“从北京调入公安部半年后陈思源任部长助理：前任已晋升副部长”，南方都市报，via 搜狐，20th Aug. 2019). However, already in January he visited Macau as the person in charge of an MPS office the 1st Bureau uses as a nameplate (“行政长官崔世安与公安部常务副部长王小洪会面”，澳门特别行政区政府入口网站，30th Jan. 2019; on the office, see section 3.1).



2 Pacifying the frontier: The Chekist roots of CCP political protection

The 2019 restoration of the MPS's core bureau's historical name signalled the Xi era's embrace of a continuity reforms and renamings had obscured. The history of the bureau and its predecessors can elucidate the connotations the party leadership foregrounded by reaffirming its 'political protection' mission. In the Leninist security tradition, the term has become prominent at junctures demanding the imposition of party control on newly seized, or newly challenging, domains.

The circumstances of the CCP's own establishment prompt an understanding of political protection as guarding the party-controlled domain from threats from its frontiers. The Bolsheviks set up and long financed the CCP as one of the outposts combatting those threats — largely through the Comintern, effectively a component of the Soviet foreign intelligence apparatus. The (so far seemingly overlooked) fact that the Soviet intelligence operative in charge of the CCP's 1st Congress happened to report at the time to an organ with 'political protection' in its name felicitously highlights the party's role in Bolshevik policy and anticipates the concept's significance in its future development.

As the CCP evolved into an autonomous entity, its leaders felt an urge to set up a 'Chinese Cheka': cadres sent to the USSR 'to study political protection' would form the core of the CCP's first intelligence organs. Among these, the first one capable of emulating Chekist terror was set up as soon as the CCP managed to control patches of territory. The Political Protection Bureau, the Chinese Soviet's secret police, was a predecessor of the state security organ the CCP, like the other triumphant parties in Stalin's post-war bloc, established upon seizing state power — the MPS. This secret police mission, this section shows, lives on in the MPS's core unit, unaffected by its temporary renaming as something else than 'political protection bureau'.

2.1 A Chekist op gone wrong: The CCP as a creature of Bolshevik political protection

The concept of political protection developed in the Leninist tradition together with the need to safeguard the borders of an expanding communist polity. The Cheka and its successor agencies were instructed to treat physical border security as inseparable from ideological security. The 1922 Politburo order establishing the GPU listed among its roles the "political protection of the borders".²⁶ This implied keeping out counterrevolutionaries as well as counterrevolutionary ideas threatening Soviet rule, a particularly challenging task in the Far East, where the Bolsheviks struggled to establish control.²⁷

The CCP's very establishment as a Bolshevik satellite group should be seen in the context of Leninist intelligence agencies' work to protect the nascent communist state from threats from the east.²⁸ The Comintern envoy likely responsible for funding the

²⁶Reproduced in, e.g., *Ф.Э. Дзержинский и охрана границ Советского государства*, Воениздат, 1977, p. 86.

²⁷В. А. Ширяев & Н. А. Егоров, "Пресечение подрывной деятельности против Советской России на Дальнем востоке в 1920-е годы", *Военно-исторический журнал* 624 (Apr. 2012).

²⁸Nominally an alliance of revolutionary movements, the Comintern was an instrument of Soviet political policy, which treated foreign communist parties as sections of the Moscow-led International. The



emerging CCP's activities, in particular the organisation of its first congress in 1921, was a military intelligence officer in the Far Eastern Republic, a Bolshevik-controlled buffer state.²⁹ By the time of the CCP's first congress, the Far Eastern Republic had merged military intelligence into its civilian counterpart, State Political Protection – in turn absorbed by the OGPU upon the republic's reunification into Russia the following year.³⁰

As the CCP evolved from an underfunded component of Bolshevik external security into an armed force imposing Soviet rule on conquered Chinese territory, it developed its own political protection structures. Like much of the party, and later state, apparatus, the young CCP's security organs learnt from their Soviet counterparts. In 1925, Zhou Enlai told Chen Geng 陈赓, later one of the PLA's ten senior generals, that he could become "China's Cheka".³¹ The next year, the CCP Central Committee sent Chen to the Soviet Union to study "Soviet political protection work".³² Chen and other Soviet-trained operatives would indeed hold senior roles in the CCP's first intelligence organs, set up under Zhou's leadership from the late 1920s.³³ The concept of political protection was inscribed in the CCP's institutional make-up in 1931, as the party's declaration of a Soviet state created a need to pacify these areas. The State Political Protection Bureau (国家政治保卫局) was established to "investigate, suppress and eliminate" counterrevolutionary activities.³⁴ Like with its Russian predecessor, the Bureau's systematic use of torture made its vast investigations quickly lead to the execution of thousands of imagined enemies among party and Red Army ranks and

Comintern Executive Committee's International Liaison Department (Отдел международной связи, OMS) – its "brain and inner sanctum", as a Comintern leader's widow put it; "the world communist movement's nervous system", in the words of an OMS head's son – functioned as one of the Bolsheviks' intelligence agencies (Aino Kuusinen, *Der Gott stürzt seine Engel*, Molden, 1972, p. 49; В. И. Пятницкий, *Осип Пятницкий и Коминтерн на весах истории*, Харвест, 2004, p. 174). The OMS maintained close relations and cooperated with the other Soviet external intelligence units, the GPU Foreign Department and the Red Army Intelligence Directorate, the GRU's predecessor (idem, *Осип Пятницкий и Коминтерн на весах истории*, pp. 184 sqq.). The OMS set up an illegal liaison station in Shanghai in September 1921 (И. Сотникова, "Шанхайский пункт Отдела международной связи ИККИ в 1920-1930-х гг.", *Проблемы Дальнего Востока* 5 (2014); for a more carefully sourced account of its later history, see Frederick S. Litten, "The Noulens Affair", *The China Quarterly* 138 (1994)).

²⁹Vladimir Neiman (Viktor Berg), known in China under the pseudonym Nikolsky, began serving in the Far Eastern Republic People's Revolutionary Army's intelligence department in 1921. Neiman, sent to China by the Comintern's Far Eastern Secretariat, supplied funds to Comintern workers in China (А. Каргунова, "Нейман-Никольский – участник I съезда КПК", *Проблемы Дальнего Востока* 4 [2006]). A year after the first congress, the CCP was still almost entirely dependent on Comintern funds (石川禎浩, *中国共产党成立史*, 岩波書店, 2001, p. 274). A better-known Comintern envoy who attended the first congress, Henk Sneevliet, limited himself, in his own account, to following the secretariat's instructions relayed by Nikolsky (*Bericht des Genossen H. Maring für die Executive*, via Archief Henk Sneevliet, 11th July 1922, p. 2).

