

Original Paper

An Examination of Yun D. Y.'s Thought on the Peasant Question

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Abstract

Yun D. Y., as one of the important leaders in charge of peasant work in the early days of the Communist Party of China, gradually formed a systematic thought on the peasant issue in the practice of revolutionary struggle. Yun D. Y. insisted on the leadership of the proletariat over the peasants in the peasant issue; highly affirmed the great role of the peasants in the new democratic revolution and called on the peasants to participate in the revolution; led the peasant movement and armed the peasants; and insisted that all the work should be centered on the masses, leaving behind a valuable legacy for the solution of the peasant issue in his short life. Yun D. Y.'s thinking and exploration of the peasant problem promoted the modernization of Marxism and laid a solid foundation for the Chinese Communists to seek the correct revolutionary path of "encircling the city with the countryside" in theory and practice.

Keywords

Yun D. Y. Peasant Problem

Yun D. Y., a Chinese proletarian revolutionary and early leader of the of China, was loved by Chinese youth. He was born into a famous family and grew up in a turbulent era of internal and external conflicts, which made him set up the ambitious ambition of serving the country and saving the people from his childhood. 1918 to 1920, Yun D. Y. organized and set up the Mutual Aid Society and Liquan Book Club successively, and in the course of his practice, "began to pay attention to the hardship of the countryside and the peasants", and developed the revolutionary idea of "going to the countryside to set up countryside education" (Editorial Office of People's Publishing House, 1982, p. 135) to stimulate the peasants. "In July 1921, Yun D. Y. founded the Coexistence Society in Hubei, an early Communist Party organization, to unite the advanced intellectual youth and to study and propagate Marxism, and joined the CPC at the end of the same year. At the end of the same year, he joined the CPC. Thereafter, under the scientific guidance of Marxism, Yun D. Y. rationally realized the importance of uniting the power of the peasants for the Chinese revolution, and constantly explored effective ways to carry out

the peasant revolution.

Yun D. Y. paid attention to the peasant issue for a long time during his revolutionary struggle, and constantly combined Marxism with the concrete reality of China and the peasant issue, forming his unique thoughts on the peasant issue. Studying and researching Yun D. Y.'s thoughts on the peasant issue is of great practical significance to the in-depth understanding of the modernization of Marxism.

1. The Formation Process of Yun Daiying's Thoughts on the Peasant Question

1.1 Germination of Ideology

Before he became a member of the Chinese Communist Party, Yun D. Y. was concerned about and engaged in rural work. As a teenager, Yun was deeply influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the intellectuals of his generation in modern China, which was under the humiliation of the great powers and poverty, and he aspired to follow the example of the patriots in striving for the realization of the country's prosperity and the happiness of the people.

Yun D. Y. was nurtured by the excellent traditional Chinese culture and influenced by the idea of emphasizing people's rights from his childhood, and in 1917, he wrote *Cultivation of Social Character* that "although we cannot regard ourselves as a place of significance when we devote ourselves to a social cause, we must be a responsible person for this cause" (Yun, 2014, p. 104), revealing his altruistic idea of public morality and public spirit. In the same year, Yun Daiying stated in the *Preface to Ailan Pavilion* that he did not crave for food, drink, clothing and wealth, and took the pursuit of the people's happiness as the goal of his life. In 1918, Yun D. Y. initiated the organization of the Mutual Aid Society, which advocated helping people to be happy, and to improve one's personal character and cultivation in the course of mutual help and encouragement. In 1919, Yun D. Y. carried out a student movement in solidarity with the May Fourth Movement. During the student movement, he realized that the power of the students was thin, and that "the general public must be roused to serve as a strong backing for the students." (Li & Zhong, 2006, p. 125) After the baptism of the May Fourth Movement, the members of the Mutual Aid Society were greatly improved in their ideology. In 1920, members of the Mutual Aid Society established the Liqun Book Club under Yun D. Y.'s active initiative and planning. Yun and the members of the Liqun Book Club planned and visualized the cause of "new villages" and helped the peasants to improve themselves. The Liqun Book Club was also closely associated with the Changsha Culture Book Club founded by Mao Zedong and others, and its members often shared new ideas and cultures with each other, helping each other and sharing their experiences in running the club. At this time, although Yun D. Y.'s thoughts on the peasant issue were relatively naïve and some of his ideas were even unrealistic, his thinking and practice on rural issues laid the foundation for his later leadership of the peasant movement.

