The system of special commissioners and the early labor movement of the Communist Party of China: Illustrated by the history of the Anyuan workers’ movement (1921–1925)

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Abstract
Existing literature on the Communist Party of China (CPC)-led labor movement places particular emphasis on the revolutionary discourse and analysis of class struggle but pays less attention to the organizational form of the CPC-led labor movement from the perspective of organizational sociology. This paper uses the early Anyuan labor movement as its case study and analyzes and compares the work effectiveness of CPC special commissioners, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, for the purpose of exploring the organizational form of the system of special commissioners in the CPC-led labor movement. Although Anyuan was an important early base of the workers’ movement of the CPC, the existing research contributes little on the subject of its historical process and the organizational form of the CPC-led Anyuan labor movement. This paper argues that Li Lisan created the Anyuan labor movement using his own personal resources, but his successor Liu Shaoqi failed to sustain the Anyuan movement. It shows that the system of special commissioners in the CPC was responsible for the rise and fall of the Anyuan labor movement. In the early stages of the CPC-led labor movement, neither the class consciousness of the workers nor the will of the central CPC committee determined
the progress of the labor movement. Rather, this depended on the personal resources of the CPC special commissioners. The actual work effectiveness of special commissioners was related not only to their personal resources, but also to the commissioners' positions in the CPC. The special commissioner system caused tension between the CPC unified leadership and individual commissioners. This led to the complex question of the relationship between professional revolutionary organizations and the masses in revolution. Specific analysis of the early system of special commissioners of the CPC helps us to focus on the organization of the CPC-led labor movement and also to understand the early forms of organizational development and evolution of the CPC.

Keywords
System of special commissioners, labor movement, Anyuan, personal resources

Introduction
The communist party as a modern political organization requires not only support from the class base, but also certain kinds of organizational methods for internal integration for its sustainable and stable operation. A communist party is a proletarian party by its nature; nevertheless, this does not mean that a communist party is the proletariat itself, nor does it equate the communist party with the working-class masses. The resolutions passed in the Second Congress of the Communist International held in 1920 stated explicitly that the Communist Party is part of the working class and, moreover, that it is the most advanced, class-conscious and, therefore, most revolutionary part. The party is precisely the head of the working class whose purpose is to lead the proletariat and the organization of the masses (Editorial Committee of Literature of History of the International Communist Movement, 1988). Since the communist party is the proletariat’s vanguard organization, in order to lead the proletariat and other organizations of masses, it should first establish its organization and leadership of the masses of its own class (that is, the working class) so as to realize its leadership over other organizations.

With the assistance of the Communist International, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded in July of 1921 and passed the resolution to join the Communist International and accept its instructions in July of 1922. The CPC was a newly established party that took the proletariat as its class base, attached great importance to carrying out the labor movement, expanding its class base, and gradually establishing its leadership over the labor movement and the masses at the beginning of its establishment. The first resolution passed after the First Congress of the CPC proposed that the basic task of the CPC was to dispatch party members to workers to establish industrial unions, organize workers, and educate them (The State Archives Administration, 1989). Thereafter, the CPC led
the first upsurge of labor movements in China. Although the labor movements led by the CPC encountered setbacks from time to time, the working focus of the CPC was gradually shifted to other movements, such as the peasant movement and the military movement; however, because the labor movement was associated with the class nature of the CPC, it had been one of the basic and important tasks of the CPC for a long time. Therefore, in the early stages of the CPC leading labor movements, the method of organizing the labor movement and how labor union leadership was formed are issues worth discussing.

However, in addressing such issues, former studies on the history of labor movements in China were guided by the discourse of the history of revolution, which assumed that labor and capital were severely opposed and held the general view that the CPC could naturally launch a labor movement (Liu, 2002). It to some extent equated the communist party with the working class and neglected the differences between them, and thus it was not concerned about the organizing methods used by the CPC in leading the labor movement. Influenced by studies on new labor history, overseas experts such as Chesneaux (1968) and Perry (2012) explored the formation of the subjectivity of the working class in Modern China from the perspective of social history on a long-term basis and scarcely looked into the CPC’s method of organization in leading the labor movement. As a matter of fact, the study on the organization system of the CPC is a weak point in studies of CPC history and revolutionary sociology. Ying (2016) believed that the organizational relationship among different ranks, different organizations and different levels of authority, as well as interactions among cadres of different categories in the party, should be studied from the perspective of organizational form, so as to better understand the development and evolution of democratic centralism of the CPC.