³⁰М.В. Чепик, "Военная контрразведка в системе органов безопасности Дальнего Востока в 1920–1922 гг.", *Армия и общество* 3 (2013); А.Г. Тепляков, "Непрофессиональный террор: деятельность и кадры госполитохраны Дальневосточной республики (1920–1922)", *Уроки Октября и практики советской системы 1920–1950-е гг.* Политическая энциклопедия, 2018.

³¹陈赓传, 当代中国出版社, 2003, p. 55.

³²Party-approved historiography attributes the words to Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, then the CCP general secretary (穆欣, 陈赓大将军, 上海人民出版社, p. 50; cf. 陈赓传, p. 41).

³³Guo Xuezhong, *China's Security State: Philosophy, Evolution, and Politics*, CUP, 2012, pp. 306 sqq.; Peter Mattis & Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer*, Naval Institute Press, 2019, ch. 1; 穆玉敏, "鲜为人知的'北京特科': 陈赓组建的秘密机构", *档案春秋* 1 (2009).

³⁴中華蘇維埃共和國國家政治保衛局組織綱要, 27th Jan. 1932, reproduced in 韩延龙 & 常兆儒, eds., *革命根据地法制文献选编(中)*, 中国社会科学出版社, 2013, pp. 289 sqq. See also 赵晓耕 & 曲词, "苏区'国家政治保卫局'与肃反扩大化问题辨正", *北方学* 4 (2008).



the population of the Soviet areas, in a campaign of terror only stopped by the Long March.³⁵

Although the CCP would eventually turn against its Soviet parent and retroactively disavow much of its influence, the early CCP security system's nature as a local Cheka has not left the CCP's institutional memory — as it were, Chekist pride has proved too resilient for the Sino-Soviet split to erase. In a 1941 speech, two years after the Political Protection Bureau's roles had been absorbed into those of the Central Social Affairs Department (中央社会部), Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 reminded security personnel that, just like the Bolsheviks could not have maintained the success of the October Revolution without protection work, “a good CCP member should regard being in charge of protection work as the highest honour”.³⁶ In 2015, an article in a PLA journal recalled that the Chinese Soviet government “learnt and borrowed from the Soviet Union's Chekist system's successful experience in the foundation of the state to establish the Cheka of the East that the CCP created”.³⁷

2.2 The MPS's core bureau: The ‘Chinese Cheka’ from Mao to Xi

Faced with the task of pacifying China's territory and population after seizing state power in 1949, the CCP institutionalised Chekist political security structures into a ministry, with its first numbered unit dedicated to political protection. The MPS Political Protection Bureau (政治保卫局), the ministry's largest and most powerful, was tasked with maintaining political order and countering hostile intelligence forces.³⁸ Subsequent bureaucratic reforms, including the institutional disruptions of the Cultural Revolution, did not dilute the political security mission of the MPS core unit, renamed Domestic Security Bureau in 1998.³⁹

Even while removed from the 1st Bureau's name, political protection remained in the spirit, as well as the letter, of its purview. MPS regulations defining criminal cases handled by its subunits have consistently included categories of activity “endangering state security”, labels regularly used to criminalise dissent, such as “inciting subversion of state power” and “separatism”.⁴⁰ Far from reforming away from the Chekist tradition, updates in 2015 and 2020 added further political offences, respectively incorporating newly defined manifestations of “extremism” and making explicit common citizens' liability for divulging “state secrets”.⁴¹ Government documents continued to

³⁵Michael Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics: a history*, Duke UP, 2005, pp. 39 sqq., 66, 91.

³⁶Yancheng speech, quoted in 郭華倫, *中國共產黨史論*, 國立政治大學國際關係研究會, 1968, p. 228; cf. 刘少奇年谱, via gov.cn, 中央文献出版社, 1996.

³⁷宋磊, 张丹薇 & 尹晶晶, “国家政治保卫局的历史贡献与现实启示”, 西安政治学院学报 6 (2015).

³⁸Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People: Mao's Secret Agents, 1949–1967*, CUP, 2013, pp. 30 sq.

³⁹Except for a two-year interruption in the 1950s, the bureau maintained its original name until the PLA's takeover of the ministry, which turned it into its Political Protection Group in 1970 (政治保卫组) (Dutton, *op. cit.*, p. 362 n. 30; Schoenhals, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 sq.). It became the MPS Bureau for Investigating Counterrevolutionaries (对反革命侦察局) during the 1983 reform of the security apparatus and reverted to its first name in 1989 (“公安部内设机构沿革”, 湖北法治网, 25th Dec. 2006).

⁴⁰Crimes against “state security” and “social order” under the 1st Bureau's purview further include treason, espionage, illegally obtaining and possessing state secrets and insulting national symbols (公安部关于印发《公安部刑事案件管辖分工规定》的通知, 公通字 [1998]80 号, reproduced in 公安法律规章司法解释全书, 中国法制出版社, 2005, pp. 3-152 sqq.).

⁴¹The 2015 amendment reflected the addition to the *Criminal Law* of crimes such as “possessing materials that propagate extremism” (Art. 120-6) and the passing of the new *Counter-Terrorism Law*, both introducing new legal instruments to support ethnic, religious and political persecution (公安部关于印发《公安部刑事案件管辖分工补充规定 (三)》的通知, 公通字 [2015]36 号, via 崇义县人民政府; 公安部关于印发

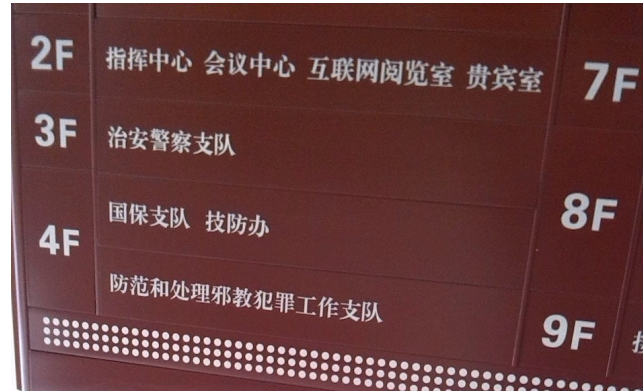


Figure 3: A sign inside the Bengbu 蚌埠 Public Security Bureau in 2013, showing domestic security and anti-cult units on the same floor. Courtesy of Wu Lebao 吴乐宝.

describe domestic security organs as being responsible for “political protection” and maintaining “social and political stability”.⁴²

Pacifying the frontiers of permissible belief also falls under the 1st Bureau’s purview. In the last few decades the bureau has, together with a system of linked structures, worked to suppress religious organisations outside those the party controls. While the anti-cult bureaucracy developed to combat Falun Gong, a qigong-inspired group initially supported by the MPS⁴³ that the CCP later came to see as a threat, its scope extends to other heterodox movements.⁴⁴ The 1st Bureau’s role in the suppression of Falun Gong goes back to the campaign’s early days.⁴⁵ The MPS set up a dedicated Anti-Cult Bureau (反邪教局), its 26th, which then gradually merged back into the

《公安部刑事案件管辖分工规定》的通知 (2020); cf. 中华人民共和国刑法 (修订), via 中国人大网; 中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法, via 中国人大网.

