




RESEARCH ARTICLE

How the first revolution affected the second: The setback of 1927 for the Chinese Communist Party Revolution in the 1920s

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Abstract

The Bolsheviks' world revolution encountered setbacks in the 1920s. Among the bloodiest of these was the massacre of 1927 when the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) entire central leadership was killed in the Chinese Nationalist Party's (GMD) coup. Existing explanations highlight Moscow's miscalculation, infighting within the Kremlin, Soviet advisers' information dilemma, and the CCP leaders' political inexperience. This article compares the opening stages of the Bolshevik (or Russian) and Chinese Communist Party revolutions to explain why the 1927 setback became a catastrophe. It argues that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 caused fundamental changes, which thwarted any attempt to replicate the 1917 victory in the post-1917 world. The CCP in 1927 faced three disadvantages that the Bolshevik Revolution had engendered: a misleading myth about the October Revolution, a Bolshevized system of repression created by Soviet advisers to the GMD, and the 'red scare' in Japan and British Southeast Asia, which blocked members of the CCP from escaping overseas. This article draws on leaders' biographical materials to compare the two parties' learning from foreign revolutions, records in suffering repression, and experiences as overseas refugees. The comparison shows that the Bolsheviks did not face these three disadvantages before 1917.

Keywords: Revolution; repression; wave; Russia; China; international

Introduction

The Bolshevik (or Russian) Revolution changed the world. From the outset of the Bolshevik takeover of power, the revolution had spilled over: first from metropolitan areas to the former imperial borders, and then from Russia to abroad. Yet the earliest rounds of exporting revolution saw frustrating outcomes. Though the Bolsheviks and the Comintern committed immense resources to this cause, no socialist regimes were sustained outside of Russia, except in Soviet-occupied Mongolia. Among the setbacks of the 1920s, the bloodiest was the Bolsheviks' interference in the Chinese Communist Party Revolution (hereafter CCP Revolution). In the early 1920s, the Comintern helped to found the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and reform the Chinese Nationalist Party

(GMD). Backed by the Soviet Union, the GMD-CCP united front launched the Northern Expedition (1926–1928) against the Beiyang warlords, to unify China and eradicate warlordism. Yet, after the GMD military occupied the Yangtze areas, its leaders split with the CCP and the Soviet Union and unleashed an anti-communist massacre. This repression started in spring/summer 1927 and lasted until the early 1930s, until the remnants of CCP forces had fled to rural areas. The CCP suffered heavy losses in the bloodshed. The majority of the central leaders were either executed or killed. Of those remaining, some, frightened and tortured, abandoned the revolution, while others fled to rural areas. The massacre of 1927 also inaugurated a protracted Chinese civil war, which marked the failure of the drive to replicate a Bolshevik-style seizure of power in China.¹

Many historians have explained the impetus for the setback of 1927. Most literature highlights four factors: Moscow's mistaken perception of Chinese society, the infighting between Stalin and Trotsky, the conflict between Comintern advisers and CCP leaders, and the young CCP's lack of experience. While not contradicting these explanations, this article explores why the setback of 1927 was so catastrophic. It can be understood in terms of the scale of its damage to the CCP movement: the leading groups of the CCP suffered surprisingly high losses, to the extent that after 1927 the rebuilt leadership practically comprised an entirely new group. It was under this new leadership that the CCP movement's direction finally changed, and it abandoned the pursuit of an overnight urban seizure of power and switched to a protracted rural guerrilla war.

Drawing on sociological theories of revolution, this article explores how the Bolshevik Revolution, the successful model the CCP sought to replicate in the mid-1920s, caused the 1927 setback to be a catastrophe. The author argues that whereas individual-level conflicts and misconceptions led to the setback, the structural social changes that the Bolshevik Revolution brought to the world caused it to be catastrophic. This first successful revolution became the curse of the second revolution, rendering the second unable to replicate the first's success. To make this argument, this article includes biographical data from the original Russian and Chinese languages. This data cover the two communist parties' central leading groups. It focuses on the crucial information that led to the catastrophic outcome, including these individuals' learning from foreign models of revolution-making, their records of suffering and evading repression, and their experiences as overseas refugees.

The article argues that it was the success of the Bolsheviks in 1917 that altered the global landscape of revolution and caused the CCP movement's vulnerability to a catastrophic setback. As the first successful socialist revolution, the Bolsheviks' victory became the stuff of myths. This mythification stemmed partly from Moscow's misleading teaching and partly from the CCP's cognitive limitations. The CCP imagined the victory in 1917 to have been an easy takeover of power, and neglected

¹'Revolution' can be defined in multiple ways. In this article, it refers to the actions aimed at a national seizure of power such as the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It was finally completed in 1921 when the Whites were smashed at the former empire's peripheries. The CCP Revolution was more protracted. The civil war lasted from 1926 until the early 1950s. The revolutionary tide in 1927 was a serious attempt to seize power, when the CCP anticipated a quick victory in eastern China. Though the attempt failed, it inaugurated a protracted revolution.

to see the setbacks, compromises, and retreats. This distortion misled the CCP into highlighting moral factors such as bravery and heroism, while neglecting tactics and strategies for revolution-making. It also rendered the CCP leaders mentally and tactically unprepared for the GMD's anti-communist coup.

Moreover, to win the Northern Expedition, the GMD chose to 'Bolshevize' itself. With the guidance of Soviet advisers, the GMD transformed itself from a loose radical group into a Soviet-style party. Following a Leninist model, the GMD built a system that subordinated all the machinery of violence—military, police, courts, and prisons—to the Party leaders' will. Thus, the GMD's punishment system became less restrained, such that the arbitrary use of lethal repression could be used against the Beiyang warlords as well as against the CCP.

Additionally, the Bolshevik Revolution aroused a global 'red scare'. As the Japanese and the British Southeast Asian authorities tightened border controls, CCP elites lacked overseas outlets for temporary refuge. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, the sole secure rear, pushed CCP elites back home to continue the dangerous revolution. Thus in China, while the GMD's massacre was ongoing, the CCP's rural guerrilla states had yet to be established.

The main body of this article consists of five parts. The first is a review of existing explanations of the CCP's 1927 setback, and introduces the sociological perspective of the transnational spread of revolution. The second notes data and methods. The third to fifth sections are the empirical core of the article, each focusing on one mechanism: the mythification of the Bolsheviks' success in 1917, the Bolshevization of the GMD, and the loss of CCP overseas outlets for refuge. A conclusion summarizes the argument and adds qualifications.

The catastrophe of 1927

A long scholarly effort has explained the CCP's catastrophe of 1927: why did the Comintern cause such a bloody outcome in its export of revolution?² Most existing explanations, which overlap with each other, highlight a mixture of three factors: the Comintern's miscalculation, the young CCP's mistakes, and infighting within the Soviet leadership. One major explanation is the Comintern's mistaken conception of China's revolutionary dynamics and social structure. The Bolsheviks analysed Chinese society 'through a narrow Russian spectacle', drawing experience from European contexts.³ Before the arrival of the Comintern advisers, Chinese Marxists had been ideologically

²Yung-fa Chen, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian* (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2001); Bruce Elleman, *Moscow and the emergence of communist power in China, 1925–30: The Nanchang Uprising and the birth of the Red Army* (London: Routledge, 2009); Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919–1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Alexander Pantsov, 'Bolshevik concepts of the Chinese Revolution 1919–1927', in *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between triumph and disaster*, (eds) Mechthild Leutner, Roland Felber, Mikhail L. Titarenko and Alexander M. Grigoriev (London: Psychology Press, 2002), pp. 30–43; Steve Smith, *A road is made: Communism in Shanghai 1920–1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000); Qisheng Wang, *Geming yu fangeming: shehui wenhua shiye xia de minguo zhengzhi* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010); Kuisong Yang, *Mao Zedong yu Mosike de en'en yuanyuan* (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1999); Kuisong Yang, *Zhongjian didai de geming guoji da beijing xia kan zhonggong chenggong zhidao* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2010).

³Smith, *A road is made*.

diverse, but collaboration with the Soviets imposed a monolithic interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.⁴ On the other side, historians have also emphasized that the early CCP's dependency on the Comintern prevented any disobedience.⁵ Other scholars argue that Chen Duxiu's lack of political acumen generated a vicious competition: Chen's attempt to squeeze the GMD elites out of the top echelons of the leadership sparked the GMD's anti-CCP backlash.⁶ Historians are particularly interested in the internal disagreements on the Soviet side and how the infighting between Trotsky and Stalin, and between the Comintern headquarters and the representatives, led to the catastrophe of 1927. Whereas Stalin's strategy of a 'bloc within' was unrealistic and opportunistic, Trotsky's proposal that the CCP withdraw from the GMD was unlikely to succeed either.⁷ Historians have also differentiated between Lenin and his successors. Lenin's insistence on maintaining a democratic revolutionary dictatorship was misused by Stalin and Trotsky to foster radicalization. This rendered the infant CCP vulnerable to anti-communist violence.⁸ Other historians argue that the uprising of 1927 was also a plot by Stalin, for the purpose of demonstrating that Trotsky's radicalism could not work.⁹ A less developed explanation draws on the GMD's Bolshevikization. This process concentrated power on the Party's supreme leader, and also fused political and military powers, which rendered the GMD's use of violence arbitrary and brutal.¹⁰

These explanations commonly focus on individual-level calculations and interactions. While not contradicting these well-developed explanations, this article explores a broader structural transition that shaped these individual-level details. It asks: whereas there had always been personal and factional politics in both the Bolsheviks and the CCP, why did these cleavages cause such a bloody outcome in the Bolsheviks' interference in the CCP revolution? The post-1917 CCP was different from the pre-1917 Bolsheviks. Not backed by any established socialist state, before 1917, the Bolsheviks had not suffered the extent of destruction and bloodshed the CCP did in 1927. In its early stages, why did the first revolution suffer less lethal repression than the second one?

This question also speaks to the general social science research on revolution. Since most revolutions take place in a transnational way or spill over international borders, scholars have long been analysing how revolutions of different national societies affected each other.¹¹ It is widely accepted that early revolutions, successful or not,

⁴Chen, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian*, p. 69.

⁵Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*; Yang, *Mao Zedong yu Mosike de en'en yuanyuan*.

⁶Chen, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian*, pp. 100–112, 113–114.

⁷Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*.

⁸Pantsov, 'Bolshevik concepts of the Chinese Revolution 1919–1927', pp. 30–43.

⁹Elleman, *Moscow and the emergence of communist power in China*.

¹⁰Wang, *Geming yu fangeming*, p. 125; Yang, *Zhongjian didai de geming guoji da beijing xia kan zhonggong chengong zhidao*, p. 137.

¹¹G. Arrighi, T. K. Hopkins and I. Wallerstein, *Antisystemic movements* (London; New York: Verso, 1989); Colin J. Beck, 'Reflections on the revolutionary wave in 2011', *Theory and Society*, vol. 43, 2014, pp. 197–223; Mark R. Beissinger, 'Structure and example in modular political phenomena: The diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip revolutions', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2007, pp. 259–276; T. Boswell and C. Chase-Dunn, *The spiral of capitalism and socialism: Toward global democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Mark N. Katz, *Revolutions and revolutionary waves* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1997); Krishan Kumar, 'The future of revolution: Imitation or innovation?', in *Revolution in the making of*

inspire more revolutions. A foregoing revolution may help subsequent ones by providing intellectual inspiration, creating international opening(s), and offering direct political, military, and financial aid. Such help may expand a revolution within a single nation into a transnational event.¹²

Under this consensus, a few scholars have noted the other side of the coin: when early revolutions mislead, or leave barriers for, following revolutions, follower-revolutionaries tend to suffer setbacks and failures. For example, foregoers tend to exhaust public sympathy and attention, leaving latecomers with less moral support from the international community.¹³ The success of early revolutions has provided opportunities for counterrevolutionaries to learn, which has hindered later revolutions' success.¹⁴ Moreover, followers may draw mistaken lessons from successful examples, due to incomplete information and/or cognitive oversight.¹⁵ All of these effects are more likely in revolutionary movements that are temporarily and spatially proximate. In this sense, comparing the Bolsheviks and the CCP would be more relevant than, for example, comparing the English and the Americans, the French and the Chinese, or the French and the Russians.¹⁶

The catastrophe of 1927 also speaks to two broader debates on the early history of the CCP. First, it informs us when and how the CCP became a Leninist party. The critical period around 1927 is a turning point, as Van de Ven argues.¹⁷ Before the first GMD-CCP united front, the CCP was fragmented, consisting not of communists but

the modern world, (eds) John Foran, David Lane and Andreja Zivkovic (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 222–225; George Lawson, 'Revolutions and the international', *Theory and Society*, vol. 44, 2015, pp. 299–319; John Markoff, *Waves of democracy: Social movements and political change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996); Sidney Tarrow, 'Cycles of collective action: Between moments of madness and the repertoire of contention', *Social Science History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1993, pp. 281–307; Charles Tilly, *European revolutions, 1492–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Kurt Weyland, 'The Arab Spring: Why the surprising similarities with the revolutionary wave of 1848?', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2012, pp. 917–934.

¹²Fred Halliday, "'The sixth great power": On the study of revolution and international relations', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 16 no. 3, 1990, pp. 207–221; Katz, *Revolutions and revolutionary waves*; Charles Kurzman, *Democracy denied, 1905–1915: Intellectuals and the fate of democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Markoff, *Waves of democracy*; Eric Selbin, *Revolution, rebellion, resistance: The power of story* (London: Zed, 2010); Nader Sohrabi, 'Global waves, local actors: What the Young Turks knew about other revolutions and why it mattered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2002, pp. 45–79; Tarrow, 'Cycles of collective action'; Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and war* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Kurt Weyland, 'The diffusion of revolution: "1848" in Europe and Latin America', *International Organization*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2009, pp. 391–423.

