

TONY SAICH

THROUGH THE PAST DARKLY: SOME NEW SOURCES ON THE FOUNDING OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

The current stress of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party on the necessity of “seeking truth from facts” and the accompanying more liberal attitude to research have led to a re-vitalisation, as in other areas, of the study of party history. The portrayal of Mao Zedong in a more fallible light and the ending of the overemphasis on his role in the Chinese Revolution have led to the study, or re-study, of aspects of Chinese communist history in which Mao was not directly, or only marginally, involved, and to evaluations, or re-evaluations, of the contribution of other communist leaders. The contemporary view that the concept of “two-line struggle” has been overstressed in past historiography, particularly during the Cultural Revolution decade, has also helped historians in China to provide a more “objective” account of the role of other key figures. Differences of opinion no longer have to be castigated as outright opposition nor do later “failings” by individuals necessarily lead to a search by historians to expose a “counter-revolutionary” past throughout.

However, it should be noted that current historiography is still bound by some familiar shackles. For example, despite some initial attempts, an objective appraisal of Chen Duxiu and the policies of the First United Front and its disastrous end has not been forthcoming.¹ Vilification of the “Gang

¹ Despite a more objective, and indeed more sympathetic, treatment of Chen Duxiu by Chinese scholars, his “official” image as it was determined prior to the Cultural Revolution has remained essentially unchanged. While some authors have tried to shift the “blame” for the events of 1924-27 from the shoulders of Chen Duxiu to those of the Comintern, in official writings he remains the main culprit. As Barrett has pointed out, while the names of those such as Qu Qiubai and Li Lisan have been rehabilitated, Chen Duxiu has only undergone a re-evaluation (*chongping*), but not rehabilitation (*pingfan*). See D.P. Barrett, Guest Editor’s Introduction to Chinese Law and Government, Spring-Summer 1984, pp. 4-5, 7. For a further consideration of recent Chinese communist writings concerning Chen Duxiu, see Gregor Benton, Two Purged Leaders of Early Chinese Communism [Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Amsterdam, Working Paper No 41] (1984).

of Four” and their supporters has led to a scouring of the past to find past deeds with which to further blacken their names: the accounts often based on the most spurious of explanations.

Despite these peccadillos, a healthier situation now exists than at virtually any time since 1949. The practical effect of this has been the setting up of numerous societies for the study of party history, the publication of new journals and the convening of conferences on various topics of party history. One topic that has benefitted from this with a renaissance of its study is the founding of the party. The purpose of the present research note is to comment on new information available touching on three particular aspects: the setting up of the Communist Party “small groups” (*xiaozu*), the decline of party work in Shanghai prior to the First Party Congress, and the First Party Congress itself.

Three major collections of documents, memoirs and articles provide the bulk of the information in this note. These collections have provided most of the basic material for articles published recently in China on this subject. By far the most important is the two-volume collection *Yi Da Qianhou* (Around the Time of the First Party Congress).² Of less value, but still of interest and containing a number of valuable vignettes, are *Yi Da Huiyilu* (Recollections of the First Party Congress) and *Malin zai Zhongguo de Youguan Ziliao* (Materials Concerning Maring in China).³ These materials are contradictory, often confusing, but are none the less interesting and valuable contributions to our knowledge of the early years of the party’s existence.⁴

² *Yi Da Qianhou*, compiled and ed. by the Contemporary History Research Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Party History Research Department of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution (2 vols; Beijing, 1980), 452 and 577 pp., respectively. This collection also contains a number of interesting memoirs relating to the formation of the Socialist Youth Corps, the work-study programme in France, and Chinese students in Japan. It is indispensable reading for anyone interested in this period. A copy of the collection is available for purchase in Hong Kong.

³ *Yi Da Huiyilu*, ed. by the Zhishi Chubanshe (Shanghai, 1980), 176 pp.; *Malin zai Zhongguo de Youguan Ziliao*, ed. under the auspices of the Contemporary History Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing, 1980), 202 pp. The latter collection contains materials relating to the whole of Sneevliet’s (Maring’s) two visits to China and copies of the articles which he wrote for the Chinese newspapers *Xiangdao* (The Guide Weekly) and *Qianfeng* (Vanguard).

⁴ This research note relies heavily on the materials in the *Yi Da Qianhou* collection. No attempt has been made to be comprehensive, as it is impossible to know precisely what has been published in China, but still remains unavailable to non-Chinese scholars. To an extent it remains a question of pot-luck. This research note is a by-product of a larger project to publish the Sneevliet archives held in the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam.

It is commonly known that six communist “small groups” had been established *inside* China before the First Party Congress was convened in July 1921.⁵ However, there is still disagreement and uncertainty about when and how they were set up. Some of the recently available materials sheds new light on these two questions.

The first communist “small group” to be set up was in Shanghai, and this group functioned as the provisional centre for the party prior to the First Congress. Essentially, two dates are given for the founding of this group: May 1920 and August 1920. The former date was, until recently, the more commonly accepted by historians both within China and outside. Evidence now suggests that the latter is the more probable date. The usage of May 1920 stems from the date given in the 1947 official publication *Zhongguo Xiandai Geming Yundongshi* (History of the Contemporary Chinese Revolutionary Movement), and this has been followed by most writers.⁶ Although a meeting was held in May, it was not the meeting to found the party, but, more probably, to organise a Marxist study group.⁷ Li Da, one of those intimately involved in the events, gives a date of August 1920 and