⁴²中共祁东县委机构编制委员会关于印发祁东县公安局主要职责内设机构和人员编制规定的通知, 祁编 [2010]42 号; 安康市人民政府办公室关于印发安康市公安局主要职责内设机构和人员编制规定的通知, 安政办发 [2015]157 号; “未阳市公安局机构介绍”, 未阳市人民政府, 21st Nov. 2018.

⁴³In 1995, Falun Gong’s founder launched a book at an MPS university. Ye Hao 叶浩, a senior Falun Gong figure since the movement’s origins with a central role in its online presence, retired from the MPS in 1996 as a deputy bureau chief level cadre with the predecessor unit of the MPS Internet Security Protection (11th) Bureau (方言, “叶浩——法轮功之‘王’”, 天津市反邪教协会, 25th Nov. 2010; cf. 国务院授予陶驹驹等三百七十二名同志人民警察警衔命令, 国函 [1992]185 号). Ye was a career MPS cadre who in the Mao era worked for the ministry’s 1st Research Institute, specialised in police weapons, surveillance equipment and other technology (方言, *op. cit.*; Murray Scot Tanner, “Changing Windows on a Changing China: The Evolving ‘Think Tank’ System and the Case of the Public Security Sector”, *The China Quarterly* 171 [2002]; “公安部第一研究所简介”, 公安部第一研究所). The MPS’s support is also narrated in Falun Gong materials, as relayed in, e.g., David A. Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*, Columbia UP, 2007, p. 223.

⁴⁴Raids on and other operations against the Mentuhui 门徒会, one of a number of Chinese Christian sects that emerged in the 1980s, by local equivalents of the 1st Bureau illustrate this point (“阿拉善警方抓获 5 名‘门徒会’邪教人员”, 平安阿拉善, via 微信, 19th June 2020; 石峥 & 赵冉, “河北承德县公安查处一起‘门徒会’邪教组织非法活动”, 长城网, via 人民网, 19th July 2021; “平昌公安开展反邪教宣传教育进校园活动”, 平昌长安网, 16th Sept. 2021; “眉山捣毁两个邪教窝点”, 眉山头条, via 网易, 2nd Nov. 2021). For a recent treatment of the movement, see Yuan Hao, “The Transformation of Mentuhui (Society of Disciples)”, *Shades of Gray in the Changing Religious Markets of China*, ed. by Fenggang Yang, Jonathan Pettit & Chris White, Brill, 2021.

⁴⁵In 1999, as the campaign began in earnest, it was the 1st Bureau that ordered local public security to monitor the movement (河北日报, 1st Aug. 1999, cited in James W. Tong, *Revenge of the Forbidden City: The Suppression of the Falungong in China, 1999-2005*, OUP, 2009, pp. 37 sq.). As early as 2000, active and former 1st Bureau officials participated in activities seeking international support for Falun Gong repression. See



1st Bureau.⁴⁶ A nation-wide party-state bureaucracy that coordinated anti-cult work, anchored in the ‘610 Office’, also overlapped with that under the 1st Bureau until its absorption into the MPS in 2018.⁴⁷ The abolition of the 610 system may be seen as linked to the purge of the security apparatus, which also affected anti-cult cadres.⁴⁸ In 2019, the anti-cult bureau was reconstituted as the fourth, led by a cadre transferred from the first.⁴⁹ The 4th Bureau’s new name suggests that it has taken over the duties of the abolished 610 system.⁵⁰

Geoff Wade & Jichang Lulu, “The China Association for Friendship (中国友谊促进会) and its links with the Ministry of Public Security”, forthcoming.

⁴⁶The 26th Bureau’s chief between 2003 and 2007 might have been the last not to concurrently lead the 1st (“河北省常委、政法委书记张越接受组织调查”, CCDI, 16th Apr. 2016). The bureaus shared at least a deputy chief by 2008, and three consecutive chiefs since 2011 (“孙志强同志简历”, 天津纪检监察网, 27th Nov. 2020; “白少康同志简历”, CCDI, 6th May 2019; “孙力军被免去公安部副部长职务 上个月已被查”, 中国经济网, 8th May 2020; “从北京调入公安部...”). In addition to the leadership, the bureaus came to share some sections, suggesting they had effectively merged by the late 2010s (“全省公安‘3·29’培训班开班仪式在我院举行”, 湖北警官学院, 29th Mar. 2018; “中央和国家机关拟推荐的第八届首都民族团结进步奖先进集体、先进个人名单公示”, 旗帜网, 29th June 2018; “红色基因筑牢警魂 不忘初心忠诚前行”, MPS, via 新京报, 4th Sept. 2018).

⁴⁷At the local level, 610 Offices were often run by public security officials in charge of their respective 1st Bureau equivalents (关于调整局党委成员工作分工的通知, 张公委 [2014]1 号, 中共张家港市公安局委员会; “吉林省公务员局 吉林省公安厅关于表彰全省公安系统优秀基层单位和优秀基层民警的决定”, 吉林省公务员局, Jan. 2015; “萧县公安局局党委委员、副局长李万刚”, 萧县人民政府, 28th Oct. 2016; “南通市通州区公安局领导分工”, 南通市通州区人民政府, 15th Nov. 2016). On the system under the Central Leading Small Group on Preventing and Dealing With the Cult Issue (中央防范和处理邪教问题领导小组办公室) and its (‘610’) office, see Tong, *op. cit.*, ch. 6, whose claims should however be differentially assessed based on the authoritativeness of the sources cited. At least three 610 Office chiefs in the 2010s were concurrently MPS deputy ministers (“李东生涉嫌严重违纪违法接受组织调查”, CCDI, 20th Dec. 2013; “刘金国不再担任 610 办公室主任, 现任中纪委副书记”, 澎湃新闻, 26th May 2015; “公安部黄明副部长到新会展派出所视察指导基层警务工作”, 成都市公安局高新技术产业开发区分局, 21st Nov. 2017). The system was abolished in 2018, with the leading small group and the 610 Office respectively absorbed by the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission and the MPS (“中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》”, 新华网, 21st Mar. 2018). During 2018 and 2019, the reform spread to the subnational level, collapsing provincial to county-level 610 offices into the corresponding security organs (“江西省机构改革方案获中央批复 (附机构设置表)”, 修水县人民政府, 26th Oct. 2018; “安徽省机构改革详情公布”, 安徽纪检监察网, 31st Oct. 2018; 黑龙江省关于市县机构改革的总体意见, 黑发 [2018]44 号, via 黑龙江省委机构编制委员会办公室; “中共昭通市委办公室、昭通市人民政府办公室关于印发《昭通市深化市级机构改革实施方案》的通知”, via 昭通市生态环境局, 18th Feb. 2019). Any lingering local 610 offices would likely have already been mere nameplates of local 1st Bureau equivalents to which the reform would have meant no change in practice. On the implications of local coalescence between agencies, see Charmian Goh et al., “Unbundling systems: Foreign affairs reform in China’s provinces”, *Sinopsis*, 11th Apr. 2021, p. 4, and references therein.

