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**March 8, 1963**

**Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum, 'The  
Succession to Chiang Kai-shek'**

**Citation:**

"Central Intelligence Agency Memorandum, 'The Succession to Chiang Kai-shek'", March 8, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA-RDP79T00429A001300020005-9.  
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/300313>

**Summary:**

The CIA evaluates two possible successors to Chiang Kai-shek: his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, and Chen Cheng.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Chun & Jane Chiu Family Foundation

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SUCCESSION  
TO  
CHIANG KAI-SHEK

8 March 1963

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8 March 1963

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MEMORANDUM: The Succession to Chiang Kai-shek

SUMMARY

1. Chiang Kai-shek's advancing years add urgency to the question of who will inherit the close control he has maintained through the years over Nationalist affairs. The succession problem is a delicate one for the US since one of the two chief contenders for power, Vice President Chen Cheng, is the constitutional successor, whereas the other, Lt. General Chiang Ching-kuo, the President's son, wields growing power which is at least as great as, and perhaps more than, that of Chen.

2. The transfer of authority seems likely to be orderly, but the US attitude, if too forcefully pro-Chen or pro-Chiang Ching-kuo, could increase the chances of open struggle. We believe that both contenders would be most responsive to a US position which clearly backed constitutional succession while at the same time allowing Chiang Ching-kuo a continuing important role in Nationalist affairs.

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OCI No. 1026/63

8 March 1963

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

MEMORANDUM: The Succession to Chiang Kai-shek

1. A stable government on Taiwan capable of providing forces toward its own defense, and of promoting economic growth with decreasing outside aid, is an essential interest of the United States. President Chiang Kai-shek has provided the requisite leadership for stable government and is in good health, but in view of his advanced age (he is 75) a transfer of power could occur at any time. The attitude of the US will be important in ensuring that the transfer of authority is orderly. The succession problem is a delicate one since one of the two chief contenders for power, Vice President Chen Cheng, is the constitutional successor, whereas the other, Lt. General Chiang Ching-kuo, the President's son, wields growing power which is at least as great as, and perhaps more than, that of Chen.

2. President Chiang Kai-shek, believing he is indispensable for the return to the mainland, has jealously retained his authority and dominates the leadership on Taiwan. He has delegated some powers to Chen Cheng and Chiang Ching-kuo, though he personally monitors the activities of both. His control of the Kuomintang, from which the ruling elite is drawn, is unchallenged. The president guards his power by extensive intervention in routine government matters. He is also a father figure of enormous prestige.

3. Chen Cheng, vice president and premier, the constitutional successor, is in charge of the civil government and makes decisions on routine economic and civil matters. He is a lifelong follower and willing subordinate of Chiang Kai-shek. He has a loyal following among Kuomintang "elder statesmen," old-line military leaders, economic specialists, and members of the Legislative Yuan, and he enjoys considerable support among Taiwanese. His re-election

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to the vice-presidency in 1960 indicated that he retained Chiang Kai-shek's approval. On several occasions Chen had become embroiled with recalcitrant National Assemblymen bent on reducing the power of the executive. This defiance of Chen indicates that he lacks Chiang Kai-shek's authority. Chen also is handicapped by poor health, which forced him to be absent from his office during late 1961 and early 1962.

4. Chiang Ching-kuo's potential as an eventual successor to the leadership stems from a combination of his intelligence, vigor, political astuteness, and his father's support. These have enabled him to gain control of many key centers of power. Chiang, however, has long shown a tendency to exercise his power from behind the scenes. Nominally, Chiang Ching-kuo is a cabinet minister without portfolio, an honorific post with few duties. He is, however, the deputy secretary general of the National Defense Council whose chief is inactive; this gives him control over internal security, intelligence activities, and strategic planning for the mainland attack. He is also one of the 15 members of Kuomintang Central Standing Committee, the policy-making organ of the party.

