

Cao Qijin and the Revolution in the Yangtai Region

Jianqing Chen, Xiangjun Liu, Yiting Qin

Yangzhou University, Yangzhou, Jiangsu, 225002, China

Abstract

Cao Qijin was born in 1906 in an ordinary staff family in Yangzhou, Jiangsu, embracing progressive thinking at a young age and solidarity with the May 30th Movement in Shanghai. He participated in the leftist organization of the KMT in Yangzhou during the Chinese National Revolution. During the first civil revolutionary war, Cao participated in creating and leading the first CPC branch in Yangzhou, and then carried out the workers and peasants' movement in the cities and villages of Yangtai area widely. He organized workers and peasants to resist the exploitation of capitalists and landlords, laying a good mass foundation in central Jiangsu and making outstanding contributions to the CPC work of the Yangtai regions.

Keywords

Cao Qijin; CPC Yangzhou Branch; Revolutionary Movement in YangTai.

1. Introduction

Cao Qijin (1906-1931), a native person of Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province, had pseudonyms of Chen Junhao and Lu Shiying. He was the founder and leader of the first CPC branch in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. He received the influence of progressive thought since childhood, actively participated in the revolutionary movement during the great revolution, participated in the establishment of CPC Organizations in Yangzhou and surrounding areas during the first domestic revolutionary war. He went deep into Yangzhou, Tai county and other urban and rural areas to carry out party work. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1929. In 1931, Cao Qijin was shot and executed by Kuomintang reactionaries at the foot of Beigu mountain in Zhenjiang. He was only 25 years old. In 1984, the Ministry of civil affairs of the people's Republic of China Awarded Cao Qijin the title of revolutionary martyr. In 2009, Cao Qijin was rated as "50 heroes and models in Jiangsu who made outstanding contributions to the founding of new China".

2. IN Support for the May 30th Movement (五卅运动)

On March 25, 1906, Cao Qijin was born in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. When he was young, he studied in Yangzhou Anhui Lvyang primary school(扬州市安徽旅扬小学) and the provincial fifth normal school(省立第五师范附属小学). In 1919, the May 4th Movement ("五四运动") broke out, and mass demonstrations in support of the patriotic movement of students in Beijing broke out in Yangzhou [1]. At that time, Cao Qijin was only 13 years old. He was deeply impressed by the mass Patriotic Movement in the May 4th movement. From 1922 to 1923, he successfully entered Shanghai Nanyang public school (上海南洋公学) and studied in Shanghai for one year, but soon had to return home because his father lost his job. During his schooling, Chinese society was in turmoil, and the people were displaced due to the scuffle of warlords. During this period, Cao Qijin read many progressive books and periodicals such as *New Youth*, Lu Xun's novels *Call to arms* and *Wandering*, and his ideal of saving China was becoming more and more firm.[2]

In May 1925, workers in Japanese cotton mills in Shanghai and Qingdao went on strike successively, which was suppressed by Japanese imperialism and Northern Warlords. The

Chinese people were outraged. On the same day, Yun Daiying, a member of the Communist Party of China and alternate member of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, came to Yangzhou provincial No. 5 normal school and No. 8 middle school(扬州市立第五师范和第八中学) and delivered a speech entitled *normal students and rice bowl problem*(“师范生与饭碗问题”)to teachers and students. He deeply analyzed the situation at home and abroad at that time, calling on young people to join the revolutionary patriotic movement and contributing to saving the nation from danger [3]. In *the weekly China Youth* edited by Yun Daiying at the same time, it also published the headline article entitled *the May 30 massacre in Shanghai and the responsibility of Chinese youth*(“上海五卅惨杀及中国青年的责任”)written by Ren Bishi[4], which reflected the working orientation of the CPC party and League organizations in seeking to mobilize patriotic youth from all over the country to support the May 30 movement at that time. When Yun Daiying delivered a speech in Yangzhou, Cao Qijin was in his seat and was deeply influenced by the anti- imperialist patriotic movement of the CPC.