⁴⁸The purge of 610 Office deputy head Peng Bo 彭波 for reasons that included “deviating” from party policy on “online public opinion struggle” in turn links to the earlier reform of the cyberspace affairs system, at the intersection of security and propaganda (“原中央防范和处理邪教问题领导小组办公室副主任彭波严重违纪违法被开除党籍”, CCDI, 17th Aug. 2021; “原中央防范和处理邪教问题领导小组办公室副主任彭波受贿一案一审开庭”, 最高人民法院, 13th Dec. 2021; for Peng’s past as a cyberspace affairs cadre, Jichang Lulu, Filip Jirouš & Rachel Lee, “Xi’s centralisation of external propaganda: SCIO and the Central Propaganda Department”, *Sinopsis*, 25th Jan. 2021, n. 16).

⁴⁹“从北京调入公安部...”; “全国公安机关集中销毁邪教反宣品试点活动在昆明举行”, 云南省公安厅, 19th July 2021. The new anti-cult chief, Sang Linyu 桑麟榆, was 1st and 26th Bureau deputy chief as late as 2017 (*新世纪乌记事 (2017)*, 中共党史出版社, p. 19; Wade & Lulu, *op. cit.*). The 4th Bureau was previously in charge of border administration (張起厚, “中共公安部的序列號職能局”, *展望與探索* 9.3 [2011]).

⁵⁰The 4th Bureau is now the Bureau for Work on Preventing and Dealing with Evil Cult Crimes (防范和处理邪教犯罪工作局), echoing the full name of the former leading small group and its office (“全国公安厅局长会议代表参观中国警察博物馆重温人民公安史”, MPS, via 百色市公安局, 21st Jan. 2021).



3 Expanding the frontier: The 1st Bureau in Hong Kong and abroad

The CCP's most significant territorial acquisition since the Mao era renewed the challenges of bringing an unruly society under totalitarian control. The task of pacifying Hong Kong engaged the resources of 'China's Cheka' long before the 1997 transfer. After it, more robust institutional resources had to be deployed faster than a tactical compromise with the UK contemplated. 1st Bureau cadre are now among the leaders of Hong Kong's new state security police. The accelerated absorption of the mock-diasystemic colony into the totalitarian one-party state renewed the importance of political protection, the concept that had defined CCP rule each time it seized territory — and the CCP's own birth as an outpost of Chekist protection. The urgency of this task may indeed explain the outburst of Chekist rhetoric the party centre sent down the political-legal system, causing the MPS's core to revert to its old name.

Today's Political Security Protection Bureau's mission near the border of the party's controlled territory is to help terminate Hong Kong's liberties. Its purview does not, however, cease at the border. Political security units play a role in policing areas of Myanmar controlled by CCP-supported armed groups, a domain the CCP treats as combining the domestic and the foreign. Beyond these blurred borders, the Bureau joins the CCP's influence agencies, spread across party, state and military structures and used to coopt elite figures into CCP-compliant, consonant or innocuous attitudes. The 1st Bureau leads MPS influence operations abroad, using classic Leninist 'friendship' tropes to manipulate those it cannot subdue.

The Bureau's overseas operations are not disjoint from the larger CCP security system's efforts to enlist foreign justice and law enforcement into collaborating with its extraterritorial projection. In these exchanges, the superficially plausible presentation of state security as equivalent to law enforcement under democratic control acts as the outermost shell of political protection work.

3.1 Procrastinate no further: Political protection in Hong Kong

The 1st Bureau's responsibility for MPS Hong Kong work long precedes the hand-over. By 1983, the MPS operated from Xinhua News Agency's Hong Kong headquarters, sharing security and intelligence tasks with the new MSS.⁵¹ In the aftermath of the Tian'anmen massacre, the 1st Bureau was involved in countering Operation Yellowbird, an effort to smuggle democratic leaders and intellectuals into the the British colony.⁵² In 1994, the bureau received a dedicated external nameplate, the MPS Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (THKMAO, 公安部台港澳事务办公室).⁵³ For much of its recent existence, the office has been led by the 1st Bureau chief.⁵⁴ Illustrating the 1st Bureau's role in Hong Kong, it was its THKMAO nameplate that the

⁵¹ 许家屯, *许家屯香港回忆录*, 联经, 1993, ch. 2; Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong UP, 2010, pp. 94 sq.

⁵² 江迅, “黄雀行动背後港人捨命救危内情”, 亚洲周刊, 14th June 2009.