5. Chiang Ching-kuo's followers are a more cohesive group than Chen's. They occupy governmental positions important for political control which can be used to develop mass support among veterans and youth. These ambitious young men are conservative and unsympathetic to abstract concepts of popular government and parliamentary procedures. They staff the Youth Corps, the veterans program, the security apparatus and the Kuomintang's political department which permeates all levels of the armed forces. In November 1962, the positions of governor of Taiwan and chief of the Taiwan Garrison security forces were filled by men considered responsive to Chiang Ching-kuo. He is reported to be gaining more support among combat commanders in the armed forces and in the party. He also appears to be the dominant influence in the provincial party organs.

6. Among Chiang Ching-kuo's political liabilities are considerable suspicion and distrust of his Soviet training, his Russian wife, and some fear of his methods for political indoctrination and social control.

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7. The constitution provides that if the president dies before the end of his term, which expires in 1966, the vice president succeeds him. The Kuomintang party constitution is less explicit. It prescribes that the deputy director general, now Chen Cheng, shall assist the director general, Chiang Kai-shek, in administering the party, but makes no provision for passing on Chiang's powers as head of the party. A national party congress would have to be called to elect a new director general. In the meantime, the central standing committee, the highest authority below the director general, would presumably meet and decide policy. Party rules provide that Chen will become chairman of the standing committee.

8. It seems likely that a constitutional course will be followed in the succession to Chiang Kai-shek, with Chen Cheng assuming the leadership of the government and the party. Both Chen and Chiang Ching-kuo probably would desire time in which to consolidate their support.

9. The role Chen Cheng and Chiang Ching-kuo have played in the past strongly suggest that Chen is capable of sharing political control of Taiwan. Chiang for his part would be likely to use force in a bid for complete power only if Chen moved to undercut his base.

10. Chiang Ching-kuo's tendency to exercise control from behind the scenes probably would incline him not to seek a public mandate quickly. He almost certainly would prefer to leave Chen Cheng the problems of dealing with the irascible elements of the Legislative Yuan and the National Assembly. Chiang Ching-kuo probably would move quietly to consolidate his internal power and look to eventual acquisition of supreme power, either through de facto acquisition of such power from behind the scenes, or through eventual election as president of the GRC by the National Assembly--possibly in 1972, when Chen, if still living, will have reached the Generalissimo's present age. A coup attempt by Chiang Ching-kuo might occur, though we consider this less likely than the above.

11. Other factors such as the "return to the mainland" rationale of the present government, Communist

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China's influence, economic conditions of Taiwan, the possible loss of offshore islands, or a local war in the Pacific area which adversely affected the Taiwan regime, appear unlikely to influence significantly the succession problem. "Return" will continue, after Chiang Kai-shek, to have considerable and at times troublesome significance for US-GRC relations and for politics and sense of purpose on Taiwan, even though neither Chen nor Chiang Ching-kuo shares the Generalissimo's passion on this subject. The Vice President may see continued stressing of "Return" a political necessity but he most assuredly does not believe it tactically within reach. Chiang Ching-kuo's views appear to be similar, his interest in mainland matters reflecting his father's preoccupation rather than his own; moreover, he has indicated over the past ten years that he is genuinely concerned with local matters on Taiwan.

12. Communist China has failed to extend its influence into local Taiwan affairs, either among the Chinese or the Taiwanese. All experienced observers agree that the overwhelming majority of both the mainland Chinese and the Taiwanese reject Communism and seek no rapprochement with the Communist Government. This precludes any significant role for Communist China in the succession.

13. The Nationalists' awareness of the US desire for an orderly succession will be important in achieving such a transfer of power. The chances of an open struggle for power would increase if Chiang Ching-kuo, the holder of superior strength, were to suspect that the US was seeking to freeze him out of ultimate control. The same would be true if Chen Cheng were to suspect the US sought to rob him of his authority by backing Chiang Ching-kuo. We believe that both Chen and Chiang would be most responsive to a US attitude which clearly backed constitutional succession, while at the same time acknowledging the need for a continuing important role for Chiang Ching-kuo in Nationalist affairs.

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