On June 30, 1925, Yangzhou mass organizations launched a massive strike and class strike to support the demonstrations in Shanghai, Hong Kong and other places against the May 30 massacre, which initially formed an anti-imperialist united front[5]. During this period, Cao Qijin, who had joined the Kuomintang leftist organization under the influence of Yun Daiying, founded the magazine “Sleeping on wages and tasting gall”(“卧薪尝胆”杂志)in Yangzhou, established a Student Federation, mobilized students to launch a student movement in support of the May 30 movement [6]. This series of activities played a positive role in the in-depth development of the struggle, and he himself gradually exercised and grew up in the struggle.

In the second half of 1926, with the support of Communists and local revolutionary masses, the Guangzhou national government launched the northern expedition. In Yangzhou, the left-wing local organizations of the Kuomintang led by Cao Qijin and Wang Shouquan have established a relatively perfect organizational structure, including students, teachers, workers, urban poor and suburban farmers, and have made contact with the party headquarters of the Kuomintang in Jiangsu Province[6]. In early 1927, after the Northern Expedition army entered Yangzhou, it actively supported the revolutionary movement. In early April, the party organization of Yangzhou Kuomintang held a Congress and elected and established a formal county party department. Cao Qijin was the organization minister. The county party department actively expanded the local trade unions, farmers' associations and other organizations in Yangzhou. The revolutionary situation is reaching a climax.

3. Participate in the Establishment of the CPC Yangzhou Branch

In April 1927, Chiang Kai Shek launched the “April 12” Counter Revolutionary Coup(“四一二”反革命政变), and white terror spread. Many of his fellow leftists gave up their ideal of saving the country because of the bad environment of the Kuomintang. But Cao Qijin didn't give up and rejected his father's proposal to let him study in Jiangxi, waiting for the opportunity to devote himself to the revolution again.

Such an opportunity soon came. After the August 7th Meeting (“八七会议”), the CPC Central Committee successively sent responsible persons to restore the CPC organization throughout the country. In September 1927, the Jiangsu provincial Party committee approved the establishment of the Yangzhou independent branch of the CPC and designated Wang Shouquan as the secretary. After Wang Shouquan returned to Yangzhou, he soon found Cao Qijin, who cooperated closely and had rich working experience during the great revolution. Under the very severe external environment at that time, Cao Qijin actively cooperated with Wang Shouquan's work. They jointly established the Yangzhou County independent branch of the Communist

Party of China. Cao Qijin served as the branch officer. It was in this year that Cao Qijin officially joined the Communist Party of China[6].

The revolution throughout the country continues to develop. At the enlarged meeting of the provisional Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held in November 1927, Qu Qiubai and other leaders of the CPC Central Committee mistakenly estimated the revolutionary situation and adopted a struggle strategy divorced from reality. They believed that “there is a trend of converging into a large-scale general riot of workers and peasants to seize power”, and asked Party organizations at all levels to launch peasant riots and worker riots in various ways, “Until it leads to the victory of the revolution in one or more provinces”[7]. In December 1927, the CPC Yangzhou County independent branch was renamed the CPC Yangzhou County special branch. Under the influence of Qu Qiubai's “left” blind activism line, the special branch not only carried out the urban workers' and students' movement, but also actively expanded the party organization in rural areas, preparing to launch a peasant riot at the junction of Taixing, Taixian and Jiangdu, seeking to establish a revolutionary base.

