

37

The Germ of Chinese Communism in France

On November 11, 1918, the Armistice was signed.⁽³²⁾ Early in January the following year, the year of the Versailles Peace Conference, I followed Mr. Li Yü-ying to Paris, where we set to work for the Franco-Chinese Educational Association, helping the student-workers and at the same time, organizing the Chinese "combatants" or war-workers.

First, a house was purchased in the Paris suburb of La Garenne Colombes, where we established a "Federation Chinoise" which became a center for both students and war-workers. The greater part of our time, and the time of the many colleagues who were assisting, was of necessity taken up by the student-workers arriving from China. But apart from my work with the students, I was editor-in-chief of a magazine, published for the war-workers, the *Chinese Labor Monthly*. When he was in France, Rector Ts'ai wrote many articles for this publication which was the only Chinese-language magazine available for our one hundred thousand fellow countrymen living in France. It was really quite an attractive publication since at that time there was a Chinese printing house at Tours.

A few days after my arrival in Paris, I wrote about our activities to Mao Tse-tung, so that he could report to our friends at home. I quote an excerpt from that letter:

The student-workers' and laborers' organization seems quite effective and we could handle at least a thousand more students. From that thousand we should be able to select one or two hundred new members for our Hsin Min Study Association. As for the war-workers, there are already more than one hundred thousand of them and I don't think it should be too difficult to pick at least ten thousand from among them. In this manner we can build up our Association to form a really practical basis for the reform of our country. Up to this time I have been concentrating all my efforts on the workers because I want to wait for Ts'ai Ho-shen to arrive before starting the recruitment of the students. When he arrives, we can get down to work in real earnest.

When Mao Tse-tung's reply came, he seemed very enthusiastic. He wrote, "We are laying the foundations for the reform of China! Of course I should be doing my best to spread the movement here in Changsha, but now it seems that it will be much easier for you over there in France. . . ."

At that time we were both adhering strictly to the original principles of the Association as regards to moral and ethical qualifications of its members, and our main aim was the growth of the Association as a sort of cultural and intellectual leaven.

Many active and intelligent students came to France from China under the part-time employment scheme. However, since we did not know them, we could hardly invite them to join the Hsin Min Study Association, and this created jealousies. At times, of course, this situation was inevitable.

Another difficulty which it was practically impossible to avoid was created by the fact that the funds of the Franco-Chinese Educational Association were inadequate to cope in a satisfactory manner with the ever-increasing numbers of student-workers. Many arrived with little or no knowledge of French, and to look after all these young people and to find them suitable jobs was by no means an easy task. We had to put up with much criticism and grumbling from those whose economic situation was insecure.

Few of these thousands of Chinese in France, war-workers and students, knew very much about Communism. Many of them, however, had anarchistic tendencies in varying degrees and quite naturally this created a propitious atmosphere for Communist propaganda work. They could see with their own eyes the outward appearances of success attained by the lower classes in the Russian Revolution, and while few if any of them had time or ability to study the abstract underlying theories, the majority had learned the word Marxist and what it stood for in a practical, everyday sense. They were not in a position to analyze and to criticize the new Russian doctrine, but a number of them regarded it in the light of a new religion under which one had to have a blind faith in Karl Marx and his precepts in exactly the same way as Christians believe in their Christ. Some had already adopted just such an attitude and belief, but it was their own private, blind, almost religious conviction, since there was as yet

no organized propaganda work among them.

In the spring of 1919, Ts'ai Ho-shen arrived in France and whenever the opportunity for such a declaration arose, he told his fellow countrymen what a good thing Communism was. He had no organization for them to join at this time, nor had he studied the Marxist or any other theory of revolution. Long before this, however, Ho-shen had adopted on his own initiative, the slogan, "Down with the Capitalists!" He told me, "I wrote a long letter to Jun-chih (Mao) saying that the Russians must have sent someone to China in secret to organize a Communist Party there. I said that we should follow Russia's example in this matter. We should not delay. There's no need to study all the details first!"

Well do I remember our subsequent conversation on the subject when I insisted, "But we *must* study the matter carefully before making any decision! I agree in principle that capitalism should be overthrown but I am not prepared to follow blindly the principles of Russian Communism!"

"What does it matter what type of Communism it is?" asked Ts'ai. "The more we study the longer we have to put off making our decision. We've got the Russian plan all worked out for us. It's all ready-made. Tell me why we should go looking around for some other type? Their whole scheme is all ready, it's written out on paper for us to read, and they themselves are carrying it out in practice. Why should we waste our time in further experimentation?"

"But," I asked, "why should China be the son of Russia?"