⁵³ 張起厚, *op. cit.*; “国务院办公厅关于印发公安部职能配置、内设机构和人员编制方案的通知”, 国办发 [1994]45 号, in “公安机关组织管理条例实用问答”, 中国法制出版社, 2006, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Out of four recent 1st Bureau chiefs, only Bai Xiaokang 白少康 (2011–2013) may not have concurrently headed the office (“尚冰、陈智敏兼任国家网信办副主任”, 中国经济网, via 人民网, 23rd Jan. 2015; “特區與內地簽署通報機制新安排文本”, GovHK 香港政府一站通, 14th Dec. 2017; “白少康同志简历”, “行政长官崔世安与公安部常务副部长王小洪会面”; cf. n. 60). The 1st Bureau-THKMAO arrangement is mirrored at the subnational level (“湖南省郴州市公安局 2018 年度部门决算说明”, 郴州市公安局,



ministry used to sign a criminal information exchange agreement with Hong Kong law enforcement authorities in 2017.⁵⁵

The party reasserted political security as the MPS's central task as it sped up efforts to impose it on Hong Kong. The regulations that define the 1st Bureau's purview reflect this urgency: their 2020 amendment tasks the bureau with investigating the crime of "disrespecting the national anthem", added to PRC law as booing the *March of the Volunteers* became an increasingly popular form of protest.⁵⁶ The 2019 transmission of the revitalisation of political security through the CCP political-legal system reached Hong Kong as well: a week after the National Public Security Conference, the PRC government's Hong Kong Liaison Office discussed it in a study session.⁵⁷ As media commentary in Hong Kong noted at the time, the proposed extradition bill that would lead to large protests in the spring of 2019 was first proposed by the city's security bureau barely a month after the MPS minister's warning on "colour revolutions".⁵⁸

The foregrounding of the 1st Bureau's political security purview culminated in its embedding in Hong Kong's new state security police. In 2020, the new state security law that formalised the abrupt termination of the 'One Country, Two Systems' model and Hong Kong's judicial independence created a Hong Kong state security office, with leading roles held by MPS and MSS officials.⁵⁹ The MPS's participation built on the 1st Bureau's existing Hong Kong affairs portfolio: the state security office's inaugural MPS deputy director is Li Jiangzhou 李江舟, a former 1st Bureau chief and long-time official with the bureau's Hong Kong affairs office.⁶⁰

3.2 The near abroad: The MPS across the Myanmar border

Evidence presented below indicates the 1st Bureau's purview extends to operations in areas held by PRC-supported armed groups in inside Myanmar territory. MPS extraterritorial operations, such as those under the 'Skynet' (天网) initiative, have included repatriating fugitive PRC officials from Myanmar.⁶¹ The armed group-held areas, where CCP security agencies operate with relative freedom, illustrate the transition between political protection's domestic and extraterritorial domains.

30th Sept. 2019; "沈亚平"; "机构设置", 盱眙县人民政府, 1st Aug. 2020; "区公安局机构设置", 南通市海门区公安局, 8th Dec. 2020; "盐城市人民政府关于刘杰、朱长征同志职务任免的通知", 6th May 2021).

⁵⁵ "《内地与香港特别行政区关于就采取刑事强制措施或刑事检控等情况相互通报机制的安排》签署", 新华社, via 中国政府网, 14th Dec. 2017.

⁵⁶ 公安部关于印发《公安部刑事案件管辖分工规定》的通知 (2020). The offence was added to the PRC *Criminal Law* in 2017 ("中华人民共和国刑法修正案(十)", NPC, 4th Nov. 2017; 中华人民共和国刑法(2020年修正文本), Art. 299). Cf. "港区人大代表: "嘘"国歌是一种无知的行为", 外交部驻香港特别行政区特派员公署, 20th Nov. 2015.

⁵⁷ "中央政府驻港联络办召开领导班子会议 传达学习贯彻全国公安工作会议精神", 中央政府驻港联络办, 15th May 2019.

⁵⁸ 吕秉權, "移交逃犯修例 與國家安全大背景", 明報, 22nd May 2019.

⁵⁹ "中华人民共和国香港特别行政区维护国家安全法", NPC, 1st July 2020, Art. 48. One of the office's deputy directors, Sun Qingye 孙青野 a/k/a Sun Wenqing 孙文清, comes from the MSS ("Guangdong Party veteran Zheng Yanxiong appointed as head of central govt's office for safeguarding national security in HK", *Global Times* [3rd July 2020]; "Changes to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List since January 1, 2021", U.S. Department of the Treasury, 22nd Mar. 2021, p. 23).

⁶⁰ "两位"老公安"已调往驻港国安公署任职", 北京青年报-政知道, via 腾讯网, 25th Feb. 2021; "譚耀宗: 駐港國安公署任命人選合理", 文匯報, 3rd July 2020. Li was at the 1st Bureau's THKMAO nameplate since 2002, heading it as of 2012; in 2016 he became police liaison at the Hong Kong Liaison Office ("我校李江舟校友 2020 年 7 月 4 日 国务院任命为驻港国安公署副署长", PPSUC, 9th Nov. 2020).

⁶¹ 姜洁, "“红通人员”强涛、李建东被缉捕并遣返", 人民日报, 3rd June 2020.



Figure 4: Yunnan public security official Guo Bao (left) meets United Wa State Party general secretary Bao Youxiang in Wa State, Myanmar, Dec. 2021. Source: 佤邦新闻.

The first public use of the 1st Bureau's new name recorded in this paper occurred in a Myanmar work context.⁶² In his mid-2019 visit to Lincang, deputy bureau chief Gu Bochong urged local public security officials to “bring into play Lincang’s advantageous location along the border to do intelligence work well and improve capacity building abroad”.⁶³ Like much of the province, Lincang borders areas of Myanmar held by PRC-backed ethnic armed groups.⁶⁴

Public security structures play a prominent role in the province’s relationship with these areas: a former deputy chief of the Yunnan Public Security Department now acts as an envoy travelling into Myanmar territory for talks with ethnic armed groups (Fig. 4).⁶⁵ In addition to providing equipment and other support to the groups’ law enforcement bodies,⁶⁶ Yunnan public security organs themselves dispatch personnel

⁶²See section 1.1.

⁶³朱清然, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴These relationships partially continue the CCP’s support for the defunct Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The CCP’s imprint is apparent in, e.g., the United Wa State Party’s (UWSP) political structures, inherited from the CPB and mirroring the CCP’s (Tom Kramer, *The United Wa State Party: Narco-Army or Ethnic Nationalist Party?*, East-West Center, 2007, p. 37; for recent work on Wa society and politics in China and Myanmar, see Bertil Lintner, *The Wa of Myanmar and China’s Quest for Global Dominance*, NIAS Press, 2021; Magnus Fiskesjö, *Stories from an Ancient Land: Perspectives on Wa History and Culture*, Berghahn, 2021). The UWSP-led Wa State People’s Political Consultative Conference, modelled on the CCP’s top united front organ, illustrates the CCP’s enduring organisational legacy (“佤邦政协第二届全邦委员会会议邦康举行”, 缅甸第二特区佤邦人民政府新闻局, via Sina, 15th Dec. 2016; “佤邦政协第三届委员代表会议 18日上午开幕”, 佤邦新闻, via Youtube, 20th Mar. 2021).

