

LENINIST LEGACIES AND REVOLUTIONARY LIFE HISTORIES IN THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY: A PLUTARCHIAN CASE STUDY OF CAI HESEN AND ZHAO SHIYAN

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This article explores the political influence of V. I. Lenin and the Russian Revolution on the lives of two Chinese revolutionaries: Cai Hesen (1895–1931) and Zhao Shiyuan (1901–1927), who were critical to the early ideological development of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the spread of mass politics. A Plutarchian comparative case study of Zhao Shiyuan and Cai Hesen provides a more nuanced view of the commonalities and differences in their youth group experiences, politicization in France, travel to the Soviet Union, political-agitation activities, and martyrdom. One of the key unifiers of these two life histories is the role of Lenin—his ideas and revolutionary practice. In addition to collected writings, archival materials, and memoirs, the article utilizes oral interviews conducted in 1985 and 1990 with relatives and friends of Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyuan and with CCP scholars.

KEYWORDS: Cai Hesen, Chinese Communist Party, European branch of the Chinese Communist Party, Vladimir Lenin, Plutarch, work-study movement, Zhao Shiyuan

RESEARCHING LENIN AND CHINESE BOLSHEVIST BIOGRAPHIES

The Leninist formula for revolution had a profound influence on twentieth-century global politics. Leninist theory and practice genuinely motivated revolutionaries around the world during the crucial decade of the 1920s. The substantive financial aid and training provided by the Communist International, formed in 1919, far outperformed any other international initiative in mass revolutionary mobilization during the 1920s. The early Chinese Communist Party (CCP) strongly supported the Bolshevik model associated with Lenin's doctrine of revolution that included: (1) a focus on the vanguard leadership of the party, (2) absolute discipline to the party center, (3) the proletariat as primary revolutionaries, (4) the need for adaptive strategy and tactics (including violence), and (5) an impending world revolution. Even as he was ill and dying, Lenin himself exemplified the adaptive strategist and

reoriented the potential world revolution to Asia in light of the obvious failures of communist revolutions in Europe.¹

This article examines the adoption and deployment of the Leninist doctrine by two significant early CCP revolutionaries in China: Cai Hesen (蔡和森 1895–1931) and Zhao Shiyan (趙世炎 1901–1927). Because of their relatively early deaths, Cai and Zhao have not been studied extensively in the West, even though early in the CCP's history they were two crucial leaders in terms of creating party strategy and providing theoretical leadership. Zhao, moreover, was one of the most effective labor organizers in the CCP, as he demonstrated in his organization of labor strikes in the CCP Northern Bureau and in the three Shanghai uprisings (1926–1927).

Their adoption of Bolshevism from the Soviet Union was based on direct experiences in Europe and the Soviet Union, in essence a truly international perspective. One of their most important contributions was their pivotal leadership in establishing European branches of the Chinese Communist youth organizations (ECCO)² in 1922 that produced key revolutionaries for China, including Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan brought forward, from Europe and the Soviet Union, a distinctive expertise in Leninism that was highlighted in their work as the editors of two pre-1927 CCP journals. As Tsinghua University historian Zhu Yuhe (朱育和) remarked, “It was strange that at that time [ca. 1922] the CCP already existed, but the thinking was not too mature. It was [through] the European [party section of the CCP] that *the thought of Lenin came to truly influence us* [emphasis mine].”³ CCP historians generally have remarked on the importance of a revolutionary blueprint being more important than Marxist theory in the CCP's formation.⁴

The present case study relies on existing studies, memoirs, and archival materials in CCP history, and it also utilizes testimonies from the Chinese History Conversations Project, a series of 40 interview sessions conducted by the author in collaboration with Tsinghua University in 1985 and 1990. CCP participants of the 1920s, relatives of participants, Chinese scholars, and Tsinghua professors took part (see Table 1).⁵

The lens of analysis for this case study is comparative, utilizing the life history model of Plutarchian biography. One of the greatest political biographers of all time, Plutarch (ca. 46–126) was a Greek who lived under the colonial rule of Rome. He pioneered the

1 Stanley W. Page, “Lenin: Prophet of World Revolution from the East,” *Russian Review* 11, no. 2 (1952): 67–77; Jonathan Frankel, “Lenin's Doctrinal Revolution of April 1917,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (1969): 117–42; Vladimir I. Lenin, *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975).

2 ECCO stands for European [branches of the] Chinese Communist organizations. The groups formed in 1922 were the European branch of the CCP (Zhongguo gongchandang lü Ou zhibu), and the European branch of the Chinese Socialist Youth Corps (Zhongguo shehuizhuyi qingnian tuan lü Ou zhibu).

3 Zhu Yuhe, comments made during an interview of Zheng Chaolin. Interview, Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, October 29, 1985.

4 Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Hans J. van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919–1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Peter Gue Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

5 All interviews were conducted in Chinese; quotations in this article are the author's translations.

Table 1. Summary of Interviews from the Chinese Conversations Project Utilized in This Article

Interviewees and interview dates	Background information
Cai Bo (蔡博 1925–1991) 10/04/85	Cai Bo, son of Cai Hesen (蔡和森 1895–1931) and Xiang Jingyu (向警予 1894–1928), was raised in the Soviet Union.
Hu Hua (胡華) 12/05/85	Hu Hua, a professor, edited the first 50 volumes of <i>Biographies of CCP Members</i> (中共黨史人物傳 <i>Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan</i>) (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1980–1992), collective biographical essays on Chinese revolutionaries.
Jiang Zemin (江澤民 1903–1989) 10/25/85	Jiang Zemin was an ECCO participant who was at Charleroi University in Belgium. He graduated in electrical engineering in 1926.
Peng Chengfu (彭承福) 6/06/90	Peng Chengfu wrote a short biography on Zhao Shiyan and organized the collection of his writings.
Sheng Cheng (盛成 1899–1997) 10/12/85, 10/18/85, 11/23/85, 6/22/90	Sheng Cheng, one of three Asian founders of the French Communist Party, was involved in political, cultural, and intellectual activities. President Francois Mitterrand awarded Sheng the Légion d'honneur.
Shi Guang (施光) 12/12/85	Shi Guang, professor of CCP history, was an exceptional interviewee. He knew the details of much history and had a broad understanding of party politics during the 1920s. Wang Zekai (汪澤楷 1895–1959) was one of his teachers
Zhang Shenfu (張申府 1893–1986) 10/25/85	Zhang Shenfu, a disciple of Chen Duxiu during the New Culture movement, was instrumental in formation of the ECCO. Zhang's wife, Liu Qingyang (劉清揚, 1894–1977), was a member of the Self-Awakening Society and a close friend of Zhou Enlai.
Zhao Lengzhuang (趙冷莊 b. 1930?) 6/03/90	Zhao Lengzhuang, niece of Zhao Shiyan (趙世炎 1901–1927), was interviewed in her home. Notes for this interview include much family information, including some on Li Peng (李鵬 1928–), nephew of Zhao Shiyan.
Zhao Xinyan (趙新炎 dates unknown) 6/27/90	Zhao Xinyan, grandson of Zhao Shiyan, had not met his grandfather but spoke of his grandmother, Xia Zhixu (夏之栩 1906–1987), and the fate of his family.
Zheng Chaolin (鄭超麟 1901–1999) 10/29/85, 6/18/90	Zheng Chaolin, a founder of the ECCO in Paris, left France in 1923 to study in the Soviet Union. With Qu Qiubai, he edited <i>The Bolshevik</i> (不畏爾斯克 <i>Buweierskike</i>). He joined the oppositionist Trotsky group in the CCP and was expelled in 1929. Imprisoned by the GMD and the CCP for 34 years, Zheng was released to house arrest in Shanghai in 1979. I was granted his first interview by a foreigner.

