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Yu Xiusong's personnel files as a historical source in the study of communist movement in China

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Abstract. One of the directions in Chinese historiography is a research into life and work of outstanding Chinese political figures that might gradually cover “the blank spots” in the history of China. In the spirit of the times, Russian researchers are increasingly turning to the study of archival materials that shed light on the activism of prominent Chinese political activists. Yu Xiusong's Personnel Files, kept in the collections of Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, is one of the principal sources on his life and activities. The study looks at Yu Xiusong's involvement in historical events in China — the CPC foundation, the CPC-Kuomintang United Front, etc. — and refines some well-ingrained views on the history of CPC and national revolutionary movement in China. The study also analyses the problem of initial cooperation between the CPC and the Kuomintang, known as the United Front of Progressive Forces based on cooperation between the CPC and the Kuomintang (1922–1927).

Keywords: Communist Party of China, CPC, Yu Xiusong, Zhou Dawen, Chen Duxiu, Communist International, Comintern, CI, Kuomintang, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, RGASPI

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«Личное дело Юй Сюсуна»: к изучению коммунистического движения в Китае

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Аннотация. Изучение деятельности выдающихся личностей Китая — одно из направлений китайской историографии, постепенно закрывающей «белые пятна» в истории страны. Российские исследователи в духе времени все чаще обращаются к изучению архивных материалов об известных китайских деятелях. «Личное дело Юй Сюсуна», хранившееся в фондах Российского государственного архива социально-политической истории, — один из основных источников изучения его жизни и партийной работы. Исследовано влияние Юй Сюсуна на исторические события в жизни Китая: создание Коммунистической партии Китая (КПК), единого фронта между КПК и Гоминьданом и др. Уточнены некоторые устоявшиеся характеристики и оценки из истории КПК и национально-революционного движения.

Ключевые слова: Компартия Китая, КПК, история Китая, Чжоу Давэнь, Чэнь Дусю, Коммунистический интернационал, Коминтерн, КИ, Гоминьдан, Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, РГАСПИ

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Introduction

The communist movement in China was initially gaining momentum with the direct assistance of the USSR. Thus, the CPC First Congress in 1921, which officially established the Communist Party of China, was prepared with the help of the Russian Communist Party representatives, the Comintern, Soviet diplomats, advisers, and political activists. At that, Soviet specialists tried to take into account Chinese national distinctions, whose most typical feature was nationwide respect for China's history and historical figures.

This study seeks to expand the source base pertaining to early stages of communist ascend to power in China, which will undoubtedly help gain a better understanding of more than a century-long history of the Communist Party of China, give a clearer picture of how Chinese revolutionaries interacted with their Russian counterparts, the Communist International (Comintern, CI) and the USSR foreign

policy departments. In this regard, a closer look at the “human factor” through the prism of historiography seems fairly useful and timely.

The study focuses on the personality of an internationalist communist, Yu Xiusong (Russian name: Narimanov), who, along with more renowned communists such as Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, Tan PinMamaeva NL.gshan, Zhang Kai (Zhang Taillei), Li Da, Zhou Enlai, Qu Qiubo and others, pioneered the establishment of the Communist Party of China. We see our task as not only to obtain a more detailed information on Yu Xiusong’s life and work, but also to formulate the problem anew, i.e. to elaborate on Yu Xiusong’s interpretation of the atmosphere within the CCP, on the CCP’s policy regarding its initial cooperation with the Kuomintang, and on the way it determined the course of events in China. The research endeavors to identify Yu Xiusong’s fundamental personality traits, with major events in China’s history shown as if from the inside, through the eyes of this CPC’s member of the higher stratum, which further enhances the objective nature of his take on the revolutionary events of the 1920s.

Yu Xiusong’s Personnel Files reveal that a most characteristic feature of communist rise in China was its close interaction with international communist movements [1. P. 64, 69].