1.2 Initial Formation

Yun D. Y., one of the earliest prominent leaders of the Party to recognize the importance of the peasant struggle, applied the basic Marxist theories on the peasant question to the practice of the peasant

revolution in China, and gradually formed a rich body of thought on the peasant question.

In 1921, with the study and acceptance of communist ideology, Yun D. Y. gradually established a Marxist worldview. In July of the same year, Yun initiated the establishment of the Coexistence Society, a revolutionary organization of a communist nature. During this period, Yun led a group of intellectual youths to conduct rural surveys in the mountains of Nanling and Huangshan in Jingxian County. Soon after, when Yun Daiying and other members of the Coexistence Society learned that the Communist Party of China had been founded in Shanghai, they were called upon by Yun Daiying to join the league and the party organization one after another. After Yun became a member of the Communist Party, he consciously applied Marxist theories to his work in the countryside, and his understanding of the rural revolution shifted from the emotional to the rational. In 1923, Yun D. Y. edited the magazine *China Youth*, and he wrote many articles calling on the intellectual youth to go to the society in the fields and villages to publicize revolutionary ideas and promote the awakening of the peasants. In 1924, he wrote in the newspaper *Awakening*, a supplement of the *Republican Daily*, "The day the peasants awaken, the cause of reformation will be successful." (Yun, 2014, p. 333) With regard to revolutionary propaganda work in the countryside, Yun D. Y. suggested that we should live with them, listen to their voices, get close to them first, then sensitize them, and then unite them, so that "they will naturally one day fully understand our ideas, and they will naturally one day, for their own benefit, become the basic force of the national revolution." (Yun, 2014, p. 395)

During this period, Yun D. Y. took Marxism as his scientific guide, correctly recognized the great role of the peasants in the revolution, and summed up his revolutionary experience in his work of propagating revolutionary ideas in the countryside; at this time Yun D. Y.'s ideas on the peasant question were initially formed.

1.3 Towards Maturity

During the First Domestic Revolutionary War, the peasant movement created a huge wave in the roaring National Revolution. The Chinese Communists soberly realized that "the rise of the peasant struggle is an indispensable condition for the success of the National Revolution, and that the peasants are the most necessary and dependable allies of the working class." (CPC Central Committee Party History Research Office, 2011, p. 156)

In 1925, Yun D. Y., in leading students to participate in the May Thirtieth Movement to fight against imperialism, deeply realized that "we have to learn from the workers and peasants, and go to the masses of workers and peasants to work for revolution together with them." (Editorial Office of People's Publishing House, 1982, p. 20) In 1926, Yun Daiying wrote in *The National Revolution and the Peasants* that "the National Revolution is the Peasant Revolution, and the National Revolution is not successful until the peasants are liberated." (Yun, D. Y., & Yun, 2014, p. 488) At the same time, he emphasized the extreme importance of the proletariat's leadership of the peasant movement, arguing that "only the proletariat can lead all classes in the national revolution." (Yun, D. Y., & Yun, 2014, p. 11) In the face of the vigorous revolutionary movement of the peasants, both inside and outside the Party

began to accuse the peasant movement. Yun D. Y. wrote an article to counterattack that only by uniting the power of the masses, organizing and mobilizing the forces of the peasants and workers could we fight against the reactionary forces, grasp the leadership of the revolution, and ensure the success of the National Revolution.

At this time, Yun D. Y. led and mobilized the peasants' movement, which enabled the peasants' power to play a great role in the revolutionary wave and began to combine Marxism with the concrete reality of the Chinese revolution. The experience of revolutionary struggle in this period contributed to the gradual maturation of Yun's thinking on the peasant issue.