Note: These interviews with participants in European branches of the Chinese Communist organizations (ECCO), with participants' relatives, and with scholars were conducted by Marilyn Levine, accompanied by Tsinghua University professors Liu Guisheng (劉桂生) and/or Zhu Yuhe (朱育和), in 1985 and 1990. They are part of a set of 40 interviews in the Chinese Conversations Project. CCP, Chinese Communist Party. GMD, Guomindang.

idea of focusing on life cycles as well as the social and political context of the figures he studied. He narrated and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of each figure, but always in a frame of their development as *moral human beings*. Plutarch's classic *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, known as the *Parallel Lives*, includes 46 paired lives and has a comparative essay for 38 biographical subjects.⁶ Beyond mere encomiums, Plutarch analyzed common elements of each life, including material on his subject's life history from childhood to death. As Glenn Paige explained, "Although Plutarch follows no exact formula, in general he directs attention to the social origins of his leaders, their civil and military achievements, their treatment of wealth and women, the objective circumstances of their rise and decline, the role of 'fortune' in their lives, the manner of their death, and their legacy."⁷ In Alan Wardman's work, *Plutarch's Lives*, he claimed that the purpose of Plutarch's life writing was to illuminate character, especially the linkage between politics and virtue.⁸

The first sections of the article examine the family, childhood, education, and youth group experiences of both leaders, followed by a focus on the events in France of 1921 that radicalized Cai and Zhao. The final sections discuss the leadership of Cai and Zhao upon their return to China. The conclusion returns to the leadership issues raised by Plutarch of character, virtue, and politics framed by comparative destinies.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH GROUPS: CAI HESEN, 1895–1920

Cai Hesen was born in 1895 in Shanghai. He was the fifth of six children and the youngest son. His father obtained a position as a minor official due to his grandmother's family's business ties and grandfather's family relationship with Zeng Guofan (曾國藩 1811–1872), according to Cai Hesen's son, Cai Bo (蔡博 1925–1991). However, due to his father's infidelity, Cai's mother, Ge Jianhao (葛建豪 1865–1943), who was pregnant with a sixth child, took Cai Hesen, who was sickly and had asthma, to her home in Yongfeng (永豐), Hunan. The family lived with Ge's mother and brother in a complex that had belonged to Zeng Guofan. It was there that Ge bore her sixth child, Cai Chang (蔡場 1900–1990).⁹

Although Cai had a weakling father, his mother Ge Jianhao was a different story. She went beyond the traditional roles of her generation, actually founding a normal school for women in Yongfeng. As Liu Liyan related of Ge's progressive attitudes: "Ge's radical methods of running the school infuriated the conservative elites. The resulting cessation of funding from the provincial government forced her to close the school."¹⁰

Cai Hesen, his sister Cai Chang, and their mother Ge Jianhao formed an unusually strong triad. Cai worked for the family business for three years but refused to continue

6 Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

7 Glenn D. Paige, "Gandhi as Leader: A Plutarchan Perspective," *Biography* 22, no. 1 (1999): 59.

8 Alan Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 1–48.

9 Interview, Cai Bo, Beijing, October 4, 1985.

10 Liu Liyan, *Red Genesis: The Hunan First Normal School and the Creation of Chinese Communism, 1903–1921* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 146–47.

after this apprenticeship. Supported by his mother and sister, he began elementary school in 1911 at the age of 16. Graduating after two years, Cai first enrolled in a technical school but switched over to the Hunan First Normal School in 1914. As if making up for lost time, Cai graduated in 1917. It was at Hunan First Normal School that Cai emerged as a youth leader. His friends included Mao Zedong, Xiao Zisheng (萧子升 1894–1976; also known as Xiao Yu 萧瑜), and his younger brother Xiao Zizhang (萧子璋 1896–1983; also known as Xiao San 萧三), among others. The school had a very advanced pedagogy, and Cai particularly enjoyed reading about reformist intellectuals of the turn of the century.¹¹

During this period, the two best friends, Cai and Mao, set up an intellectual pattern that reflected their later political personae. Mao was attracted to the heroic impulse, more inclined to follow the route of “Great Men” to serve China. Cai Hesen, however, was looking at mass education and mass empowerment. Thus, in terms of ancient philosophy, Mao prized Confucius and Mencius, while Cai believed in the less popular, utilitarian philosopher Mozi.¹²

It was during this period that Cai and progressive schoolmates began to develop the New Citizens’ Association (新民學會 *Xinmin xuehui*; NCA) that officially formed in April 1918. From modernizing China to personal rectification and physical exercise regimens, the bonds formed within this youth group strongly influenced the life choices made by its members. Although Cai and Mao were key leaders, the most important figure was Xiao Zisheng. Xiao’s memoir painted a picture of Cai Hesen as someone he admired but who was not ambitious and who, with his closest friends like Mao Zedong, was content to live without much food or comforts.¹³

The NCA originally had 14 members and emerged out of a commitment to create a better world. Robust discussions in meetings and correspondence, as well as recruitment, typified the NCA. The society grew to between 60 and 70 members and included prominent revolutionaries such as Xiang Jingyu (向警予 1894–1928), Cai Chang, Li Fuchun (李富春 1899–1975), and Li Weihai (李維漢 1897–1983). Women constituted almost half of the membership of the NCA, and feminism was an important value to emerge among these activists.¹⁴

Among the several activities promoted by the NCA was the popular work-study movement. Xiao Zisheng became the secretary to Li Shizeng (李石增 1881–1973), the prominent anarchist, who promoted the work-study movement in France along with Cai Yuanpei, Wu Zhihui (吳稚暉 1865–1953), and Wang Jingwei. Cai Hesen believed that the work-study movement would unfold to create a road to national salvation.

11 Luo Shaozhi, Liu Peicheng, He Guozhi, and Yu Danyang, “Cai Hesen,” in Hu Hua, ed., *Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan* [Biographies of personalities in CCP history] (Shaanxi: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1980–1989), vol. 6, 3–5; *Huiyi Cai Hesen* [Remembrances of Cai Hesen] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980); *Cai Hesen wenji* [Collected works of Cai Hesen] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980).

12 Interview, Cai Bo, Beijing, October 4, 1985; Robert A. Scalapino, “The Evolution of a Young Revolutionary—Mao Zedong in 1919–1921,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 42, no. 1 (November 1982): 29–61.

13 Siao Yu [Xiao Zisheng], *Mao Tse-tung and I Were Beggars* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1959), 47. For materials on the development of the NCA, see Zhang Yunhou, Yan Xuyi, Hong Qingxiang, and Wang Yunkai, comps., *Wushi shiqi de shetuan* [Organizations of the May Fourth period] (Beijing: Sanlian, 1979), 4 vols.