It should be noted that by the 1920s the international communist movement had entered a new stage, following the creation of the Third International, whose first founding congress was held in Moscow on March 6, 1919. Its stance on a number of significant issues sharply diverged from that of the II International. Inter alia, the two currents of communist movement drifted ever more apart ideologically and politically: Bolshevism was counterposed to reformism, and the idea of Soviet rule — to parliamentarism. General framework of the international communist movement came to include the “eastern vector”. Finally, “with its decisions on the Eastern question, the II Congress of the Comintern (1920) expanded its take on the world revolution to including in its scope communist and national liberation movements of the East” [2. P. 11–12].

Yu Xiusong’s “Chinese period”

Yu Xiusong was basically known for his participation in preparations for China’s Communist Party constituent congress in 1921, where its establishment was declared. There were also some little known details of Yu Xiusong’s activities during his years in the Communist universities of Moscow in 1925–1932.

Before Yu Xiusong was sent to study in the Communist universities in the USSR he had gained sufficient revolutionary experience in China, and although he had no higher education like Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and a number of others, he was renowned for his devotion to communist ideals and a high degree of responsibility in carrying out revolutionary and party work in various directions. From his early youth, he showed deep concern over poverty rates in the country,

especially among the peasants. In 1919, Yu Xiusong practiced journalism while simultaneously working on agrarian issues. From 1920 on, he was editing the communist magazine *Shanghai Worker*. His sphere of interest was not limited solely to peasants but also included the working class issues. Thus, in 1920 he got a job in a factory where he was propagating Marxist ideas among the workers. He took part in organizing trade union movement and the rise of Chinese Komsomol; in 1922 he was already elected a member of the Komsomol Central Committee. Twice, he faced trial: in 1920 for translations of communist literature, and in 1924 for participating in rallies.

A major part of Yu Xiusong's (Narimanov's) activities was associated with the spread of Marxism in China as well as with the establishment of the Communist Party of China. In this regard, of particular interest is his attitude to the October Revolution. As Yu Xiusong put in his autobiography, "the October Revolution played a major role in awakening the people of China", which testifies to his undeniable appreciation of the October Revolution for China. Yu Xiusong's revolutionary activities are also evidenced by his account that while still in high school (Zhejiang Province), together with like-minded friends, he created a number of Marxism study groups, which would later lay the basis for the formation of unified Communist Party in China.

In 1919, Yu Xiusong "made a failed attempt to organize a party of his own under the name 'He who does not work does not eat'" [1. P. 64]. This fact, apparently, is little known in the historiography of the communist movement in China. Together with his comrades in 1920, Yu Xiusong managed to create the very first party cell of the Communist Party of China in Shanghai. He believed that it was possible to establish the Communist Party of China as early as in the late 1920s. As his Personnel Files reveal, in all his resumes and reports, he stood his ground on the necessity to create the CPC in 1920s. According to Russian historiography, in the early 1920s, a growing number of Marxism study groups emerged across China with the assistance of the Communist International Executive Committee envoy G.N. Voytinsky (Zarkhin), who saw them as a basis for further creation of a Socialist or Communist Party in China.

Yu Xiusun's (Narimanov's) Personnel Files do not adequately reveal the role of the Eastern Nations Section of RCP (b) Siberian Bureau or that of the Foreign Department of RCP (b) Far Eastern Bureau in Vladivostok in the establishment of the CPC (1921). Based on the study of archives, Russian historiography mentions a special meeting convened in Shanghai in June 1920, which created the very first Communist group in China (In Chinese historiography it is known as "the earliest Communist Party") [3. P. 44]. Apparently, this is what Yu Xiusong meant, when he mentioned the CPC establishment and his joining the Communist Party in 1920.

The group in Shanghai elected Chen Duxiu its Secretary. Among those present at the meeting were Chen Duxiu, Li Hanjun, Yu Xiusong, Shen Xuanlu, Shi Cuntong, Chen Gongbo. The meeting adopted a draft program of 10 points (establishing

dictatorship of proletariat, production cooperation, etc.). According to Russian historiography, the meeting laid the foundations for the future Communist Party of China [4. P. 155]. In his Autobiography and other documents from Yu Xiusong's Personnel Files, he stands his ground the date of CPC creation — 1920.