¹³Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴Beissinger, 'Structure and example in modular political phenomena'; Kurt Weyland, 'Crafting counter-revolution: How reactionaries learned to combat change in 1848', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 110, no. 2, 2016, pp. 215–231.

¹⁵George Lawson, 'Within and beyond the "fourth generation" of revolutionary theory', *Sociological Theory*, vol. 34 no. 2, 2016, pp. 106–27; Weyland, 'The diffusion of revolution'.

¹⁶A. A. Fursenko and Gilbert H. McArthur, 'The American and French revolutions compared: The view from the U.S.S.R.', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1976, pp. 481–500; Kenneth N. McKee, 'The popularity of the "American" on the French stage during the revolution', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 83, no. 3, 1940, pp. 479–491; Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian intellectual life, 1865–1905* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996).

¹⁷Hans Van de Ven, *From friend to comrade: The founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

liberals and anarchists. The Party's structure, if any, was plagued by conflict between regional organizations and the Party centre, led by Chen Duxiu. Cooperation with the GMD endowed CCP members with the sense of being a separate entity, and enabled the CCP to conduct mass mobilization on a nationwide scale. It was during this time that the CCP began to consider a demand to centralize the Party cells.¹⁸ Yet, as Van de Ven proposes at the end of his work, scholars can move forward to explore the multiple variants of 'becoming Leninist', one of which, he mentions, is the Communist Party's control over the military and the machinery of violence.¹⁹ Van de Ven also suggests that the proliferation of biographical materials would ease research along these lines. Additional literature emphasizes the indigenous social roots of the CCP's transition to Leninism. Other scholars date the origin of Chinese communism even further back, before the GMD-CCP united front. For example, Dirlik traces the Leninist turn to the collective disillusion of Chinese anarchists at the turn of the 1920s.²⁰ After experiencing consecutive frustrations in their social experiments, they desperately sought an immediate programme for action. Luk argues that the early Chinese communists embodied, and did not 'inherit' (a term Liu Shaoqi used), Leninist principles.²¹ Their voluntarism, revolutionary professionalism, and authoritarianism had an affinity with Leninism. A more Weberian thesis on the elective affinity between anarchists and Leninism was later developed by Xu.²² Yeh offers a more subtle story: communists from peripheral provinces, who were influenced by neo-Confucian thought, travelled to coastal metropolises, where they became alienated from Confucian ethics, and thus sought similar alternatives to compensate for the family-based networks they were losing.²³

A second debate, related to the first, is over the extent to which the formation of the CCP was an indigenous event. Whereas the CCP's official historiographers assert the Party's homegrown origins against accusations that the Chinese Revolution was a transplant from Moscow, recent literature has added nuance to explanations of the CCP's integration of foreign influence vis-à-vis indigenous adaptations. In general, it is argued that the CCP sought and retained autonomy through drawing resources from diverse sources, external as well as native. For example, Saich is among the earliest to point out that the CCP's international knowledge was more complicated than simply being a monolithic Russian input: Henk Sneevliet (alias Maring), a Dutch communist, created the 'entryist' strategy during the GMD-CCP united front based on his experiences in Indonesia.²⁴ Ishikawa finds that the early CCP elites learnt Marxism from Japan and gathered information about Soviet Russia largely from English materials

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 241–245.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 245.

²⁰Arif Dirlik, *The origins of Chinese communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²¹Michael Y. L. Luk, *The origins of Chinese Bolshevism: An ideology in the making, 1920–1928* (Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²²Xiaohong Xu, 'Belonging before believing group ethos and bloc recruitment in the making of Chinese communism', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 78, no. 5, 2013, pp. 773–796.

²³Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Provincial passages: Culture, space, and the origins of Chinese communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

²⁴Tony Saich, *The origins of the First United Front in China: The role of Sneevliet (alias Maring)* (London: Brill, 1991).

via the United States.²⁵ Meanwhile, the CCP in Shanghai was neither the first nor the only 'Chinese Communist Party' that the Comintern had approved, if we are to count the bogus CCP founded by Chinese migrant workers in Russia in 1920. This indicates that the proliferation of China's communist movement was more spontaneous vis-à-vis the Comintern's 'selection'.²⁶ In terms of overseas exploration, Belogurova details the CCP's activities in British Malaysia, highlighting Li Lisan's role in setting up a Nanyang Communist Party, which was independent, but which would reinforce the CCP.²⁷ Finally, Elizabeth Perry reveals the native cultural resources the CCP invoked for mass mobilization in the 1920s, like festivals, traditional societies, kinship, etc.²⁸ This occurred before the CCP started its rural guerrilla war in 1927, when the Soviet advisers were still exercising close supervision.

Methods and data

The analysis of the Russian Revolution covers the Bolsheviks' entire pre-revolutionary history, from 1903 until 1917. It shows that the repressive violence the Bolshevik Party suffered before 1917 was significantly weaker than that experienced by the CCP, in terms of causing fewer deaths. The analysis of the CCP focuses on the critical period from 1927 to 1931, between the GMD's counter-CCP massacre in the summer of 1927 and the CCP's stabilization of guerrilla states in China's central provinces. It was during this period that the CCP, under pressure from Moscow, suffered its first and, arguably, its most severe setback. In terms of data, this article compares the records of the two parties' central bodies. The records of the violence experienced by members of these bodies are the most complete. The Bolshevik dataset covers the central bodies of the entire pre-revolutionary period between the Party's formation in 1903 and the February Revolution in 1917. The CCP dataset covers the Party's first six central committees (1921, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1927, and 1928) that were formed before 1931, and some of their affiliated institutions. Membership of these six central bodies overlapped, with 101 individual members in total.

As a faction in the Russian Social Democrat Labor Party (SD) before 1917, the Bolsheviks had no institutionalized central bodies. Thus, I incorporate into my discussion all groups of the leading characters, numbering 102 individuals, including the Bolshevik members with seats in the SD central committees, the members of central and special bureaus, and the editors of the Bolshevik organs, which often served as a temporary faction centre, such as *Iskra*, *Vpered*, *Pravda*, and *Proletariat*. These individuals' names and positions can be found in old Soviet Party history textbooks.²⁹ The analysis of the Bolshevik component focuses on the two clusters of

²⁵ Yoshihiro Ishikawa, *The formation of the Chinese Communist Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 63–79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁷ Anna Belogurova, *The Nanyang Revolution: The Comintern and Chinese networks in Southeast Asia 1890–1957* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²⁸ Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the mandate of heaven: Social protest and state power in China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

²⁹ Mikhail Moskalev, *Buro tsentral'nogo komiteta RSDRP v rossii (avgusta 1903–mart 1917) [Buro of the Central Committee RSDLP in Russia, August 1903–March 1917]* (Moscow: Izdadel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1964);

materials that are the most complete in the dataset: the numerical records of repression coded from various biographical sources, including arrests, deportations, exiles, imprisonments, executions, and escapes; and narrative records that show interaction with foreign advisers as well as details of repression. Most Bolsheviks survived, and left behind complete autobiographies in *Granat Encyclopedia* and separately published memoirs.³⁰ The former comprises questionnaires filled out by the Bolshevik leaders at the Party's congresses. Every questionnaire includes self-reported information, including place of birth, family background, process of entering the socialist movement, educational experiences, and travel abroad. Most importantly, this source includes rich information regarding repression, such as the places and times of arrest, the sites of imprisonment, and the experiences of escaping from exile (in which year and from where to where). Two auxiliary sources, less complete and systematic, are the Archive of the Tsarist Secret Police (Okhrana, hereafter NIAPO) and the Boris Nicolaevsky Collection (hereafter NC) which contain details of the Bolsheviks' exile abroad as well as their learning from foreign radicals, such as the literature they read in libraries, their interactions with European socialists, and the Party training schools they operated outside of Russia.

Organized under the guidance of the Comintern, the CCP's central bodies were better institutionalized than the Bolsheviks before 1917. Yet, even for the CCP, the definition of 'central bodies' needs qualification as well. The 1920s was the CCP's formative period when the structure and composition of the leadership was in flux. The Central Bureau elected by the First Congress only consisted of three individuals: Chen Duxiu, Li Da, and Zhang Guotao. The Second, Third, and Fourth congresses, spanning 1922 to 1927, elected central executive committees, which had more members than the Bureau. The Third Central Executive Committee is noteworthy as it marked a significant change. Its members increased from the Second Central Executive Committee's five to 14 (excluding the Soviet adviser Grigorii Voitinskii) and organizational differentiation emerged. Within the committee, positions and sub-institutions were set up, such as a committee chair, candidates, a central bureau, and a political bureau. The Fourth Central Executive Committee included more institutions, such as the standing committee, the commissioners to major regions and fronts (for example, Tangshan, Changsha, Anyuan, Guangdong, Beijing, Hankou, Youth-League, and railway commissioners). From the Fifth Congress (1927) onwards, the CCP's central leadership was formally termed the Central Committee, under which there were members, candidate members, members of the political bureau, candidate members of the political bureau, a standing committee of the political bureau, a temporary standing committee of the political bureau, and the commission of inspection.

The Sixth Central Committee was more complex and needs more interpretation. The CCP's Sixth National Congress was convened in Moscow in the summer of 1928, while the Seventh Congress was not held until 17 years later, in June 1945. Such a prolonged interregnum indicates the CCP's continuous precarity and geographical fragmentation after 1927, which made convening a national congress unfeasible.

B. N. Ponomarev, *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959).

³⁰Granat, *Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat* (Moscow: Sov. Entsiklopedia, 1989).

During this long period, the Central Committee was reorganized many times, with new members absorbed and existing ones excluded. Thus, the CCP's Sixth Central Committee was, more than any other central committee, like a conglomerate, many members of which had never even seen each other before. This article only considers the members elected before January 1931, when the Fourth Central Plenum was held. There are three reasons for this cut-off: a) most personnel replacements occurred at central plenums; b) by January 1931, the CCP's guerrilla states had taken shape, and were able to shelter the central leadership; c) a new episode of the CCP revolution began in 1931. People who lost their lives after 1931 were usually killed in combat or conspiracies, rather than murdered in prisons. Defection and attrition at the top echelons of leadership had decreased significantly as well. In sum, after 1931 the key cause of the deaths of CCP leaders changed from repression to combat. Thus, a comparable case for the post-1931 CCP Revolution would be the Russian Civil War, rather than the pre-1917 Bolshevik movement.

The selection of cases for the CCP component has several limitations: in comparison with the tiny conspiratorial group of Bolsheviks before 1917, between 1921 and 1931 the CCP was significantly larger. Thus, a sample of 100 cases does not cover the entirety of the revolutionary leadership. Some important figures of the Sixth Central Committee are not included in this article, for example, Chen Yun, Kang Sheng, Liu Shaoqi, Lu Dingyi, Wang Ming, and Zhu De, who were all first elected to the Central Committee in or after January 1931. Moreover, Central Committee members from 1921 to 1931 do not cover all central institutions and agencies. For example, within the committees were several departments, in charge of the peasant movement, women's mobilization, and publications. Skipping the members of these departments may exclude crucial figures like Wang Ruofei. However, if all of these department secretaries were to be included, this article would incorporate at least another 40 cases. However, this filtering does not limit the article's conclusion. After the archipelago of guerrilla states had taken shape in 1931, high-ranking leaders could stay in the base areas, eventually diminishing their exposure in cities. They would encounter risks only in battles where entire guerrilla forces had been annihilated. Moreover, a general pattern was that lower-ranking leaders had fewer connections with the GMD-warlords and fewer opportunities to escape to the Soviet Union.

The CCP's biographical information mainly comes from three sources. The full list of all Central Committee members is provided in *Materials of the CCP's Organizational History* (*Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*), a 13-volume documentary history edited by the CCP's Central Department of Organization. This collection chronologically depicts the composition of each Central Committee, working institutions, and local organizations. It is used as an index. Another significant source is *The Biographies of the CCP's Historical Figures* (*Zhonggong dangshi fengyun renwu*), a 10-volume collection edited by Wang Jianying. This source includes biographies of many central leaders. It contains the following relevant information: year of birth, the date they joined the central bodies, the time and place of arrest, cause of death, time and reasons for attrition from the CCP, and the time period for international travel (when they travelled abroad and when they returned). However, this source is incomplete, as it does not cover all Central Committee members. Thus, two other sources are used: *The Biographies of the CCP's Historical Figures* (*Zhonggong dangshi renwu zhuan*) and *Revolutionary Martyrs* (*Geming lieshi zhuan*). The structure of these two sources is similar. They are also multi-volume

collections, but they simply cover more figures. For the CCP's relations with the Comintern, a useful source is the six-volume documentary collection *Comintern and Nationalist Movement in China*.³¹ The coding strategies used for this article draw insight from leading experts on CCP biographical studies of CCP central committees.³²

Strategic diversity diminished by the October myth

The Bolsheviks emerged at a time of great transformation, when the socialist movement was undergoing radical transformation, both in Russia and throughout Europe. The result of this was confusion, division, and polemics, but also diversity, freedom, and flexibility. Most importantly, before the Bolshevik takeover of power in 1917, there was no socialist state to regulate this pluralism. No regimes possessed the legitimacy to force the socialist parties in Europe in one direction. Such diversity rendered the revolutionary movement in Russia inefficient, but, at the same time, prevented any adventurist terror attacks that led to bloody police repression. However, by the time the CCP emerged in the 1920s, this period of uncertainty was approaching its end. Most European social democrats had become politically 'bankrupt' in the Great War, while the Bolsheviks, already in power, had boosted their success. In control of the Soviet state machinery, their influence on the world socialist movements had intensified; the equal relations of the pre-1917 European socialist movement had transitioned into a hierarchical structure. Within such a uni-polar power structure, a strategic mistake could be amplified, leading to disastrous outcomes.