⁵ These were the “small groups” in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan (or Hankou or Hubei), Guangzhou (or Guangdong), Changsha (or Hunan), Shandong (or Jinan). There is disagreement about what these early organisations were called. While most Chinese writers refer to them as *xiaozu* (small groups), others disagree. Liu Renjing states that before the First Party Congress Shanghai, Beijing, Changsha, Jinan, Wuhan, Qingdao, Guangzhou, etc., all had organisations propagating communism, but that they had no formal name. Liu Renjing, “Huiyi dang de ‘yi da’” (Recollections of the “First Party Congress”), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 207. According to Luo Zhanlong the name Beijing communist “small group” was attached to it by later writers. At the time the “small group” did not use this name either in internal or external dealings. Luo Zhanlong, “Huiyi dang de chuangli shiqi de jige wenti” (Recollections of Several Problems around the Time of the Founding of the Party), *ibid.*, p. 195. Finally, Zhu Wushan goes as far as to say that in early 1921 there was no formal party organisation in Beijing. Zhu Wushan, “Zhonggong chengli qianhou zai Beijing gongzuo de huiyi” (Recollections of Work in Beijing around the Time of the Founding of the Chinese Communist Party), *ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶ The Committee for the Study of Modern Chinese History, *Zhongguo Xiandai Geming Yundongshi* (Hong Kong, 1947), p. 127. Bing quotes Komintern i Vostok (Moscow, 1969), p. 245, to give also a date of May 1920. He writes that on Voitinsky’s initiative the provisional central committee of the Chinese Communist Party was formed. Dov Bing, “Ma-Lin’s Activities in China From the Beginning of June Till December 10, 1921”, in: *Issues and Studies* (Taipei), IX (1972-73), No 5, p. 22.

⁷ According to Chen Wangdao, a Marxist study society was set up that later became the party organisation without, however, changing its name. Chen Wangdao, “Huiyi dang chengli shiqi de yixie qingkuang” (Recollections of Certain Conditions at the Time of the Founding of the Party), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 23. Yang Zhihua relates that in autumn or winter (1920) a communist “small group” was set up probably under the name “Marxist study society”. Yang Zhihua, “Yang Zhihua de huiyi” (Yang Zhihua’s Recollections), *ibid.*, p. 26.

he is supported by a number of others.⁸ For example, Zhang Shenfu says that the party began to be organised in Shanghai (and Beijing) in August 1920.⁹ Elsewhere, Zhang mentions a letter from Chen Duxiu that arrived in Beijing some time in August 1920. In the letter Chen mentioned that Zhang and Li Dazhao were the only two people in Beijing at that time to whom he could write about the business of setting up the party. A further letter from Chen asked whether the fledgling organisation should be called a communist party (*gongchandang*) or a socialist party (*shehuidang*). According to Zhang, on Voitinsky's suggestion the name Communist Party was agreed upon.¹⁰

Shortly after the organisation of this nucleus, groups were set up in a number of other cities, thus providing a broader base for the development of the communist movement. In general, these groups grew out of the existing radical study groups and other similar organisations. The first two localities to follow Shanghai's lead were Beijing and Wuhan. The "small group" in Beijing was set up in October rather than in September, the more

⁸ Li Da, "Qiyi huyi" (Recollections of July First), in: *Wusi Yundong zai Shanghai Shiliao xuanji* (Compilation of Historical Materials on the May Fourth Movement in Shanghai) (Shanghai, 1980), p. 593.

⁹ Zhang Shenfu, "Jian dang chuqi de yixie qingkuang" (Certain Conditions in the Early Period of the Establishment of the Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 220.

¹⁰ Id., "Zhongguo gongchandang jianli qianhou qingkuang de huiyi" (Recollections of Conditions around the Time of the Establishment of the Chinese Communist Party), *ibid.*, p. 548. Bao Huiseng offers dates of summer-autumn 1920 for the establishment. In his article written under the alias Jiwu Laoren he does not give a date, but in his 1953 recollections that form the basis for the 1957 *Xin Guan* piece he gives a date of summer 1920. Bao Huiseng, "Gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao huiyi qianhou de huiyi" (Recollections about the First National Congress of the Communist Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 312. Elsewhere Bao offers dates of July-August and summer-autumn 1920, "Dang de yi da qianhou" (Around the Time of the First Party Congress), in: *Yi Da Huiyilu*, *op. cit.*, p. 27, and "Bao Huiseng de yifengxin" (A Letter from Bao Huiseng), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 434, respectively. One further unsubstantiated report gives the date as the end of June 1920. She Fuliang says that just before he set off for Japan, five people (Chen Duxiu, Chen Gongpei, Li Hanjun, Yu Xiusong and She Fuliang) met in Shanghai to set up a revolutionary organisation. They drew up a constitution containing ten articles and decided on the name of Communist Party for the organisation. She Fuliang, "Zhongguo shehuizhuyi qingniantuan chengli qianhou de yixie qingkuang" (Certain Conditions around the Time of the Founding of the Chinese Socialist Youth Corps), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 71. She also mentions that this meeting was advocated by Voitinsky, who was in Shanghai at the time, "Zhongguo gongchandang chengli shiqi de jige wenti" (Some Questions Concerning the Period of the Founding of the Chinese Communist Party), *ibid.*, p. 34. It is interesting to note that an account of the First Party Congress written in the second half of 1921 mentions that the party began to be organised first in Shanghai from the middle of 1920 onwards. Initially the group had only five members. "Zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui" (The First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), *ibid.*, I, p. 20. For further discussion of this account see below.

readily used date. Mid September is the date suggested by Zhang Guotao (Chang Kuo-t'ao). In his memoirs he writes that at this time a meeting was held in Li Dazhao's office to establish the group.¹¹ Zhang Shenfu's account suggests a date of end September or early October as being the most likely date. He gives, however, a different view of the origins of the group. On returning from Shanghai in late September he spoke with Li Dazhao about discussions held in Shanghai concerning the founding of the party. At that time he and Li were the only party members in Beijing, and thus they set about recruiting new members. Their first recruit was Zhang Guotao after having failed in their attempts to woo Liu Qingyang.¹² The source for the date of October comes from the "Report of the Beijing 'Small Group'" to the First Party Congress which was found in the archives of the Communist International. In the report it is mentioned that in October last year (i.e. 1920) the Beijing communist group was set up.¹³ This must be taken as the most reliable date.