1.4 Systematic Formation

After the failure of the Revolution, the CPC was deeply aware that in the previous peasant movement, the failure to solve the peasant land problem and safeguard the interests of the peasants in order to consolidate power, and the failure to arm revolutionary forces to organize the peasants in order to fight for leadership had led to the bitter defeat of the National Revolution. On July 20, 1927, the CPC Central Committee emphasized, in its general strategy on the peasant movement, that the present "Chinese revolution has entered a new stage-the stage of agrarian revolution." (Central Archives, 1989, p. 215)

As early as early April 1927, Yun D. Y. emphasized at the fifth enlarged meeting of the Second Standing Committee of the Kuomintang that "only by solving the land problem of the peasants can the National Revolution win the real support of the peasants." (Li & Zhong, 2006, p. 319). In August of the same year, Yun took part in leading the Nanchang Uprising. After the failure of the uprising, Yun advocated going deep into the countryside to carry out the agrarian revolution together with the revolutionary forces of the peasants in Hailufeng led by Peng Pei, and to cooperate with the peasant self-defense army to open up revolutionary bases in the countryside. In February of 1929, Yun pointed out in his critique of the fallacious arguments of the Kuomintang's reformist faction about the Chinese revolution that "the Communist Party's agrarian revolution is precisely aimed at leading all the poor peasants themselves to rise up and demand liberation". agrarian revolution is precisely aimed at leading all poor peasants to rise up and demand liberation." (Yun, 2014. p. 157). In March 1930, Yun D. Y. published two articles in *Red Flag*, highly affirming and supporting Mao's practice of establishing rural revolutionary bases, and extolling the great achievements of the peasant revolution in western Fujian: firstly, the driving out of the Kuomintang; secondly, the setting up of the soviet regime and third, the distribution of land.

In leading the struggle for the peasant revolution, Yun D. Y. profoundly realized the extreme importance of arming the peasant and worker masses and carrying out an agrarian revolution in order to build a revolutionary base in the countryside, and gradually developed a systematic thought on the peasant question. Yun D. Y.'s thoughts on the peasant question provided an important theoretical basis and practical experience for the Party's exploration of the path of rural revolution, and promoted the development of the Chineseization and modernization of Marxism.

2. Important Elements of Yun Daiying's Thought on the Peasant Question

2.1 Insisting on Proletarian Leadership of the Peasants

Adherence to the proletariat's leadership of the peasant revolution was the fundamental criterion of Yun D. Y.'s thought on the peasant question. In 1924, Yun D. Y. emphasized in an article in the fifty-third issue of *China Youth*: "There must be a great party that guides the people like this. The foundation of the party must be built on top of the oppressed peasants and workers; he must represent the interests of the peasants and workers." (Yun, 2014, p. 580) In 1926, Yun D. Y. analyzed in detail in his article *Why is the Industrial Proletariat Most Revolutionary?* In 1926, Yun D. Y. analyzed in detail the social status, living environment, and class characteristics of the proletariat, argued that the proletariat was the most thorough and revolutionary class, and highly affirmed the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution. In 1928, in the face of the right wing of the Kuomintang betraying the revolution and claiming to represent the interests of the masses of workers and peasants, Yun D. Y. mercilessly exposed their hypocritical masks and pointed out that adherence to the proletariat's leadership of the peasant revolution was the only way to ensure the advancement of the Chinese revolution, and that this was what distinguished the peasant revolution led by the Party from the old-fashioned peasant revolution and what made it possible to achieve the victory of the Chinese revolution.

2.2 The Peasants Were the Basic Driving Force of the National Revolution.

A high degree of affirmation of the position of the peasants in the national revolution was the theoretical starting point of Yun D. Y.'s thought on the peasant question. In his article, *The Basic Forces of the Chinese Revolution*, Yun D. Y. concluded, after a sophisticated analysis and comparison, that "only the peasants and the workers are the real opposites of all the interests of the ruling class. Therefore, when it comes to revolution, they are the only ones who can still have hope." (Yun, 2014, p. 258)

