

A Study on Yun Daiying's Contributions to the Sinicization of Marxism During His Time in Luzhou



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Abstract: Yun Daiying was a key pioneer in the early dissemination of Marxism in modern China and in advancing its Sinicization. From 1921 to 1923, during his tenure at Southern Sichuan Normal School in Luzhou, Yun engaged deeply in grassroots revolutionary practice. He implemented educational reforms, organized rural outreach, conducted social investigations, established night schools for the common people, and produced some of the earliest research-based writings on rural issues. He also founded the first Socialist Youth League organization in Sichuan, cultivating a large number of revolutionary cadres. Grounded in the socio-historical conditions of semi-colonial and semi-feudal China, Yun developed a series of pioneering theoretical insights. He was among the first to articulate the influential proposition that “reactionaries are paper tigers,” systematically elaborated on the concept of the civil governance movement, and carried out localized explorations centered on rural society and peasant issues. The interplay between his theoretical contributions and practical initiatives effectively facilitated the dissemination and localization of Marxism in southern Sichuan. His work not only enriched the early pathways for the Sinicization and popularization of Marxism but also provided valuable reference points for the development of the New Democratic Revolution.

Keywords: Yun Daiying, Luzhou period, Sinicization of Marxism, contributions, educational reform

1. Introduction

The victory of the October Revolution in Russia prompted progressive Chinese intellectuals to turn their attention to Marxism. Following its introduction into China, however, the Sinicization of Marxism did not proceed smoothly during the early stages of the New Democratic Revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Among the early generation of CCP leaders, Yun Daiying occupies a distinctive position (He et al., 2006, p. 78). His investigation titled “The Condition of Peasants in Hejiang County, Sichuan Province” predates Mao Zedong’s Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan by five years, marking him as one of the earliest Party figures to examine rural class contradictions and socio-economic disparities (He et al., 2006, p. 80).

During his tenure at Southern Sichuan Normal School, Yun actively reformed outdated institutional structures, advocated democratic governance in education, promoted new ideological education among youth, disseminated Marxism among the masses, established the first Socialist Youth League

branch in Sichuan (in Luxian), led the teacher selection movement to challenge entrenched practices, and cultivated a large number of young revolutionary cadres. Through these concrete initiatives, he contributed significantly to the dissemination of revolutionary thought and facilitated the systematic practice of Marxism in southern Sichuan. His efforts left a lasting imprint on the processes of Sinicization, localization, and popularization of Marxism. A comprehensive examination of Yun Daiying’s intellectual and ideological evolution reveals a continued relevance characterized by the integration of theoretical conviction and practical engagement, offering important insights into the early transmission of Marxism in China (Yun, 1984a, p. 255).

2. Dissemination and Interpretation of Marxism Prior to His Tenure in Luzhou

Although Yun Daiying embraced Marxism and joined the CCP later than early pioneers such as Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, his subsequent contributions to the dissemination, defense, and development of Marxism—and to exploring its

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integration with China's revolutionary path — were both substantial and distinctive among his contemporaries. The October Revolution provided modern China with a new revolutionary paradigm, while the May Fourth Movement triggered an unprecedented wave of intellectual emancipation. This context fostered a nationwide movement among progressive intellectuals to study, translate, and disseminate Marxist thought.

In his early years, although not yet a Marxist and not fully committed to scientific socialism, Yun treated Marxism as a new and compelling intellectual system, engaging extensively in translation, reading, and research. Possessing strong linguistic competence, he was proficient in English and self-taught in Japanese and German, enabling him to directly access and translate theoretical works in multiple languages. At the end of 1919, commissioned by the editorial office of *New Youth*, Yun began translating Karl Kautsky's interpretation of the Erfurt Programme, published under the title *Class Struggle*. This work later played an important role in shaping the Marxist learning of early Chinese revolutionaries. In the autumn of 1920, Yun translated selected portions of Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, publishing them in *Eastern Miscellany* under the title "On the Origin of the Family."

Yun also took the lead in establishing progressive societies and intellectual platforms that became important channels for the dissemination of Marxism. Organizations such as Mutual Aid Society, Ren Society, and Liqun Book Society served as key venues for introducing and spreading new social thought in Wuhan. Founded in February 1920, the Liqun Book Society became a central hub for translating and disseminating Marxist works in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. It functioned both as a distribution center for theoretical literature and as a communication platform for progressive ideas. The Society regularly displayed and sold key Marxist texts, including *The Communist Manifesto*, *The ABC of Communism*, introductory works on Capital, and *Class Struggle*, while also collaborating with publications such as *New Youth*, *The Communist*, *Xiangjiang Review*, and *New Tide* to circulate progressive journals and books.