Also in the autumn, the Wuhan (or Hankou or Hubei) "small group" was established. Initially, the main work appears to have been carried out by Dong Biwu and Liu Bochui. After the Shanghai group had been set up, Li Hanjun sent a letter to Dong Biwu suggesting that a similar organisation be set up in Hubei. Dong replied that he would begin work and shortly afterwards Li made a special trip to Wuhan to consult with Dong, Zhang Guoen and others about this question. At about the same time Liu Bochui was in Shanghai on his way back to Wuhan from Guangzhou (Canton), where he had been involved in editing *Weimin Zhoukan*. In Shanghai he consulted on a number of occasions with Chen Duxiu, who persuaded him to join the Shanghai group. Shortly afterwards Chen sent him on to Wuhan to help Dong set up the party.

One day in September a meeting was convened to set up the Wuhan Communist Research "Small Group" (*Gongchanzhuyi Yanjiu Xiaozu*).¹⁴ Six people attended the meeting: Dong Biwu, Liu Bochui, Chen Tanqiu, Bao Huiseng, Zhang Guoen and Deng Kaiqing. The meeting discussed the

¹¹ Chang Kuo-t'ao [Zhang Guotao], *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1971), p. 111.

¹² Zhang Shenfu, "Jian dang chuqi de yixie qingkuang", loc. cit., p. 221.

¹³ This report is quoted by Zhou Zixin, "Beijing 'gongchandang xiaozu'" (The Beijing "Communist Small Group"), in: *Dangshi Yanjiu*, 1980, No 1. In his article on Li Dazhao and the founding of the party Zhou simply mentions the date without indicating the source. Id., "Li Dazhao yu zhongguo gongchandang de chuangli" (Li Dazhao and the Founding of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Jianghuai Luntan*, 1981, No 3, p. 18.

¹⁴ This is variously referred to as the Hubei Party branch (*Hubei dangzhibu*), the Hubei Party "small group" (*Hubei dang xiaozu*) and the Wuhan Party branch (*Wuhan dangzhibu*).

draft of the party programme that Liu had brought from Shanghai and listened to Liu's report on the Shanghai group. It also chose Bao Huiseng to be in charge of work for the "small group", Chen Tanqiu and Zhang Guoen to be in charge of organisational work and financial work, respectively. If the date for this meeting is correct, it would mean that the Wuhan "small group" was founded before that in Beijing and was, thus, the first "small group" to be founded after that in Shanghai.¹⁵

With the exception of the memoirs of Peng Shuzhi, Chinese writers attribute the establishment of the Hunan "small group" to Mao Zedong's initiative. This discrepancy can in part be explained by Peng's hostility towards Mao and the desire on the part of establishment historians such as Li Rui, the biographer of the young Mao, to build up Mao's involvement in the early years of the Chinese Revolution. According to Peng Shuzhi the main motive force at first in Hunan was He Minfan, the Director of the Chuanshan Secondary School. Through former pupils of his, who were in Shanghai, He came into contact with Chen Duxiu. At Chen's insistence He began to gather around himself suitable people for forming a communist group. According to Peng this work had begun in July 1920, and by September the group consisted of five people: He Minfan, Liu Hun, one of the teachers in He's school, He Shuheng, Mao Zedong and Li Yirong. However, Peng notes that the group was not formally constituted at this time.¹⁶ It is possible, in fact, that Peng is in fact referring not to the "small group", but to the Marxist study society. According to Li Rui Mao began to organise this society about the same time that he founded the Cultural

¹⁵ This is based on the account in Liao Xinchu, "Hubei dang zuzhi de jianli jiqi chuqi de huodong" (The Establishment and Early Activities of the Hubei Party Organisation), in: *Hubei Caijing Xueyuan Xuebao*, 1981, No 3, p. 26. Liao's account is essentially a summary of a number of reminiscences by Bao Huiseng. Bao mentions the role played by Liu Bochui in setting up the group and gives a date of September 1920 for the founding of the group. He mentions that he was chosen as Deputy Secretary and that Zhang Guoen was put in charge of financial work. After the "small group" was set up Manaev, one of Voitinsky's entourage, came to Wuhan to investigate the situation and to select students to go to Russia. Bao Huiseng, "Zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui de jige wenti" (Several Questions Concerning the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 373. See also id., "Gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao huiyi qianhou de huiyi", loc. cit., pp. 312-13. Elsewhere Bao gives a date of September-October 1920 and makes the comment that perhaps the Beijing group was set up a little earlier than the Wuhan group, "Bao Huiseng de yifengxin", loc. cit., p. 435. This date is earlier than that given by Zhang Guotao in his memoirs: November 1920. Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁶ Claude Cadart and Cheng Yingxiang, *Mémoires de Peng Shuzhi: L'Envol du Communisme en Chine* (Paris, 1983), pp. 154-56. I am grateful to Dr Gregor Benton for pointing out this source to me.

