Chinese Students at the International Lenin School in Moscow, 1926–38: Light from the Russian Archives

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Soviet support of the Chinese Communist movement in the 1920s and the 1930s was truly all-encompassing. Not only did the Comintern directly finance the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) but it also greatly helped the Party train its cadres in the USSR. This kind of help required a huge amount of money. By 1930, the Bolsheviks had spent five million roubles training Chinese revolutionaries at just one of the international schools.1 Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union there was a vast network of such institutions. The largest international school in the Soviet Union was Sun Yat-sen University of the Toilers of China (UTK in Russian abbreviation), which operated from 1925 to 1930 (in 1928 it was renamed the Communist University of the Toilers of China [KUTK]). Various other schools also operated. These were the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), the KUTV Military-Political Courses, the Nikolai G. Tolmachev Military Political Academy, the Mikhail V. Frunze Military Academy, the Military Engineers’ School, the Moscow Artillery School, the Moscow Infantry School, the Leningrad Signalmen’s School, the Kiev Military School, the Aeronautical Military-Theoretical School, the Borisoglebsk Pilot-School, the Kliment E. Voroshilov Third Orenburg Pilot and Air-Sentry School, the Vystrel (Shot) courses organised for Red Army commanders in Moscow Lefortovo district, and the Su Zhaozheng School in Vladivostok (the latter started in 1925 and was later renamed the Vladivostok Soviet Party Higher School and, in 1929, the Chinese Lenin Higher School).

Among these institutions, the International Lenin School (MLSh) occupied a distinctive place. It functioned longer than other schools, from 1926 to 1938, and was specially designated for the CCP and other foreign Communist parties’ top cadres. In 1936–8, there was another important training centre for Chinese students in Moscow, the Scientific Research Institute of National and Colonial Issues (NIINKP). In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Chinese students in the Soviet Union received training at the secret Chinese Party School, also known

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1 Titarenko et al. (eds) 1999, Volume 3, p. 457.
as the CCP Central Committee (CC) Party School, formally affiliated with the Central Committee of the USSR International Proletarian Revolutionaries’ Aid Organisation (MOPR), located in Kuchino near Moscow, and secretly coded the ‘NIINKP Seventh, Eighth, and Fifteenth Sections’. ²

The post-1991 opening of the Soviet Communist Party and Comintern archives, including the archives of the Comintern international schools, has laid a new foundation for scholarly research into Chinese Communist history and the history of the training of Chinese revolutionary cadres in the USSR. Memoirs of former students and instructors at these schools are also of great significance. Among them are recollections by Chiang Ching-kuo (1910–88), Afanasii G. Krymov (Guo Zhaotang 1905–89), Liu Renjing (1902–87), Ma Yuansheng (1906–77), Sheng Yue (1907–2007), Shi Zhe (1905–98), Tang Youzhang (1906–2000), Wang Fanxi (1907–2002), Wang Jueyuan, Yang Xingfu, Zhang Guotao (1897–1979), and others.³ In addition, the memoir of Lena Dinsavva (1937–), a daughter of two Chinese students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), is also of enormous importance.⁴

A number of scholars have taken the first steps in researching these precious materials. They include Vladimir P. Galitskii, Alexander G. Larin, N.N. Timofeeva, Gerontii V. Yefimov, and Yu Minling as well as a group of historians at the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Far Eastern Studies Centre of Modern Chinese history. Vladimir N. Nikiforov and Victor N. Usov have also examined some issues connected with the CCP cadres’ training.⁵ These specialists, however, focused exclusively on the 1920s. Furthermore, they only examined the history of UTK/KUTK and KUTV.

The history of the International Lenin School, NIINKP, and the Chinese Party School has remained outside researchers’ purview. Nonetheless, an examination of the MLSH documents helps us better understand the evolution of the Comintern system of supervision over the CCP. The history of NIINKP and the Chinese Party School also add important details to this analysis. This article seeks to shed light on a dramatic story of the MLSH Chinese sector that was at first an essential part of the ‘élite’ party school, but finally fell under total control of the Soviet Stalinists, who imposed a reign of terror on it.

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² Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (hereafter RGASPI), 531/1/1/8.
⁴ Dinsavva 2000.