

***Red Genesis: The Hunan First Normal School and the Creation of Chinese Communism, 1903–1921.*** By Liyan Liu. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 251. \$ 75.00.

When Mao Zedong began his formal post-primary education in Changsha in the spring of 1913, he chose a teachers' college that would soon merge with the Hunan First Normal School. That same school educated a substantial number of young men who later went on to important careers in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): Cai Hesun 蔡和森, Li Weihai 李維漢, He Changong 何長工, Xiao San 蕭三, and He Shuheng 何叔衡 are probably the best known. In this useful study, Liyan Liu reviews the history of this school and addresses the question of how it came to play such an important role in the birth of the CCP.

Xiaoping Cong has previously studied the important role of teachers' schools in the making of the modern Chinese nation, and has noted the critical role these schools played in harbouring radical intellectuals and producing future revolutionary cadres.<sup>1</sup> There is also a substantial literature on the educational reforms that produced the normal schools of the late Qing and early Republic.<sup>2</sup> Nor has Hunan in this period gone unnoticed, and Ms Liu has clearly benefited from the foundational studies of Charlton Lewis, Angus McDonald, and the present reviewer.<sup>3</sup> But Hunan First Normal was a special school deserving close attention and that is the task that this book takes up.

After a brief review of past scholarship, Liu examines the beginnings of educational reform in Hunan in the 1890s, when Liang Qichao 梁啟超 and his radical

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<sup>1</sup> Xiaoping Cong, *Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897–1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*, trans. Paul J. Bailey (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988); Ruth Hayhoe and Marianne Bastid, eds., *China's Education and the Industrialized World: Studies in Cultural Transfer* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1987); Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginnings of the Modern Era* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1983); Paul J. Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990) are some of the notable studies.

<sup>3</sup> Charlton M. Lewis, *Prologue to the Chinese Revolution: The Transformation of Ideas and Institutions in Hunan Province, 1891–1907* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1976); Joseph W. Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); Angus W. McDonald, Jr., *The Urban Origins of Rural Revolution: Elites and the Masses in Hunan Province, China, 1911–1927* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

Cantonese colleagues helped to inspire such future revolutionary martyrs as Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 and Tang Caichang 唐才常. Then Liu turns to the New Policy reforms and the transformation of the old academies into modern schools. The description of the institutional setting is completed with a chapter on the milieu of Hunan First Normal in the early republican era.

A chapter on the faculty of Hunan First Normal describes the progressive principal Kong Zhaoshou 孔昭綬, the plain-living Xu Teli 徐特立 of poor peasant background who later studied in France and joined the Communist Party, and several others. A later chapter describes the students, especially the group around Mao who joined the New Citizens' Study Society (Xinmin xuehui 新民學會). A remarkable number of these later went to Beijing and then joined the work study movement in France. A chapter on the most notable of these, Cai Hesen, the friend whose letters from Paris first led Mao Zedong to Leninism, gives us a brief portrait on the most memorable of these students.

The strongest chapter in the book is devoted to the most influential teacher in the school, Yang Changji 楊昌濟, the Confucian scholar with a *xiucai* 秀才 degree who had studied in Japan, then in Edinburgh and Germany, before returning to teach ethics first at Hunan First Normal, then at Peking University where he was recruited by Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培. Frederic Wakeman called early attention to Yang Changji's influence on Mao Zedong's intellectual development. Wakeman's account gives particular attention to the neo-Kantian principles that Yang picked up in Europe—particularly from Friedrich Paulsen, whose major work was translated by Cai Yuanpei and carefully perused by Mao as he read it with Yang Changji.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Liyan Liu's account (first published as an article in *Modern China*) seems much influenced by her mentor Chang Hao 張灝, and the neo-Confucian strains of Yang's thinking receive more attention. In particular we see the influence of the dissident Hunan scholar of the seventeenth century, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, whose popularity increased greatly in the late Qing due to his anti-Manchu writings.

Yang Changji's influence on his young protégés at Hunan First Normal is undeniable. Mao Zedong was perhaps his favourite student and would marry his daughter Yang Kaihui 楊開慧, soon after Yang's early death from cancer. Yang Changji's relations with his students were close and personal and they often gathered at his house. Not a brilliant speaker, Yang inspired them more as a patriot and an ethical thinker, proposing a selective synthesis of East and West. In the end, however, Liu does not give us a particularly rigorous or convincing analysis of exactly what it was in Yang Changji's thinking or in the intellectual environment of Hunan First

<sup>4</sup> Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 157–219.

Normal that accounted for the unusual number of early Communists. Her stress on the Confucian and moral influences bears great resemblance to Wen-hsin Yeh's study of the early Communists in Zhejiang,<sup>5</sup> but Liu has not accomplished as subtle and carefully contextualized account of the Hunan milieu.

In all, this is a useful account, for we have here a history of Hunan First Normal at a critical point in its history. But it does not break significant new ground in understanding the origins of the Chinese Communist Party, and fails to live up to the full promise of its *Red Genesis* title.

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***Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence.*** By Gloria Davies. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. xxvi + 408. \$35.00/£24.95.

The two decades between the First and Second World Wars saw a transformation in the cultural life of China. The classically schooled pioneers of late Qing reform were then succeeded by a generation whose leaders had been educated abroad. They thought in terms of revolution, and believed they had the right ideas to bring about changes in culture that would put China on level terms with other civilized nations. Central to nearly all fields of endeavour was the perceived need to nurture and mobilize the resources and abilities of the neglected masses, the key thereto being universal education in the accessible medium of the everyday spoken language, or *baihua* 白話, as distinct from the literary language, or *wenyan* 文言—a transition parallel to that from Latin to the national vernaculars which had taken place in Europe centuries earlier. Considerable progress had already been made in that respect, but the higher reaches of educated discourse and literary composition were still occupied by pure or modified *wenyan*. The aim of the New Culture movement which took off in 1918–19 was for the spoken language to sweep the board, become the one and only “national language” (*guoyu* 國語).

Since the literary language had historically been the sole repository for abstract concepts, cultural allusions, poeticisms, figures of speech, and the vocabulary of debate, while *baihua* had traditionally been largely confined to representing dialogue

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<sup>5</sup> Wen-hsin Yeh, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).