Book Society (i.e. July-August). However, Li Rui makes no mention of the involvement of He Minfan.¹⁷

As is evident from the above, the actual date of establishment of the “small group” is also unclear. Li Rui simply states that after Mao had received notification that groups had been established in Shanghai and Beijing (in May and September, respectively, according to Li Rui), he “immediately founded the same type of organisation in Changsha.”¹⁸ This would give a rough date of late 1920. This is supported by some evidence, but contradicted by other. Zhang Guotao says that the party and the Socialist Youth Corps were founded in Hunan at the same time.¹⁹ We already know, from an entry in Zhang Wenliang’s diary,²⁰ that the SYC was formed at the end of December or at the very beginning of January. If Zhang is correct, then a date of end December or early January would be correct. However, while there may have been a *de facto* “small group” at this time, whether it formally existed at this time is open to doubt. In their article on some of the early “small groups”, Chang Meiyong *et al.* simply state that “at the end of 1920 or early 1921, the Hunan Socialist Youth Corps was established and formed the ideological and organisational basis for the establishment of the Hunan Party.”²¹ Indeed Yi Lirong, one of those personally involved in the events, states quite clearly in his memoirs that before the First Party Congress there was only a SYC organisation and no party organisation.²² Peng Shuzhi also expresses the view that the Hunan branch of the party was formally set up on the decision of the First Party Congress with Mao Zedong as Secretary.²³

The Guangzhou group was formed on Chen Duxiu’s initiative after he had moved there from Shanghai to take up his post as Commissioner of

¹⁷ Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung* (White Plains, N.Y., 1977), p. 157.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁹ Zhang, however, gives a date of November, not December. Chang Kuo-t’ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, p. 129.

²⁰ As quoted by Li Rui, the entry in Zhang Wenliang’s diary for 26 December 1920 reads as follows: “Tse-tung came. The Youth Corps will hold its inaugural meeting next week.” Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*, op. cit., p. 164.

²¹ Chang Meiyong, Zhuang Youwei, Ren Wuxiang and Liu Changyu, “Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan, Changsha, liuxuesheng de zaoqi jiangang huodong” (Early Party-Building Activities in Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan and Changsha, and among Chinese Students Abroad), in: *Shanghai Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao*, 1981, No 2, pp. 18-19.

²² Yi Lirong, “Dang de chuangli shiqi Hunan de yixie qingkuang” (Certain Conditions in Hunan at the Time of the Establishment of the Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 283.

²³ Cadart and Cheng Yingxiang, *Mémoires de Peng Shuzhi*, op. cit., p. 158.

Education for Guangdong Province.²⁴ On arriving in Guangzhou, Chen found the beginnings of a communist group, which he proceeded to reorganise to bring it more into line with developments in Shanghai. In autumn 1920 two Russians, who were with the Rosta Press Agency in Guangzhou, had set about the organisation of the Guangzhou Communist Party with the help of some anarchists including Huang Lingsheng. After Chen's arrival and while setting up the "small group", the anarchists withdrew, enabling the group to be set up under the responsibility of Tan Pingshan.²⁵ This account would broadly coincide with that of Zhang Guotao, who claimed that this "small group" was formed in January 1921.²⁶

Finally, some time between winter 1920 and spring 1921, the Shandong (or Jinan) group was founded. This group was organised principally under the influence of the Beijing group, although contact by mail existed between the group and Shanghai.²⁷ Li Da, among others, points out Beijing's influence commenting that the Beijing group sent Chen Weiren to help set up the Shandong group.²⁸ Also, early members such as Wang Jinmei had

²⁴ Chen Duxiu left Shanghai to take up his post on 16 December 1920. Thomas C. Kuo, *Ch'en Tu-hsiu (1879-1942) and the Chinese Communist Movement* (South Orange, N.J., 1975), p. 85.

²⁵ See Chang Meiyong et al., "Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan, Changsha, liuxuesheng de zaoqi jiandang huodong", loc. cit., p. 18, and Wang Laidi, "Guanyu zhongguo gongchandang zaoqi zuzhi de jige wenti" (Concerning Several Problems of the Early Organisation of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Zhejiang Xuekan*, 1981, No 3, p. 10. According to Wang the transliteration of the Russian names is Mi-nuo-er (Minor?) and Bie-si-lin (Besilin?).

²⁶ Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, p. 133. Liang Furan gives the much earlier date of October 1920. He claims that Tan Pingshan called together a meeting of seven people and announced the formation of the "small group". This date would be before Chen Duxiu's arrival and seems improbable. Liang Furan, "Guangdong dang de zuzhi chengli qianhou de yixie qingkuang" (Certain Conditions around the Time of the Founding of the Guangdong Party Organisation), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 447.

²⁷ Chang Meiyong et al. conclude that the group was founded with the help of both Beijing and Shanghai. The basis for this view derives from accounts that during the summer of 1920 Chen Duxiu sent Wang Yueping a letter calling on him to set up a communist "small group". "Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan, Changsha, liuxuesheng de zaoqi jiandang huodong", p. 18. This date seems to be too early and while such a letter might have been sent later it seems clear that practical contact came via Beijing.

²⁸ Wang Wenquan and Li Zhaonian, "Guanyu Shandong gongchandang xiaozu wenti de tantao" (An Inquiry into Questions Concerning the Shandong Party "Small Group"), in: *Shandong Daxue Wenke Lunwen Jikan*, 1981, No 1, p. 97. Zhang Guotao does not mention Chen by name in his memoirs, but he does say that Beijing organised the communist "small group" and the SYC in Shandong. Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, p. 128. Ma Baosan confirms in his memoirs that Chen was sent to Shandong, but claims that this was after the First Party Congress. He was sent to set up the Shandong branch of the Communist Party (*Shandong qu zhibu*).

very close relations with those who were in Beijing, and it is reasonable to presume that Wang and the others were drawn into Beijing's sphere of influence. Further impetus to the development of this group in 1921 came from a visit from Yang Mingchai and his discussions with Shandong activists.²⁹