In May 1928, Wang Shouquan left Yangzhou for some reason, and Cao Qijin acted as the Secretary of the special branch. At this time, the Kuomintang rightists were promoting the “Clean Party”(“清党”) in Yangzhou, and established the “Steering Committee”(“指导委员会”) to register the identity of National Party members. Cao Qijin sent two comrades to sneak into the “Steering Committee” to become officers, and maintained single line contact with them to spy on the “Clean Party” intelligence of the Kuomintang rightists[8]. In June, Cao Qijin reported to the Jiangsu provincial Party Committee on the Yangzhou party organization and its work, and asked the Provincial Party Committee to appoint a new person in charge of the special branch to improve the party organization structure[9]. In September of that year, the superior party organization reorganized Yangzhou and its surrounding Party organizations, dissolved the Yangzhou County Party Committee, and served as the county Party committee with a special committee. The special committee was responsible for contacting and managing the party organizations of Gaoyou County, Tai county, Dongtai county and Yizheng[10]. Cao Qijin was changed to the Secretary of the Yangzhou urban district Party committee under the Dongtai county Party committee. During this period, under the leadership of Cao Qijin, the party organizations in Yangzhou urban area established organ publications, printed and distributed documents such as *National revolution and Class struggle*(“国家革命与阶级斗争”)and *Instructions for Secret Work*(“秘密工作须知”), widely carried out the workers' movement[11]. Cao Qijin successively participated in leading the party's work in Yangzhou YaoYang Match Factory and many pawn shops, carried out rights protection struggles such as salary demand and anti- closure, and established a party branch in it. At the end of 1928, under the leadership of Yangzhou county Party committee, YaoYang Match Factory launched a reasoning struggle with the management,successfully achieved the results of the struggle of reducing working hours per day and raising wages by 10% [12]. In addition, there are traces of Party organization activities led by him among carpenters, rickshaw drivers and electric lamp factory workers in Yangzhou city. In the second half of 1928, the number of Party members in Yangzhou City and surrounding areas reached 70 or 80[13].

4. Leading the Peasant Movement in Yangzhou and Taizhou

From June 18 to July 11, 1928, the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in Moscow. The Congress resummarized and correctly pointed out the political situation at that time, recognized that “the current situation is generally not the revolutionary climax of the broad masses”, and criticized the mistakes of left-wing blind activism represented by Qu Qiubai from the August 7th Congress to the spring of 1928[14]. In the resolution on leading the peasant movement issued by the Jiangsu provincial Party committee in July 1928, it also

summarized various problems existing in the process of the former party leading the peasant movement, such as “simple riot concept”, “regardless of the masses” and “regardless of the objective environment”, and pointed out that “in particular, it is necessary to correct the previous blind activism of ignoring the masses and ignoring the objective environment”[15].

Under the leadership of the CPC Central Committee and the CPC Central Committee in August 1929, the CPC Central Committee launched a wide range of rural anti-rent campaign and carried out the anti-corruption movement under the instructions of the CPC Central Committee. In November 1928, the Yangzhou special committee appointed Cao Qijin as the special commissioner of Yangzhou Dongxiang to carry out work in the rural areas along Jiangdu. The farmers in village where people surnamed sun and Li live and other villages in this area lived in poverty, “all of whom were destitute farmers”[16]. Once launched, a rent and debt resistance movement was soon formed. Local landlords and usurers had to reduce rent and debt. In the process of organizing the farmers' movement, Cao Qijin and Yangzhou party organization comrades were in Gaohanzhuang, Sunjiadun, Lijiaqiao established three party branches respectively, with a total of more than 50 party members. The revolutionary enthusiasm of farmers has been well mobilized[17].

On February 9, 1929, the Kuomintang Jiangdu county government sent a large number of armed investigation teams to join the local Wuqiao self-defense force to search and arrest Sunjiadun, Lijiaqiao and other villages. The Yangzhou party organization was severely hit, the Secretary of the Party branch was arrested, and many organizational documents were not brought out in time. With the help of the local people, Cao Qijin was able to evacuate secretly and returned to the urban area of Yangzhou after two days[18]. As the revolutionary situation around Yangzhou was very critical at that time, Cao Qijin was forced to leave Yangzhou and go to Shanghai, the seat of the Jiangsu provincial Party committee of the Communist Party of China, where he accepted the new task of carrying out party work in Tai county. In April 1929, Cao Qijin went to Tai county (now Taizhou) under the pseudonym of Chen Junhao and lied that he was from Nantong. In May, the provisional provincial Party committee of Tai county of the Communist Party of China was established, and Cao Qijin was appointed secretary. He established party branches and trade unions in the city, and mobilized farmers to unite to fight against rent, debt and donation to landlords[19].