14 Marilyn A. Levine, *The Found Generation: Chinese Communists in Europe during the Twenties* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 50–53.

Cai Hesen was able to meet Cai Yuanpei and admired him enormously. Cai Hesen taught at a work-study preparatory school in Shanghai and departed to France, accompanied by his mother, his sister, and several NCA members, including Xiang Jingyu, who shortly would become his wife.

FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION, AND YOUTH GROUPS: ZHAO SHIYAN, 1901–1920

Zhao Shiyan was born on April 13, 1901, in Youyang (酉陽), Sichuan. Like Cai Hesen, he was the next to last child born and the youngest son. He had one younger sister, three older sisters, and four older brothers. His father was both a successful merchant and a landlord and was able to afford his large family. He was a stern person, while Zhao's mother was a devout Buddhist and a very gentle person. As the youngest of five sons, and having three older sisters, Zhao Shiyan was the most coddled child. According to a 1990 interview with Zhao Shiyan's niece, Zhao Lengzhuang (趙冷莊 b. 1930?), Zhao Shiyan swayed three of his siblings to join the CCP, including his third sister, Zhao Shilan (趙世蘭 1896–1969), and his younger sister, Zhao Juntao (趙君陶 1903–1985). Zhao Juntao's husband, also a CCP member, was killed in 1931. She was widowed with two children; one of them, Li Peng (李鵬 1928–), later served as the fourth premier of China from 1987 until 1998.¹⁵

Zhao Shiyan not only had a more salubrious childhood than Cai Hesen did, he was the opposite in terms of personality—an extrovert and a precocious student who excelled in athletics and had the greatest ease in organizing social and political associations. After private tutoring, Zhao attended a Western-style elementary school, graduating in 1914, and then matriculated at a secondary school attached to Beijing Normal College in 1915. At this high school, “Zhao excelled in his studies, particularly in English. . . . Although Zhao's school performance was outstanding, he adopted a critical attitude to the curriculum and pedagogical practices at his high school.”¹⁶ Living in the capital, the heart of the New Culture movement, Zhao Shiyan not only advocated for issues like coeducation but also edited newspapers and wrote news articles to promote political change, helped tutor other students, organized the high-school students during the May Fourth demonstrations, and founded a high-school Youth Association (少年學會 Shaonian xuehui).¹⁷

Among the chief political influences on Zhao Shiyan during the period was the Young China Association (少年中國學會 Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui; YCA), a group that was organized nationwide, rather than just regionally. The YCA advocated the leadership of youth, personal liberation, and the Kropotkin philosophy of mutual aid. The goals and strategies of the YCA were articulated by Wang Guangqi (王光祈 1892–1936), a prominent New Culture movement leader who proclaimed in English: “Our association

15 Interview, Zhao Lengzhuang, Chongqing, June 30, 1990.

16 Levine, *Found Generation*, 55–56. For a good overview of Zhao Shiyan, see Peng Chengfu, *Zhao Shiyan* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1983). The fullest collection of Zhao's writings is *Zhao Shiyan wenji* [Collected works of Zhao Shiyan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), which has a useful chronology. Memoirs of Zhao Shiyan are included in *Yida qianhou* [Before and after the founding of the CCP] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), 2 vols.

17 Levine, *Found Generation*, 55–56.

dedicates itself to the Social Services under the guidance of the Scientific Spirit, in order to realize our ideal of creating a Young China.”¹⁸

The most practical activity undertaken by the YCA was its short-lived experiment with the Work-Study Mutual-Aid Corps (工讀互助團 *Gongdu huzhu tuan*). Small “communes” were developed in several cities, from Beijing to Wuhan, by ardent members. The students would live together as a unit, sharing tasks and resources to advance together.¹⁹ The Work-Study Mutual-Aid Corps ultimately did not succeed in its immediate goals, but it provided a key step in the politicization process for Chinese youth.

From 1919 until 1922, Zhao lived by the principles of mutual aid, self-reliance, and personal liberation extolled by the YCA. Perhaps most importantly, no matter what the challenges, he believed that often there was a cycle of anticipated social or political struggle that could result in real unity. This sense of harmonizing with disparate groups is *essential* to understanding Zhao Shiyan’s successful political activities. His niece Zhao Lengzhuang shared an early middle-school essay in which Zhao, in his early teens, wrote: “‘Struggle’—these two characters [‘奮鬥’二字 *fendou er zi*] I often regarded as the primary meaning of life, no matter what—we all should be struggling.”²⁰

At the age of 19, Zhao Shiyan had been tested by the crucible of the New Culture movement and a Western educational foundation. Much like Cai Hesen, Zhao saw the opportunity presented by the work-study movement and left for France in the mid-summer of 1920. He envisioned life and the future in terms of engagement and struggle.

Before he left for France, Zhao Shiyan had meetings with the cofounder of the CCP, Chen Duxiu. Chen approved Zhao to work with his protégé from Peking University, Zhang Shenfu (張申府 1893–1986).²¹ Although Zhao Shiyan had the CCP invitation to join Zhang Shenfu’s cell in Europe, Zhao—like so many others—sought a road to national salvation that relied on a peaceful, self-reliant, and communal method of activity. During his first year in France, Zhao was to transition from this commitment to nationalistic and anarchist principles to a firm embrace of communism and his role in leading the formation of the party in Europe. Zhang Shenfu’s small cell, later mobilized by Zhao Shiyan on a larger scale, was the official nucleus of the nascent ECCO.

THE TURNING POINT IN FRANCE: 1921

Remarking on the sojourn in France and the politicization process during 1921–1922, one of the most insightful surviving founders of the ECCO, Zheng Chaolin (鄭超麟 1901–1998), observed that the European experience created a dividing line for the activists of the May Fourth movement: “We [only] had seen a shadow of revolution during the May Fourth movement and realized it did not provide a path forward. It was inadequate and needed to end.”²²

18 Wang Guangqi, “Shaonian Zhongguo zhi chuangzao” [Creation of the YCA], *Shaonian Zhongguo* 2 (August 19, 1919): 1–7.

19 Shakhrah Rahav, “How Shall We Live? Chinese Communal Experiments after the Great War in Global Context,” *World History* 26, no. 3 (September 2015): 521–48.