With respect to the date of establishment three possibilities have been put forward: summer-autumn 1920, winter 1920 or spring 1921. Again it is difficult to say with precision the date. The first date would seem to be too early, given that the Shanghai group was not set up until August 1920. With respect to the other two dates, Wang Wenquan and Li Zhaonian suggest that winter 1920 is the more probable. From its launch on November 7, 1920, Chen Weiren was involved in the editing of the Beijing publication *Laodongzhe* (The Worker). According to Wang and Li it was probably in this formal capacity that Chen went to Jinan. Further, at the end of 1920 Chen left China to study in Russia, thus providing us with a final possible date for his visit. Within this time span it is probable that the visit was sooner rather than later, as after returning from Jinan to Beijing he would still have to prepare for his trip to Russia.³⁰

Although the precise structure and names differed from place to place, by the time of the First Party a threefold structure existed for the communist organisations. Operating illegally at the core were the "small groups", then there were the SYCs operating semi-openly and providing a recruitment pool for the party, and, presenting a public face, trying to reach the widest audience possible, there were the Marxist study societies (see table).

Just as the organisation varied from place to place, so too did the type of work engaged in and its intensity. However, in general, with varying degrees of success, the nascent groups involved themselves in the labour movement and propaganda work. For example, to facilitate this work, the Shanghai "small group" was divided into two sections: one for propaganda and one for labour work.³¹ Work was patchy, and particularly at the party centre in Shanghai during the first half of 1921 it began to collapse.

According to Ma, a communist "small group" had been founded in early 1921 by Wang Jinmei and Deng Enming. Ma's timing of Chen's visit is wrong, as Chen went to Russia for study at the end of 1920. Ma Baosan, "Shandong dangzuzhi de faduan" (Making a Start with the Shandong Party Organisation), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 393.

²⁹ Wang Wenquan and Li Zhaonian, "Guanyu Shandong gongchandang xiaozu wenti de tantao", p. 97.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Li Da, "Zhongguo gongchandang de faqi he diyici, dierci daibiao dahui jingguo de huiyi" (Recollections of the Origins of the Chinese Communist Party and the First and Second Party Congresses), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 8.

Founding dates for “small groups”, Socialist Youth Corps and Marxist study societies

Locality	Small groups	SYC	Marxist study societies ^c
Shanghai	August 1920	August 1920 ^a	May 1920 ^f
Beijing	October 1920	End October 1920 ^b	March 1920 ^g
Wuhan	September 1920	Unclear	Unclear ^h
Hunan	Possibly end 1920, early 1921	December 1920 ^c	July/August 1920 ⁱ
Guangzhou	January 1921	August 1920 ^a	Early 1921 ^j
Shandong	November/December 1921	Unclear ^d	Autumn 1920 ^k

^a Chang Meiyang et al., “Wuhan, Guangzhou, Jinan, Changsha, liuxuesheng de zaoqi jiangand huodong”, p. 22. However, in March-April 1921 the SYC was temporarily disbanded in Guangzhou.

^b “Beijing shehuizhuyi qingniantuan de jianli” (The Establishment of the Beijing SYC), in: Beijing Ribao, 20 August 1980, p. 3. Liu Renjing gives a founding-date of spring 1920 and says that Zhang Tailei was placed in charge. Liu Renjing, “Huiyi shehuizhuyi qingniantuan” (Reminiscences of the SYC), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 217.

^c Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*, p. 164. In May 1921 the SYC was temporarily disbanded.

^d Ma Futang says that the SYC was set up in Shandong in the later half of 1921. Ma Futang, “Dang chengli qianhou Shandong diqu de yixie qingkuang” (Conditions in the Shandong Area around the Time of the Founding of the Party), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, p. 401. This account is not supported by others.

^e The Marxist study societies noted are not the first organisations in these places to be set up that propagated Marxism. The May Fourth movement led to a flourishing of societies for the study of new ideas, many of which concentrated on socialist ideas. Those listed here are ones which used the actual name of a Marxist study society or equivalent.

^f See note 6. This group was composed of three sets of people: students returned from Japan such as Li Da and Li Hanjun, teachers from Hangzhou such as Chen Wangdao and Shi Cuntong, and Guomindang supporters such as Dai Litao, Shen Xuanlu and Shao Lizi. Shao Lizi, “Dang chengli qianhou de yixie qingkuang” (Conditions around the Time of the Founding of the Party), in: Yi Da Qianhou, II, pp. 61, 69.

^g Jindaishi Ziliao (Source Materials on Modern History) (Beijing, 1955), pp. 161-73.

^h Although no Marxist study society as such was established, a similar role was played by the Reading Society for the Enlightenment of the Masses and the Liqun Publishing Company. See Guangming Ribao, 12 May 1955, and Liao Xinchu, “Hubei dang zuzhi de jianli jiqi chuqi de huodong”, loc. cit., pp. 24-25.

ⁱ Li Jui, *The Early Revolutionary Activities of Comrade Mao Tse-tung*, pp. 157-62.

^j After the “small group” was set up, it organised this society to propagate Marxism. It had a membership of some eighty people. Zhang Jingru, Wang Chaomei, Wang Dejing and Huang Futong, *Zhongguo Gongchandang de Chuangli* (The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party) (Hebei, 1981), p. 153.

^k In March 1921 the society was forced into conducting its activities only semi-openly. Wang Wenquan and Li Zhaonian, “Guanyu Shandong gongchandang xiaozu wenti de tantao”, loc.cit., p. 95. Another accounts that the society ran into problems in March 1921, but says that it was set up in spring 1920 following Voitinsky’s visit. Zhang Jingru et al., *Zhongguo Gongchandang de Chuangli*, pp. 157, 156, respectively.