Cao Qijin's work in Yangzhou and Tai county echoed the peasant movements around Yangzhou in the same period. From June to September 1929, peasant riots led by the central county Party committee of Rugao also took place in Rugao and Taixing regions at that time. At one time, he even established the workers' and peasants' Red Army. The workers' and peasants' armed forces exterminated the local landlord armed forces, and held a mass meeting of nearly 1000 people, which made great achievements[20]. The Yangtai peasant movement led by Cao Qijin also echoed the Rutai riots. At the same time, Cao Qijin's work laid a good mass foundation in the surrounding areas of Yangzhou, and provided good conditions for the New Fourth Army to open up the anti-Japanese bridgehead position and Huangqiao base area in Northern Jiangsu during the anti-Japanese War. The early work of Cao Qijin and other Communists prepared the conditions for the smooth development of the post revolutionary struggle[21].

5. Struggle in Prison

On August 16, 1929, Cao Qijin, as the interim Secretary of the county Party committee of Tai county, was arrested after his identity was found when the county Party Committee received Wu Shouyi, a provincial traffic policeman. Before being arrested, Cao Qijin destroyed the party's confidential documents and kept the party's important secrets. After his arrest, he never revealed his true identity. He always regarded himself as Chen Junhao of Nantong. After being sentenced, Cao Qijin was put into the third prison of Suzhou Kuomintang in Jiangsu Province.

In this prison, Cao Qijin did not forget his mission, adhered to his duty as a communist and led his prison friends to fight. As one of the main leaders of the special branch of the Communist Party in prison, Cao Qijin paid attention to giving full play to the fighting role of the party organization. First, he organized newspaper reading activities to analyze the current situation. The second is to organize talks and exchange information with Party members in prison during the time of ventilation, so as to facilitate communication and the upload and release of tasks. The third is to expand the team and accumulated strength for the development of Party members with high ideological awareness and strong frustration tolerance among the difficult friends. In prison, Cao Qijin wrote six poems to inspire his comrades. One of them was "why is it harmful to be stained with blood? Iron shoulders should shoulder morality and morality. One man has thousands of former servants, and the red flag is spreading in his heart" ("血迹斑斑何足妨，铁肩道义自担当。一人前仆千人继，心拥红旗在展扬"). Cao Qijin showed his determination and thick spirit of struggle. He regarded the cause of the party as his primary cause, showing his revolutionary pride and tenacious fighting spirit.

According to the memories of Guan Wenwei, a Communist Party member who was imprisoned in Suzhou prison in April 1930, after the efforts and development of Party members and comrades in the prison, there was an in prison mutual aid group and a special branch committee of the Communist Party in the prison. The mutual aid group mainly tried to provide relief to imprisoned comrades, striving for the release of political prisoners and assist the families of martyrs. In terms of organization, there was a prison special branch committee directly under the Jiangsu provincial Party committee, leading the four party branches in the prison. The members of the branches are mainly hundreds of Communist Party members imprisoned, but also developed a small number of other prisoners and even guards to become party members[22]. A prison struggle at the end of 1929 was led by Cao Qijin, who was already in prison at that time. Cao Qijin led political prisoners and other prisoners in prison to carry out a three-day hunger strike and put forward requirements such as abolishing lynching, improving medical conditions and increasing ventilation time. The inmates had great determination and successfully forced Suzhou prison to agree to their request in the struggle. The hunger strike won, but Cao Qijin was sentenced to two more years in prison[23].