20 Interview, Zhao Lengzhuang, Chongqing, June 30, 1990.

21 Interview, Zhang Shenfu, Beijing, October 25, 1985. Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth Is Running Out: Conversations with Zhang Shenfu* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

22 Interview, Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, October 29, 1985.

One call to action that spurred hundreds of Chinese youth to politics was the promotion of the work-study movement, whose sponsors, as mentioned above, included Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui, Cai Yuanpei, and Wang Jingwei. To undertake the organization of the movement, these leaders formed the Sino-French Education Association (華法教育會 Huafa jiaoyuhui; SFEA) in March 1915. The SFEA was very successful in the mobilization of youth and the outreach to interested Chinese and French groups, including Chinese regional governments. The SFEA succeeded in recruiting approximately 1,600 Chinese youth to travel to France between 1919 and 1921. The goal of these worker-students was to labor in French factories that were understaffed after the First World War and pay their own tuition to French colleges to obtain technical educations. The idea that the industrialization of China was key to national salvation and the concepts of mutual aid and working with one's hands were also key components of the work-study plan.²³

Although these ideas were effective in inspiring Chinese youth to come to France, the economic situation in France did not allow for the rapid influx of Chinese worker-students, and as more youth arrived, they encountered increasing difficulties. The employment promise did not materialize, and Chinese and French organizations tried to fill in the gap with some aid but could not cover the needs of the impoverished worker-students. For example, hundreds of Chinese worker-students slept on the floor of the Chinese Federation or outside in tents donated by the American YMCA. The SFEA initially provided much aid for the worker-students, but they simply were overwhelmed by the demands, which grew more desperate as winter arrived and starvation began to escalate. By the beginning of 1921 the flow of Chinese worker-students was halted. Subsequently, in January 1921, Cai Yuanpei issued two announcements that attempted to distance the SFEA by claiming other groups also were responsible. His second announcement abrogated all financial help from the SFEA for the worker-students. This was seen as a huge betrayal by someone regarded as a giant of the New Culture movement.²⁴ After the halt of SFEA funding, a series of movements took place as tensions escalated. These "three struggles of 1921" were the Twenty-Eighth (February 28) movement, the loan struggle, and the Lyon incident.²⁵

Each of the three struggles is discussed in the rest of this section in tandem with the politicization of Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan. In the midst of the mass disillusionment and anger, especially after the discontinuance of SFEA support, two major factions emerged

23 Key works on the work-study movement include several Chinese compendia and monographs. Utilized in this article is Tsinghua University Faculty Research Unit on the History of the Communist Party, comp., *FuFa qingong jianxue yundong shiliao* [Documents on the travel-to-France work-study movement] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1979), 3 vols. In Western languages there are numerous graduate theses, monographs, and articles. For example: John Kong-Cheong Leung, "The Chinese Work-Study Movement: The Social and Political Experience of Chinese Students and Student-Workers in France, 1913–1925" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1982); Levine, *Found Generation*; Paul Bailey, "The Chinese Work-Study Movement in France," *China Quarterly* 115 (September 1988): 441–61; Nora Wang, "Deng Xiaoping: The Years in France," *China Quarterly* 92 (December 1982): 698–705.

24 Chinese news reports and articles, mostly reflecting disillusionment and feelings of abandonment, were published throughout this period. See opposing YCA views: Zhang Mengjiu, "Liu Fa liangzhou de ganxiang" [Reflections after two weeks of travel to France], *Shaonian Zhongguo* 2, no. 6 (December 1920): 7–16; Li Huang, "Liuxue pingyi" [Critique of overseas study], *Shaonian Zhongguo* 2/6 (December 1920): 1–7.

25 Levine, *Found Generation*, 98–134.

among the student activist community; Cai Hesen led one group and Zhao Shiyan the other. Their conflicting views erupted during the first struggle of 1921, the Twenty-Eighth movement.

Cai Hesen had settled with his family in Montargis, a small city that had both a college and factory work available. Cai Hesen chose not work in a factory. He focused on reading, collecting books to share with others, and devising how to achieve a revolution.²⁶ The clarity with which Cai Hesen understood ideological issues and his advice on how to weave that knowledge into the foundation of the CCP made him stand out from others. It may have been the exposure to broader materials in France and the time/space to read and reflect that allowed Cai Hesen to reach a more mature understanding of Marxism-Leninism. He wrote lengthy letters back home, distributed articles among his cohort in France, and held reading and study discussions. Cai was aware of the cusp of change that prevailed in the French socialist and communist developments. He wrote a lengthy article about European and Soviet radical politics in June 1920 and highlighted French labor activities and debates, conditions for socialism, and the evolving French Communist Party.²⁷

By August 1920, in letters back home to China, Cai Hesen was advocating Bolshevism and a dictatorship of the proletariat through a disciplined communist party. Cai outlined his proletariat revolutionary vision in a letter to Chen Duxiu.²⁸ In his letter to Chen, Cai wrote that plans had to be made specific for a communist party to follow. Cai exclaimed, “Sir! Liberation of the workers in not a question of one place, one country, one nationality, but a question of society for one world. Marxist socialism is an international socialism, and we must refuse to carry forward the sensibility of [regionalism].”²⁹ What was remarkable about Cai’s letters, articles, and viewpoints during this period was his understanding of Leninism without the formal training. In the words of John K.-C. Leung, “Cai Hesen was perhaps the most advanced Chinese Marxist-Leninist at the time.”³⁰ Robert Scalapino, in a seminal article on the evolution of Mao Zedong’s thinking, outlined the dramatic influence on Mao of Cai Hesen’s correspondence in 1920–1921 on the development of Marxism-Leninism and tactics. Scalapino elucidates the entire range of Leninist ideas and mentions that “in addition, [the letters] provided detailed instructions on how to create and develop a Communist party in China.”³¹

Initially, Cai Hesen was not able to persuade the majority of the NCA members to follow his lead toward Marxism-Leninism during a retreat in July 1920.³² But by the

26 “Cai Hesen tongzhi shengping nianbiao” [Chronology of comrade Cai Hesen], in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 837.

27 Cai Hesen, “Faguo de zuijin de laodong yundong” [The current French workers’ movement], *Shaonian shijie*, June 11, 1920, repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 33–48.

28 Cai Hesen, “Makesi xueshuo yu zhongguo wuchan jieji” [Marxist theory and the Chinese proletariat], February 11, 1921, repr. with Chen Duxiu’s response in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 74–80.

29 Cai, “Makesi xueshuo yu zhongguo wuchan jieji,” 78.

30 Leung, “The Chinese Work-Study Movement,” 349; Leung made perhaps the most in-depth analysis of Cai and his development of Marxism-Leninism.

31 Scalapino, “The Evolution of a Young Revolutionary,” 29.

32 Xiao Zisheng, “Xinmin xuehui fu Fa huiyuan mendani huyi qingkuang” [Membership of NCA involved in travel-to-France program at time of Montargis meeting] (1920), repr. in *FuFa qingong jianxue yundong shiliao*, vol. 2, 805–9.

beginning of 1921, when the work-study movement was deteriorating, Cai was able to prevail in gaining adherents to Marxism with another Montargis group, the Society for the World of Work-Study (工學世界社 Gongxue shijieshe). Organized by Li Weihan, Li Fuchun, Luo Xuezan (羅學贊 1893–1930), and others, the group aimed to provide a network of mutual support. During the Twenty-Eighth movement, the Society for the World of Work-Study supported Cai Heseng and became a part of what was known as the Montargis faction.³³

In response to the announcements by Cai Yuanpei, the Montargis activists demanded that the Chinese government support the worker-students with 400 francs per month for each student for up to four years. Even though they demonstrated without a permit on February 28, 1921, a delegation of 12 was received by the Chinese foreign minister, Chen Lu (陳籙 1876–1939), who offered three months of support at five francs a day and free repatriation back to China and pledged to try to find employment for the students. While some students applauded, others began to use their fists on Chen Lu, who was protected by the police.³⁴ Chen Lu refused to press charges. A French Sûreté agent particularly pinpointed Cai Heseng as the leader and recommended that he be watched as a “dangerous individual.”³⁵