Yu Xiusong's participation in the 3rd World Congress of the Communist International testifies to his growing authority in the ranks of communist-oriented Chinese revolutionaries. He was also an active participant in every important event related to the CPC involvement in the national revolution and to defining its policies. Of primary importance was the CCP decision to join forces with the Kuomintang through KMT membership for its members, who at same time retained their membership in the CCP. The support of CPC members for this unprecedented step was of great importance for further consolidation of both the CPC and the KMT. Narimanov was in the forefront here as well. Upon the decision made by the CCP leaders in 1922, he joined the Kuomintang. The Kuomintang leader Sun Yat-sen, who supported this unusual policy, believed that the Communists “infused” new blood into Kuomintang, revitalized and rejuvenated the party, contributed to the victory of the national revolutionary movement over the northern militarists, to China's unification and the assertion of its national sovereignty. In 1924, Yu Xiusong was elected Secretary of the KMT provincial committee in Zhejiang Province. He devoted much time to work in the armed forces of the Canton Army. In 1923–1924 he worked in the General Staff, in 1925 he was a member of the CPC General Committee in Shanghai and at the same time Secretary of KMT district committee. Thus, Yu Xiusong supported the Communist Party of China not only in words, but also in deeds, which was not something everyone could do.

Summarizing Yu Xiusong's activities, his professional and managerial experience in his “Chinese period”, it should be emphasized that as one of the founders of the CPC and the Communist Youth Union of China (CYUC), secretary of the Shanghai Party and Komsomol, editor of the “Shanghai Worker” magazine and in other positions, he proved to be a convinced communist, defender of the Comintern directives against opportunists and evasions in the CPC.

Yu Xiusong's Soviet Period

The year 1925 marks the end of “Chinese period” of his life and work, and the beginning of his new “Soviet period”, where he enters as an already accomplished leader, a communist-internationalist with considerable experience in party work.

While the United Front policy was on the rise, Yu Xiusong, as an experienced leader and Secretary of the CCP faction in the Kuomintang, was sent to Moscow in 1925 to study first at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, then at the Sun Yat-sen Communist University of the Toilers of China, where he received general and ideological education. In 1926, he became a member of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (b). At the Sun Yat-sen University, he chaired

the student organization and was a member of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (b) cell. He was also a standing secretary of the CCP faction in the Kuomintang. He left the Kuomintang in 1927 after the KMT abandon the idea of “first united front” and launched a crackdown on the CPC [1. P. 9].

As mentioned above, Yu Xiusong successfully completed a course of study (general and ideological education), as he had felt he was lacking knowledge and deemed it necessary to take an in-depth program, including the study of Marxism. The process of educating international students in the Soviet Union was already up and running, and was successfully gaining momentum. Here is the list of major communist universities in the USSR — University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), 1925, Sun Yat-sen Communist University of the Toilers of China (UTK, 1928–1929), the Communist Workers’ University of China (KUTC, 1928–1929), the International Lenin School (ILS). Yu Xiusong studied Marxism with full responsibility, as did his fellow Communist university students, which was characteristic of Chinese revolutionaries of that time.

Meanwhile, intra-party contradictions in the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks grew, unwittingly drawing Chinese students into its orbit, Yu Xiusong for one, along with his associate Zhou Dawei (Chugunov) and others. Being a direct man, Narimanov openly opposed factionalism, fought against Trotskyism, and opposed the right-wing within the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the CPC. For his exposure of the Trotskyists, he drew special attention of Pavel Mif and other Soviet party figures.

Intra-party fault lines in Communist universities were deep and accompanied by rigidity, intransigence and drastic measures. Unfortunately, Yu Xiusong fell their victim. He was of the strong opinion, perhaps well substantiated, that by 1928, the situation at Sun Yat-sen University had become “dire, where one word is enough to be accused of counter-revolution”, which he repeatedly and openly pointed out [1. P. 7, 60–61].