⁶⁵Former PSD deputy chief Guo Bao 郭宝 met UWSP general secretary Bao Youxiang 鲍有祥 in late December 2021 (“鲍有祥主席亲切会见中国云南省涉缅办副主任、邻国涉外事务专员郭宝”, 佤邦新闻, via Youtube, 21st Dec. 2021). In 2019, Guo visited both Wa State and Mong La, held by the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), another CPB-descended group (“肖明亮副主席等我邦领导亲切会见中国云南省禁毒委副主任郭宝一行”, 缅甸第二特区佤邦人民政府新闻局, via Sina, 24th Dec. 2019; “吴再林主席亲切会见中国云南省禁毒委副主任郭宝一行”, 缅甸掸邦东部第四特区资讯网, 1st July 2019; “中国云南省禁毒委副主任郭宝一行到访我区”, 缅甸掸邦东部第四特区资讯网, via Sina, 27th Dec. 2019). For Guo’s career and his identification with the cross-border envoy, see “云南任免周建忠、郭宝、李翌、李翌职务”, 经济日报, 7th Aug. 2019; “郭宝副厅长看望慰问英勇牺牲民警李敬忠家属”, 云南省公安厅. The envoy’s name’s pronunciation happens to differ only in tone from the abbreviation of the 1st Bureau’s old name (国保), and its spelling only in one character from the bureau’s affectionate homophone ‘national treasure’ (国宝).

⁶⁶Examples abound. A Yunnan county’s public security bureau donated motorcycles to Wa State police in 2019 (“中国云南省孟连县公安局向佤邦司法委警察局捐赠一批警用摩托车”, 缅甸第二特区佤邦人民政府新闻局, via Sina, 20th Dec. 2019). A prefecture-level bureau has offered training to NDAA law enforcement (“中国西双版纳州与缅甸掸邦东部第四特区警务会谈”, 缅甸掸邦东部第四特区资



into their controlled territory to collect intelligence and perform arrests. In a 2014 case, after a month-long investigation, PRC public security officers arrested in a hotel in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin and “brought to justice” a fugitive CCP cadre, with the involvement of “Myanmar police” (likely referring to armed-group forces) lasting only the hours it took to hand him over across the border.⁶⁷ In 2019, Yunnan police sent a team into Myanmar to locate and detain a fugitive “with the help of local police”, again with less than a day needed between his capture and repatriation from Wa State.⁶⁸ Yunnan public security personnel have also conducted operations infiltrating drug trafficking groups in Kokang.⁶⁹

This engagement with Myanmar directly involves the political protection system centred at the MPS 1st Bureau. Yunnan local-level domestic security personnel have participated in visits to ethnic armed group-controlled areas.⁷⁰ 1st Bureau analogues at the county level and below recruit Burmese translators, with duties such as their unit’s “day-to-day contact with Myanmar”.⁷¹ Security-protection organs recruit Burmese translators as far from the border as Liaoning.⁷²

3.3 The 1st Bureau’s operations overseas

The 1st Bureau’s activities are not limited to the PRC’s territory or border areas. Its involvement in global influence operations points to the party’s understanding of political protection as including the international domain.

The MPS External Liaison Office (对外联络办公室) is likely a 1st Bureau nameplate. As with the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao affairs unit, multiple local government sources identify external liaison offices as nameplates of local 1st Bureau equivalents.⁷³ At the central level, personnel overlap between the bureau and the office is consistent with a nameplate relationship.⁷⁴ The office lacks the public visibility of other MPS

讯网, 12th June 2017). The Lincang PSB’s long-term cooperation with Kokang counterparts has includes “intelligence sharing” and the transfer of over a hundred fugitives in less than a decade (“我区与中国临沧市举行边境事务会晤”, 果敢自治区, 19th Oct. 2016). Pointing to the importance of these relationships, in 2021 a county-level public security bureau that conducts exchanges with ethnic armed groups reduced its annual budget for receiving delegations by nearly 40%, citing as the main reason that the pandemic limited cooperation with security forces across the border (“景洪市公安局 2021 年预算公开说明”).

⁶⁷“我省“猎狐 2015”专项行动取得新突破”, 河南省公安厅, 28th Apr. 2015.

⁶⁸朱紫阳, “云南普洱警方抓获一名公安部 A 级通缉令逃犯”, 人民网, 26th Aug. 2019.

⁶⁹“杨谦: 智勇双全除毒魔”, 人民公安 17 (2020).

⁷⁰“中缅双边警方在双版纳边境会谈”, 西双版纳傣族自治州人民政府, 21st Aug. 2012.

⁷¹“333010035”, 泸水市公安局, via 华图, 2021.

⁷²“2018 年度辽宁省公安系统考试录用公务员 (人民警察) 职位信息表”, 辽宁人事考试网.

⁷³For a sample showing this identification from the province to the county level, attested between 1985 and 2020, in one case already using the new political security name, see “武汉市志”, 武汉地方志编纂委员会办公室, 第六卷 政治 (下); “武进区人民政府工作部门及直属单位”, 无尽年鉴 2011; “市政府办公室关于印发昆山市公安局主要职责内设机构和人员编制规定的通知”, 昆山市人民政府, 昆政办发 [2012]89 号, 7th Aug. 2012; “陕西省人民政府人事任免”, 陕西省人民政府, 政府公报 2014 年第 4 期, 4th Mar. 2014; “关于常州市公安局金坛分局下设机构更名的通知”, 坛公局 [2016]79 号, 3rd Aug. 2016; “常熟市公安局 2017 年部门预算”, 常熟市公安局, 14th Feb. 2017; “高邮市公安局内设机构及下属单位”, 高邮市公安局, 10th Jan. 2018; “区公安局机构设置”.

⁷⁴Former 1st Bureau chief Tan Songqiu 谭松球 concurrently led the External Liaison Office (中共公安部系统调查研究, 法務部調查局, 1995, p. 203; 江迅, “黄雀行动背後港人捨命救危内情”, 亞洲週刊 23 (June 2009), cf. 杨伟民, “香港反“港独”作家江迅离世死因引争议, 医院角色受质疑, 多名评论员呼吁调查”, 环球时报, 18th Oct. 2021; on Tan’s career, see Wade & Lulu, *op. cit.*). Former 1st Bureau deputy chief and External Liaison Office head Liu Jun 刘钧 further instantiates the overlap (陈浩良, 韩纪民 & 文清, 开国中将韩振纪, via 中红网, 解放军出版社, 2015; a longer biography of unclear origin appeared on obituary websites of uncertain authoritative in 2013: “公安部原对外联络办公室主任刘钧同志”, 天堂纪念网, 23rd Oct. 2013, on which website cf. “深圳孝爱天下科技有限公司”, 爱企查.). On Li Wenda 李



external-facing units.⁷⁵ Descriptions of the office's activities and its use of front companies and other entities typically involved in intelligence work indicate that the office's focus might be on covert activity.⁷⁶