It is generally believed that no organizational system took shape in the early stages of the CPC’s establishment and during the Great Revolution (1924–1927); the CPC gradually formed its mature organizational system until the Soviet Period (1929–1934), when it independently seized the military force and political power. However, the existing studies actually show that the CPC introduced the system of special commissioners of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) upon establishment (Ma, 2016b; Sun, 2015) and that during the Great Revolution, it established the Party branch system and the Party system (Sun, 2016). Furthermore, the system of special commissioners at that time was not only adopted in the early labor movement by the CPC, but also continued in the peasant and military movements launched afterwards. Sun (1987) pointed out that the system of special commissioners was an important form of highly centralized leadership imposed by the Communist International. Wei (2013) analyzed the case of members of the Guangzhou Peasant Movement Training Institute serving as special commissioners of peasant movements. Sun’s (2015) study further pointed out that the CPC cadres who held important positions in the movement’s early stages and had abundant working experiences, returned as overseas party members from Moscow and Europe and, after intensive learning and systematic training, were likely to be selected as special commissioners. The adoption of the system of special
commissioners in the CPC’s early stages helped the Central Committee to preserve its authority and form a combined force from top to bottom; it also helped the Committee to develop Party and mass organizations in all regions so as to expand the CPC’s power. However, in actual practice, there were some problems, for example some special commissioners tended to undertake all tasks and had unclear orientations, and the CPC relied excessively on special commissioners. In my own previous analysis (Ma, 2016b), I found that in leading the labor movement in its early stages, since there were no industrial unions in the country, the CPC adopted the system of special commissioners from the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and dispatched special commissioners to some key areas to develop the labor movement from top to bottom. There were about 30 special commissioners in the early stages of the CPC, and each special commissioner received a monthly allowance of 20 to 30 yuan on average. Each commissioner had to make use of his/her personal resources in the region to advance work effectively in the face of the power of clans, warlords and secret societies.

However, the above studies were general discussions on the system of special commissioners rather than in-depth analyses of the real working process of any one particular special commissioner, involving thorough research on the influence of the system of special commissioners on the important work of the CPC during a single period. This has made it difficult for readers to understand the operations of the system in actual practice and their influence on the work of the CPC. To address this question, for this paper, the early Anyuan labor movement was chosen as the research subject and, in particular, the working effects of two special commissioners, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi were compared so as to study the mechanism of the system of special commissioners in the CPC’s early stages and discover how the system influenced the rise and fall of the Anyuan labor movement.

The Anyuan labor movement was chosen for two reasons. First, Anyuan was a famous labor-movement base in the early stages of the CPC and, for this reason, was labelled ‘Little Moscow’. Although the labor movement in China sank to its lowest ebb after the 2.7 Massacre in 1923, the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal survived and became the last and only labor union in the country (Deng, 1983). At an earlier time, Hunan-born revolutionary youths such as Mao Zedong, Li Lisan, and Liu Shaoqi had once worked there. Some young cadres from Hubei, Anhui and Shanxi took refuge in Anyuan after the 2.7 Massacre and participated in the Anyuan labor movement. This labor movement did not enter into its trough period until the September Massacre broke out in September 1925. Both the selection of Anyuan (an important base for the labor movement in the early period of the CPC) and the study of its ups and downs over four years, may be of help in identifying the experiences and lessons attained in the Anyuan labor movement in the CPC’s early stages and also beneficial in understanding the specific practices of the system of special commissioners during that time.

Second, although Anyuan served as an important base for the labor movement of the CPC, the studies in the history of the Anyuan workers’ movement are insufficient. The history of the Anyuan workers’ movement in China was affected
by political considerations after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC); it was especially associated with the fate of the state leaders and, therefore, many important historical materials and facts became seriously distorted and, as such, these studies can hardly be regarded as scientific research. After the reform and opening-up policy, related organizations edited and published a great many historical materials, and the contributions of three key leaders during the Anyuan labor movement were evaluated objectively (Research Study Group on the Labor Movement of the Anyuan Railway Workers and Coal Miners, Pingxiang Society of History of the Communist Party of China, 2013). However, in the current literature, there are hardly any in-depth studies on the working methods of the CPC in its early stages in leading the Anyuan labor movement. In her book *Anyuan: Mining China’s revolutionary tradition*, overseas scholar Elizabeth J. Perry (2014) discussed two concepts, cultural positioning and cultural patronage, in describing the CPC’s methods of creating a revolutionary tradition in Anyuan and rediscovering a revolutionary tradition after the founding of the PRC. Perry (2011) maintained that in the early stage of the CPC, Mao Zedong and Li Lisan started night schools and, as teachers, promoted communism among workers with local customs and folk songs and provoked them to start the labor movement. In this way, the tradition of ‘red scholars’ in the CPC was created. However, these revolutionaries from other regions imposed political education on the illiterate miners and labor workers by applying symbolic resources; to what extent were they able to achieve their goal? Could any strikes have taken place in Anyuan, and lasted for several years, that were only brought about by political education? Perry’s work (2014) mainly contains materials on local history and social history, especially the introduction of a great many materials from the memories of veteran workers after the founding of the PRC, without any differentiation or analysis, rather than first-hand literature and materials, such as the *Victory Album for Strikes* by the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners, selected documents of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, and documents of the Soviet Union Communist Party (Bolshevik). Furthermore, Perry failed to analyze the ins and outs of leaders in the Anyuan labor movement and the real working effects, instead embellishing historical materials with abstract concepts to explain the revolutionary tradition over a long period of CPC history. This may only bring about more distortions and misunderstanding in the study of the history of the Anyuan workers’ movement, which has been seriously distorted by methodological conflicts.