Although the struggle won, since then, the prison authorities have also learned a lesson. Their behavior has intensified and carried out the so-called "adjustment", which is actually a more severe torture. Outside the prison, from June to July 1930, Li Lisan's "left" line gained a dominant position in the party, mistakenly estimating the possibility and role of the full outbreak of the Chinese revolution[24]. The special branch committee in the prison has accepted the instructions of the Suzhou county Party Committee on organizing the riot and is also preparing to organize the prison riot in December. From the situation of all parties, the probability of success of the riot is small, but Cao Qijin, Xu Jiajin and other party members have great determination and still implement the instructions of the party organization. The prison break was held as scheduled in accordance with the previous orders and instructions. Suzhou county Party committee overcame all kinds of difficulties, secretly distributed small files to the party members of all numbers in the prison, and quietly filed open the shackles for escape. The agreed signal was three shots, but when the agreed time came, there was no gunshot, only silence all night. At about eight o'clock the next day, twenty or thirty soldiers rushed into the detention center, nailed the prisoners' shackles again and sealed the trumpets. At that moment, the inmates in the prison knew that the operation had failed, and the sad atmosphere lingered in the whole prison. What's more sad is that many people sold their souls for personal interests and reported the relevant information of the operation to the prison. The prison reported the collected information to the Suzhou court. After many requests and replies, Cao Qijin and other core personnel involved in leading the riot were finally escorted to Zhenjiang and handed over to Zhenjiang Military Justice Commission for trial. What is impressive is that during the escort,

although Cao Qijin and others were all wearing iron shackles, their spirit was not eroded. One by one, they were elated and sang the *International Song*. The onlookers and even the guards of the escort all sighed and moved[25].

After being escorted to Zhenjiang, Cao Qijin and others did not lose their fighting spirit and continued to give advice. On the one hand, they sought help and rescue, on the other hand, they tried to escape from prison. The party members escorted in batches contacted the county Party committees in Zhenjiang, Suzhou and other places, carried out detailed deployment and coordination, and actively did the ideological work of the guards. However, at the time of prison escape, a guard of the investigation team withdrew temporarily, resulting in the final failure of prison escape. Only one escaped successfully can be said to be the only comfort for Cao Qijin[26]. When Cao Qijin was in prison, he still took responsibility. He persisted in the struggle in prison and united his cellmates to fight with the prison authorities. His tenacious will of continuous struggle infected the comrades around him. Even if the struggle was faced with failure again and again, he did not give up or retreat, adhered to his original intention and fought bravely with the enemy to the end, which demonstrated the noble quality of a Communist Party member.

6. Heroic Righteousness

At the end of 1929, Cao Qijin's family got the news of his son's arrest and imprisonment. His wife Zhu Xian went to visit. Cao Qijin lost a lot because of his torture in prison, but his eyes still glittered with the firmness of the revolution to the end, and his ambition did not decline. After a period of time, Cao Qijin was transferred to Zhenjiang military judicial committee for trial. A few days later, his wife Zhu Xian went to visit again and brought warm clothes. Cao Qijin refused: "Don't want anything for the time being. Take care of your health." [27] This was the last time the couple met. Cao Qijin knew clearly in his heart that he was about to die for the revolution, so he sent the last care to his family. He died bravely with heavy shackles and firm steps for the great revolutionary cause of the Communist Party of China and the happiness and well-being of the people.

At the end of 1930, the escape organized by Cao Qijin and his comrades in prison finally failed. Cao Qijin and his arrested comrades were finally escorted to Zhenjiang Military Justice Commission for trial. On February 24, 1931, at the foot of Beigu mountain in Zhenjiang, Cao Qijin, who was only 25, finally died at the hands of the Kuomintang reactionaries. Until the last moment of his life, Cao Qijin did not reveal his identity as the leader of the Yangzhou party organization. In the eyes of the enemy, he died as Chen Junhao in Nantong, protecting other members of the party organization and the party's revolutionary fire. Cao Qijin firmly supported the Communist Party of China until his death, and explained with his life the heroic revolutionary spirit of "blood stains are no harm, iron shoulders and moral responsibility" in his poetry. Cao Qijin is a soldier fighting for national liberation, an excellent model for the people of Yangzhou and an eternal hero. His heroic deeds will be handed down from generation to generation. It is gratifying that the "The motherland is changing and thriving" ("眼看山河异, 天开日月新") that Cao Qijin hopes to see has been seen in our eyes.

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