After the Twenty-Eighth movement, one of the key groups created to support the worker-students was the Comité franco-chinois de patronage des jeunes chinois en France (Franco-Chinese committee of patronage of young Chinese in France; CFC), created in May 1921. Formed by French businessmen, educators, and government officials, the CFC wanted to help the students in both education and employment. During its existence, the CFC gathered over 1,200 dossiers, and in less than half a year had distributed more than 250,000 francs to educational institutions and students.³⁶

Although the Twenty-Eighth movement was defeated, it brought public discourse on Marxism to the fore. The Montargis group had argued that the basis for the group’s request was that they should not be working in the capitalist system but supported by their own country to perform their studies. Other worker-students pilloried the Montargis group for hypocrisy in asking for a “cut of the pie,” while stigmatizing the government as a bastion of capitalist practice. Chief among the critics were Zhao Shiyan and Li Lisan (李立三 1899–1967), who formed the Work-Study Alliance (勤工儉學同盟 Qingong jianxue tongmeng) in March 1921 to affirm the beliefs of the value of mutual aid and self-sufficiency.³⁷

33 Li Weihan, “Huiyi Xinmin xuehui” [Memoirs of the NCA], in Xu Rihui, ed., *Wusi yundong zai Hunan huiyilu* [Memoirs of the May Fourth movement in Hunan] (Hunan: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1979), 17–58.

34 Tian Yi, “Liu Fa qingong jianxue sheng shi guan qingyuan ji” [Account of the official petitions of the travel-to-France worker-students], *Jiaoyu zazhi* 13 (July 20, 1921): 1–7.

35 Note of Monsieur Deveze, 9 March 1921, Service de liaison des originaires des territoires français d’outre-mer [SLOTFOM], VII, 6, Section d’outre-mer, Archives nationales, Aix-en-Provence, France.

36 “Statuts et comptes rendus de séance du CFC,” 1921–1923, 47 AS8, Archives nationales, Paris; “Statuts et comptes rendus de séance du CFC,” 1921–1923, 47 AS27, Archives nationales, Paris.

37 Xu Teli, “Ou Mengdani tongxue de gongqi” [Criticizing the appeal of the Montargis students], *Lü Ou zhoukan* 68 (February 26, 1921): 1 and *Lü Ou zhoukan* 69 (March 5, 1921): 1. For an account of the Work-Study Alliance, see Long Zhi [Li Lisan], “Wo duiyu qingong jianxue de yijian” [My opinions concerning work-study], *Lü Ou zhoukan* (February 5, 1921): 65.

On his arrival in France, Zhao Shiyuan had worked in several factories, including the Creusot-Schneider factory. He dedicated himself to his radical activities. Even when his parents sent him money from China, Zhao wanted to be self-reliant and shared funds with others. He immersed himself in the milieu of the laborers so that he could serve them.

³⁸ In a 1990 interview, Zhao Shiyuan's biographer, Peng Chengfu (彭承福), explained his central position working in the factories, studying Marxism-Leninism, and conducting labor organizational activities. She explained, "He did not sit and study at home like Cai Hesen—[Zhao] did not have that situation. . . . The road that led to the [Chinese] laborers Zhao Shiyuan created it!"³⁹

Zhao Shiyuan continued his frenetic activities in France, working long hours in the factories, organizing study groups, meetings, associations, and keeping up his role in the small communist cell formed by Zhang Shenfu. In the latter group, he met Zhou Enlai, who was to become his propaganda official and successor as they formed the groups that made up the ECCO in 1922. During the pivotal early winter months of 1921, over 200 worker-students joined the Work-Study Alliance within the space of a few weeks. Zhao Shiyuan even found time to tutor Chinese workers as well as to read, study, and write. His few writings during this period demonstrated the lingering anarchist values that animated the mutual aid experiments that had been promoted by the YCA.

During the Twenty-Eighth movement, there were supporters of both sides in a series of polemics, and a sense of disunity emerged within the work-study movement. Because Zhao Shiyuan believed that a communist party must be formed, he put aside the political rancor and personally visited Cai Hesen and the Montargis group to heal the rift and join together in the ultimate objective of creating a communist party that could bring about a proletarian revolution. At that stage, however, another disruption emerged for the Chinese worker-students in terms of the second struggle of 1921, the "loan struggle," which took place during the summer.

The loan struggle was a protest that emerged when it became public that the Chinese government was negotiating secretly with the French for a loan of five million francs. Massive letter-writing campaigns, meetings, and protests were organized during this second struggle of 1921. The culmination came in a huge public meeting on August 13, at which Chen Lu's secretary was physically beaten and coerced into signing an agreement that the government would not negotiate a loan. Chen Lu responded by an announcement that all government aid to the worker-students would cease one month hence.⁴⁰ This was a second serious blow to the work-study movement after its abandonment by the SFEA, and it was followed by further action after the third struggle of 1921, the Lyon incident.

Although Cai and Zhao played a role in the loan struggle of 1921, they emerged as major leaders during the Lyon incident, which took place in September 1921. The worker-students were in dire straits, but they were awaiting the opening of a Sino-French

38 Interview, Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, January 18, 1990; Peng, *Zhao Shiyuan*, 14–21.

39 Interview, Peng Chengfu, Chongqing, June 5, 1990.

40 Yu Gong [Zeng Qi], "Lü Fa Huaren fandui Zhong Fa jiekuan zhi shimo" [The whole account of the movement by Chinese in France against the Sino-French loan], *Xinwen bao*, August 1921 and October 1921, repr. in *FuFa qingong jianxue yundong shiliao*, vol. 2, 493–504; Zhou Enlai, "Zhong Fa da jiekuan jing shixing qianzi yi" [Situation of the signing of the big Sino-French loan], *Yishi bao* (written July 30, 1921), repr. in *FuFa qingong jianxue yundong shiliao*, vol. 2, 472–77.

Institute in Lyon that previously had been promoted as a place that would provide a path forward in terms of matriculation. However, Cai Yuanpei and Wu Zhihui had been setting up a more elite institution that required entrance examinations, and it became known that Wu Zhihui was escorting a fresh batch of over 100 students who would become the first class at the institute.⁴¹ Believing this was a betrayal of the work-study movement, over 100 worker-students went to protest on the day of Wu's arrival with the new students. They occupied a dormitory and refused to leave. The worker-students were arrested and escorted by the police to a military barracks. Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan were among the leaders of this protest occupation, and Zhao was part of the negotiating team set up to find a solution. Unfortunately for the worker-students, Chen Lu had not forgotten the humiliations and rude treatment of the other two incidents. Thus, Chinese officials did not negotiate with any intention to help the worker-students, and the arrested students were deported back to China in mid-October.

Cai Hesen was among the deportees. Upon his return to China he was accepted and active in the CCP and was immediately elevated to the small and powerful CCP Central Committee. Cai's wife, Xiang Jingyu, followed him home to China during the following months as she was expecting their first child.