The post-revolutionary propaganda of the Soviet Union claimed that the Bolshevik Party was a Leninist party. Yet, in fact, before 1917, the Bolsheviks had never forced integration to promote ideological unity. Rather, since its birth in 1903 as a faction within the SD, the Bolsheviks had been trapped in infighting and exchanging polemics with other socialists, and lacked a model of revolution-making to which its entire membership consented. Even the Soviet Union's official textbooks conceded such pluralism. The Soviet Party history textbooks comprised a list of the Bolsheviks' rivals, who held diverse understandings of the best revolutionary strategies (for example, populism, legal Marxism, economism, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, conciliators, liquidators, Otvovists, defensists).³³ The boundaries between these factions were obscure and floating.

³¹RTsKhIDNI, 'Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii', in VKP(B), *Komintern i natsional'noe dvizhenie v Kitae (1926-27), Part II* (Moscow: A. O. 'Buklet', 1996).

³²Thomas Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the evolution of the Chinese communist leadership* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2000); Marilyn Levine, 'Post WWI Chinese revolutionary leaders in Europe', *Journal of Historical Network Research*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2022, pp. 187-232; Victor Shih, Christopher Adolph and Mingxing Liu, 'Getting ahead in the Communist Party: Explaining the advancement of Central Committee members in China', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 106, no. 1, 2012, pp. 166-187; Victor Shih, Wei Shan and Mingxing Liu, 'Gauging the elite political equilibrium in the CCP: A quantitative approach using biographical data', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 201, 2010, pp. 79-103.

³³H. Avdeev, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda: khronika sobytii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1923); Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CCPSU), *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). Short course* (New York: International Publishers, 1939); V. Nevskii, *Ocherki po Istorii rossiiskoi kommunisticheskoi partii* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo rabochee, 1925); Ponomarev, *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii sovet'skogo soiuza*; Nikolai Nikolaevich Popov, *Outline History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: International Publishers, 1934).

Accordingly, the Bolsheviks' pre-1917 perceptions of revolution-making had great breadth, and no one approach could dominate the movement. For example, militant adventurists pursued armed insurrections, but they never managed to consolidate the Bolshevik faction's resources. During the 1905 Revolution, they endeavoured to establish a stable overseas guerrilla base to maintain persistent military campaigns against the Tsarist state. Advocates of this proposal assembled in Finland, but no major Bolshevik leaders attended this meeting.³⁴ Lacking financial and personnel support from the centre, these individuals returned to sporadic terrorist attacks, and agitated the rank-and-file of the military. This switch led them to cooperate with socialist revolutionaries and Polish nationalists, which, paradoxically, contradicted the Bolsheviks' ideological line.³⁵ The moderates did not prevail either. As the Duma elections became routinized, Lenin and other Bolsheviks proposed a strategy of using the Duma as a platform to propagate revolutionary programmes and to contain the conservatives. But this proposal also gained little support, in that many socialists viewed participation in parliamentary politics as betrayal.³⁶ It was not uncommon for revolutionaries, who opposed the parliamentary route, to turn to radical journalism or to switch to straightforward strike-making.³⁷

Such diversity embodied a time of uncertainty. As the traditional approach of peasant agitation became outdated in the 1880s, the Russian socialist movement lapsed into a collective anxiety about where to go. This anxiety manifested itself in the trend around the 1905 Revolution whereby major parties—the SD as well as the Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR)—tried to learn from a variety of contentious politics. They developed a project to 'build[ing] socialist libraries', whereby these parties advocated for members, sympathizers, and foreign counterparts to collect materials on contentious events abroad and from Russian history. Within this campaign, a frequent refrain was that the Russian socialist movement faced unprecedented reconstruction.³⁸ This concern was so acute that the sources for learning were not confined to prominent labour uprisings such as Stepan Razin and Yemel'ian Pugachev, but rather extended to more traditional ones such as the Old-Believer riots, Slavophile campaigns, student boycotts, banditry, and anarchist rural social experiments.³⁹ For example, it was suggested that socialists should imitate the persecuted religious minorities to embed universal doctrines into dialects and folklore, in order to spread revolutionary mobilization nationwide.⁴⁰ Likewise, to learn from movements beyond Russia, materials were collected outside of traditional strongholds of socialism, such as Germany and France, to inform surrounding fights in Ireland, Japan, and even the

³⁴Archive of the Tsarist Secret Police (Okhrana), Hoover Institute, Stanford University (hereafter NIAPO), Box 214, Index XXIVj, Folder 2.

³⁵NIAPO, Box 214, Index XIX, Folder 5.

³⁶August H. Nimtz, *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917: The ballot, the streets—or both* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 154–159.

³⁷Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii', pp. 361–362.

³⁸Boris Nicolaevsky Collection, Hoover Institute, Stanford University (hereafter NC), Box 675, Folder 21, 30.

³⁹NC, Box 78, Folder 11; Box 669, Folder 08.

⁴⁰NC, Box 630, Folder 15.

Arab-Muslim world.⁴¹ It was also around the same time that a significant body of textbooks was published or translated, such as Tun's *History of the Revolutionary Movements in Russia*⁴² and Grimm's *Revolution of 1848 in France*.⁴³

Most importantly, before the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, there was also no established socialist state to play the role of 'big brother'. Between the Franco-Prussian War and the Great War, Europe was undergoing democratization and the transition to nation-states. Both processes caused enormous confusion among socialist movements. The expansion of suffrage showed the possibility of improving workers' welfare without violent revolution, while the founding of a tariff system and universal conscription divided the international proletariat into mutually conflicting national entities,⁴⁴ which triggered the historic debate on 'revisionism'. In terms of institutions, the Socialist International (1889–1914) did not have any real power over its constituent members. Instead, it served only as a platform for sharing information;⁴⁵ nor were any leading parties, either French or German, able to dominate this organization. As nationalism intensified, the large parties' relative power was further undermined by small socialist parties in southern and eastern Europe. Such pluralism enabled Russian socialists of any ideological orientation to find overseas supporters. Working closely with socialists of the Second International, many Bolsheviks joined factions for parliament struggle and trade unionism.⁴⁶ Some even joined the French or German parties.⁴⁷

However, once the Bolsheviks came to power, such diversity and freedom perished. They started exporting their revolutionary model abroad and soon switched from West to East. The Bolsheviks had long envisioned such imposition, but before 1917, they had lacked the power to realize this objective. Now they mastered the state machinery left by the Romanov dynasty. The CCP's founding was aided by the Comintern. The Party's growth throughout the 1920s was closely supervised by Soviet advisers. Despite infighting within the Kremlin, the Soviet leaders pressured the CCP into an aggressive attack: they advocated generating an open alliance with the GMD to use the latter's military forces to eliminate the warlords in northern China, while fomenting agitation among workers and peasants as leverage to constrain and channel the GMD. The dispute among the Soviet leaders was tactical, and based on when it was ripe for the CCP to turn away from the GMD, and how to securely complete this switch. Trotsky's insistence on an immediate breakup with the GMD sounded adventurist, but Stalin's later proposal that the CCP penetrate the GMD to subvert it proved no less risky. Nevertheless, underneath this disagreement was a consensus that

⁴¹NC, Box 669, Folder 08.

⁴²NC, Box 631, Folder 15.

⁴³NC, Box 711, Folder 1.

⁴⁴Perry Anderson, 'Internationalism: A breviary', *New Left Review*, vol. 14, 2002, pp. 12–13; James Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914* (New York: Praeger, 2008), pp. 4–22.

⁴⁵Fred Halliday, 'Revolutionary internationalism and its perils', in *Revolution in the making of the modern world*, (eds) Foran, Lane and Zivkovic, pp. 77–79.

⁴⁶Barbara C. Allen, *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885–1937: Life of an old Bolshevik* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015); Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Building the Party, 1893–1914* (London: Bookmarks, 2010), p. 241; Ocip Piatnitsky, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik* (New York: International Publishers, 193[?]); Cathy Porter, *Alexandra Kollontai. A biography* (London: Merlin Press, 2013).

⁴⁷Piatnitsky, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik*, pp. 175–176.

the CCP should aggressively attack the old regime and imperialism, as the disagreements paled in comparison to those within the Social Democratic Labor Party before October 1917.

Although Moscow's conception of the CCP Revolution involved many mistakes, it took time for these mistakes to dominate the CCP's mindset. The CCP's understanding of the experiences of 'October success' changed over time. In the initial contact with the Soviets, the CCP elites' perceptions of the Russian Revolution were far more diverse than they later became. When the Russian Revolution of 1917 started, Chinese intellectuals faced barriers to accessing international information, due to linguistic and cultural differences, as well as the information blockage engineered by the Beiyang government. Nonetheless, the initial understanding of the Russian Revolution was impressive, especially after many started studying the Russian language and had opportunities to visit the country. Before Stalin took full control, Chinese visitors retained access to an array of revolutionary ideas, through libraries, working with Soviet colleagues, romantic relationships with locals, communicating with revolutionaries from other Eastern countries, as well as visiting the West. This allowed them to bring home diverse information about how the Bolshevik Revolution had taken place. For example, Qu Qiubai was well informed about the linguistic reforms in non-Russian republics⁴⁸ and the activities of American businessmen and engineers in resurrecting the Russian economy.⁴⁹ Zhang Tailei, who worked for the Comintern agency on eastern colonies, was a columnist who wrote about anti-imperialist movements and was well informed about the situation in India, Persia, Morocco, and Egypt.⁵⁰ Certain predictions proved surprisingly accurate, even by today's standards. As Li Dazhao stated in 1918, 'elites of small nations (*ruo-xiao-min-zu*) such as Ukraine and Georgia were uprising against the Tsars, but eventually, they would return under a form of reunion'.⁵¹

The Chinese visitors also knew of the Bolsheviks' 'retreat' in the 1920s, the ongoing New Economic Policy, and its related polemics. Shen Yanbing translated Bukharin's speech stating that the 'revolution inevitably destroyed [the] economy, but without [a] functioning economy, the revolution could not keep going'.⁵² Li Dazhao, collecting biographical information on major leaders of the Bolshevik and provisional governments, concluded that the current Revolution 'was the product of a small circle of elites, while the bulk of the Russian population was not interested in it'.⁵³ China's early socialists tracked the dynamics of foreign armed intervention. They knew that the Allies had struggled to reach a consensus on how to contain Bolshevism: 'While France and Japan support an expedition, Britain and America object' and 'they [imperialists] are unable to reach a solution; some only allow for a blockage of Russia's major ports to eliminate Maximalists while others move further to establish a moderate government'.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Tiejian Chen (ed.), *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku Qu Qiubai juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2014), pp. 21–23.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

⁵⁰Tailei Zhang, *Zhang Tailei wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013), pp. 153–154.

⁵¹Zhenwu Yang and Heping Zhou (eds), *Hongse qidian zhongguo gongchanzhuyi yundong zaoqi xijian wenxian huikan* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2012), vol. 11, p. 378.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 783–784.

⁵³*Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 378.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, vol. 14, pp. 27, 47.

Gradually, the CCP's understanding of Bolshevik history became monolithic and mysticized. Even those who had initially offered genuine insights omitted many details, consciously or unconsciously, from their narrations of the Bolshevik Revolution. The CCP's understanding began to show several biases. First, agency—arguably the central component of Leninist revolutionary theory—was often overlooked. Rather, many CCP elites explained the Bolsheviks' success as a structural inevitability. CCP observers were enthusiastic about 'discovering' structural similarities between Russia and China, such as the atrophy of imperialism worldwide, the misery and grievance among toilers, 'colonial people uprising against their metropolitans', and the diminished power of Britain and France due to the Great War.⁵⁵ Such arguments stressed similarities between China and Russia, but these were not measured. For instance, there was minimal quantitative comparison between Russia of 1917 and China of the 1920s. A pamphlet by Deng Zhongxia (1894–1933) asserted 'though China did not have serfdom, China's peasants were far more miserable than Russian serfs and had a higher enthusiasm for revolution'.⁵⁶ The recovery of the Soviet economy in the 1920s was often invoked as evidence that Russia could afford to support the Chinese revolution, but little information was provided on the extent to which Russia was willing to mobilize and deliver its resources.⁵⁷

In the CCP's understanding, pre-1917 Russia was a structurally rotten, fragile, old system, which had enabled the Bolsheviks' uni-minded insistence on a decisive outcome, and China would repeat the same victory. Li Lisan (1899–1967), a major organizer of and advocator for the CCP's armed insurrections at the turn of the 1930s, argued that the Bolsheviks' victory had been achieved through Lenin's persistence and determination after 1905. Li believed that the structure conducive to revolutionary breakthroughs had always existed, and that non-Bolshevik parties had neglected it. Accordingly, he concluded that whether the CCP could break through its current bottleneck depended on the entire Party's 'class mind', its determination, and persistence.⁵⁸ During an inspection of a Shanghai Party school, Li became angry that those planning the uprising were wasting time questioning the general experiences of the October Revolution: 'These rules had been articulated enough in Moscow's training schools.' He suggested that local CCP units 'should focus on technical details, such as surveying neighborhoods and population to [research how to tactically apply the Bolshevik experiences]'.⁵⁹

The CCP's learning from the Bolshevik Revolution emphasized bravery over useful techniques and strategies. In consequence, when the GMD massacre came, many CCP elites did not know how to protect themselves. A review of the terror of 1927 lamented: 'Party members of even very well-founded regions didn't know anything about how to

⁵⁵Ibid., vol. 28, pp. 56–58.

⁵⁶Zhongxia Deng, *Zhongguo zhigong yundong jianshi [A brief history of China's worker movement]* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957).

⁵⁷Yang and Zhou (eds), *Hongse qidian zhongguo gongchanzhuyi yundong zaoqi xijian wenxian huikan*, vol. 28, pp. 57–58.

