

Document 12.4: Letter to the Editor by Ding Keshan, March 30, 1948

During the Civil War, the weekly newspaper Guancha (The Observer) was a voice for the politically liberal segment of the Chinese population. It was a popular publication in the late 1940s; it primarily published the writings and opinions of college professors. The following is an excerpt from the letters-to-the-editor page. Ding wrote the letter on the day the National Assembly opened. He described the “election” process in his district.

[T]he Guomindang’s candidate for the National Assembly representative was Dong Xiuming; and there were a few others also seeking election. One cold cloudy afternoon, Dong Xiuming gave a public election speech in the open-air theater...In order to learn something about democracy, I braved the cold wind to listen. When I arrived, except for a few shop apprentices, all those seated in the audience were peddlers from off the nearby streets.... [They said] the police had told them to come.... Then three or four officers brought in over two hundred men who were said to be just then undergoing military training. Only then were all the seats filled. Mr. Dong’s speech was very simple and contained no election principles at all...After Mr. Dong had concluded his speech, the *xian*¹ magistrate, Wang Yifang, took over and began to talk. To the “voters” in the audience he said: “I order you to elect Mr. Dong Xiuming. This order is the same as the order telling you that you should go to do repair work on the defense installations. It is wrong for anyone to disobey....” After the meeting, [word went out] to every household: “The *xian* magistrate has spoken. Whoever does not vote for Dong Xiuming will have to go out and work on the defense installations when they need repairs in the future.” The result of the election was, of course, that Dong Xiuming received the most votes.

Today is the big opening of the National Assembly and I suppose Mr. Dong Xiuming is already sitting securely in a representative’s seat.... Really what a joke it is.

Source: *Kuan-ch’a (The Observer)*, April 10, 1948. Quoted in Pepper, Suzanne. *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945–1949*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. 139–140.

¹ district