Zhao, who escaped deportation, and several other leaders were criticized among worker-students for their lack of success, but Zhao continued his party organizational efforts and during the summer and winter of 1922 formed the ECCO, with members in France, Germany, and Belgium. There were many activities, publications, and debates associated with these groups, including a major influence on the United Front with the newly formed European branch of the Chinese Nationalist Party (中國國民黨旅歐支部 Zhongguo guomindang lü Ou zhibu; EGMD).⁴² In addition, several ECCO members also were introduced into the French Communist Party.⁴³

In March 1923 Zhao left for the Soviet Union along with 12 other comrades to study and observe the Bolshevik revolution firsthand. Over 40 ECCO members were to return to China via travel and study in the Soviet Union. The formation and activities of the ECCO had profound impacts on the Chinese Revolution by providing some of the leaders most pivotal to the CCP, by creating strong personal networks, and through its adherence to the Leninist model of the vanguard party, absolute discipline, and belief in world revolution.⁴⁴

In terms of Leninist revolutionary activities such as propaganda-agitation as a main technique to mobilize adherents, Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan were *complementary* in

41 Chen San-ching, "Minchu liu Ou jiaoyu de jiannan lishi: Liang Zhong Fa daxue chushen" [The difficult beginnings of study abroad in Europe: a preliminary examination of the Sino-French Institute in Lyon], in Zhongyang yanjiu yuan [Academia Sinica], ed., *Jindaishisuo minchu lishi yantaohui lunwenji* [Research essays on early Republican history] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1984), 991–1007.

42 For the case that the ECCO under the leadership of Zhou Enlai and later Deng Xiaoping were the first to form an ECCO-EGMD United Front and exerted more influence, see Marilyn A. Levine and Chen San-ching, "Communist-Leftist Control of the European Branch of the Guomindang, 1923–1927," *Modern China* 22, no. 1 (January 1996): 62–92.

43 Xiao San, "Huiyi fu Fa qingong jianxue he lü Ou zhibu" [Remembering the travel-to-France work-study movement and the ECCO], in *Yida qianhou 2* (?DATE?): 511–16; Interview, Jiang Zemin, Beijing, October 25, 1985; Interviews, Sheng Cheng, Beijing, October 12 and 18, 1985.

44 See Levine, *Found Generation*, chap. 5.

their talents. The former was much stronger as a revolutionary theorist and the latter as a revolutionary practitioner. Yet they shared strong common views and orientations as they proceeded to the next and final stage of their lives and martyrdom.

BOLSHEVIK DREAMS AND A MARTYRED DEATH: CAI HESEN, 1921–1931

France inculcated the dream and the foundation—but it was within the practice of revolution that both Cai and Zhao evolved into their full growth as Leninist theorists/practitioners.

Cai Hesen had what might be called a mercurial rise in the CCP as a member of the Central Committee in 1922. Cai did not have formal training in Marxism-Leninism and had not been part of the CCP's founding, but during the party's formative period he had an impact on leaders such as Chen Duxiu and his own childhood friend, Mao Zedong. Most important at this time were the theories and orientations that Cai represented. When asked about the impact of the French ideological experience, Zheng Chaolin reflected on the ECCO and the particular contribution of Cai Hesen that helps explain Cai's swift rise in the CCP: "In France, we emphasized international revolutionary ideology, and in China, patriotism was generally emphasized. We were aligned with internationalism. . . . Cai Hesen said that it is not enough for us to talk about the patriotic revolution now. We should talk about world revolution. In his thinking, Cai Hesen regarded patriotism as a weakness, not as a merit. Nationalism was a weakness, not a merit."⁴⁵ Exactly aligned with Bolshevik ideology and development in 1920–1922, Cai expressed the ideas and tactics of Lenin. According to Alexander Pantsov, Lenin was the most eminent Communist translated in China between 1922 and 1927. More than 30 of Lenin's works were translated during this period. "By comparison, the period between June 1919 and April 1927 there were published—in part or full—only 10 of Marx's works in China."⁴⁶

In addition to his role on the CCP Central Committee, Cai Hesen was appointed editor of the CCP's main propaganda organ, *The Guide* (向导 *Xiangdao*). *The Guide* was established in Shanghai on September 13, 1922. When it was closed by the authorities within the month, Cai moved its base to Beijing by October. *The Guide* was a national paper with distribution points in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, and Changsha that had a successful run. It was closed down in July 1927. In all there were over 200 issues, and Cai Hesen contributed up to 170 essays. With the exception of the end of 1925 and the beginning of 1927 (when he was in Moscow), Cai Hesen directly edited *The Guide*.⁴⁷

In June 1923, Cai Hesen and his wife, Xiang Jingyu, returned to Shanghai, where they stayed until their trip to the Soviet Union in October 1925. In Shanghai, Cai kept up his editorial duties and also taught communist theory at the newly created Shanghai University. In August 1924, Cai developed a 200-page teaching overview of the past,

45 Interview, Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, June 18, 1990.

46 Pantsov, *Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*, 30–31.

47 Dou Aizhi, "Cai Hesen yu 'Xiangdao zhoubao'" [Cai Hesen and the weekly *Xiangdao*], *Zhongguo xiandai shi fuyin baokan ziliao*, no. 1 (January 1982): 61–66.

present, and future of the proletarian revolution against capitalism and imperialism, entitled *The Evolution of Society* (社會進化史 *Shehui jinhuashi*).⁴⁸

Cai Hesen's writings were prolific on an array of topics, including peasant involvement in revolution, revolutionary theory, and organizational tactics. These themes consistently exposed the rampant greed and violence of both the imperialists and the warlords. At the same time, Cai was conveying the CCP party line, such as the necessity of a United Front with the Guomindang. Cai usually translated these necessities into a need to weave China into the world revolution that was fighting international imperialism.⁴⁹ After the death of Sun Yat-sen, Cai asked the question, What would now become of revolutionary strategy after the death of such a powerful symbol of revolution as Sun Yat-sen? His answer was to highlight elements of Leninist revolutionary strategy, including the world revolution. Cai wrote: "Where does the [Chinese revolutionary] special character arise from? It is derived from the international situation. So, the Chinese revolution is just like Turkey, Persia, India, Egypt, and every colonial revolutionary movement, it is a part of the world revolutionary movement."⁵⁰

Cai, like most of the CCP leaders, initially opposed the United Front. However, he grew increasingly bound by the paradox of the very Leninist party discipline exploited by Stalin in his China policies by 1927. After the violent termination of the United Front, Cai became involved in the intensive polemics of blame, particularly criticizing Chen Duxiu.⁵¹ Cai Hesen himself was increasingly marginalized, especially by the growing party control of Li Lisan and then Wang Ming (王明 1904–1974) and by some of the students returned from the Soviet Union, who were more in line with Stalin.⁵² In 1931, Cai Hesen, overworked and ill, was sent to Hong Kong. Cai and Xiang Jingyu had divorced in 1926, and he had remarried. His second wife and family implored him not to go to Hong Kong as it was too dangerous for him. Determined that he had to uphold the discipline of the centralized party, Cai went to Hong Kong, where he was captured and executed.⁵³ Although many had regarded Cai Hesen as a taciturn, bookish revolutionary, his courageous journey to his probable capture testifies to his extraordinary inner strength and sense of purpose.

BOLSHEVIK DREAMS AND MARTYRED DEATH: ZHAO SHIYAN, 1923–1927

After convening the second ECCO congress in February 1923, Zhao Shiyan departed in March with 12 other ECCO members to study at the Toilers of the East University

48 Cai Hesen, *Shehui jianhuashi* [Evolution of society], August 1924, repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 437–635.