Media reports based on leaked Malaysian government documents offer a glimpse into the 1st Bureau's intelligence capabilities and its involvement in international operations. In 2016, the 1st Bureau's then-chief Sun Lijun assured Malaysian officials that PRC organs were conducting "full operational surveillance" of Hong Kong-based reporters of a US newspaper investigating corruption involving a Malaysian government fund.⁷⁷ US court documents also accuse Sun Lijun of hiring a Republican fundraiser to lobby for the deportation of a fugitive PRC businessman.⁷⁸

The operation shows the 1st Bureau's use of networks active in US influence work over several election cycles. A defendant in the Trump administration influence case that involved the 1st Bureau chief is the daughter of a couple involved in illegal donations to the Clinton campaign in 1997.⁷⁹ A further defendant in the case had previously been charged with illegally contributing to Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign.⁸⁰

The 1st Bureau chief's broad mandate to negotiate in the US and Malaysian influence cases signals the organ's importance within the political system. According to a media account of leaked meeting minutes, Sun Lijun conveyed to Malaysian officials a PRC offer to use the country's "leverage on other nations" to stop investigations on the Malaysian fund.⁸¹ The indictment in the Trump administration lobbying case quotes

文达, another 1st Bureau and External Liaison Office cadre, see Alex Joske, "Secret police: The Ministry of Public Security's clandestine foreign operations", *Sinopsis*, 25th Jan. 2022, p. 5.

⁷⁵E.g., the MPS maintains a unit dedicated to Interpol cooperation (張起厚, *op. cit.*).

⁷⁶Joske, *op. cit.*, where links are also discussed between the External Liaison Office and the family of Marshal Ye Jianying 叶剑英, historically linked with military intelligence.

⁷⁷According to minutes of meetings leaked to the *Wall Street Journal*, Sun said the PRC was tapping the journalists' residences, offices and electronic devices to "establish all links that [*Wall Street Journal* Hong Kong] has with Malaysia-related individuals" (Tom Wright & Bradley Hope, "China Offered to Bail Out Troubled Malaysian Fund in Return for Deals", *The Wall Street Journal* [7th Jan. 2019]).

⁷⁸Aruna Viswanatha & Rebecca Ballhaus, "New Details Revealed of RNC Fundraiser's Lobbying for China", *The Wall Street Journal* (24th July 2020); *United States v. Nickie Mali Lum Davis*, Information, D. Haw., 17th Aug. 2020. The newspaper story refers to Sun as vice minister, while the court document calls the individual in question a minister. A later press release on an indictment in the case referred to him as a vice minister ("U.S. Entertainer/Businessman and Malaysian National Charged with Back-Channel Lobbying Campaign to Drop 1MDB Investigation and Remove Chinese Dissident from U.S.", US Department of Justice, 11th June 2021). Sun was a vice minister when the document was filed, but not when the events took place. He has never been a minister; given his arrest and expulsion from the party, a promotion does not seem imminent (cf. n. 24). Other US media subsequently repeated the identification of the PRC official with Sun, also citing unnamed sources (Spencer S. Hsu, "Major RNC, Trump fundraiser Elliott Broidy pleads guilty to acting as unregistered foreign agent", *The Washington Post* [20th Oct. 2020]). The Republican operative pleaded guilty to the charges but was later pardoned ("Elliott Broidy Pleads Guilty for Back-Channel Lobbying Campaign to Drop 1MDB Investigation and Remove a Chinese Foreign National", US Department of Justice, 20th Oct. 2020; "Pardons Granted by President Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)", US Department of Justice).

⁷⁹"Feds allege Hawaii woman was key player in illegal lobbying scheme", iLind, 21st Aug. 2020; George Lardner Jr., "2 Donors Agree to Plead Guilty in Justice Dept. Probe of Democratic Fund-Raising", *The Washington Post* (22nd May 1997).

⁸⁰"U.S. Entertainer/Businessman and Malaysian National Charged with Back-Channel Lobbying Campaign to Drop 1MDB Investigation and Remove Chinese Dissident from U.S.", US Department of Justice, 11th June 2021; Liam Stack, "Fugees Rapper Pras Michel and Financier Charged in Illegal Scheme to Raise Money for Obama", *The New York Times* (10th May 2019); *United States v. Prakazrel Michel, Low Taek Jho*, Indictment, D.D.C., 6th May 2019.

⁸¹Wright & Hope, *op. cit.*



Sun's offer to "return certain US citizens held hostage", accept illegal immigrants for deportation and provide "new assistance with regard to North Korea".⁸²

3.4 Good cops: Friendship as the outer layer of political protection

Outside the borders of totalitarian control, political security vocabulary mutates into that of friendship and peace. The overlap between the 1st Bureau's external engagements and those of other MPS units invites a reassessment of law enforcement cooperation. Since the most important unit linked to foreign exchanges is the political protection bureau, such non-hostile interactions are best seen as a good-cop act pursuing the unit's same goal of protecting political security.

Like other organs in the CCP security, foreign affairs, trade, military and united front apparatuses, the MPS maintains a friendship-themed front for influence work outside official channels.⁸³ The China Association for Friendship (CAFF, 中国友谊促进会), is effectively a front for the MPS 1st Bureau: former 1st Bureau chiefs and other leading bureau cadre typically hold top roles at CAFF. The euphemistic naming hardly blurs CAFF's focus on political security. The front and its personnel have cultivated ties with security forces, think tanks and sitting and former officials in countries from Taiwan to the US, seeking cooperation in areas such as "counterterrorism", cyber-security and the fight against "cults", mirroring categories that domestically label aspects of the protection of the party's power.⁸⁴

The MPS's system of Foreign Non-Government Organisation Management Offices (境外非政府组织管理办公室), with which foreign NGOs must register, also appears to be controlled by the 1st Bureau.⁸⁵

Away from the strident affirmation of the MPS's core political protection mission, its interlocutors in democratic states often treat it as similar to accountable law enforcement organs of which the ministry is only a *faux ami*. Exploiting foreign acceptance of party-state agencies' external presentation is a basic tactic of CCP influence work.⁸⁶ Dozens of states maintain extradition treaties, as well as legal and financial information sharing agreements with the PRC.⁸⁷ Courts and law enforcement agencies assist the party-state's repression tasks by acting on Interpol notices, by now effectively co-opted as an instrument of authoritarian projection.⁸⁸ In 2017, Europol, the EU's law enforcement cooperation agency, signed a "strategic cooperation agreement" with the MPS, building on years of MPS cultivation of ties with European officials.⁸⁹ In 2015, a

⁸²Viswanatha & Ballhaus, *op. cit.*; *US v. Lum Davis*, p. 32.