⁵⁸Zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi diyi yanjiubu (First Department of the Central Committee Research Office on Party History) (ed.), *Li Lisan bainian danchen jinianji* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 71–74.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 68.

mobilize the masses', 'they didn't recognize the boundary between clandestine and legal', 'many Party cells mixed with bandits and disappeared', they had 'no knowledge of uniting ethnic minorities', and they were too 'panicked by the White Terror [counter-CCP repression], to ask for protection from local warlords'.⁶⁰ As Sheng Yue (1907–2007) recalled, upon their departure from Moscow Sun Yat-sen University, the old Bolshevik Solomon Lozovskii (1878–1952) confessed that the training session had imparted few techniques that were useful in revolution-making. Sheng recalled that most of the time in Russia had been devoted to training in the skills of demonstrating the advantages of Soviet communism and forming an alliance with old bureaucrats.⁶¹ CCP propaganda, taking the eloquent orator Yun Daiying (1895–1931) as an example, described more of what a communist society should look like than how power had been seized.⁶² This was consistent with the entrenched belief that the circumstances for revolution were ripe and the only agency needed was to *believe* the situation was ready. Extensive training in agitation-making as well as other special techniques such as military and intelligence started after the terror of 1927. More and more CCP leaders came to believe that achieving an easy revolution had proven to be impossible.

A more disastrous mistake resulting from the CCP's learning from the Bolsheviks was the negligence of the Bolsheviks' zigzags, compromises, and retreats. Early Chinese socialists and observers had noticed this negligence, but as the victory of the Russian Revolution became mythicized, it had been underplayed and omitted. As the CCP's ties with the Comintern tightened, the teaching of the Party's propagandists increasingly highlighted confrontational aspects of the Russian Revolution. For example, the fight against Anglo-American intervention was depicted as a heroic confrontation and full victory.⁶³ As for the Brest-Litovsk Peace, the CCP's *Qianfeng* newspaper aggressively presented Soviet diplomacy as Russia having nothing to request from Germany, but Germany having a lot to gain from Russia.⁶⁴ The CCP mentioned Moscow's collaboration with Kemal Ataturk (1881–1938), but praised it as 'determined support for the Turkish people to have defeated imperialism'.⁶⁵

The CCP also celebrated rapidity. It believed that the Russian Revolution had achieved a thorough victory by the turn of the 1920s. Even Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) presented the Bolshevik Revolution as a model in which 'labor forces brought down all foreign capitalists overnight'.⁶⁶ In the case of setbacks, an oversimplified reading of the Bolshevik Revolution also led to tragic heroism. Depressed by the GMD's massacre, Qu Qiubai, apparently overlooking the Bolsheviks' compromises with Germany, asserted that China could respond to the imperialist-supported GMD with a rural insurrection and achieve a quick victory.⁶⁷ In order to argue that the Bolshevik takeover was

⁶⁰Geming lishi dang'an, Zhejiang Provincial Archive in Hangzhou City, G001-002-678, 433001.

⁶¹Yue Sheng, *Mosike zhongshandaxue yu zhongguogeming* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2004), pp. 73–77.

⁶²Daiying Yun, *Yun Daiying quanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2014), p. 372.

⁶³Yang and Zhou (eds), *Hongse qidian zhongguo gongchanzhuyi yundong zaoqi xijian wenxian huikan*, vol. 28, pp. 87–88.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, vol. 28, p. 498.

⁶⁵Jiangsu sheng dang'anguan (Jiangsu Provincial Archive), *Jiangsu sheng danganguan guancang geming lishi baokan ziliao huibian* (Nanjing: Dongnan daxue chubanshe, 2014), p. 29.

⁶⁶Ying Li, *Chen Duxiu yu gongchan guoji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2019), pp. 20–23.

⁶⁷Chen (ed.), *Zhongguo jindai sixiangjia wenku Qu Qiubai juan*, pp. 193–194.

at the vanguard of a global revolution, the CCP writers vehemently defended Soviet Russia, viewing every negative narration of the Bolshevik Revolution as ‘Western bourgeoisie-plotted rumors’.⁶⁸

There was no doubt that the Comintern’s ‘influences’ always contained ‘ideological myths’ and conscious strategies, but the relation between these two components changed over time. The CCP revolutionary movement in the 1920s marked the starting point of the Comintern’s long-term transition. This transformation was a slow-moving process towards the instrumentalization of a world-revolutionary ideology to achieve the Soviet Union’s national interests. At the beginning of this transformation, the communist parties outside of Russia had plural explanations for the Bolsheviks’ success, but, eventually, only one narrative survived, serving as a disciplinary device arising out of the Soviet leaders’ geopolitical calculations, rather than the revolutionaries’ unconscious selective memory. The Comintern’s geographical orientations were transferred in a loop, first from Europe to the East, and then back to Europe. Initially, the Bolsheviks counted on a world revolution in ‘advanced’ Europe, which was a natural extension of their ideology. After insurrections failed in Hungary, Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria, Moscow began to envision a revolution in the colonial Eastern world. Yet, from the late 1920s on, the Comintern’s attention returned to imperialist politics in Europe. The Second World War broke out towards the end of this long-term process of reorientation, during which the Comintern became a geopolitical instrument of the Soviet Union. A crucial turning point was the Comintern’s Seventh Congress in 1935. Before this congress, the Comintern’s programme had been caught up in an internal struggle between world revolution and defending the Soviet Union. The tension between geopolitical calculation and ideological idealism led to confusion, chaos, and setbacks. However, after this congress, Moscow clarified that all communist parties had to join anti-fascist united fronts to defend the Soviet Union’s interests. Another critical juncture was the period between 1923 and 1925. When Lenin was alive, he had allowed communist parties to adopt organizational structures and strategies that fitted their national contexts. But even during this period, an impulsion of ‘Leninization’ had started, in pursuit of making all communist parties into a branch of the Comintern and (ideally) devoid of any internal opposition. Under the directorship of Grigorii Zinov’ev (1893–1936), Moscow clarified that only one organizational structure was legal, regardless of each party’s preferences, local contexts, and historical traditions.⁶⁹

Many details suggest that the CCP’s experience in the 1920s was the initial part of this transition: competitive interpretations of the Russian Revolution were being replaced by Stalinism, but this process had been far from complete. The International Lenin School in Moscow (1926–1938) was an institution for training Stalinists. After the director Mikhail Bukharin was deposed, the school’s teaching programme was reshaped. However, other than a few individuals, such as Dong Biwu, Chinese graduates of this school did not become central CCP leaders.⁷⁰ Therefore, at the turn of the

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 55; Zhang, *Zhang Taili wenji*, pp. 247–248.

⁶⁹John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, ‘Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: A historical controversy revisited’, *Labor History*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2019, pp. 165–192.

⁷⁰Alexander V. Pantov and Daria A. Spichak, ‘New light from the Russian Archives: Chinese Stalinists and Trotskyists at the International Lenin School in Moscow, 1926–1938’, *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2008, pp. 29–50: 23–29.

1930s, Moscow's influence on the CCP revolution was more through diffused powers and unintended consequences, rather than direct coercion and full control. Another example was the myth of 'the 28 Bolsheviks'. In the CCP's official historiography, these individuals were framed as a coherent Stalinist team with the secret mission of seizing the leadership of the Chinese Revolution. However, according to recent scholarship, they were a loose network. They varied greatly in age, social origin, education, places of birth, and length of residence in the Soviet Union. As trainees of Moscow Sun Yat-sen University, they were fragmented in the struggle between Stalin and Trotsky, but neither Soviet leader was able to control all of them. These trainees returned to China as Sun Yat-sen University closed, but only sporadically. After arriving in the guerrilla zones, these leaders did not generate any factions that consistently fought local cadres.⁷¹

The brutalization of China's repression system by the export of revolution

Though the CCP drew many mistaken lessons from the Bolshevik Revolution, its adventurist revolutionary attempt in 1927 might not have ended in a massacre had the repressor it encountered been a pre-1917 Tsarist-style state. The GMD's brutal repressive machine was largely an outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution. The Bolsheviks of the pre-1917 years mainly endured non-lethal forms of repression, such as imprisonment, deportation, and exile, while the CCP in 1927 encountered a Soviet-trained monster, which nearly obliterated the Party's entire central leadership.

In using lethal punishment, the Tsarist state was moderate in comparison with totalitarian regimes. It issued even fewer death sentences than contemporary democracies like France and the United States.⁷² This was partly because the House of Romanov was restrained by a vast elite and strove to be viewed as a benign European monarchy. These elites included liberal-minded aristocrats, judges, and lawyers, as well as the professional military. Having some sympathy for the revolutionary movement, these individuals tended to either minimize sentences or resist arbitrary orders for over-punishment.⁷³ For example, in the wake of 1905, arguably the heaviest setback in the history of the Russian Revolution, only one-third of the 3,300 arrestees served their original sentences and, in practice, even these sentences were reduced.⁷⁴ The Tsarist state was also plagued by insufficient professionalization: the police department was underfunded and fragmented, its power was constrained by technocrats and local officials, and its staff was small and poorly trained.⁷⁵

⁷¹Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the evolution of the Chinese communist leadership*, pp. 23–30.

⁷²Jonathan W. Daly, 'Criminal punishment and Europeanization in late imperial Russia', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, 2000, Bd. 48, H. 3, pp. 341–362.

⁷³Dmitry Shlapentokh, 'From "ancient regime" to "new regime": The case of the Czarist and Bolshevik repressive machinery', *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 19, no. 5/6, 1999, pp. 1–125; Otto Schmidt, *Bol'shaia sovskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet encyclopedia]* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1947); Jacob Walkin, *The rise of democracy in pre-revolutionary Russia: Political and social institutions under the last three czars* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

⁷⁴Jonathan W. Daly, *Watchful state: Security police and opposition in Russia, 1906–1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 23.

⁷⁵Daniel Beer, *The house of the dead: Siberian exile under the tsars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), pp. 310–318; Wayne Dowler, *Russia in 1913* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), pp. 191–193, 207.

Table 1. Deaths of Bolshevik leading elites by year.^a

Periods	Pre-revolutionary			Post-revolutionary		
Years	1905–07	1907–17 ^b	1917–21	1922–33	1934–53	After 1953
Number	2	6	12	21	43	12

a. In total 102. The years of death of six individuals are unclear.

b. Before March 1917, the collapse of the Tsarist state.

Although the Bolsheviks suffered repression, they were rarely sentenced to death. The majority of the 102 central leaders outlasted the Tsarist state, living to see the new Soviet state (see Table 1). Only eight died under the old regime—two were randomly executed by police and soldiers at the height of the repression between 1905 and 1907,⁷⁶ while the remaining six died of poverty or disease, mostly during exile to Siberia or abroad. The Bolsheviks' main forms of repression were imprisonment and exile. The density of imprisonment shows how reluctant the Tsarist state was to use lethal punishment. Before the downfall of the Tsar, on average, each individual had been arrested around four times (a number that is still underestimated, in that people tended to conceal their experiences of imprisonment to avoid intra-Party investigation) (see Table 2). Many Bolsheviks were repeatedly arrested: Gleb Bokii was arrested 12 times, Andrei Bubnov 13, and Pavel Nogin claimed that he had been arrested more than 15 times.⁷⁷ The survey data on the SD's Sixth Congress of August 1917 showed that between the 150 attendees, they had been arrested 549 times, and nearly half had been arrested more than four times.⁷⁸

Even arrests and exiles were moderate. In 1905, many Bolsheviks were released soon after capture because the courts lacked evidence to convict them.⁷⁹ Even among those who were guilty, the penalty was lax. As the Congress survey of 1917 shows, the 110 responders were incarcerated for a total of just 245 years, whereas 55 responders were deported for a total of 127 years.⁸⁰ The short periods of incarceration allowed people to quickly return to radical activities. However, even after 1905 when the government intensified monitoring, prisoners could still read, write, and even coordinate conspiratorial activities outside.⁸¹ In addition, imprisonment was not a lifelong stigma. Upon release, prisoners could still enrol in schools and colleges, and even attend Duma assemblies.⁸² It was also not routine for the Tsarist state to extend punishment to prisoners' families. For example, Lenin's wife and siblings stayed within the reach of police, but they were not harassed.⁸³

⁷⁶Shmidt, *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet encyclopedia]*, vol. 6, pp. 182–183, 261–262.

⁷⁷Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 173, 370, 564.

⁷⁸Data coded from B. N. Ponomarev, *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1959).

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 300–301, 373–374, 509–510, 584–585, 677–679, 785–787; Grigorii Kopanev (ed.), *Geroi Oktīabrīa: biografii aktivnykh uchastnikov podgotovki i provedeniia Oktīabr'skogo voozruzhennovo vosstaniia v Petrograde* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 162–163; Shmidt, *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet encyclopedia]*, vol. 6, pp. 120–121.

⁸⁰Ponomarev, *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii sovetskogo soiuza*, p. 255.

⁸¹Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 553–554, 564.

⁸²Kopanev (ed.), *Geroi Oktīabrīae*, vol. 2, pp. 138–139; Shmidt, *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet Encyclopedia]*, vol. 6, pp. 219–220, vol. 20, p. 221.

⁸³Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 373–374; 464–465; Shmidt, *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet Encyclopedia]*, vol. 44, p. 215.

Table 2. Arrests of Bolshevik leading elites before March 1917.^a

Arrests	Number
None	3
1	12
'More than once' ^b	8
2	21
3	16
4	8
5	7
6	10
7	3
More than 7	14
Total: >322	Total: 102

a. Nine cases are missing.

b. In the original Russian source, this category is titled 'neodnokratno', which means 'more than once'.