In March 1924, Yun D. Y. elaborated on the meaning and purpose of the national revolution and the relationship between the Chinese revolution and the world revolution in *What is the National Revolution?* in which he expounded the connotation and purpose of the National Revolution and the relationship between the Chinese and world revolutions, and in analyzing the forces of the revolution, he pointed out that although the peasants were more dispersed and not easy to unite, "they feel the deepest pains of the harsh political economy, and their alliance with the revolutionary army is the great force of the revolution." (Yun, 2014, p. 126) In June, Yun D. Y. published an article in the thirty-seventh issue of *China Youth* analyzing the reasons for the rural movement: first, peasants accounted for a large portion of the country's population; second, peasants worked hard but could not take care of their wives and children; and third, they had the desire for revolution. He specifically emphasized the need to go to the countryside to understand the peasants and educate them, and most crucially, to unite the young peasants. In 1926, Yun D. Y. published an article in the *Huangpu Journal* stating, "The peasants and laborers are the fundamental force of the revolution." (Central Archives, 1989, p. 387) In 1927, in response to criticisms of the peasant movement both inside and outside the Party, Yun D. Y. emphasized

once again at a seminar on the peasant question at the General Political Department of the National Revolutionary Army that "China's revolution is a part of the world's revolution, and the peasants and laborers are the main force of the revolution," and called on the peasant representatives to "go back to the countryside and organize themselves. organize and liberate themselves." (Yun, 2014, p. 46) Yun D. Y.'s realization of the importance of peasants in the Chinese revolution laid a solid foundation for the Party's leadership of the peasant movement during the revolutionary period.

2.3 Organizing and Propagandizing Peasants to Join the Revolutionary Movement

Organizing and propagating the peasants to join the revolutionary movement was intrinsic to Yun D. Y.'s ideas on the peasant question. Yun D. Y. realized at an early stage that if he wanted to save China, he had to awaken the sleeping people. As early as during the establishment of the Coexistence Society, Yun paid close attention to China's rural problems. He believed that the solution to the rural problems should begin with education in the countryside. In March 1924, Yun D. Y. vividly and exhaustively recounted the hardship and oppression of the peasants in his article *Life of the Peasants in Huangpi, Hubei*. He called on young people to emphasize the work of the peasants, conduct in-depth research in the countryside, and look for ways to rescue the peasants. Yun D. Y. pointed out that the peasants were a powerful revolutionary force, but without propaganda and organization, they were like scattered sand. Therefore, "the greatest significance of the rural movement" (Yun, 2014, p. 419) is to organize and propagandize the peasants and to study their sufferings and demands practically. And "the best rural movement is still the education of the common people" (Yun, 2014, p. 393), to enrich the spiritual life of the peasants and inspire them with revolutionary ideas through a variety of forms of propaganda.

In December 1925, Yun Daiying also enriched the Party's ideology of propaganda work in *Propaganda and Organization Work among the Peasants* by detailing the do's and don'ts and detailed methods of propaganda work among the peasants in the three aspects of politics, economy and culture. Yun D. Y. pointed out in his letter to Liu Yazhi that "the most important work in the Party is to propagandize all the people so that they will know how to fight for their own interests; to organize all the people so that they will be able to fight for their own interests." (Yun, 2014, pp. 377-378) Yun D. Y.'s ideology of peasant mobilization and propaganda started from the peasants' point of view, effectively grasped the pain and needs of the peasants, and organized and guided the peasants by means that were pleasing to the peasants, thus powerfully advancing the development of the revolutionary situation.

2.4 Insisting that the Revolution Be Centered on the Peasant Masses

The insistence on launching the national revolution centered on the peasant masses was the fundamental position of Yun D. Y.'s thought on the peasant question. Yun D. Y. emphasized that work with the peasants should be done from the peasants' point of view and in their interests, and that close contact with the masses should be maintained and bureaucratic practices should be opposed.

In August 1924, Yun D. Y. emphasized in a speech titled *Education for the Rule of the People* that in order to serve the people, firstly, one should respect the people; secondly, one should have a deep understanding of the masses; and lastly, one should work for the interests of the people. In 1926, Yun D.

Y., in his speech *Thoughts on Traveling to Chaoshan*, once again called on the comrades of the revolution to stand on the feet of the workers and peasants in their own interests and to lead them in the struggle for their own interests. In the same year, Yun D. Y. pointed out in his article *The National Revolution and the Peasants* that "the national revolution pays special attention to the interests of the peasant and laboring masses, and if the peasant and laboring masses are forgotten, it will not become a national revolution" (Yun, 2014, p. 488), fully demonstrating his revolutionary ideology centering on the peasant and laboring masses.