As for general information on leaders of the early Anyuan labor movement, Li Weihan, who once served as Executive Secretary of the CPC Hunan Committee, later recalled ‘The first-generation leader quit his job, the leader of the second generation was Li Lisan, the leader of the third generation was Liu Shaoqi, and the leader of the fourth generation was Lu Chen’. Mao Zedong also talked about leaders of the Anyuan labor movement at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, stating that ‘Liu Shaoqi was the leader of the third generation, and Li Lisan was the leader of the second generation. How about the leader of the first generation? He went away’ (Liu and Huang, 1989: 25). According to records in the
Anniversary Album for Strike Victory of the Club and the Second Anniversary Album, in May 1922, when the club was first established, Li Lisan was the Director of the Club, which was reorganized after the strike victory in September 1922, and Li Lisan served as the General Director (Liu and Zhu, 1980). After Li Lisan left his post in April 1923, Liu Shaoqi succeeded him (Lu, 1980), and after Liu Shaoqi left his post in January 1925, Lu Chen succeeded Liu as General Director until the outbreak of the September Massacre of Anyuan. After comparing such documents and materials, we can conclude that during the period 1921–1925, Li Lisan, Liu Shaoqi and Lu Chen were indeed the general managers of the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners successively, while Li Weihan’s statement that ‘the first-generation leader quit his job’ might refer to Mao Zedong.

Because the system of special commissioners in the early stages of the CPC is this paper’s main focus, out of the four generations of leaders of the Anyuan labor movement, only the work of the two CPC special commissioners, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, has been analyzed and compared. The ins and outs and actual working performances of the other two leaders have not been analyzed. Mao Zedong had been living and studying in Hunan, his hometown, and was serving as the executive secretary of the CPC Hunan Committee. He was a typical local revolutionary leader. He came to Anyuan to investigate the promotion of local revolutionary activities instead of undertaking a mission on behalf of any level of central organization. His mission was very different from those of the two special commissioners dispatched by the Central Committee, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, in terms of their identities as cadres and the nature of their work. Although Lu Chen was a backbone member in the Hubei Liqun Publishing House directed by Yun Daiying, he initially went to Anyuan as a teacher, not as a special commissioner sent by the Central Committee. More importantly, during the period when Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi were in charge of the Anyuan labor movement, they were directly and closely related to its ups and downs, while the other two people were not significant to the movement’s rise and fall. Although Mao Zedong claimed that he was the first-generation leader of the Anyuan labor movement, he confessed that he ‘ran away’, that is, he returned to Changsha after several days of investigation in Anyuan. He had to make arrangements for work in Hunan and did not stay in Anyuan as part of the long-term labor movement. Only eight months after Lu Chen accepted the post of General Director of the Anyuan labor movement, the September Massacre broke out, and the decline of the Anyuan labor movement was actually and very obviously under the leadership of the former leader, Liu Shaoqi.

Therefore, based on the direct document literature of the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners and of the Central Party Committee, Central Youth League Committee and Labor Union systems as well as related chronicles, selected works, and memoirs, this paper focuses on analyzing the two special commissioners, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, and their actual working performances. By studying how these commissioners’ work influenced the Anyuan labor movement,
I discuss the specific practices of the system of special commissioners in the early stages of the CPC and the experiences and lessons the CPC learned in leading the Anyuan labor movement, with the aim of proposing a new way of understanding the methods and experiences of subsequent labor movements led by the CPC.

**The leadership and unified management of Special Commissioner Li Lisan in Anyuan**

Although Li Lisan was considered a second-generation leader of the Anyuan labor movement, during his work in Anyuan from December 1921 to April 1923, he started a workers’ continuation school, built the Anyuan Party Branch and Youth League Branch, established the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners, led the strike by railway workers and coal miners, and served as the General Director of the Club after its reorganization. He was the founder, leader and developer of the Anyuan labor movement in a real sense. The activities of Li Lisan in Anyuan have been explicitly recorded in the *Anniversary Album for Strike Victory of the Club*, and thus they will not be discussed in detail in this paper. Instead, the paper focuses on answering the following questions: how did Li Lisan launch the strike of workers in Anyuan and with what kind of identity and local resources? Did he have the ability to unite the powers of all parties after the reorganization of the Club following the victory? After Li Lisan left Anyuan, would his successor take over his local resources and maintain the unity of the Club? By addressing these problems, can we identify the differences in the working effects of different types of cadres in the CPC because of differences in personal resources, working methods, and external environments?