Escaping was also easy. The 102 Bolshevik leaders altogether reported 59 escapes—certain figures, such as Stalin, succeeded every time and thus never really lived in exile.⁸⁴ Moreover, most places to which prisoners were exiled were on major river crossings, for logistical reasons and to reduce costs. In practice, this facilitated escape. In winter, when the river surface was frozen, a dog cart could transport escapees to the closest train station before police even noticed they were missing.⁸⁵ In summer, escapees could row a small boat either to a town close to the railway, or switch to a steamship.⁸⁶ Escape was even more feasible from the 1890s onwards as the Siberian railway extended into the Far Eastern region.⁸⁷

From the power seizure in 1917 through to the Civil War (1918–1921), the Bolsheviks forged a repressive system that was far less restrained in using lethal violence. The fragmentation and professional autonomy of the Tsarist regime were replaced by an unprecedentedly high infusion and concentration of power whereby all punishments in all sectors were subjected to the Communist Party's arbitrary will. Meanwhile, with the adoption of many modern techniques, the system became more penetrating and extensive. Once the 'proletarian dictatorship' decided to annihilate an identified enemy, there was little possibility of survival by manipulating the regime's internal cleavages or escaping. The height of this regime came in the 1930s. During this time, hardly any 'people's enemies' were released or escaped from the Gulag.⁸⁸

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 698–699.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 584–585.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 636–638, 651–653.

⁸⁷Beer, *The House of the Dead*, pp. 338–339.

⁸⁸J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The road to terror: Stalin and the self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's police: Public order and mass repression in the USSR, 1926–1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 23–30;

Ironically, when the Bolsheviks exported this model to China, it first reached the GMD and soon became its killing machine to repress the CCP.

Before the rise of the GMD, China's Beiyang warlord government (1912–1928) bore some similarities with the Tsarist state. Under Beiyang rule, the punishment system was evolving towards a separation of powers, whereby the executive branch faced many restraints. Judicial professionals returning from European universities strove to found an independent court system, while the Beiyang governors endorsed such efforts, resisting the GMD-CCP's idea that courts and prisons were instruments of a political party. These warlords shared the Confucian belief that the public apparatus did not belong to any 'party'; in traditional Chinese political thought, 'party' was a derogatory term almost synonymous with 'faction' or 'clique'.⁸⁹ Without any superintending force above all regime branches, the Beiyang system of repression contained internal inconsistencies. Harsh sentences issued by one department were often moderated by another,⁹⁰ while the military's use of violence against radical movements was curbed by civilian courts.⁹¹ Even though Chinese society was increasingly plagued by a worship of violence under the warlordism of the 1910s, before the GMD's domination, the use of naked violence to remove political rivals was rare, especially among the conventional military elite.

The brutalization of China's repression system started with the Bolshevization of the GMD, during preparations for the GMD-led Northern Expedition War (1926–1928). The Northern Expedition movement was a temporary alliance of South China's local strongmen. To harness these strongmen, the GMD sought to found a military force that would be exclusively loyal to it. At the insistence of GMD leaders Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), Jiang Jieshi (1887–1975), and Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), the GMD underwent a Soviet-style reorganization, which concentrated power within the Central Political Committee, an imitation of the Bolsheviks' Central Politburo.⁹² Presiding over officer training, Jiang especially appreciated the Soviet commissar system and viewed it as a device for ensuring officers' obedience.⁹³ Unsurprisingly, when the GMD turned its military machinery against the CCP, the most brutal killings took place in the special courts and military-police prisons under the control of Jiang and Wang.⁹⁴

George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's political police. The all-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, December 1917 to February 1922* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁸⁹Second Historical Archives of China (SHAC), *Zhonghua minguo dang'an ziliao huibian* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 3, wenhua: 31–32.

⁹⁰*Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan* [The Biographies of the CCP Historical Figures], CCP History Research Office, 1980, vol. 1, p. 250; *Geming lieshi zhuanji ziliao* [The Biographical Materials of the Revolutionary Martyrs], Revolutionary Martyrs Association (hereafter RMA), 1985, vol. 2, pp. 156–157, 223.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, minzhongyundong: 575–577.

⁹²Wang, *Geming yu fangeming*, p. 225.

⁹³Hanguo Zhu, Weizhen Yang, Huifeng Lin and Youshen Chen, *Zhonghua minguo zhuanqishi: guomin geming yu beifa zhanzheng* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2015), p. 180.

⁹⁴One influence on the GMD's brutalization could have been fascism. Before 1927, pro-GMD writers such as Dai Jitao had been writing about fascism in China. Yet, the GMD's official access to European fascist states started in the early 1930s, through contact with the Italian counsellor in Shanghai, the son-in-law of Benito Mussolini. After the GMD-Soviet split, the Central Club clique (CC, founded in 1930) and the Blue Shirt Society (founded in 1932) espoused that China's modernization should preserve the nation's traditional values and resist foreign influences, including communism from Soviet Russia and the iconoclastic

Before the rise of the Bolsheviks, the GMD's imagination of revolution had an a-military, even counter-military, character, similar to that of the Bolsheviks before the Russian Civil War. In the early days the GMD anticipated that the revolution would be a coup without protracted fighting; the old regime was corrupt and no serious combat was needed to topple it. Moreover, revolutionaries bore the obligation to minimize destruction caused by war and prevent society's general brutalization driven by war. Whenever feasible, they should maximize their use of negotiations, even bribery. This route for the GMD was affected by the Anglo-American fear of Jacobin terror and bottom-up mobilization. Its adherents viewed revolution as a beast that revolutionaries had to discreetly harness. Such a mentality dates back to the GMD's fight against the Qing Dynasty. In a meeting with Xiong Kewu (1895–1970) in 1905, Sun Yat-sen argued that international students should not wait until they completed their military education abroad to foment uprisings. Sun believed that revolution depended on suddenness and the courage to create originality, and thus basic proficiency in using weapons sufficed for a successful revolution.⁹⁵ In a 1910 letter, Sun Yat-sen estimated that an impending uprising would involve little combat. He judged that the government soldiers around Beijing had low morale, due to discontent with the Qing court's deposition of General Yuan Shikai. He also explained why he had high expectations of the navy: after the Sino-Japanese War the Qing navy had become tiny, consisting of just four cruisers, and thus could be captured without battle.⁹⁶ After the Revolution of 1911, Sun Yat-sen warned that China should learn from Europe and North America, to avoid another round of bloody revolution.⁹⁷ The reluctance to engage in normalized warfare persisted until 1923 when Sun started cooperating with Moscow. In reflecting on the Taiping Rebellion, Sun warned against the worship of violence among revolutionaries. He advocated for learning from the American Revolution, where diplomacy had been a crucial alternative to endless warfare.⁹⁸ Even when discussing the Bolsheviks' experiences, Sun defined the 'success' of the Bolshevik Revolution as 'concluding the Civil War within three years, not like in China to allow the war to persist until it became warlordism'.⁹⁹

Such Bolshevization also spilled over from the Party and military into the broad punishment system left over by the Qing and Beiyang regimes. Imitating the Soviet Union, the GMD took a huge step forward in concentrating power in the judicial system. Many judges and judicial officials were deposed for having opposed the GMD's meddling in professional trials, with a great number of 'people's jurors', appointed by the GMD, replacing them. These GMD judges lacked professional backgrounds and expertise, and simply proceeded with whatever punishment the GMD decreed.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, to bypass the constraints of regular procedures, the GMD also

values of the May Fourth Movement. Maggie Clinton, *Revolutionary nativism: Fascism and culture in China, 1925–1937* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

⁹⁵Zhongshan Sun, *Sun Zhongshan quanji xubian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017), vol. 1, p. 74.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 120.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 238.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 365.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 478.

¹⁰⁰Zaiquan Li, *Fa zhi yu dang zhi: guo min dang zheng quan de si fa dang hua* [Rule of law or rule of party: The partitioning of the GMD judicial system] (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2012), pp. 76–78.

established numerous temporary ‘revolutionary courts’ which were run by gangs, partisans, local officials, and inspectors. During the Soviet-backed Northern Expedition, the GMD’s use of lethal violence expanded, in the name of repressing counter-revolutionaries. In many situations, the function of judgement and punishment was fulfilled by the military. Military bodies had their own apparatuses, which paralleled those of the regular courts, such as ‘confessional hospitals’, military courts, police courts, and other special courts.¹⁰¹ The police department was also heavily staffed by officers and soldiers, many of them from the GMD military, which exacerbated the abuse of lethal violence.¹⁰²

Certainly, the GMD’s perception of Soviet Russia underwent immense change over the long term, shifting from moral admiration to willingness to strategically cooperate, and then to organizational and ideological imitation. Initially, the GMD viewed Russia merely as geopolitical leverage, and not as a partner on an even footing. During the Revolution of 1911, Sun Yat-sen spoke strategically of China’s existing border disputes with Russia, alluding to China ‘resolv[ing] these disputes to Russia’s maximized advantages’ if Russia provided support for the GMD’s efforts to mitigate Japanese influence.¹⁰³ After the Bolsheviks came to power, Sun restrained his enthusiasm, as his sympathy and admiration did not extend to Soviet communism. He thought of communism as ‘soilless in China’, and celebrated the Russian Civil War as a heroic national struggle against imperialist powers, during which the Bolshevik Party and the labouring masses had demonstrated great endurance. ‘A socialist republic had withstood for eight months. This fact itself conveyed great inspirations to the Eastern peoples.’¹⁰⁴ Sun believed that the Russian Revolution would ignite a wave of unrest in British, French, and Japanese colonies.¹⁰⁵ From 1920 onwards, Sun Yat-sen began considering direct cooperation with the Bolshevik government, but only in strategic and technical terms. In a meeting with Grigorii Voitinskii (1893–1953), he enquired whether it would be feasible to build a radio station in Vladivostok, in order to establish wireless communications between Guangzhou and Moscow. He also mentioned a secret agreement with Lenin according to which the GMD would accept funds from Russia.¹⁰⁶ In 1922, Sun asked if Soviet Russia would build a railway from Central Asia to northwest China, via which China would be able to receive weapons and military trainers.¹⁰⁷ From 1923 onwards, Sun Yat-sen’s collaboration with Russia became focused on ideology and organization. In talks with Mikhail Borodin (1884–1951), he showed an interest in the political work and everyday routine in the Soviet military, saying that ‘these [settings] were what the Chinese revolutionary army needs’.¹⁰⁸ Twice in 1924 Sun mentioned that Soviet Russia survived the Civil War on the shoulders of the Bolshevik Party members’ discipline. ‘Ordinary Party members sacrificed individuals’ freedom’ and ‘[The]

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰² Yanlong Chao and Yigong Su, *Zhong guo jin dai jing cha shi [A history of modern Chinese police]* (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2000), p. 537.

¹⁰³ Sun, *Sun Zhongshan quanji xubian*, vol. 1, p. 140.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 290.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 323.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 496, 502.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 255.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 478.

Table 3. Executions of CCP leaders, 1927 to 1931.

Categories	Sub-categories	Number
1. Persisted within the CCP post-1949		8
2. Martyrs executed during 1927-1931		38
3. Dropped out between 1931 and 1949	3.1. Non-combat death	6
	3.2. Expulsion	10
	3.3. Quit/missing	14
	3.4. Defection	13
	3.5. Killed in combat	10
4. Unclassified		2
Total		101

Russian Revolution could be concluded so fast because grassroots Bolsheviks all well understood the Party's doctrines and were willing to fight for those programs.¹⁰⁹ Sun even likened the GMD's 'Three Principles of the People' to Russia's 'New Economic Policy', arguing that in terms of countering imperialism, the Russian Revolution was as nationalistic as the Chinese one.¹¹⁰

Mapping the fate of the 101 central leaders (see Table 3) suggests that they had a miniscule probability of survival, and shows a long-term trend of massive replacement of elites in the CCP Revolution. Individuals who left the CCP before 1949, even just before then, are not included. Out of the 101 members, only eight survived into 1949 and remained within the CCP. These included the most powerful and influential figures, such as Li Da, Li Weihan, Mao Zedong, Ren Bishi, and Zhou Enlai. However, even these eight individuals need explanation. For example, due to a suspected record of desertion in the 1930s, Zhou Xiuzhu did not progress beyond the grassroots level, working as an accountant in Yan'an. Even though her CCP membership persisted from the 1940s into the post-1949 period, she was no longer a CCP leader. This applies to similar cases, such as that of Wang Yazhang, who later returned to the CCP. More importantly, of the eight individuals, six of them first joined the Central Committee at the time of the Fifth or Sixth national congresses, after the massacre had begun. In other words, at the culmination of the massacre, these individuals had yet to be labelled as important targets. If this factor is taken into consideration, the repression inaugurated in 1927 was harsh, to the extent that few members of the central bodies between 1921 and 1927 were CCP leaders post-1949. The central body members who were no longer present can be divided into two groups: those who were murdered during the massacre of 1927 (38) and those who lost their lives or quit the CCP movement before 1949 (53). In addition, there are two exceptional cases that are difficult to classify: those of Gao Junyu and Xu Meikun. The former died of disease in 1925, before the

¹⁰⁹Ibid., vol. 4, p. 184, vol. 5, p. 80.

¹¹⁰Ibid., vol. 4, p. 59.

massacre, while the latter was released from prison because of his personal relationship with Cai Yuanpei and Shao Lizi, two prestigious educators. Xu's case was rare in the CCP Revolution, but has many equivalents in the Russian Revolution.