Centered around the Liqun Book Society, Yun further established organizations such as the Jian Society and Cheng Society, along with initiatives including the Liqun Weaving Factory and a primary school in Huanggang. These diverse institutional

forms formed an integrated grassroots network combining ideological dissemination, theoretical education, and mass mobilization. Yun frequently organized study sessions, discussions, and reading groups, fostering collective engagement with Marxist theory. In the second half of 1920, a Marxist Research Society was established in Wuhan, quickly becoming a center for progressive youth to study Marxist classics and discuss current affairs. To further expand Marxist outreach, Yun dispatched members across the country as teachers and students to promote Marxist and revolutionary ideas among broader audiences.

In addition, Yun made extensive use of periodicals to interpret and disseminate Marxist theory, publishing dozens of articles in journals such as *Young China*, *Eastern Miscellany*, *Construction*, *Mutual Aid*, *Our Journal*, *New Youth*, and *Wuhan Weekly Review*. In May 1920, he edited a book series for the Young China Association, compiling a recommended reading list of twenty-six works, with *Marx and His Doctrine* placed at the forefront. The list also included key texts on historical materialism, Bolshevism, and labor issues, reflecting his systematic engagement with Marxist theory. In the same year, his article "On Socialism," published in *Young China*, explicitly argued that "through the impetus of class struggle, capitalism will inevitably be overthrown and private ownership abolished."

3. Major Revolutionary Activities During His Time in Luzhou

Following his complete transformation into a Marxist, Yun Daiying broke free from the constraints of anarchism and achieved a significant ideological liberation. After joining the CCP, he consistently upheld strict standards as a Party member and became more active in studying and promoting Marxism. During his teaching career in Sichuan and Shanghai, he utilized various platforms to disseminate Marxism and patriotic education among the masses and students, actively expanding revolutionary influence. Wherever he went, he spread the seeds of Marxist theory and revolutionary ideals.

On October 30, 1921, recommended by Chen Yusheng, a member of the Young China Association, Yun arrived in Luxian (present-day Luzhou) to serve as Director of Academic Affairs at Southern Sichuan Normal School. He remained there until January 1923, spending a total of fourteen months in Luzhou. His major activities during this period include:

3.1 Promoting the school public ownership movement

To dismantle autocratic administrative practices and feudal influences within the school, Yun vigorously promoted the “school public ownership movement.” He authored an article on this reform, advocating financial transparency and participatory governance in faculty appointments (Research Office of Party History, CPC Luzhou Municipal Committee, 1987, p. 42). Following the teacher selection movement, several incompetent and conservative staff members were dismissed. Yun temporarily assumed teaching responsibilities himself and later recruited qualified educators from major cities such as Wuhan, Chongqing, Chengdu, and Shanghai (Research Office of Party History, CPC Luzhou Municipal Committee, 1987, p. 70).

3.2 Organizing the boy scouts’ traveling lecture group

During the winter vacation of 1921, Yun organized a traveling lecture group composed of teachers and students, personally leading the team on foot across multiple counties, including Longchang, Neijiang, Zigong, Fushun, Nanxi, Yibin, Jiang’an, Naxi, and Hejiang. Over the course of a month, they traveled more than 2,000 li, delivered over twenty lectures, and conducted extensive social investigations (Young China Association, 1922). Through direct engagement with workers and peasants, participants gained first-hand understanding of exploitation and oppression, fostering both revolutionary awareness among themselves and patriotic consciousness among the masses.

3.3 Establishing public lecture venues and popular education institutions

Recognizing the importance of public discourse spaces, Yun proposed the establishment of lecture halls and a popular education center at Baita Temple, a key gathering place for local residents. These platforms enabled systematic dissemination of new culture and progressive thought, effectively countering entrenched feudal ideologies. Yun also organized public debates on issues such as freedom in marriage and youth autonomy, directly challenging conservative forces and promoting modern democratic values.

3.4 Founding the socialist youth league in Luzhou

To mobilize progressive youth in southern Sichuan, Yun established the “Xuexing Lijin Society,” attracting young intellectuals for theoretical study and social practice. In early 1922, under directives

from the central leadership of the Socialist Youth League, Yun convened key members and formally established the Luzhou branch, marking the first such organization in Sichuan (He et al., 2006, p. 432).

3.5 Writing “a further explanation for members of the young china association”

In this major theoretical work, Yun applied historical materialism to argue that only through reliance on the masses and revolutionary methods could the old economic system be overthrown and socialism realized (Yun, 1984b, p. 25). The publication of this article marked his full emergence as a proletarian revolutionary guided by Marxist theory and had significant influence among progressive intellectuals and students.