Soon Narimanov faced accusations, largely initiated by P.A. Mif — professor and rector of KUTK, a prominent figure in All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Comintern. In general, the accusations had a multi-layered character. On March 9, 1928, P.A. Mif summoned Yu Xiusong and Zhou Dawei (Chugunov) to his office and accused them of factional struggle at Sun Yat-sen University as well as of their ties with former CPC leader Chen Duxiu and Tan Pingshan, with whom Narimanov claimed to have worked toward the CPC foundation. Yu Xiusong admitted their acquaintance and joint work, he even interceded for Chen Duxiu before Mif and openly expressed his opinion stating that “after Chen Duxiu was removed, there was no capable leader, but collective leadership” [1. P. 29]. It should be noted that at that time in the ranks of Chinese communists there really was no leader authoritative and capable enough to lead the party out of the crisis. Defending himself against most unsubstantiated allegations, including those related to his involvement with the Kuomintang (links with Chiang Ching-kuo (Yelizarov), son of Chiang Kai-shek,

Dai Jitao and some others), Yu Xiusong expressed his sincere bewilderment and “wondered: on what basis ordinary communication, that did not involve politics could be imputed to him?”. It should be noted that the most ridiculous accusations concerned Yu Xiusong’s connections with acting or former Kuomintang members. In the first place, such accusations testified to the incompetence of prosecutors, who were unfamiliar with the Kuomintang Party and largely ignored positive results of the “united front” policy.

Nevertheless, as is clear from Yu Xiusong’s Personnel Files, in compliance with the CPC decision to cooperate with the Kuomintang, in the period from 1925 on, i.e. as anti-communist sentiments in the KMT grew stronger, he repeatedly expressed open criticism of the Kuomintang [1. P. 42–43]. Thus, the documents this research relies upon provide information on growing distrust between the two parties as early as from mid-1920s, which tended to intensify in the 1930s–1940s and played a fatal role in revolutionary processes decline in China in the second half of the 1920s.

While answering in total honesty to questions from various commissions investigating the so-called Narimanov’s case, Yu Xiusong emphasized the absence of any political context in his contacts. As a matter of fact, Mif himself at times acknowledged the fact that the accusations were unsubstantiated; in fact, after 1928 there was a hesitant support for Narimanov from the Central Control Commission (CCC) of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and from the International Control Commission (ICC). However, when Narimanov moved to the ILS, the pressure from his opponents intensified.

More alarming criticism resided in the accusations concerning Narimanov’s alleged links with the “Solidarity Association” established in the USSR and linked to the Trotskyists. On January 3, 1930, one of the ILS indictment documents recorded that Narimanov was not involved with any opposition, but was a member of the “Solidarity Association” and that he denied its very existence before party bodies. Principal accusation was that Yu Xiusong allegedly belonged to an illegal political organization “Zemlyachestvo” (Jiangsu-Zhejiang), which, according to the prosecutors, existed in communist universities and acted in alliance with the Trotskyists. At the same time, Yu Xiusong’s letter from to the ILS Bureau revealed that Yu Xiusong had nothing to do with “Zemlyachestvo”.

With hindsight, this tragic story can briefly summarize as follows: soviet leaders should not have implicated Chinese students in internal disputes of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, since the students due to their youth and lack of theoretical knowledge were unlikely to assess the situation adequately. Similarly, the Soviet side was not fully aware of China’s specifics and could not always adequately assess relations between the parties or between their leaders.

Ultimately, the charges were upheld by the Comintern’s Executive Control Commission (ECC) on the following grounds: Yu Xiusong organized “Zemlyachestvo”, supported Trotskyism, and had ties with right-wing

opposition. However, as Narimanov alleged, even before a crusade on right-wing opposition was launched, he opposed its leaders, notably N.I. Bukharin, especially on the Chinese question. In his Statement to the KIC, Yu Xiusong fiercely defended his positions, accusing his opponents of slander, and asserting his non-involvement in the factional struggle. Nonetheless, in 1932, Yu Xiusong was removed from the International Leninist School (ILS) and was sent to Khabarovsk in 1935.

Following a request from General Sheng Shicai, Xinjiang Military District Chief of Staff and essentially an independent ruler of Xinjiang, Yu Xiusong along with a 24-strong group of national staff left for China to assist in Xinjiang in order to implement programs of socio-economic development (designed with Soviet assistance) and to consolidate Chinese control over Muslim groups in Xinjiang. He became one of the leaders of the Xinjiang Anti-Imperialist Society, editor-in-chief of the “Anti-Imperialist Front” and rector of Xinjiang Institute.