Among the 101 central leaders, 38 were murdered between April 1927 and the summer of 1931. In this transitional period, when the massacre was unfolding, the CCP had yet to establish stable guerrilla zones where its high-ranking cadres could shelter. These 38 people, including prestigious figures like Cai Hesen (1895–1931), Chen Qiaonian (1902–1928), Chen Yannian (1898–1927), Li Dazhao (1889–1927), Peng Pai (1896–1929), and Xiang Jingyu (1895–1928), were first arrested and then executed, usually summarily and without a formal trial. The repression of these 38 shows several patterns. The arrests were concentrated in Shanghai (15), Wuhan (5), Guangdong and Hong Kong (5), Beijing (3), Changsha (3), and a few other cities. Such a geographical distribution suggests that most arrests occurred within the jurisdictions of the GMD's Nanjing and Wuhan governments, as well as that of the Guangdong warlord Li Jishen (1885–1959). The involvement of Li Jishen is not surprising. Among the eight armies of the Northern Expedition, Li Jishen's corps was modelled on the Soviet military, probably only second to central GMD groups. The two figures arrested in Hong Kong were extradited to Li Jishen and then executed. Related to the places of arrest, the main executors were the GMD military, police, and intelligence sectors (amounting to 25 out of the 38 cases), and in other cases, the warlord military men in Guangdong, Beijing, and Sichuan.

The pattern of execution paralleled the geographical distribution. Unlike the pre-1917 Bolsheviks who remained incarcerated until they escaped or were released, the majority of the CCP arrestees were summarily executed. Out of the 38 martyrs, eight were executed within three days after their arrest (often the next day), nine were executed within one week, seven within two weeks, five within one month, and two within two months. Only seven out of the 38 were imprisoned for longer than two months (including one, Li Zifen (1902–1932), who died of torture and poor conditions in prison). This pattern suggests that the GMD and its close associates were not restrained by any formal procedures, as was the case in Tsarist Russia. They simply regarded the repression as a civil war. Most arrestees were shot, but some were hanged, hacked to death with their eyeballs gouged out, drowned, or nailed to city gates.¹¹¹ Not even regular courts' involvement in sentences helped, as the GMD regime had placed them under strict control. Whereas before 1917, Bolshevik arrestees were often released due to a lack of evidence, CCP arrestees received heavy sentences even when there was no proof of the accusations against them. Their innocent relatives could also be harassed, detained, tortured, or killed. Moreover, the GMD often modified existing sentences to inflict heavier punishments. Illegally detained arrestees were also poisoned or shot in secrecy.¹¹²

Apart from the elites who sustained their power into the post-1949 period and the martyrs of 1927, 53 elites dropped out of the CCP movement, for various reasons, between 1931 and 1949. These elites can be divided into five categories. A small group of very high-ranking elites died non-combat deaths: Chen Tanqiu (1896–1943),

¹¹¹RMA, vol. 1, pp. 188, 197–198, 242; vol. 2, pp. 32, 208–209, 237.

¹¹²RMA, vol. 4, pp. 154, 164, 303–304, 330; vol. 6, p. 104; vol. 7, p. 18.

Deng Fa (1906–1946), and Xiang Ying (1898–1941) died under suspicious circumstances, while Guan Xiangying (1902–1946), Su Zhaozheng (1885–1929), and Zhang Hao (Lin Yuying, 1897–1942) died of disease. A larger group, about ten people, was expelled from the CCP, organizationally or physically. Some either claimed to be Trotskyists, or were accused of being so. Against the backdrop of the Stalin–Trotsky fight, this accusation was fatal. Some were executed in the CCP’s intra-Party struggle. Understandably, most expulsions took place in the aftermath of the massacre, when the entire CCP was debating who was responsible for the bloody setback and disagreed on how to organize the guerrilla fighting. Apart from non-combat death and expulsion, 14 people quit the CCP. They were not arrested, but changed their ideological beliefs or felt pessimistic or frightened. A few, like Zhang Lian’guang (?–?) and Zhuang Wen’gong (1901–1965), disappeared. The most destructive group comprised the ‘traitors’, who were arrested and joined the GMD. This group included Gu Shunzhang (1904–1935), one of the founders of the CCP’s intelligence system. Lastly, around ten people were killed in combat, mainly around the CCP’s Long March. The difference between this sub-category and the 38 martyrs of 1927 lies in the fact that the victims were killed in battlefield shootings or right after being captured. There was no transitional imprisonment period between capture and execution.

Many important CCP leaders did not sit on the central committees from 1927 to 1931, but were too important for the history of the CCP to skip. These individuals had assumed middle-ranking positions or even merely worked as rank-and-file propagandists before 1927, but they took over leading positions following the massacre and maintained their power in the post-1949 years.¹¹³ The culmination of several factors allowed these non-central committee elites to survive the massacre: their relative junior and lower rankings that lessened their political visibility, the sheltering effect of residence in the Soviet Union, the eventual stabilization of the guerrilla zones, the local strongmen’s autonomy which buffered the repressive violence from the Nanjing government, and the CCP’s organizational learning from the setback of 1927, which facilitated the arrestees’ rescue and their evasion of repression.

The effect of low visibility and training abroad manifested in the ‘internationalists’. One case was that of Wang Ming (1904–1974), the CCP’s delegate to the Comintern. During the White Terror period, Wang Ming was in the Soviet Union, serving as Pavel Mif’s (1901–1938) interpreter and assistant, which kept him at a distance from the repression in China. When the coup started in Shanghai, Wang Ming was accompanying Mif in visiting Guangdong, and right before the coup spread to Wuhan, Wang Ming returned to the Soviet Union with Mif. Nevertheless, Wang Ming did not evade imprisonment. He was arrested by accident upon his return to China in 1931, in the Shanghai Concession. Because of his low rank—a propagandist without a formal position—he was released, and it was never even detected that he was a CCP member. However, soon after his release, Wang Ming was elected to the CCP’s political bureau.¹¹⁴ The other two internationalists, Zhang Wentian (1900–1976) and Bo Gu (Qin Bangxian, 1907–1946), had similar trajectories. Zhang studied in the Soviet Union from October 1925 to February 1931. On his return to China, he was promoted to director of the

¹¹³Levine, ‘Post WWI Chinese revolutionary leaders in Europe’.

¹¹⁴Guoquan Zhou and Dehong Guo, *Wang Ming Nianpu* (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1991), pp. 16–17; 37–38.

CCP's Central Department of Propaganda.¹¹⁵ Bo Gu resided in the Soviet Union for an extended period as well, from October 1926 to May 1930. Upon his return to China, he became an ordinary cadre in the General Trade Union. Yet, this young pupil quickly ascended to become first secretary of the Communist Youth League.¹¹⁶ All three of these individuals' backgrounds show that the massacre of 1927 created a power vacuum. Previous leading elites disappeared almost overnight and those who replaced them would exert significant influence over the ensuing decades of the CCP Revolution. Their common experiences also suggest that the Soviet Union indeed functioned as a shelter and a training centre, but only for the individuals who were to take over the CCP's leadership power after 1927. The timing of the period they spent overseas enabled them to return directly from the Soviet Union to the CCP's guerrilla bases in China. Such a seamless transition reduced their risk of arrest and execution in cities.

Several other important figures remained in China but managed to evade arrest and execution. One was Nie Rongzhen (1899–1992), the PRC's marshal in 1955, who had been working in the military and intelligence from 1927–1931. On the eve of the coup, Nie participated in the attack on Wuchang and was appointed military secretary of the CCP's Hubei Committee.¹¹⁷ Nie participated in organizing the insurrections in Nanchang and Guangzhou. From 1928 onwards, he was the military secretary of the CCP's Guangdong Committee, and then joined the CCP's Central Department of Intelligence. By 1931, Nie had become the CCP's chief of the general staff. While serving in the military could lead to the fatal result of being shot in battle, at the same time, it enabled people to avoid arrest. Another case was Li Fuchun (1900–1975), the PRC's director of the Central Planning Committee in 1954. During the Northern Expedition, Li served as the CCP's delegate to Tan Yan'kai's second army. When this army seized Nanchang, Li was in the core command circle and when the coup started, he left for Shanghai to escape arrest. There he stayed underground until leaving for the Jiangxi guerrilla base.¹¹⁸ Nie Rongzhen's and Li Fuchun's experiences indicate two factors that mitigated the risk of being killed by counter-CCP violence. First, they worked in the GMD command and participated in major operations, which enabled them to detect many signals of the ongoing counter-CCP plot and escape early. Second, they worked closely with the military units where the CCP members and sympathizers were concentrated. This provided a temporary shelter where they could evade arrest before moving into the guerrilla zones or underground work.

Two other individuals had arrest records worth mentioning: Liu Shaoqi (1898–1969), the PRC's chairman, and Wang Ruofei (1896–1947), chief secretary of the CCP's Central Military Committee. Liu was arrested in 1929 in Fengtian during China's battle with the Soviet Union over the Chinese Eastern Railway.¹¹⁹ Zhou Enlai

¹¹⁵Peisen Zhang, *Zhang Wentian nianpu (1900–1941)* (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000), pp. 112–113.

¹¹⁶Zhiying Li, *A biography of Bo Gu (Bo Gu zhuan)* (Beijing: Dang dai zhong guo chu ban she, 1994), pp. 74–75.

¹¹⁷Rongzhen Nie, *Nie Rongzhen huiyilu [A memoir of Nie Rongzhen]* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986), pp. 50–56.

¹¹⁸Chongji Jin and Weizhong Fang, *Li Fuchun zhuan* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), pp. 65–68.

¹¹⁹The Chinese Eastern Railway (*Zhongdonglu*) was constructed by the Russian empire in northeast China from 1897 to 1902. After the Bolshevik Revolution, it remained under the control of the Soviet Union. In 1929, the local governor, Zhang Xueliang, attempted to take the railway by force, but this action

arranged for his rescue, and he was soon released, as judges found no solid evidence to incriminate him.¹²⁰ This event became a source of trouble for Liu in coming years as many suspected that he was a traitor. It is hard to verify what happened to Liu in prison, but he was indeed arrested by Fengtian, in the jurisdiction of the warlord Zhang Xueliang. Although Zhang's Northeast had been officially subsumed into the GMD government in 1928, the region still retained autonomy. Had Liu been arrested in the GMD's direct jurisdiction, he might have been executed under pressure from Nanjing, like the CCP agitator Pan Wenyu in Hubei. Wang Ruofei was arrested in 1931 when he agitated in northwest China, after which he was imprisoned in Baotou until his release in 1937. Fu Zuoyi (1895–1974), an independent warlord emerging from the Shanxi local forces, and not fully controlled by the Nanjing government, made the arrest. Fu initially interrogated Wang, but failed to obtain the desired information. Sometime after 1934 he was transferred to the army prison in Taiyuan, in the jurisdiction of Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan (1883–1960). Yan did not murder Wang either. He was released in 1937, a beneficiary of the second alliance between the CCP and GMD.¹²¹ In general, local strongmen had greater incentives to protect the CCP leaders, partly because they did not fully understand the CCP's ideology, and partly because they used such protection as strategic leverage to counter the GMD's central faction and win over the CCP.

The gangs were pivotal in the 1927 massacre, as they had turned from backing the GMD-CCP united front to supporting the GMD's counter-communist coup. Such an abrupt change would foreshadow the CCP's relationship with secret societies in the ensuing three decades. Though the gangs were depicted as aiding the GMD in the massacre, before and after this collusion, their relationship had undergone a long-term transition. Under the Beiyang government, the gangs were an autonomous social force. Since the late Qing, they had collaborated with the revolutionaries. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, secret societies, claiming to be heroic contributors to the revolution's success, further expanded their presence. In response, the Beiyang government viewed the gangs as a potential threat, fearing that the GMD could collude with gang members to commit subterfuge. However, although the Beiyang government issued orders to contain the gangs, the actual effect of these was limited. A major factor was the de facto political division after Yuan Shikai's death. For example, in Sichuan, where there had been civil war between warlords after 1916, gangs had proliferated and become a force with which every warlord had to collaborate.¹²² During the Northern Expedition War, the Shanghai gangs supported the GMD-CCP military. They mediated between the CCP and the French colonial authorities, persuading the latter to allow the CCP to locate its headquarters in the concessions. The gangs also utilized their intelligence networks within the Shanghai warlord government to send warnings and

was thwarted by Soviet forces. During this battle, CCP members in China used propaganda to support the Soviet Union, and those who served in the Soviet Union participated in the combat.

¹²⁰Chongji Jin and Zheng Huang, *A biography of Liu Shaoqi (Liu shao qi zhuan)* (Beijing: Zhong yang wen xian chu ban she, 1998), pp. 140–142.

¹²¹Zhiling Chen and Yang He, *A biography of Wang Ruofei (Wang ruo fei zhuan)* (Shanghai: Shang hai ren min chu ban she, 1986), pp. 126–157.

¹²²Baoqi Qin, *Banghui yu geming* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013), pp. 215–237.

negotiate for the release of arrestees. This support from the gangs enabled CCP leaders like Chen Duxiu and Luo Yi'ning to avoid arrest.¹²³ Before the GMD's coup in 1927, the CCP's situation resembled that of the Bolsheviks before 1917: they faced an old system that bore many cleavages and cracks.

Yet, as the GMD seized power in 1927–1928, these cleavages and cracks began to diminish. The gangs' switch to supporting the GMD was the starting point of the latter's transition to its concentration of power. On the eve of the coup, Jiang Jieshi sent his delegates to negotiate with the gangs, to secure their support. Yet, this was the last time the gangs worked with the GMD on an equal footing. As the data on arrests and executions show, the gangs were not directly involved in the killing of CCP members, at least at the level of central-body members. From 1927 to 1931, gang members provided support mainly in terms of intelligence and information, helping the GMD military and agents to identify and capture CCP members. The post-1927 GMD incorporated gangs as its instrument for information gathering, while at the same time forbidding their penetration into the GMD's inner circle and blocking their influence on high politics. In other words, under the GMD's rule, the gangs started to lose their status as an autonomous force, and the authorities refused to regard them as an equal ally. This transformative process continued unfolding after 1927. In the 1930s, the GMD government issued orders to contain the gangs. During the Sino-Japanese War, many GMD secret agents infiltrated the gangs, taking high positions or recruiting gang leaders as informants to work for the GMD's intelligence departments. After the defeat of Japan, the situation deteriorated even further for the gangs. When all Western concessions in Shanghai were returned to China, the gangs lost their bases. Their industrial and financial entities were expropriated by the GMD officials.¹²⁴ Therefore, it could be debated whether Jiang Jieshi's break with Soviet Russia was a move to fascism; however, the general direction in which the GMD was moving was aimed at forging a unified political system, where the use of violence became more monopolized and arbitrary.