4. Contributions to the Sinicization of Marxism During His Time in Luzhou

Drawing on his diverse revolutionary activities and practical initiatives in Luzhou, Yun Daiying’s contributions to the Sinicization of Marxism can be summarized in the following dimensions:

4.1 Systematic study of Marxism and contextual analysis of china’s principal social contradictions

Yun engaged in a systematic study of Marxist classics while grounding his theoretical inquiry in empirical investigations of Chinese society. Through platforms such as the Liqun Book Society and the Mutual Aid Society, he organized intellectual activities, published articles, and conducted in-depth analyses of pressing social issues. As editor-in-chief of China Youth, he authored numerous essays addressing contemporary realities, guiding young people and intellectuals to engage with social problems and participate in revolutionary transformation. Moreover, Yun developed a clear understanding of the nature of Chinese society as semi-colonial and semi-feudal, accurately identifying its principal contradictions and the central tasks of the revolution. These insights provided important theoretical guidance for subsequent revolutionary practice and were later reflected in his participation in major historical events such as the May Thirtieth Movement, the Nanchang Uprising, and the Guangzhou Uprising.

4.2 Theoretical innovation: the first formulation within the party that “reactionaries are paper tigers”

In the early exploration of the Sinicization of Marxism, Yun achieved a notable theoretical breakthrough by being the first within the Party to advance the proposition that “reactionaries are paper

tigers.” In his 1922 article “The Civil Governance Movement,” published in *Eastern Miscellany*, he offered a forward-looking and theoretically grounded analysis of the essential characteristics and historical limitations of reactionary forces in the context of modern China. This proposition was not merely abstract theorization but emerged from Yun’s close engagement with China’s social realities and revolutionary practice. Guided by Marxist philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism, he examined the semi-colonial and semi-feudal structure of Chinese society and identified its underlying contradictions and developmental patterns. Yun argued that reactionary political forces—driven by self-interest and detached from the people—lacked a stable mass base and therefore could not sustain long-term dominance.

4.3 Recognition of the transformative power of the masses and active engagement in the civil governance movement

Yun demonstrated a profound understanding of the transformative potential of the masses in processes of social reform and democratic revolution. He emphasized the central role of the people as active agents in the civil governance movement and devoted considerable effort to both participating in and guiding such initiatives. In September 1922, he published “The Civil Governance Movement” in *Eastern Miscellany*, systematically outlining its core principles and practical pathways. In contrast to elite-centered political thought, Yun positioned the masses at the center of political transformation, arguing that social progress must rely on broad public participation. To address the challenges of democratic development in modern China, he proposed seven practical measures, including raising political consciousness, fostering unity among the people, establishing mechanisms for governmental oversight, engaging in legitimate political struggle, maintaining organizational discipline, and strengthening ideological education and revolutionary propaganda.

4.4 Focus on rural society and the peasantry: advancing rural transformation

Yun placed strong emphasis on rural issues and the transformation of peasant society. In January 1922, he led a series of grassroots-oriented initiatives in southern Sichuan that connected intellectual work with rural realities, marking an important early attempt by Chinese Marxists to engage directly with village society. These efforts can be summarized in three main aspects. First, he organized a winter

traveling lecture group composed of over thirty teachers and students, who conducted on-the-ground outreach across multiple counties. This initiative broke the spatial limitations of traditional education, enabling direct engagement with workers and peasants while disseminating progressive ideas. Second, he promoted systematic rural social investigations. Based on field research, he and his students produced “The Condition of Peasants in Hejiang County, Sichuan Province,” published in *China Youth*, which offered an early and systematic analysis of rural conditions and social contradictions in southern Sichuan. Third, he established night schools for the common people to address widespread illiteracy, developing accessible teaching materials tailored to the needs of ordinary citizens and promoting basic education among the lower strata.

5. Conclusion

Yun Daiying was a pioneering figure in the early dissemination of Marxism in China and in advancing its Sinicization. During his tenure at Southern Sichuan Normal School, he implemented a series of localized revolutionary practices. He was the first within the Party to articulate the forward-looking proposition that “reactionaries are paper tigers,” offering a penetrating analysis of the inherent weaknesses and historical limitations of reactionary forces. He also systematically elaborated the concept of the civil governance movement, constructing a framework for mass mobilization and social transformation. At the same time, he placed early and sustained emphasis on rural class contradictions and peasant issues, exploring a localized pathway that integrated theoretical inquiry, grassroots investigation, mass mobilization, and educational enlightenment.

Overall, Yun Daiying’s theoretical explorations and revolutionary practices significantly promoted the dissemination and localization of Marxism in southern Sichuan. His contributions enriched the early development of the Sinicization and popularization of Marxism and provided important theoretical and practical reference points for the trajectory of modern China’s revolutionary movement.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest in this work.

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