Zhang Xueliang and Terrains of Memory across the Taiwan Straits

Zhang Xueliang, the Young Marshall, was the son of the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin, and commander of the Northeastern Peace Preservation Force from the late 1920s. This paper explores the terrains of memory that Zhang Xueliang inhabits on both sides of the straits. It argues that divergent emphases in attempts at his memorialisation point to a substantive schism in the significance accorded to Zhang. Those differences are so great that state-sponsored efforts to construct a common terrain of historical memory across the Taiwan Straits may have widened its fractures.
Zhang Xueliang, the Young Marshall, was the son of the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin, and commander of the Northeastern Peace Preservation Force from the late 1920s. He allied with Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalists but opposed Chiang’s military strategy towards Japan and the Chinese Communists. In 1936 in Xi’an, after secret negotiations with the Communists, Zhang therefore captured Chiang Kai-shek and compelled him to negotiate an alliance against Japan. After the Xi’an Incident, Zhang was arrested and held in custody by the Nationalists, before being relocated to Taiwan in 1949. There he remained under house arrest until 1991, when he moved to Hawai’i and died at the age of 100 in 2001.

This paper explores the terrains of memory that Zhang Xueliang inhabits on both sides of the Straits. It argues that his legacy suited the ideological interests of the PRC Party-state in obvious ways during the course of the KMT government under Ma Ying-jeou in Taiwan from 2008 to 2016. He also has an ideal place in the commercialisation of memory in mainland China as Red Tourism and in the efforts on Taiwan to establish the concept of Blue Tourism. The paper further suggests that these divergent emphases in attempts at memorialisation point to a substantive schism in the significance accorded to Zhang. Those differences are so great that state-sponsored efforts to construct a common terrain of historical memory across the Taiwan Straits may have widened its fractures.

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