Four main reasons can be found to explain the problems with party work in Shanghai. First, following Voitinsky's departure there were financial problems.³² According to Li Da, for want of other means party funds were maintained by members' contributions from the money they had received from articles sold. Because of these financial problems the journal *Gongchandang* (The Communist) was forced to discontinue publication.³³ Second, with Chen Duxiu's departure to Guangzhou the main driving force in the group was gone, and those remaining in Shanghai had difficulty handling the work-load.³⁴ Third, Li Hanjun, who deputised for Chen Duxiu, was less inclined towards practical work and was pressed for time because of his teaching commitments.³⁵

Finally, strong disagreements developed between Chen Duxiu and Li Hanjun over the future development of the party, and this further hampered work. Even before Chen's departure for Guangzhou the two had clashed over the production costs for *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), and this dispute was the source of the enmity between the two men.³⁶ With respect to the party, the main disagreements concerned power relationships within the party. In February 1921 Chen drafted a party document which he sent to Shanghai. In it he advocated that the party adopt a system of centralised power (*zhongyang jiquanzhi*). Li totally disagreed with this, and felt that Chen merely wished to get members to approve his own autocratic rule. In reply Li advocated the division of power among the localities (*difang fenquan*) with the centre functioning as an office without authority. The dispute sufficiently incensed Li Hanjun that he expressed his desire to resign as temporary secretary and from the editorship of *Xin Qingnian*. He asked Li Da to take over his duties in the party, and Li Da claims that he did so for the sake of party unity.³⁷

³² Bericht des Genossen H. Maring für die Executive (1922), v. Ravesteyn Papers, No 79, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis.

³³ Li Da, "Zhongguo gongchandang de faqi he diyici, dierci daibiao dahui jingguo de huiyi", loc. cit., p. 9.

³⁴ In fact, Bao Huiseng was pressed into service to help with the work in Shanghai. Towards the end of 1920, he arrived in Shanghai with a group of Wuhan SYC members who were intending to go to Moscow for study. The study trip proved impossible to realise, at least as far as Bao was concerned, and Bao was asked to stay on in Shanghai to help with party work. "Gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao huiyi qianhou de huiyi", p. 304.

³⁵ Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, p. 136.

³⁶ Li Da, "Zhongguo gongchandang de faqi he diyici, dierci daibiao dahui jingguo de huiyi", p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. Bao Huiseng gives a different account of the decline of party work in Shanghai. Following a May Day rally, Chinese and French-concession police raided the party office and the communist-sponsored Foreign Languages School. Li Hanjun called a meeting to discuss this matter, and suggested that the activities of the party be suspended

It was in this atmosphere of disarray that the decision was made to convene the First Party Congress. The knowledge of events at the First Party Congress has been somewhat murky, and even basic questions such as the date and number of participants have been subject to extended debate. Of the thirteen Chinese participants at the Congress, nine have left some sort of memoir, but with the exception of Chen Gongbo's they were written at least fifteen years, and in some cases almost sixty years after the event.³⁸ We are fortunate thus that an account of the Congress written in the latter of 1921 is in the *Yi Da Qianhou* collection.³⁹ This account, which appears to be in the form of a report, lay in the archives of the Comintern until it, or a copy of it, was returned to the Chinese in 1957 along with a

and party headquarters be moved to Guangzhou. Alternatively, Chen Duxiu should be asked to return to Shanghai. Bao was instructed to go to Guangzhou to talk these matters over with Chen. "Gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao huiyi qianhou de huiyi", p. 304. A similar account is contained in his article under the alias of Jiwu Laoren in *Xin Guan*, 1957, No 13.

³⁸ The principal memoirs of the Chinese participants are as follows. *Li Da*, "Guanyu zhongguo gongchandang jianli de jige wenti" (Some Questions Concerning the Establishment of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, pp. 1-5 (23 February 1954); *id.*, "Zhongguo gongchandang de faqi he diyici, dierci daibiao dahui jingguo de huiyi", pp. 6-18 (August-September 1953). *Zhang Guotao* (Chang Kuo-t'ao), *Wo de Huiyi* (My Recollections), I (Hong Kong, 1971); *id.*, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*. *Liu Renjing*, "Yi Da Suoyi" (Trivial Recollections of the First Party Congress), in: *Yi Da Huiyilu*, pp. 45-52 (21 December 1979). *Dong Biwu* in *Nym Wales*, *Red Dust: Autobiographies of Chinese Communists* (Stanford, 1952) (interview from 1937); *id.*, "Zhongguo gongchandang 'yi da' de zhuyao wenti" (Important Questions Concerning the "First Congress" of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, pp. 360-64 (28 June 1961); *id.*, "Dong Biwu tan zhongguo gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao dahui he Hubei gongchanzhuyi xiaozu" (Dong Biwu on the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the Hubei Communist Small Group), *ibid.*, pp. 365-71 (12 August 1971). *Chen Tanqiu*, "Reminiscences of the First Congress of the Communist Party of China", in: *Communist International*, American ed., XIII (1936), pp. 1361-66; British ed., XIII, pp. 593-96. *Mao Zedong* in *Edgar Snow*, *Red Star over China* (New York, 1938) (interview from 1936). *Chen Gongbo*, "Wo yu gongchandang" (I and the Communist Party), in: *Hanfeng ji* (Cold Winds Collection) (n.p., 1944), pp. 191-267 (1943); *id.*: Ch'en Kung-po, *The Communist Movement in China*, ed. with an introd. by C. Martin Wilbur (New York, 1966) (1924). *Zhou Fuhai*, "Fusang jiyi shou dangnian" (My Recollections of Studying in Japan), in *Wangyi ji* (The Bygones) (Shanghai, 1944) (1942); also in *Chen Gongbo Zhou Fuhai Huiyilu Hebian* (Recollections of Chen Gongbo and Zhou Fuhai) (Hong Kong, 1967), pp. 107-36; *id.*, "Taochu liao zhidu Wuhan" (Escape from the Red Capital Wuhan), *ibid.*, pp. 137-78. *Bao Huiseng*, "Gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao huiyi qianhou de huiyi", pp. 303-21 (August-September 1953); *id.*, "Zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui de jige wenti", pp. 372-78 (12 August 1978); *id.*, "Dang de yi da qianhou", *loc. cit.*, pp. 24-44 (1979); *id.*, "Huiyi dang de chuangli shiqi" (Recollections of the Time of the Founding of the Party), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, pp. 379-81 (9 November 1978).