He was adamant. He was furious. He wanted action. "Because Russia was the Father of Communism!" he replied. "We should follow the Russian lead. First, simply because it is much easier. Second, the revolution in China, when it comes, could then depend upon Russian aid, both clandestine and openly, in supplying funds and arms. Geographically, Russia and China are destined to be allies. Transport between the two countries is easy. In a word, if the Chinese Communist revolution is to be successful, we must follow Russia unconditionally. I am telling you the truth. That is exactly how I feel!"

"I do understand how you feel," I continued. "But, my friend, we must think first of all about the welfare of our country and about

our own people. The problem is by no means so simple as you make it sound! This is not our own personal affair! How can we allow China to become a vassal state? How can we as loyal citizens be a party to such a plan?" I asked.

Ts'ai insisted, "To carry out the revolution we must choose the most expedient course. I have already written to Jun-chih to tell him what I think about this idea and I am sure he agrees with me. You're much too idealistic, sentimental, theoretical, and easy-going!"

"Even though Jun-chih does agree with you entirely, I do *not* agree!" I exclaimed. "I can't help being sincere and I cannot go against my conscience. I want my conscience to be clear. I simply could not be a party to making China a vassal of Russia."

"Yes, I know," Ts'ai agreed quietly. "We both understand your personality and we all admire you very much. That's why I want to study this matter with you very carefully."

"But," I pointed out, "you are not studying it! You have already decided upon a course of action and now you are trying to convert me to your idea. You are asking me to accept your principles unconditionally. You are exactly like a preacher, trying to persuade an old friend to believe in his religion!"

"Oh no, I wouldn't dare to do that!" Ts'ai declared. "I have a very great respect for you, your character, and your opinion, quite apart from our personal friendship. We are just having a friendly discussion now."

This conversation took place just two days after Ts'ai Ho-shen arrived in Paris. Fifty or sixty students had come in the same boat with him and the Franco-Chinese Educational Association decided to send them to the College de Montargis where they could spend their time studying French while they were waiting for suitable jobs to be found for them. Montargis is a four-hour train journey from Paris. After Ts'ai left, we wrote to each other frequently. Sometimes he wrote me letters twice a day. But our respective opinions did not change.

Ts'ai Ho-shen talked about Communism to his companions in Montargis and at the same time wrote persuasive letters to students in other parts of France. He had little talent for speaking but he expressed himself well on paper, even better than Mao Tse-tung.

The others all found his letters inspiring and his enthusiasm was contagious. His mother, who was about fifty at that time, and his young sister, Ch'ang, had come to France with him and they both listened respectfully to his ideas. His first real convert, however, was his sweetheart, Hsiang Ching-yu, who was also one of the best members of our Hsin Min Study Association. Miss Hsiang not only wrote well, she was also a very good speaker. Her character was particularly sincere and at the same time she was attractive and very gentle. She became China's first woman Communist and Ts'ai Ho-shen's medium for propaganda. She influenced both sexes and converted many people to her way of thinking, but the women especially listened to her attentively and were moved by her earnest sincerity. She wrote me many long letters discussing our perennial problem.

Another old friend who came to France at this time was Li Wei-han. His second name was also Ho-shen and we called him Li Ho-shen or sometimes Lao Li (Old Li). He too was one of the earliest members of the Association and we were very fond of him. I had known him in Changsha where we attended the First Normal together, and I liked him very much. His father was old and very poor but, though Li loved him dearly, he was not able to help him and we all felt very sorry for both of them. Li Wei-han was a very modest, quiet person who spoke slowly and carefully. He always took great pains to understand the other person's point of view in any discussion. He had no Chinese books to read and he could not read French; so in Montargis he spent much of his time talking with Ts'ai Ho-shen. The two Ho-shens usually agreed, and it was quite natural that Li Wei-han should accept Ts'ai's ideas and opinions. During the war between China and Japan the Communists sent Li and Chou En-lai as delegates to talk peace with the Government in Chungking and later in Nanking. Afterwards, I saw from the newspapers that he was the chief secretary of a seemingly very important political conference in Peking and at the present time, he must have a high position in the Government. When I see or hear news of his "play-acting," I cannot help thinking of the talks we used to have in Montargis, and how he stuttered at that time. Li Wei-han, Ts'ai Ho-shen, and Hsiang Ching-yu were the three most enthusiastic evangelists who worked to spread the Communist doctrine!

But in 1919, though the potentialities of the group had apparently been considered by the French Communists who had carried out a little propaganda work on a very small scale, there was no Communist organization among the more than one hundred thousand Chinese workers and students in France. The established Chinese colonies in that country had a pro-Communist organization. In 1920 and 1921 already quite a number of members had been enlisted. The inspiration for this organization came directly from Peking and indirectly from Moscow.