However, even in Xinjiang, Yu Xiusong’s past turned against him — his political activities came under criticism, slanderous allegations by his opponents concerning his years in communist universities in Moscow, notably the ILS, came to the surface. In Sheng Shicai’s conversation with Kang Sheng and Wang Ming in Urumqi in mid-November 1937 on their way back to China from Moscow, Kang Sheng and Wang Ming, who had a conversation with Stalin prior to their departure from Moscow, told Sheng Shicai that it was “necessary to fight the Trotskyists” in Xinjiang. Sheng Shicai was unaware which of the 25 were Trotskyists. He showed their photos to Kang Sheng, who “identified” the Trotskyists. As a result, all but one of the 25 Chinese experts ended up on the list of Trotskyists, including Yu Xiusong. The latter was soon arrested and handed over to Soviet law enforcement agencies in 1938. Yu Xiusong underwent severe trials and died in jail in the period of mass repressions in the USSR [1. P. 41].

Conclusion

What happened to Yu Xiusong is not an isolated incident in Soviet-Chinese relations. Not dwelling in detail on this tragedy and at the same time strongly condemning such practices, we should not forget the other side of relations between the CPC on the one hand, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the Comintern and the Soviet Union on the other. The All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the Communist International, the USSR rendered expedient assistance to China in ideological, material and financial fields, as well as in other spheres, which was largely appreciated by the Chinese both in the stage of preparation for the First (Constituent) Congress of the Communist Party of China and in the course of its further development. CCP leaders, most notably Mao Zedong, gave the concept of Chinese revolution a contextualized character that accommodated

Chinese historical specificity and ensured longevity of the party, which celebrated its centennial in 2021.

Yu Xiusong (Narimanov) was one of the first Chinese Communists who played a prominent role in the formulation and *most notably the implementation of CCP policies*, following the First Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1921.

Yu Xiusong's Personnel Files reveal his active part in the formulation and implementation of the United Front policy, a historical event that had no equivalent in that period, which makes Yu's contribution all the more valuable. The documents show that Yu Xiusong belonged to a rare category of political and revolutionary figures who pioneered a transition from revolutionary theory to revolutionary practice. After Yu Xiusong joined the Kuomintang in 1922, he became a member of the Communist Party of China regional committee in Shanghai in 1925 and at the same time secretary of the Kuomintang district committee, leader and secretary of the CPC faction in the Kuomintang on a permanent basis. These details expand on earlier ideas of the content and value of the United Front in revolutionary practice, and testify in support of a notion that specific character of the revolutionary process in China was taken account of in the revolutionary movement. It is further evidenced by the fact that being a man of broader views, Yu Xiusong even became a member of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Bolsheviks) in 1926.

Narimanov's broad sphere of interests was primarily manifested in specific focus of his activities. Besides the United Front, whose importance in Chinese history can hardly be overestimated, quite evident is his attention to the role of a military factor in Chinese history. In 1924, Yu Xiusong worked as a communist-internationalist in the armed forces of the Canton Army; in 1923–1924 he was a member of the General Staff.

It should be noted that Yu Xiusong's point of view also reflected his balanced approach to manpower issues, including that of leadership in the CCP and the role of CCP leader Chen Duxiu in the suppression of revolutionary movement of the 1920s by the Kuomintang. As Yu Xiusong believed, "if not Chen Duxiu, only collective leadership is possible".

Yu Xiusong's analytical skills and experience in revolutionary and political activities enabled him, as early as in his "Chinese period", to see and foresee the rise and further intensification of distrust between the two major political parties in China — the CCP and the Kuomintang. As a result, the Chinese Communist Party in its revolutionary practice was able to seek to evade conflict situations and make due use of the United Front as an event that united nationalist and communist movements and the country as a whole. A careful study of Yu Xiusong's activities and his influence on historical events both inside and outside China places him in the ranks of China's outstanding personalities of its revolutionary period, and lead to conclusions on the expediency of further development of such kind of topics in historiography.

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