Yun D. Y. also emphasized the need to come from the masses and go to the masses, "Revolutionary organizations should absorb the peasants who are generally rich in revolution and educate them with relatively strict training, so that they can become the backbone of the peasant movement; only when this backbone has strength will the peasant masses become a disciplined revolutionary army." (Yun, 2014, p. 376) And if party cadres really work for the revolution, they should go deep into the masses, get close to them, and maintain close contact with the people. In the early 1930s, Yun D. Y. highly praised Mao Zedong's revolutionary base in the countryside, arguing that "the Soviet in western Fujian had indeed shown itself to be a government of the workers and peasants" (Yun, 2014, p. 299), and that "it was a government that served the workers and peasants."

Yun D. Y.'s idea of serving the people greatly promoted the development of the peasant revolution, profoundly influenced the development path of China's rural revolution, and provided useful theoretical support and empirical inspiration for the CPC's exploration of the path of rural revolution.

3. The Historical Status of Yun Daiying's Thoughts on the Peasant Question

3.1 Promoting the Chineseization and Modernization of Marxism

Yun D. Y.'s thought on the peasant question is a product of Yun D. Y.'s practice of exploring the peasant revolution in the Chinese countryside under the scientific guidance of Marxism, a product of the combination of Marxism with the concrete realities of the Chinese countryside, and a product of the combination of Marxism with the characteristics of the Chinese revolutionary epoch at that time.

Applying Marxist theory, Yun D. Y. rationally recognized that the peasants were the broadest force in the Chinese revolution and highly affirmed the great role of the peasants in the revolution. In the course of the revolutionary struggle, Yun continuously explored scientific methods of organizing and mobilizing the peasants, summed up practical experience, and explored the path of development of the rural revolution. He adhered to the positions, principles and methods of Marxism, but was not confined to the specific views of Marxism and adhered to Marxist dogmas unchanged. Starting from the actual situation in China, he correctly understood the relationship between the Chinese revolution and the world revolution, fought resolutely against the forces that denied the peasant movement, and vigorously criticized the trend of thought that denied the communist movement, and in the course of the revolutionary struggle formed the theoretical achievements of Marxist revolution with Chinese characteristics, realizing the innovation and development of Marxism in China. Yun D. Y.'s ideas on the

peasant question have made a significant historical contribution to the promotion of the modernization of Marxism in China.

3.2 Laying the Theoretical and Practical Foundation for Taking the Road of Rural Revolution

Yun D. Y.'s thoughts on the peasant question systematically expounded in theory that the peasants are the great force of the Chinese revolution, and scientifically answered a series of questions on rural work, such as how to propagandize and educate the peasants, how to lead and mobilize the peasants, and how to arm and organize the peasants. Based on the reality of the Chinese revolution, it enriches and develops the Marxist view of the peasants, is an important part of the theory of the peasant movement of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and has become the guide for the CPC's leadership of the peasant revolution.

In the course of leading the peasant movement and carrying out revolutionary work in the countryside, Yun D. Y. wholeheartedly worked for the interests of the peasants, respected the toiling peasants and strengthened their sense of affinity and trust in the Party, and formed a benign and interactive relationship between the Party and the masses. After the failure of the Revolution, Yun D. Y. carried out the construction of revolutionary bases in the vast countryside, arming the peasant masses to carry out the agrarian revolution, and providing a useful practical exploration of the revolutionary path of "encircling the countryside with the city and seizing power by armed force" during the period of the Agrarian Revolutionary War.

Yun D. Y.'s rich and profound thinking and practice of the peasant revolution greatly promoted the development of the Chinese revolution, provided a new perspective for the exploration of the path of the Chinese revolution, theoretically and practically laid a solid foundation for the Chinese Communists to seek the path of the rural revolution, and made a significant contribution to the formation of the Party's theory of the peasant revolution and the exploration of the path of the rural revolution.

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