⁸³For a sample of CCP influence agencies across the political system, see Codarin et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 11 sqq.

⁸⁴CAFF's institutional position, history and activities are discussed in more detail in Wade & Lulu, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵Multiple local foreign NGO management offices, from the provincial to the county level, are nameplates of the corresponding 1st Bureau equivalents, or at least share their leadership ("领导干部任职前公示", 广西壮族自治区公安厅, 10th May 2018; "盐城市人民政府关于刘杰、朱长征同志职务任免的通知"; "政治安全保卫大队(挂境外非政府组织管理办公室牌子)", 江山市人民政府; "晋江市公安局主要机构设置及职责", 晋江市人民政府, 27th Mar. 2021; "黎平县公安局机构设置", 黎平县人民政府, 22nd Nov. 2021). This suggests the central-level office may also be a 1st Bureau nameplate.

⁸⁶On this idea, see Martin Hála & Jichang Lulu, "Lost in translation: 'Economic diplomacy' with Chinese characteristics", *Sinopsis*, 11th Mar. 2019.

⁸⁷"中国已与 81 个国家缔结引渡条约、司法协助条约等共 169 项", CCDI, via 新华网, 11th Nov. 2020; "2019 年中国对外缔结条约情况", MFA, 1st Apr. 2021.

⁸⁸For a recent overview, see "No room to run: China's expanded mis(usage) of Interpol since the rise of Xi Jinping", *Safeguard Defenders*, 15th Nov. 2021.

⁸⁹Johnson, "The east rises...", section 4.



Polish state-affiliated think-tank report concluded from an analysis of Xiist security work that EU members “should put security issues on the agenda in their relations with China”, with possible “first steps” in “tangible China-Europe security cooperation” including “intelligence sharing”.⁹⁰

Personnel links and function overlap with other MPS units can effectively make the 1st Bureau a participant in exchanges where it is not a foreign partner’s direct interlocutor. In 2011, MPS personnel visited French forensic police organs to learn about such topics as the use of DNA databases, then in its infancy in China. While the PRC delegation was affiliated with the MPS Physical Evidence Identification Centre (物证鉴定中心)⁹¹ and local-level analogues, its leader, the centre’s then-party secretary, has a decades-long association with the 1st Bureau.⁹²

4 Conclusion

By restoring the MPS core unit’s name, the party reasserted the ministry’s role as the PRC’s main state security organ. The stress on political protection was likely motivated by challenges to totalitarian rule in Hong Kong. This new emphasis was an intensification of unbroken party policy, rather than a Xiist *novum*: even while euphemistically named, the bureau’s purview continued to include the classic secret police functions that defined its establishment.

The Leninist tradition had repeatedly invoked the concept of political protection to label the pacification of unruly domains, beginning with the Soviet agencies the MPS’s predecessors learnt from. It rhymes with Moscow dispatching a political protection operative to oversee the CCP’s birth that, 99 years later, Leninism’s new centre would appoint Political Security Protection Bureau cadre to manage the new secret police pacifying newly absorbed territory.

Cooperation with the MPS enlists foreign state institutions as ancillary executors of political security protection work. Classic propaganda tactics wrap efforts to extend the security apparatus’ international reach in rhetoric palatable to Western politicians and officials. The ministry’s external portrayal as a law-enforcement agency analogous to those subordinate to democratic governments is a mode of this ‘good-cop’ tactic. In another, ‘friendship’ as a euphemism for submission frames aspects of the 1st Bureau’s engagement with officials appointed to serve constituents in demo-

⁹⁰Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, “China’s Security Activities Extend beyond Asia”, *Strategic file* 18.81 (Nov. 2015), Polish Institute of International Affairs.

⁹¹The Centre was known as the MPS 2nd Research Institute until 1996 (“公安部内设机构沿革”; “国家级司法鉴定机构公布 负责人就遴选工作答问”, 中央政府门户网站, 22nd Oct. 2010; pace Tanner, *op. cit.*). As an example of the Centre’s continuing interest in the subject, a recent MPS-cofunded study had a coauthor from the Centre’s analogue under the Tibet Public Security Department, who was responsible for sample collection (Hui Li et al., “Concordance and characterization of massively parallel sequencing at 58 STRs in a Tibetan population”, *Molecular Genetics & Genomic Medicine* 9.4 [2021]).

⁹²殷治田 et al., “法国国家警察总局法庭科学实验室简介”, *刑事技术* 1 (2012). Until 2001, Yin Zhitian 殷治田 led an institute under the MPS External Liaison Office, a 1st Bureau nameplate (Joske, *op. cit.*, n. 49). He was later at the Tibet Public Security Department (“维护青藏铁路工程秩序 西藏段交通治安巡警队亮相”, *法制日报*, via Sina, 7th June 2003). By 2014, he had left the Centre to become the 1st Bureau’s political commissar (“公安部一局政委殷治田到婺城公安分局开展调研”, *浙江在线*, 1st Dec. 2014; Joske, *loc. cit.*).



cratic polities. ‘Friendship’ and ‘cooperation’ likewise framed earlier efforts to protect and extend Leninist political security.⁹³

In addition to a renewed stress on political security, the shedding of the 1st Bureau’s ‘domestic’ name could point to a stronger role in the party’s external influence work.

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⁹³“Principles of indissoluble friendship and cooperation” justified the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Peace and friendship were then threatened by “counterrevolutionary forces acting in concert with external forces inimical to socialism”. The wording comes from a TASS 21st Aug. announcement, issued by the CPSU Politburo (“**Постановление Политбюро ЦК КПСС «О Заявлении ТАСС»**”, *Prager Frühling: Das Internationale Krisenjahr 1968*, ed. by Stefan Karner et al., vol. 2, Böhlau, 19th Aug. 1968, pp. 738 sqq.; on the authoritativeness openly signalled by the use of the phrase “TASS is authorised to announce”, see, e.g., “**История фразы “ТАСС уполномочен заявить”**”, TACC, 26th Aug. 2019). The spirit of “comradeship and friendship” reached Czechoslovak audiences in, e.g., the communiqué that followed the Moscow meeting between Czechoslovak and Soviet party and state leaders (Československý rozhlas, 27th Sep. 1968, reproduced in Josef Macek & Vilém Prečan, *Sedm pražských dnů. 21.–27. srpen 1968*, Academia, 1990, pp. 380 sqq.).