Escape outlets blocked by international panic

Apart from inspiring the GMD and helping it build a brutal Soviet-style system of repression, the Bolshevik Revolution also aroused a counter-communist red scare in China's borders, which blocked the CCP's outlets for escape overseas. Afraid of the spread of Bolshevism, the Japanese and British colonial authorities in Southeast Asia upgraded their migration controls. CCP members of the 1920s–1930s were thus unable to escape abroad as freely as the Chinese radicals of the 1890s–1910s had. Instead, they were forced to stay within China, either dying at the hands of the GMD, or shifting their focus to rural areas where they would embark upon a new era of the Chinese Revolution. The Bolsheviks before 1917 had encountered no such blockage or containment. Europe before the Bolshevik Revolution had not seen a real socialist regime, and thus, the tolerance for freedom and public sympathy for socialist movements prevailed, guaranteeing an overseas base to shelter Bolsheviks seeking asylum from the Tsar's persecution.

¹²³Zhi Zhao, *Banghui yu zhongguo zhengzhi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017), pp. 265–266.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 249–260.

Russia had a long history of using Europe as a base to command domestic radical activities;¹²⁵ the Bolsheviks continued this tradition. They not only participated in the theoretical polemics of the Second International,¹²⁶ but also physically remained in Europe as a way to avoid domestic repression. This was possible in Europe before the Great War. Although the German state eventually promulgated an anti-socialist law, Britain and Switzerland remained accessible for socialists, while the French government liberalized after the amnesty of Paris Communards.¹²⁷ The harsh anti-communist blockage would start only after the Bolshevik takeover in 1917.¹²⁸ Europe tolerated socialists, and escaping Russia was not difficult. Russia's industrial centres were near Western borders and many sections of the borders were plains. Escapees would set out from St Petersburg or the Baltic regions, flee first to Finland or Poland, Russia's liberal domains, and then transit to Switzerland or Germany.¹²⁹ Those who departed from Ukraine or Transcaucasia usually crossed the Black Sea to Bulgaria and then went north, entering Austria.¹³⁰

The Bolsheviks spent decades abroad. Among the 102 central leaders, at least 44 had experience of living abroad. They went abroad to escape arrest, attend Party conferences, or to work as full-time assistants to Party leaders. Fifteen individuals lived abroad for longer than five years, including the most prominent Bolsheviks such as Ian Berzin, Alexandra Kollontai, Vladimir Lenin, Maxim Litvinov, and Aleksandr Shliapnikov. Building new lives after emigration was difficult, but not impossible. A small circle enjoyed the privilege of being supported by Party funds, while those with intellectual backgrounds and linguistic skills earned money by writing for local newspapers. Others supported themselves with their expertise as engineers or technicians.¹³¹ At the very least, radicals could sell their physical labour, as many Russian emigre colonies needed cheap services like porters.¹³²

Living abroad was not merely about survival. Wide support came from Western socialists and the public, thanks to freedom of expression and association. In 1907, initiated by Karl Liebknecht and the German Social Democrats, special funds were raised to support the Russian SD's publications in Europe. The French, Swedish, Austrian, Belgian, and Czech SDs, as well as the headquarters of the Second International, contributed hundreds of Deutschmarks every month.¹³³ In Britain, the Society of Friends

¹²⁵Edward A. Cole, 'Paris 1848: A Russian ideological spectrum', in *California Slavic Studies*, (eds) Nicholas Riasanovsky, Gleb Struve and Thomas Eekman (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1975); Stewart Edwards, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971). Woodford McClellan, *Revolutionary exiles: The Russians in the First International and the Paris Commune*. (London; Totowa, NJ: Cass, 1971).

¹²⁶Mikhail Agursky, *The third Rome: National Bolshevism in the USSR* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); Richard F. Hamilton, *Marxism, revisionism, and Leninism: Explication, assessment, and commentary* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).

¹²⁷James Joll, *The Second International 1889-1914* (New York: Praeger, 1956), pp. 22-24.

¹²⁸Zhang, *Qu Qiubai yu gongchanguoji*, pp. 23-25.

¹²⁹Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 408, 700-702; Kopanev (ed.), *Geroi Oktīabrīa*, vol. 2, pp. 272-273.

¹³⁰Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 366, 387-388, 408-409.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 355, 406, 408, 582-583, 766-778.

¹³²Piatnitsky, *Memoirs of a Bolshevik*, pp. 177-178.

¹³³NIAP0, Box 190, Index XV1b (2), Folder 1.

of Russian Freedom was founded, which collected funds from the local public and in return, published magazines to report on Russia's domestic situation. Many British intellectuals volunteered for presentations and lectures.¹³⁴ Socialists also helped Russians access the media. For example, with the aid of a German medical doctor with a socialist tendency acting as a broker, the SD succeeded in publishing anti-Tsarist essays in *The New York Times*.¹³⁵ To make use of the Western press, the Russian SD founded the Informational Bureau in 1911, whose task was to make contact with the mass media and provide the latter with regular news sources.¹³⁶

Europe's liberal environment also allowed the Bolsheviks to continue their Party training. In the early 1910s, the Bolsheviks managed to establish Party schools in Paris and Capri.¹³⁷ These training schools were not free from harassment by agents of the Tsarist secret police, but European socialists alleviated their troubles. Italian socialists called upon local police to drive away Russian spies, while French socialists utilized their seats in parliament to strengthen anti-espionage laws to limit the activities of the Tsarist Okhrana.¹³⁸ During the First World War, as European governments tried to contain anti-war socialist propaganda, many Bolsheviks began to be arrested; however, they received help from European colleagues who aided them in obtaining defence services or paying bail.¹³⁹

The CCP could have replicated the Bolsheviks' strategy of hiding abroad, but, paradoxically, the success of the Bolshevik Revolution diminished such a possibility. As anti-Bolshevik panic spread, states surrounding Russia tightened their border controls. For example, Japan was a GMD stronghold during its fight against the Qing dynasty. As studying in Japan became fashionable after 1895, many GMD radicals utilized Japan's freedom of expression and association to prepare for revolution. They also escaped to Japan to avoid domestic persecution, where they enrolled in schools, rebuilt their networks, and raised funds. These groups even included many future CCP elites, such as Lin Boqu (1886–1960) and Wu Yuzhang (1878–1966).¹⁴⁰ Thanks to loose surveillance, Chinese radicals of this period often received aid from Japanese sympathizers.¹⁴¹ However, after 1917, Japanese authorities revoked these freedoms. The military conservatives and the liberals reached a consensus that Japan had to build a

¹³⁴NIAPO, Box 205, Index XVIIIs, Folder 2.

¹³⁵NIAPO, Box 205, Index XVIII, Folder 1.

¹³⁶NIAPO, Box 205, Index XVIII, Folder 1.

¹³⁷Ignat Efimovich Gorelov (ed.), *Bol'sheviki: dokumenty po istorii bol'shevizma s 1903 do 1916 god byvshego moskovskogo okhrannogo otdeleniia* [Bolsheviks: Documents on the history of Bolshevism from 1903 to 1916 of the Moscow branch of the Tsarist Secret Police] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1990), pp. 103–104, 120–122; Jutta Scherrer, 'The relationship between the intelligentsia and workers: The case of the Party schools in Capri and Bologna', in *Workers and intelligentsia in late Imperial Russia*, (ed.) Reginald Zelnik (Berkeley, CA: International and Area Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1999).

¹³⁸Gorelov (ed.), *Bol'sheviki*, p. 106; NIAPO, Box 212, Index XVIVE, Folder 2.

¹³⁹Granat, 'Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionovo dvizheniia rossii: entsiklopedia granat', pp. 398–399; Georges Haupt and Jean Jacques Marie, *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik leaders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 54–59.

¹⁴⁰Xin Li (ed.), *Wu Yuzhang huiyilu* [A memoir of Wu Yuzhang] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1978); Boqu Lin, *Lin Boqu riji* [A diary of Lin Boqu] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984).

¹⁴¹Nongshan Xue, *Zhongguo nongmin zhanzheng zhishi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1935[1996]), p. 467.

firewall to confine the spillover of Bolshevism.¹⁴² Tokyo and Nanjing agreed in 1928 that any arrested CCP activists would be sent back to the GMD government.¹⁴³ In the late 1920s, some CCP members continued to try to escape to Japan in the hope that they would be able to enrol in local colleges as their predecessors had done before 1917. Yet, these individuals found that they had been added to the police blacklist before they even boarded the boats.¹⁴⁴ The CCP's Tokyo branch continued to exist until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, but due to repression, throughout the 1930s their activities were de-politicized and downgraded to intellectual entertainment such as studying economics, Esperanto, woodblock printing, and drama.¹⁴⁵

Another overseas stronghold compromised by the Bolshevik Revolution was British Southeast Asia. Since the 1890s, Singapore and Malaya had been major bases for Chinese radicals. These countries were ideal shelters for them because of their dense Chinese populations and geographical proximity to China's mainland. Previously the GMD's branch in Singapore had been a legally registered organization under British rule. However, after the Bolsheviks seized power, the British authorities tightened control. At the height of the 1927 massacre, the CCP attempted to make Hong Kong a temporary base, but found they could not obtain visas.¹⁴⁶ CCP leaders who escaped to Malaya and Singapore founded the Communist Party of the South Sea,¹⁴⁷ but the British authorities soon arrested and deported them. With all core leaders arrested, the Party disintegrated. Although CCP activists Luo Zhu (1902–1970), Tan Pingshan (1886–1956), and Wang Yazhang (1904–1990) escaped to Southeast Asia, they lost their connections with the CCP and the Comintern because they had no local communist networks to join.¹⁴⁸

The impact of the Bolshevik Revolution also blocked the CCP's access to Western Europe. At the turn of the 1920s, many senior CCP elites had joined the 'Work-Study' programme in France and Belgium. This programme was initially designed by several anarchist educators and funded by the Beiyang government, but it eventually became a hotbed of student radicalism.¹⁴⁹ After the Bolshevik takeover of power, the French police suspected that Chinese students were involved in Moscow-backed subversion. Europe also ceased to be an escape route because of pressure from the Soviet Union. Stalin banned foreign communists from communicating with each other by bypassing Soviet supervision. Accordingly, travelling across Europe without Soviet permission

¹⁴²Tatiana Linkhoeva, *Revolution goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

¹⁴³'Ribei gongchandang de sishinian' [Forty years of the Communist Party of Japan] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1962), pp. 10–12.

¹⁴⁴RMA, vol. 4, pp. 57, 105, 112–114.

¹⁴⁵RMA, vol. 4, pp. 125–126; CCP Party History Research Office, vol. 10, pp. 169–180.

¹⁴⁶CCP History Research Office, vol. 6, pp. 43–45; RMA, vol. 4, pp. 3–4, 210; vol. 7, pp. 151–152, 329.

¹⁴⁷Anna Belogurova, 'Networks, parties, and the "oppressed nations": The Comintern and Chinese communists overseas, 1926–1935', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (e-journal), no. 24, 2017, pp. 45–47.

¹⁴⁸Jianning Wang, *Min zhu ge ming shi qi li zhong gong jie zhong yang ling dao ji ti shu ping* [The CCP leading bodies during the period of the democratic revolution] (Beijing: Zhong gong dang shi chu ban she, 2007); RMA, vol. 6, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹Marilyn Avra Levine, *The found generation: Chinese communists in Europe during the twenties* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).

was forbidden. After the downfall of Trotsky, Stalin feared that if CCP members were allowed to travel through Europe, they might encounter Trotsky's supporters living there.¹⁵⁰ Certainly, Europe was geographically distant from China, and not the ideal destination for political exile. Even so, the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution still had an impact.

Additionally, the Soviet Union was not a dependable destination for refugees. Travelling to Russia was by invitation only. Thus, it was not surprising that out of the 76 CCP elites, only 12 had experience of the Soviet Union. Reaching the Soviet Union was also technically difficult. The geographic distance between Moscow and China's central provinces was enormous. Even if travellers were lucky enough to pass through customs, they faced crossing vast deserts and wilderness. Moreover, the Soviet Union was not a sanatorium where guests could stay freely, as the Bolsheviks had done in pre-1917 Europe. Moscow sent their CCP pupils back to China, aware that long-distance command by telegraph and Soviet advisers was unreliable.¹⁵¹ As a result, most CCP members stayed in Russia for less than two years. After finishing their training, they were sent back to China, where many, such as Deng Zhongxia and Qu Qiubai, were murdered.¹⁵²

Visits to the Soviet Union never ceased: dating back to the late 1910s, they continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, the author's investigation of travel to the Soviet Union as a potential shelter from domestic repression shows that the statistics in Table 4 only reflect travel between 1927 and 1931. Of the 101 central-body members, 31 went to the Soviet Union during this dangerous period. This proportion indicates that even for the CCP's central elites, travelling to Russia was a selective privilege rather than a guaranteed right. Additionally, the time they spent in the Soviet Union varied: 11 people stayed for less than two months, most attending the CCP's Sixth National Congress in the summer of 1928, the sole congress convened outside of China. The short visits indicate that they returned to China following the congress, where the counter-CCP terror was ongoing. The overall map is consistent with the impression of short-term stays as well. The majority of CCP travellers returned within half a year. Seven stayed for over one year, and only four stayed longer than two years. This supports the conclusion that what the Soviet Union provided was not a nursing home or a free place to stay, but rather a crash-course training school; Moscow eagerly drove its trainees back to the dangerous revolutionary front.