49 Examples of Cai's articles include: Cai Hesen, "Zhongguo geming yundong yu guoji zhi guanxi" [The Chinese revolutionary movement and its international relationships], *Xiangdao*, May 2, 1923, repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 268–72; Cai Hesen, "Jindai de jidujiao" [Modern Christianity], in *Fan jidujiao yundong* [Movement to oppose Christianity] (1924), repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 689–701.

50 Cai Hesen, "Sun Zhongshan sheshi yu guomin geming" [Death of Sun Yat-sen and the people's revolution] (published March 1, 1925), repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 726–27.

51 Cai Hesen, "Lun Chen Duxiu zhuyi" [Discussion of Chen Duxiu ideology], *Xiangdao*, September 10, 1931, repr. in *Cai Hesen wenji*, 804–32.

52 For more in-depth information on the dynamics of this cohort and the leadership that later emerged, see Thomas Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution of the Chinese Communist Leadership* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2000).

53 Interview, Shi Guang, Beijing, December 12, 1985.

in the Soviet Union. On April 28, 1923, Zhao delivered a report on the ECCO to the Moscow branch of the CCP and attended the Fifth Plenum of the Communist International. During his Soviet sojourn, Zhao wrote and published several articles, such as “The Soviet Union and the United States” (*Xiangdao*, February 13 and 20, 1924), and “The World, Lenin, and Leninism” (*Guomin ribao*, March 3, 1924).⁵⁴ Zheng Chaolin, who spent much time with Zhao during his Soviet sojourn, remarked that Zhao’s grasp of theory had reached a new stage.⁵⁵

In his Lenin tribute, serially published June 8–12, 1924, Zhao Shiyan discussed how Lenin had taken up the mantle of Marx and responded to the call for revolution. So must the CCP members now carry on the world revolution. Zhao explained, “Standing at the beginning of the struggle, the first order of business must be an iron disciplined party of the proletariat, and in the center of this is the policy of the worker-peasant alliance . . . within Lenin’s written works one can find the explanations of the tactics that should be used.”⁵⁶

Zhao Shiyan left Moscow in July 1924, having gained a greater grasp of the reality of the Bolshevik revolution. According to Peng Chengfu, Zhao’s real genius was in his ability to organize revolutionary labor movements. However, Zhao’s writings gained in sophistication during his Soviet sojourn. His articles highlighted the Leninist ideas of world revolution, the role of the proletariat and peasantry in the revolution, and the necessity for political work and the utilization of violence. In the throes of revolutionary study and practice, Peng asserted that “Zhao returned from the Soviet Union to participate in the struggle. His practical experiences gave him his own thoughts, combined with his studies in the Soviet Union, so he understood Lenin’s essential theories relatively well.”⁵⁷

Zhao Shiyan’s career in the CCP upon his return to China also resulted in high positions similar to Cai Hesen’s. He was appointed editor of a second CCP party organ, *Political Life* (政治生活 *Zhengzhi shenghuo*). Zhao published over 70 articles in this journal alone, which was astonishing given the amount of labor-organizing responsibility he was delegated. Because of his firsthand grasp of the factory work and his ability to create persuasive propaganda, Zhao was sent upon his return to China to help Li Dazhao with the CCP Northern Bureau. His skills in organizing labor, leading worker strikes, and creating propaganda reached full height during the following three years. He organized peasants in Mongolia and labor in Tianjin and several other cities throughout 1925–1926, and then he was sent to mobilize the workers in Shanghai for a general uprising, known as the “three Shanghai uprisings” (1926–1927). The first two Shanghai uprisings were defeated and followed by a third effort that culminated in a victory by the workers, involving pitched battles that overthrew the regional warlord, Sun Chuanfang (孫傳芳 1885–1935), on March 25, 1927. Zhao Shiyan and Luo Yinong (羅亦農 1902–1928) were the main organizers and inspiration behind this truly amazing event. Zhao’s close comrade Zhou Enlai joined them to coordinate the third uprising.⁵⁸ In an accomplishment that was the apogee of his career, Zhao Shiyan demonstrated a remarkable set of talents and a very

54 “Zhao Shiyan nianpu,” in *Zhao Shiyan wenji*, 571–94.

55 Interview, Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, June 18, 1990.

56 Zhao Shiyan, “Liening” [Lenin], *Guomin ribao*, June 8–12, 1924, repr. in *Zhao Shiyan wenji*, 93.

57 Interview, Peng Chengfu, Chongqing, June 5, 1990.

58 Peng, *Zhao Shiyan*, 34–82.

charismatic personality, especially when one considers the entrenched, well-funded power of the aligned forces of the warlords arrayed against the CCP. Nowhere were Zhao's talents for communication and facilitation displayed as in the complex environment of the three Shanghai uprisings. His articles analyzing and encouraging workers and CCP comrades during the uprisings—and his political savvy in understanding the growing ambition of Jiang Jieshi (蔣介石 1887–1975) while dealing with violent fighting, strikes, and the fierce cruelties of his opponents—demonstrate his sense of balance and his selflessness.

Zhao Shiyan's talents were recognized, and he was appointed to the Central Committee in 1927. As his work among the laborers continued, he wrote a lengthy article in 1926 on “The Theory and Practice of Leninism” (列寧主義之理論與實際 “Lieningzhuyi lilun yu shiji”).⁵⁹ Zhao tightly bound the notion that Leninism was not just a theory but that rather, having been central to the successful Bolshevik revolution, Leninism was the only hope for a set of practices that would affect the rest of the world. Still an internationalist, Zhao Shiyan believed in the revolution for all oppressed peoples: “Lenin was the author of the ‘October Revolution’—the start of the world revolution, [he is] the leader and guide for the entire world's proletariat, peasant masses, and all those who are oppressed. Currently, *Leninism is our banner for the oppressed; Leninism is our weapon; the entire world revolution is our responsibility* [emphasis Zhao's].”⁶⁰

Like Cai Hesen, Zhao Shiyan had married young. His wife, Xia Zhixu (夏之栩 1906–1987), was a CCP member. They already had a child as the three Shanghai uprisings took place. When the Northern Expedition progressed toward Shanghai in April 1927, Zhao opposed welcoming Jiang Jieshi to the city and did not want the workers to give up their arms as ordered by Stalin and the Comintern. Stalin was more concerned with keeping the Guomindang-CCP United Front together and did not have a great deal of knowledge about the Chinese situation. He also was at the height of his battle with Trotsky for national leadership. However, Zhao truly was a disciplined party member, and the orders were followed, resulting in a major bloodbath beginning on April 12, 1927. Zhao stayed in the city and was captured on July 2. Zhao realized that there were police waiting for him at his home, but, rather than attempt an escape, he quickly told his wife that she must warn others of the danger and report to Wang Ruofei (王若飛 1896–1946), who was in charge of the area and was a close friend. Wang worked hard to secure Zhao's release through offering bribes. But after Zhao was identified by a turncoat, release was not an option in the heated days of 1927. Zhao Shiyan was decapitated on July 19 at a crossroads of Fenglin Road.⁶¹

Just as Cai Hesen had gone bravely to his death, his comrade Zhao Shiyan also faced constant violence and danger with courage and conviction. In his last few days, knowing his probable fate, Zhao Shiyan buoyed up the spirits of more than a dozen others who had been captured. Knowing their death was near, Zhao spoke of their legacy and the ultimate victory of the revolution. It might have seemed a long shot at that bleak

59 Zhao Shiyan, “Liening zhuyizhi lilun yu shiji” [Leninism in theory and practice], repr. in *Zhao Shiyan wenji*, 393–407.