First, the Russians had sent a secret agent (whose name is not important here) to Peking to contact the Dean of Literature at the University, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, who was a very aggressive type of person, and the Director of the University Library, Li Ta-chao, in an endeavor to persuade them to prepare the way for the organization of a Communist Party in China. Why prepare for the organization? The Chinese Government would not permit any open organization of Communist elements; so it was decided to create an association of young people whose aims were declared as "socialistic." This association was known simply as CY. That is, the two separate letters pronounced as in English, but which in fact stood for "Communist Youth." To those who were not initiated it meant nothing at all.

In a similar manner and for the same reasons of security, the incipient Communist Party itself was known to its members as the CP. Only the best and most promising elements of the CY were chosen to make up the CP. At the same time, outside the CY, a number of *Ma Ke Sze Yen Chiu Hui*, or Karl Marx Study Groups, were formed and an official Foreign Language School was opened, the primary object of which was to create the facilities necessary for teaching Russian without giving rise to suspicion. The Marx Study Groups even had their signs hanging in the University quite openly for a time.

As the reader has gathered from the foregoing, Ch'en Tu-hsiu accepted the suggestion emanating from Moscow, and what is even more important, he accepted the Russian money, paid to him in dollars, to cover the expense of forming these groups and organizing the nucleus of the Communist Party. Several organizations and subsidiary branches came directly under his control.

Ch'en Tu-hsiu had two sons, Ch'en Yen-nien and Ch'en Ch'iao-nien, both of whom entered the CY. Near the end of 1920, these two boys were sent to France with instructions from their father Ch'en Tu-hsiu and their "grandfather" Moscow, to start a Communist organization in that country. In Paris, they were known as "the two Ch'ens." The work which they had been entrusted to do proved to be beyond their capabilities and they were recalled to China and two others were appointed to take over.

These were Chao Shih-yen and Jen Cho-hsuan, two Szechwan students who were living in France at the time. Chao and Jen were both very capable and responsible young men and they did a great deal to further the cause of Chinese Communism in their positions as head secretaries of the CY in France. In the secret registers which they kept were listed several hundred names of those under their orders, but not all of these were members of the original Chinese colony.

Later when Jen Cho-hsuan returned to China, he was made head of the CY and the CP in Changsha in Hunan Province. Eventually he was arrested by the Government, and condemned to death and shot. His body was left lying on the ground where it fell and the next morning someone passing by heard his breathing and removed him to a hospital where his life was saved. Public opinion, through the press, was so strongly in his favor that the Government took no further action against him. When he had fully recovered from this unusual experience, he declared that his work for the Communist Party had been a success, but that in this, his second life, he did not wish to be a Communist! In due course he was elected to the Central Committee of the Kuomintang and is now in Formosa. He became Dr. Sun Yat-sen's best theoretician, but I have not seen him for about forty years.

Among the Communists of that time whom I knew well, Ts'ai Ho-shen and Hsiang Ching-yu are dead. Hsu T'e-li is nearly eighty years old. He was my professor of pedagogy and later that of Mao Tse-tung. He went to France with Ts'ai Ho-shen as a student-worker with the title of "old" student. It was he who chose me to go as professor to the Hsiu Yeh, though I was still a student at the First Normal School. Though he was not a very good theoretician, the Chinese Communist

Party took him to "decorate" their party as an old combatant. Ts'ai Ch'ang, Li Wei-han, Chou En-lai, Li Li-san, Li Fu-ch'un, Ch'en Yi, Jao Su-shih, and many others also were among the several hundred whose names were on the secret registers of Chao and Jen.

Thus did those first germs of Communism spread among the Chinese in France.

38

The Meeting in the Forest

By October of 1920 the activities of the Franco-Chinese Educational Association had increased to such an extent that it became necessary to send a delegate back to China. It was decided that I should return to discuss certain matters with Rector Ts'ai and Mr. Li Yü-ying. When I knew I was going, I wrote letters to both Ts'ai Ho-shen and to Mao Tse-tung. In his reply, Ts'ai said that before my departure we should call a general meeting of Hsin Min Study Association. He suggested that it should be a sort of farewell or *bon voyage* party for me, and that we should discuss together what methods should be adopted to carry out the revolution in China, and finally whether or not Russian-style Communism was a practical system for China.

As yet the power of the Moscow-controlled CY was not strongly felt among the Chinese in France; so we considered ourselves quite free to discuss whether or not Russian Communism was suitable for China.

The majority of the Hsin Min members lived in Montargis; so the date was set for the meeting to be held in that town. I left Paris at four o'clock on the day before the meeting and even before the train entered the Montargis station, I made out Ts'ai Ho-shen with his mother, Auntie, and Hsiang Ching-yu, and many others who were waiting for me on the platform—about twenty of them altogether. I shook hands with all of them, and then Ts'ai and Hsiang Ching-yu invited me to a café near the station. I suggested that I would prefer to find a hotel first and then we could go there to talk where it would be much quieter. However, Hsiang Ching-yu said, "Ho-shen and I have already found you a room. It's in a hotel quite close to our school."