

CHEN Duxiu

Chén Dúxiù 陈独秀

1879–1942 Chinese Communist Party founder

Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, founder of the Chinese Communist Party and a leader of the New Culture Movement (c. 1915–1923), was a lifelong rebel who fought corrupt political practice, first against the Qing dynasty, then against the warlord Yuan Shikai 袁世凯, and finally against the ruling Guomindang 国民党 (Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石).

Chen Duxiu was a classically trained scholar-turned-rebel who published the famous journal, *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), which persuaded an entire generation of young intellectuals to repudiate their own culture and to embrace a Western scientific frame of mind and a democratic political outlook. At the same time, he and his fellow intellectual Hu Shi 胡适 succeeded in bringing about the vernacular movement, or the change from writing in a classical to a colloquial syntax. In 1920 he established the Shanghai Marxist Study Society, which was the precursor of the Chinese Communist Party. He was expelled from the party in 1929.

Chen was born in Huai-ning (now Anqing), Anhui Province. Classically educated, he placed first in the first-level civil service exam at age seventeen. He failed the next level of exam but wrote *A Treatise on the Defense of the Yangzi River*—a reflection of his growing patriotism—a year later. He studied in Japan on five occasions and joined a revolutionary overseas Chinese student organization,

the Youth Society, in 1902. He was expelled from Japan in 1903 for cutting off the queue (a braid of hair usually worn hanging at the back of the head) of a Chinese official—an

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act that symbolized his hatred for the ineffective and corrupt Qing dynasty (1644–1912). He returned home and formed the Anhui Patriotic Society. In 1903, with the closing of the revolutionary newspaper *Subao*, Chen and his friends edited its replacement, *The Citizen's Daily* (*Guomin riribao*). When this enterprise fell apart due to internal dissent, Chen returned to his home province and published the *Anhui Vernacular Paper* in 1904. For a brief period he also learned to make bombs with the Shanghai Assassination Squad established by Cai Yuanpei. Chen formed an anti-Manchu organization, the Yuewanghui, in 1905 and was implicated in Xu Xilin's assassination of Governor-General Enming.

After the 1911 revolution, which established Republican China (1912–1949), Chen briefly served as secretary-general of the Anhui provisional government and helped to develop a military strategy to overthrow President Yuan Shikai. When the attempt failed, Chen escaped to Japan and edited *Tiger* magazine with Zhang Shizhao in 1914. He returned to Shanghai in 1915 and founded *Youth* magazine, later renamed *New Youth*. Chen became the dean of the School of Letters at Beijing University in 1917 at the invitation of Cai Yuanpei, then chancellor of the university. Chen galvanized a generation of young people with his eloquent essay, "Call to Youth" (1915) in which he urged the young to adopt six new attitudes: to be self-directed, progressive, proactive, global, practical, and scientific. He hailed French civilization for bestowing upon humanity three gifts: science, democracy, and socialism. Chen and Professor Hu Shi played a leading role in transforming written Chinese from a classical form to one reflecting the spoken language, a development of enormous importance. Disillusioned by the clash between Western powers in World War I and the outcome of the Treaty of Versailles, and inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Chen turned to Marxism as a means to building a strong, self-sufficient China. Aided by Russian Comintern (the Communist International established in 1919 and dissolved in 1943) agent Gregori Voitinsky, Chen founded the first Communist cell in Shanghai in the summer of 1920 and was elected secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at its first congress on 23 July 1921. In 1920 Chen also served briefly as education secretary for the Guangzhou (Canton)

warlord Chen Jiongming. As party secretary from 1921 to 1927 Chen Duxiu repeatedly protested Moscow's contradictory directive to join the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang) and usurp its power from within. He was blamed by the CCP for carrying out Comintern orders to conduct doomed labor and peasant uprisings in the face of overwhelming opposition by the warlords and by General Chiang Kai-shek. He resigned as party secretary on 15 July 1923 and was expelled from the CCP on 15 November 1929 for failing to follow Comintern directives, for being antiparty, and for thinking like a Trotskyite (an adherent of Russian Communist leader Leon Trotsky). Chen joined the Chinese Trotskyites for a brief period. He was jailed by Chiang Kai-shek from 1932 to 1937. In prison he pursued his scholarly interest in phonetics and philology (the study of literature and of disciplines relevant to literature or to language as used in literature). He died destitute five years after his release from prison.

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