60 Zhao, “Liening zhuyizhi lilun yu shiji,” 393–94.

61 “Zhao Shiyan nianpu,” 592–94. Zhao's death devastated his fellow party members; along with Chen Yannian's, his was the first tribute on the first page of the new CCP post-1927 journal *Buweiersike* [The Bolshevik].

moment as he awaited the sharpness of a blade on his neck, but history has demonstrated the validity of his faith.

CONCLUSION: VIRTUE IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Plutarch analyzed leaders through a lens of civic-mindedness, rise to power, virtues and vices, political career, and the manner of death. The profile of two revolutionaries in this article has endeavored to demonstrate that these attributes that Plutarch framed were not so different from the perspectives held by the generation of the Chinese New Culture youth in the twentieth century. They wanted to create a better society through thought and action, and if necessary they were willing to sacrifice their own happiness and very lives to attain that goal.⁶² Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan lived in a time of political ferment and civic awakening, which in the values of Plutarch would make their decisions to act for the public good all that more indicative of virtuous character. Although they had very different personalities and leadership talents, there are some remarkable similarities in the life stories of Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan.

This paper has shown that both Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan were the youngest sons in families that had businesses, and both were not close to their fathers. Both Cai and Zhao had caring mothers, and their closest siblings were their sisters. Cai had the more challenging childhood, as his mother split the family due to his father's infidelity, while Zhao's mother was known as a gentle, unassuming woman. Both Cai and Zhao showed great resolve during their childhoods and young adulthoods. For Cai this reached its height when he refused to go into the family business, after working there for three years, and instead attended school as an older student. As to Zhao, he determinedly convinced his family that he should go from Sichuan to Beijing to attend high school.

The experiences that led to the politicization of Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan were similar. They both went to progressive Western schools. They both participated in the youth groups of the New Culture movement, in which they developed their early political orientations. These youth groups were political training grounds that encouraged personal rectification, self-reliance, rejection of old values, promotion of feminism, and acting to save the nation. Both Cai and Zhao went through a period of transition from regional to national to international outlook during these years that was particularly developed after they settled in France. As we have seen, in their writings both Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan eschewed narrow patriotism for internationalism.⁶³

Both Cai and Zhao went to France with political motivations to save China. They emerged as leaders in the work-study movement, although Cai stayed in Montargis where he studied Marxist-Leninist theory and Zhao worked in factories and organized worker-

62 New Culture literature and polemics abound in these ideas, particularly the sacrifice of youth. See Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, 5th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979; repr. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Books on Demand, 2000).

63 This issue of internationalism alluded to in this article merits further comparison between the ECCO and CCP. For example, were the networks developed by the ECCO cohort broader in terms of diverse regional affiliations?

students in political activities and associations. Both Cai and Zhao were leaders in the three struggles of 1921. Although they were at polar ends during the Twenty-Eighth movement of 1921, they reconciled their differences and worked together toward organizing a communist party. By the spring of 1921, Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan had adopted the Bolshevik revolution as their model and espoused Leninist concepts of the vanguard party, the proletarian world revolution, and absolute discipline to the Communist International. It is amazing that while in a foreign country they not only wrote and spoke about the need for this kind of revolution but organized their fellow worker-students into groups and activities and ultimately created the ECCO.

The similarity of their trajectories is perhaps most notable in the fact that Chen Duxiu expressed faith in Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan and supported their leadership roles, even though Chen had no strong personal connection with either of them. Zhao, in spite of his youth, gained the confidence of Chen Duxiu, who thought so highly of him that he authorized him to join the CCP cell run by Zhang Shenfu as Zhao departed for Europe. Likewise, Chen Duxiu responded positively to correspondence from Cai Hesen, and Cai was admitted to the CCP Central Committee shortly after his return to China.

The revolutionary careers of Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan both exemplified continued commitment to Leninism and the discipline of the vanguard party in the service of world revolution. They both spent time in the Soviet Union, where they advanced their understanding of the realities of the Bolshevik revolution. They both married strong women who also were CCP members. They both were fathers who sacrificed their “family” bonds in dangerous situations, such as by giving their children to relatives to raise. Both Cai and Zhao were prolific and public writers throughout their lives, reaching their strengths as editors in charge of the two main organs of propaganda for the early CCP. They both had rapid rises in the CCP and were appointed to the CCP Central Committee. They both participated in landmark CCP revolutionary activities that helped to build the party. Finally, they both expressed a sincerity and devotion to the principles of Leninist theory and practice that animated their outlooks and activities—indeed their very lives and deaths.

Interestingly, in terms of their character development and personalities, Cai was a reserved person, an introvert, while Zhao was an extrovert who readily made friends. Cai had severe asthma and spent much of his time in reading and reflection. Zhao had buoyant health and spent much of his time organizing others into groups. These traits were demonstrated in their leadership strengths and challenges. Cai Hesen developed a strongly cerebral style and put his efforts into indirect contact, such as his post-1927 criticisms of Chen Duxiu, which tended to be lengthy articles. Zhao Shiyan was able to excel at multitasking due to his ability to network and to organize, while displaying confidence and cheerfulness. In Zhao’s case, one wonders if this sense of confidence also generated a sense of dangerous invulnerability? Was Cai more cautious than Zhao? One of the differences in their European experience is that Cai Hesen left before the formal formation of the ECCO and entered into the CCP Central Committee in the more dangerous era of 1922, while Zhao’s freedom to organize in 1922–1923 in France might have lessened his sense of the risks of his activities.

In the face of grim betrayal, both Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan showed extraordinary courage. The scale of their legacies is in the results of their active careers as well as their brave deaths. Cai Hesen, the theorist, and Zhao Shiyan, the practitioner, both were

critical to the development, triumphs, and survival of the CCP. Because each man was fairly young when he died—Cai at 36, Zhao at 26—there is not a commensurate focus in historical studies on their contributions to the Chinese revolution relative to their actual achievements. Thus, this article has attempted to highlight the significance of their roles in history in the context of another legacy of their time—the role of the Bolshevik revolution as a pattern and Lenin’s theories as a guide that drove these two men forward in living their lives and facing their deaths. Within a Plutarchian analysis, their lives and deaths certainly demonstrated the centrality of politics and virtue in this early phase of CCP history. As Plutarch wisely wrote in his *Parallel Lives*, “By the study of their biographies, we receive each man [person] as a guest into our minds, and we seem to understand their character as the result of a personal acquaintance, because we have obtained from their acts the best and most important means of forming an opinion about them. . . . What more valuable for the elevation of our own character?”⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ *Plutarch's Lives: Translated from the Greek, with Notes and a Life of Plutarch*, trans. Aubrey Stewart and George Long, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1880), 395.