Of the 31 travellers, 29 returned to China in the most dangerous years—1928, 1929, and 1930. This does not mean they were all executed (although Cai Hesen and Qu Qiubai were). Returning to China during that risky period could also increase CCP members' likelihood of defection and attrition. Meanwhile, travelling to the Soviet Union had the effect of alleviating the risk of repression at home. Of the 38 martyrs of 1927, nine had been to the Soviet Union; in contrast, the other 29 were among the 70 central-body elites who had not been to Russia during this dangerous period. Travelling to

¹⁵⁰The Compiling Group of this Collection [Benshu bianxie zu], 'Materials of history of the CCP' [Zhonggong dangshi ziliao] (Beijing, Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1982), vol. 1, p. 242 (hereafter MHC).

¹⁵¹MHC, vol. 40, p. 161. Conrad Brandt, *Stalin's failure in China, 1924-1927* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 145-146; Wang, *Min zhu ge ming shi qi li zhong gong jie zhong yang ling dao ji ti shu ping*, vol. 1, pp. 280-289, 327.

¹⁵²RMA, vol. 4, pp. 173, 270; vol. 5, pp. 314; vol. 8, p. 59.

Table 4. CCP members' travel in the Soviet Union.

Duration of travel	Numbers	Year of return	Numbers
Under two months	11	1928	17
Two to six months	7	1929	6
Six months to one year	4	1930	6
One or two years	2	1931	1
Longer than two years	4	1932 and after	1
Total: 31			

the Soviet Union, even briefly, lowered the risk of execution from 41.2 per cent to 29 per cent.

After 1931, in general, the CCP was absent from significant events that transpired outside of China. For example, while over a hundred Chinese volunteers participated in the Spanish Civil War, most of them had come from outside of China, for example, France and Belgium.¹⁵³ Transnational communication was scarce as well. The founding Anti-Fascist Alliance of Eastern Peoples Congress, which convened in Yan'an in 1941, gathered so few foreigners that the organizers did not follow any consistent standards in grouping the participants. Some were grouped by ethnicity, such as the Jews, Tibetans, and Inner Mongolians, and some by region, such as Northeast China, and others by nationality, such as the Japanese, Thai, Indians, and Vietnamese.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the CCP's overseas contact did not dissipate. Following the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935, it sent a delegate to Paris to coordinate all CCP activities outside of China. Rao Shushi (1903–1975), the then CCP ambassador to the International of Red Trade Unions, was even dispatched to North America to reorganize the Chinese bureau of the Communist Party of the United States.¹⁵⁵ The start of the Pacific War in 1941 gave the CCP some breathing space. As Japan intruded on Southeast Asia, China's Anglo-American allies loosened or lost control over this region. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the CCP Central Secretariat issued an order to Zhou Enlai and Liao Chengzhi (1908–1983) that the Southern bureau should send staff abroad to establish an intelligence network in the Japanese-occupied regions to report back to Yan'an. Through a personal relationship with the British governor in Hong Kong, Liao Chengzhi and Pan Hannian (1906–1977) sent cadres to Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore to assist local Chinese compatriots in conducting anti-Japanese propaganda.¹⁵⁶ During the Pacific War, the CCP maintained a sporadic presence in Southeast Asia. After the New Fourth Army was annihilated during the

¹⁵³Gaia Perini, 'Chinese internationalism during the Spanish Civil War', *The Comintern and the Global South*, (eds) Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 210–230: 222–223.

¹⁵⁴Tinyue Wang, *Jueqi de qianzou zhonggong kangri zhanzheng shiqi duiwai jiaowang jishi* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1995), p. 272.

¹⁵⁵Belogurova, 'Networks, parties, and the "oppressed nations"', p. 571.

¹⁵⁶Wang, *Jueqi de qianzou zhonggong kangri zhanzheng shiqi duiwai jiaowang jishi*, pp. 45–46.

Wannan Accident, the CCP evacuated many cultural workers to Burma, including the prominent musician Zhang Guangnian (1913–2002).¹⁵⁷

A special group comprised the CCP elites in Germany. Over the course of the interwar period, about 50 CCP members and associates had been to Germany. These individuals had been active before 1923, and after 1925 they became increasingly connected with the Comintern.¹⁵⁸ Those who were prominent in the political and military command, like Zhou Enlai and Zhu De, stayed briefly. Most who stayed longer engaged in academic activities. Zhang Shenfu (1893–1986), a philosopher, spent his time in Berlin translating Albert Einstein and writing articles for a newspaper based in Tianjin.¹⁵⁹ Cheng Fangwu (1897–1984), a major leader of the CCP's higher education system maintained his activities through a stipend from friends.¹⁶⁰ With food aid from Song Qingling, Hu Lanqi (1901–1994) stayed in Berlin as a self-financed student. Her revolutionary action consisted of writing polemics with the GMD's officer-trainees. She was arrested in Hitler's anti-communist campaign in 1932, but was rescued by German communists, a process that was typical for the Bolsheviks in Europe before 1917.¹⁶¹ By 1940, all CCP members had left Germany, with the exception of Liao Chengzhi, who had been sent by the Comintern to organize the Chinese sailors in the German trade union and thus had stable financial support.¹⁶²

The overall map of the CCP's overseas activities suggests that the sheltering effect of living abroad varied across individuals. A pattern is that in the context of counter-communist repression, marginal elites were more likely to survive abroad, while core leaders could neither stay for the long-term nor act freely. Because of their political prominence, core members were more visible, easily recognized, captured, and deported by local customs officials and police. Meanwhile, these core leaders were professional revolutionaries, who depended on a Communist Party local network for their stipends. In the counter-communist terror, most overseas networks had been dismantled. Thus, once financial support declined, these leaders had to leave. Marginal elites were in a different situation. They were less visible to local authorities, and their CCP memberships were vague, often fused with non-revolutionary identities. And they could support themselves financially as translators, newspaper editors, proofreaders, or bookstore managers. They also had fewer obligations to maintain contact with the organizations in China. All of this allowed these marginal elites to retain flexibility, vacillating back and forth in their support of the CCP's overseas activities. This partly explains why the CCP central-body leaders had limited experience of living abroad.

¹⁵⁷Fan Jiang, *Miandian huaqiaoshi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2019), pp. 252–260.

¹⁵⁸Thomas Kampen, 'Chinese communists in Austria and Germany and their later activities in China', *Asian and African Studies*, vol. XI, no. 1–2, 2007, pp. 21–30: 23.

¹⁵⁹Shenfu Zhang, *Yijiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 28–31.

¹⁶⁰Aohui Zhang, *Cheng fangwu nianpu* (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1994), p. 61.

¹⁶¹Lanqi Hu, *Hu Lanqi huiyilu* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1985), pp. 228–230.

¹⁶²Anna Belogurova, 'The Chinese International of nationalities: The Chinese Communist Party, the Comintern, and the foundation of the Malayan National Communist Party, 1923–1939', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2014, pp. 447–470: 24–26.

Conclusion and discussion

That the Soviet Union and the Comintern had a negative effect on the CCP Revolution is not a new argument. Existing scholarship traces these negative effects to the Comintern's and the CCP's top leaders' miscalculations. However, the argument of this article is that the Bolshevik Revolution caused broad structural changes worldwide, which set the CCP Revolution back. The Bolsheviks were the architects of the first successful socialist revolution. Yet, their success changed the world in which their revolution had been successful, and this rendered those attempts to replicate the Bolshevik victory futile. Before 1917, the Bolsheviks had enjoyed three advantages. Though they took power by using these advantages, it was ultimately their takeover of power that would obviate these advantages. The first advantage was that there were no socialist states in pre-1917 Europe. There was no 'big brother' that could define how to foment a successful socialist revolution. As such, there were numerous debates over the direction of socialism, but none was dominant. The second advantage was that before 1917, the Bolsheviks had been repressed by a despotic Tsarist regime, which nevertheless faced many restraints in using lethal violence. Such a flawed and divided system of punishment allowed most Bolshevik leaders to survive. The third advantage was that before 1917, the borders between Russia and the West had remained open. When Bolshevik leaders escaped to Europe, they entered societies in which there was freedom of expression and association, which they could utilize to prepare for their revolution. The availability of such an outlet provided a buffer from persecution from Russian despotism.

This article also advances a broader, long-standing debate that drives CCP studies: to what extent was the CCP's turn to Leninism shaped from outside? Ideologically speaking, to what extent was the CCP revolution a Russian transplant? Despite disagreements over the timing of the CCP's Leninist turn, most studies have reached the conclusion that before 1927 the CCP had yet to become a fully developed Leninist party in which indigenous and foreign components together shaped the CCP's genesis and rise. The homegrown thesis highlights at least four recurrent elements: the CCP elites' absorption of Chinese traditional culture, such as neo-Confucianism; the reactions of early socialists and intellectuals to China's internal problems, such as the disappointing performance of republicanism and the ineffectiveness of anarchist movements; the grassroots festivals, organizational forms, and symbols that contributed to the revolutionary mobilization among workers/peasants; and, most importantly, the agency the CCP elites arduously maintained and sought to restore in the face of the Soviet Union. Scholars have also revealed foreign influence on the formation of the CCP, including Moscow's direct control, the CCP's learning from the Soviets, and the mobilizational experiences imported from the colonial world, as well as from Japan, Europe, and North America. This article, based on a quantitative biographical database encompassing the two revolutions, argues that due to the Russian Revolution's global impact, revolution was no longer replicable. This provided an impetus to the CCP's effort to restore agency.

If we acknowledge the coexistence of indigenous and external elements before 1927, this article shows that the 1927 massacre accelerated the shift in favour of the growth of homegrown elements; the CCP began to question the myth of the Bolshevik Revolution. The collective sentiments of disillusion and confusion transformed the

CCP from a Leninist party ‘in slogan’ into one ‘in action’. Despite several impatient attempts at October-style power seizures, the CCP elites eventually abandoned the belief that revolution could succeed overnight. They became committed to a protracted struggle that demanded the Bolshevization of their mentality and organization. Meanwhile, the escalation of repression and the blocked international outlets hindered the Comintern’s capacity to exert influence, and the Soviet-returnees’ ability to dominate the Party (though this barrier grew cumulatively, not just out of frustration in 1927). Thus, the CCP gained more autonomy from Moscow. Moreover, regarding Moscow’s influences on the CCP, existing literature tends to highlight the direct forms, such as the activities of the Comintern representatives, (mis)judgement by Stalin and Trotsky, and military-financial aid from Soviet Russia.

This article probes an understudied perspective—the regime of repression. The biographical dataset covering the two revolutions enabled the author to break ‘Bolshevization’ into concrete items, such as the Party’s control over violence and the military, as well as the international outlets for political refugees. Comparing the two revolutions along these dimensions reveals how the Bolshevik Revolution’s global impact made it hard for the CCP to be a passive follower. Certainly, this article by no means argues that the catastrophe of 1927 fully excluded the CCP’s overseas orientations. It has been well documented that Li Lisan still advocated for the Nanyang Communist Party to develop indigenous mobilization with CCP support.¹⁶³ It could be added that the CCP’s increasing agency led to the idea that the CCP could direct an Asian revolutionary movement independent of the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, this idea would develop into Mao’s global competition with Moscow.

Certainly, the author is not arguing that the Bolsheviks’ and the Comintern’s impact on the CCP Revolution was entirely negative. As Chen Yung-fa states, the Comintern drew the CCP into a concise but rather comprehensive introduction to world politics, which was vital to the young CCP. Without the Comintern’s financial and organizational aid, the rapid expansion of the CCP would have been unimaginable.¹⁶⁴ Based on this article’s materials and analysis, it can be ascertained that even during the mid-1920s, Moscow made several vital contributions to the Chinese Revolution. First, it forced Chinese socialists to separate from anarchists and cosmopolitans, and view China as a nation-state within a world of nation-states.¹⁶⁵ Wherever the CCP fled, they had to return to China to continue the revolution.¹⁶⁶ Second, despite its mythification of the lessons from the October revolution, Moscow still provided a textbook for

¹⁶³Belogurova, *The Nanyang Revolution*, pp. 45–47.

¹⁶⁴Chen, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishinian*, pp. 111–112.

¹⁶⁵The late 1910s saw the impact of cosmopolitanism among Chinese elite intellectuals. As Russell, Eroshenko, Tagore, and other prominent individuals visited China, many circulated ideas such as China being a civilization uncontaminated by industrialization, and that, as an oppressed people, the Chinese should give up national hostility and embrace universal love. Xiaoqun Xu, ‘Cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and transnational networks: The “Chenbao Fujuan”, 1921–1928’, *China Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, pp. 145–173. The boundary between early CCP elites, leftists, anarchists, and liberals was obscure. Many CCP members continued relevant activities such as teaching Esperanto and translating foreign literature, but they eventually either quit the revolutionary movement or switched to Leninist activities.

¹⁶⁶Not all CCP members were forced back to China. Some were retained. One example is Wu Xiuquan (1908–1991), the PRC’s ambassador to Yugoslavia. After graduating from Moscow Infantry School in 1928, Wu was sent to the Far East to serve in the Bureau of Borderland Defense because of his fluency in Russian.

revolution-making. This textbook could be tested, debated, and revised. For such a young and tiny communist party as the CCP, it was easier to revise a textbook than to write one from scratch. Third, though most material aid went to Sun Yat-sen and the GMD, the CCP underwent a profound process of Bolshevization as well. Whereas many Bolshevik-style projects were later abandoned by the GMD, such as commissar systems and party power,¹⁶⁷ they had a long-term effect on the CCP. Lastly, the mass killings suffered by the CCP left a Party leadership with a more homogeneous mentality and experiences. This allowed the CCP's internal rectification to be less bloody.

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Wu applied several times to return to China, but his application was not approved until early 1931, and he returned to China in May: Wu Xiuquan zhuan, MHC, pp. 29–30.

¹⁶⁷Wang, *Geming yu fangeming*, p. 269.

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