³⁹ "Zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui", *loc. cit.*, pp. 20-23. Unless otherwise stated the information on the Congress is taken from this report.

number of other documents.⁴⁰ The authorship of the piece is unclear, but its content coincides sufficiently with what we know already to suggest that it is authentic. Chinese communist scholars have clearly taken it to be authentic, and many recent publications have made use of information contained in the account.⁴¹ Its authenticity has been attested to on at least three occasions by Dong Biwu, one of the participants.⁴² The account enables us to date the Congress accurately, provides us with interesting information on the number of participants, and generally confirms what we know about the main debates at the Congress.

Zhang Guotao acted as Chairman at the Congress. The first session worked out an agenda for the Congress, heard speeches from Sneevliet and Nikolsky, and listened to reports from the representatives concerning the situation in their respective areas. The reports all made basically the same three points: membership was very small; it should be increased; and work should be carried out to organise workers and to conduct propaganda. These reports ran over into the second day. The Congress was then adjourned for two days at Sneevliet's suggestion to enable a draft party

⁴⁰ Two other documents relating to the First Party Congress were returned at the same time. These were "Zhongguo gongchandang diyige gangling" (The First Programme of the Chinese Communist Party) and "Zhongguo gongchandang de yige jueyi" (The First Resolution of the Chinese Communist Party). They have been translated back from the Russian into Chinese and are available in *Yi Da Qianhou*, I, pp. 6-8, 12-14, respectively. These two documents are basically the same as those that appear as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 in Ch'en Kung-po, *The Communist Movement in China*, op.cit. Interestingly, in both the Russian and the English version of the party programme article 11 is missing, which would seem to further attest to the authenticity of the documents. The English versions of the programme and the decision are *ibid.*, pp. 102-03, 103-05, respectively.

⁴¹ The most easily available such account is Shao Weizheng, "The First National Congress of the Communist Party of China: A Verification of the Date of Convocation and the Number of Participants", in: *Social Sciences in China*, I (1980), No 1, pp. 108-29.

⁴² These occasions were in 1959, 1961 and 1963. Quoted in Gong Yushu, "Guanyu zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui daibiao renshu de tantao" (An Inquiry concerning the Number of Representatives at the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party), in: *Qiushi Xuebao*, 1981, No 2, p. 82. Gong also points out that in a letter of 31 December 1929 Dong Biwu wrote to He Shuheng that the Congress "made a report to the International on China's conditions, the report was drafted Li Hanjun and Dong Biwu and approved by Congress." This prompts Gong to wonder if this is the same report as the one returned by the Russians in 1957. It would seem strange, however, if Dong did not later recognise the 1921 account as partly his work. Also, the account is hardly one about conditions in China. Dong Biwu when commenting on why the materials of the First Party Congress were never published makes the remark that Sneevliet took the copies of the documents away with him and sent them to the Communist International. Dong Biwu, "Dong Biwu tan zhongguo gongchandang diyici quanguo daibiao dahui he Hubei gongchanzhuyi xiaozu", loc. cit., pp. 366-67. If this account is correct, it would explain the presence of the documents in the Comintern archives.

programme and work plan to be drawn up as a basis for discussion. The next three sessions of the Congress were taken up with animated debates on the drafts.⁴³ Essentially the account confirms that the most divisive issue was the question whether or not party members could and should become officials and/or members of the National Parliament. By the end of the fifth session the problem of membership of the National Parliament was still not resolved, and it was decided to hold a final decision over until the next Congress. Before the sixth session, held in the evening at Li Hanjun's home, could get properly under way it was interrupted by an intruder, and later the building was searched by the police. This final session was re-convened on a boat on South Lake, Jiaying.

It was intended that the Congress would open on 20 June 1921, but because the delegates had problems in getting to Shanghai in time, the opening was delayed until 23 July.⁴⁴ The time of the Congress roughly coincides with that given by Chen Gongbo. The date of the disrupted session based on the outline above confirms Professor Wilbur's opinion that it occurred within a few days of 30 July, if not on 30 July itself. Wilbur uses Chen's comment that a murder took place in his hotel on the same night as the disrupted session to establish this date.⁴⁵ Shao Weizheng confirms Wilbur's view through his consultation of contemporary Chinese newspapers. Shao discovered reports of the murder in three newspapers that would date the murders as having taken place on the night of 30 July.⁴⁶ If this session was re-convened the following day, this would give us a closing date of 31 July for the Congress. Unfortunately, it cannot be firmly established that this was the case. Zhang Guotao speaks of there being a

⁴³ For a full account of the debates at the First Party Congress and of Sneevliet's role at the Congress see the introduction to the forthcoming publication on the Sneevliet archives.

⁴⁴ Indeed a number of participants did not even set off for Shanghai until after the original date. For example, Bao Huiseng left Hong Kong on 15 July, arriving in Shanghai around 20 July (Shao Weizheng, "The First National Congress", loc. cit., p. 113); Liu Renjing first went to the annual meeting of the Young China Society in Nanjing from 1 to 4 July (Liu Renjing, "Huiyi dang de 'yi da'", loc. cit., p. 209). Mao Zedong and He Shuheng left Changsha for Shanghai on 29 June, the entry in Xie Jue'ai's diary for 29 June reads: "today at six o'clock p.m. Shuheng left for Shanghai accompanied by Renzhi to attend the national Renzhi is a courtesy name for Mao Zedong. Quoted in He Shishan and He Shisi, "Cong 'qiong xiucai' dao 'yi da' daibiao" (From "Poor *Xiucai*" to "First Party Congress" Representative; a *xiucai* is one who passed the imperial examination at the county level in the Qing Dynasty), in: Xinxiang Pinglun, 1981, No 7, p. 79.

⁴⁵ See Wilbur's introduction to Ch'en Kung-po, *The Communist Movement in China*, pp. 22-24.

⁴⁶ These were *Xinwenbao*, 1 and 2 August, *Shenbao*, 1 August, and *Shanghai Shenghuobao*, 2 August. Shao Weizheng, "The First National Congress", pp. 115-16.

gap of one day between the last session in Shanghai and the one in Jiaxing.⁴⁷ However, Chen Tanqiu, Dong Biwu, Bao Huiseng, Li Da and Zhou Fuhai all say that the Congress was resumed the following day. According to Shao Weizheng Wang Huiwu, who suggested the venue and made all the arrangements, confirmed this latter view.⁴⁸ Yet in an account she gave in 1959, Wang indicates that a couple of days passed before the session re-convened.⁴⁹

There has also long been disagreement about the number of Chinese participants at the Congress. The accounts differ about whether there were twelve or thirteen present, and the person around whom the confusion revolves is Bao Huiseng.⁵⁰ It is evident that Bao attended the Congress, but under what status is unclear. Bao himself says that he was one of two delegates from Guangzhou, chosen as a substitute for Chen Duxiu, who was too busy to attend. Other reminiscences give varying interpretations: Dong Biwu and Chen Tanqiu also refer to Bao as a Guangzhou delegate, but Zhang Guotao and Zhou Fuhai say he was a delegate from Wuhan, and Li Da and Liu Renjing say he arrived at the Congress and stayed as a non-voting delegate. The confusion is understandable, Bao was clearly present, he was a member of the Wuhan group, he had worked for the Shanghai group, and just prior to the Congress he had come back from Guangzhou, where he had been involved in discussions with Chen Duxiu. It seems probable that, given the party's young age and its small size, not too much fuss would have been made about formal credentials for one as well known among the group as Bao must have been at the time. Even if he did not have formal credentials it seems unlikely that anyone would have objected to his presence.⁵¹ The view of Li Da and Liu Renjing that he attended as a non-voting delegate is almost certainly an inference from later practice.

However, when it came to writing a formal report for the Comintern,

⁴⁷ Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, pp. 148-49.

⁴⁸ Shao Weizheng, "The First National Congress", p. 116.

⁴⁹ Wang Huiwu, "'Yi da' zai nanhu kaihu de qingkuang" (The Situation of the "First Party Congress" Session at Nanhu), in: *Yi Da Qianhou*, II, p. 56.

⁵⁰ Zhang Guotao gives a different account to explain the discrepancy. Zhang says he refused to recognise He Shuheng's qualifications to be a delegate and, as a result, Mao Zedong thought of a way to send He back to Hunan. Chang Kuo-t'ao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party 1921-1927*, p. 142. This seems to be an improbable account, although there may have been disagreement about Bao Huiseng's official credentials to be there when it came to writing an official account for the Comintern. For further discussion of this see below. Perhaps the passage of time confused things in Zhang's memory. However, it should be pointed out that there is no mention in any other memoirs about problems concerning the recognition of delegate's credentials.

⁵¹ In fact, some accounts mention him as having played an active part in the debates at the Congress.

things may have been viewed differently and only the names of official delegates may have been noted down, and thus Bao's "floating status" was ignored. The 1921 account makes it clear that formally he was not counted as a delegate. It clearly states that there were *twelve delegates* at the Congress representing seven localities. Five localities sent two delegates apiece, while two only sent one delegate. This leaves no place for Bao as a delegate from a locality. Shao Weizheng tries to resolve this dilemma by concluding that Bao was appointed by Chen Duxiu to attend the Congress.⁵² Bao himself rejects this view: "some people say I was Chen Duxiu's representative, not the Guangdong representative, this is incorrect."⁵³ As was noted above, Bao claims that he was the Guangzhou representative, but this cannot be the case. The account says that only one delegate came from Guangzhou, and it is clear that this delegate was Chen Gongbo. This means that the line-up at the First Party Congress was as follows.

<i>Locality or organisation</i>	<i>Name</i>
Shanghai	Li Da, Li Hanjun
Beijing	Zhang Guotao, Liu Renjing
Wuhan	Dong Biwu, Chen Tanqiu
Hunan	Mao Zedong, He Shuheng
Guangzhou	Chen Gongbo
Shandong	Wang Jinmei, Deng Enming
Chinese in Japan for study	Zhou Fuhai
Comintern	H. Sneevliet
Comintern, Irkutsk Bureau	Nikolsky
Unattached	Bao Huiseng

⁵² Shao Weizheng, "The First National Congress", p. 129.

⁵³ This was in February 1979. Quoted in Gong Yushu, "Guanyu zhongguo gongchandang diyici daibiao dahui daibiao renshu de tantao", loc. cit., p. 87.