**The launching of the labor movement by Special Commissioner Li Lisan**

First, in terms of his identity as a Party cadre, Li Lisan was a special commissioner dispatched by the Central Party Committee, rather than a local revolutionary leader like Mao Zedong. Local revolutionary leaders who lived and studied in local regions for a long time coordinated all the work in the region according to the commands of the central committee; while special commissioners, who generally had studied and worked in other provinces were directly dispatched by the Central Committee and would very likely be dispatched to other regions of the country for important missions at any time. The China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department, in September 1922, stated explicitly that ‘Our department shall dispatch special commissioners to some regions on the basis of local conditions. There is no prescribed number of special commissioners’ (Party History Information Collection Committee of CPC Shanghai Municipal Committee and Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions, 1989: 41).

Li Lisan, Cai Hesen and some others returned to China from France in November 1921 and met with Chen Duxiu after they arrived in Shanghai on 11 December. Soon after, Chen Duxiu approved Li Lisan and Cai Hesen’s admission
to the Party (without an introducer or waiting period) and dispatched Li Lisan to
Hunan for the labor movement, while Cai Hesen was appointed to work on the
Central Committee (Li, 2004). Li Lisan’s personal statement in 1940 included the
following words.

After I was admitted to the Party, the CPC Central Committee asked me to accept the
arrangements by the Hunan Provincial Committee. The Secretary of the Hunan
Provincial Committee was Comrade Mao Zedong. He suggested that I go to the
biggest industrial center of Hunan, Pingxiang Coal Mine, to start work and launch
a labor union movement among railway workers and coal miners. (Li, 1999: 532)

Li Lisan had studied in France and was admitted into the Party by the General
Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, which later dispatched Li Lisan to work
in Hunan. It is clear that he was a special commissioner dispatched by the Central
Committee. After returning to Hunan, Mao Zedong ‘suggested’ rather than ‘dis-
patched’ him to work in Anyuan. Afterwards, Li Lisan was transferred to Wuhan
and Shanghai from Anyuan. It showed that he was a special commissioner who
accepted assignments from the Central Committee rather than from a local leader
like Mao Zedong, let alone a local cadre under the leadership of local leaders.

In this case, what local resources did Li Lisan rely on to start the labor move-
ment as the special commissioner? Having been born and raised in Liling, Li Lisan
was familiar with general information on the border area between Hunan and
Jiangxi as well as the coal mines in Pingxiang and Anyuan. He knew that it was
impossible to immediately carry out a large-scale labor movement against the
severe guards of the mine police and local military forces. He had to make use
of legal means to gradually establish relationships with workers. He stated that his
father was ‘teaching Chinese in the local area and worked in some social societies;
he was a gentleman’ (Li, 1999: 527): through his father’s relations in Liling and
Pingxiang he got in touch with the gentry who had connections with the Mining
Bureau. With their help, Li Lisan came into contact with the manager of the
Mining Bureau and obtained the qualifications for publicly establishing a workers’
continuation school and workers’ club (Li, 2004). In terms of his identity as a Party
cadre, Li Lisan was a special commissioner dispatched by the Central Party
Committee, rather than a local revolutionary leader like Mao Zedong. From child-
hood he knew Sun Xiaoshan, who was a member of the Chinese Revolutionary
League and the Society of Brothers in his town (Li, 1999). Li Lisan soon discovered
that there was a secret society in Anyuan which had workers as its chief members
(Li, 1999). Before the Anyuan strike, Li Lisan paid a visit to the secret society and
communicated with secret societies during the May Thirtieth Movement in
Shanghai, showing that he had close relationships with secret societies.

It was necessary to organize the mass of coal miners to launch strikes and
develop a long-term Anyuan labor movement. However, the Machinery Branch
of the Chinese Labor Union in Hunan, the Hunan Labor Association, had previ-
ously only contacted railway workers and had failed to organize the mass of coal
miners, and in the first six months after Li Lisan had arrived in Anyuan, he only connected with railway workers. The general history of the Anyuan Club contains the following note.

The members reached over 300 at the third preparation meeting on April 16; therefore, Li Nengzhi was voted in as Director General and Zhu Shaolian as Deputy Director, and several assessment officers were selected. At the Labor Day meeting on May 1, the Club was founded. After its founding, there were not many new participants (Liu and Zhu, 1980: 149).

This means that on the occasion of the Club’s founding on 1 May 1922, there were only a little over 300 members, which was nothing compared with the over ten thousand railway workers and coal miners. After the founding of the Club, there were not many active participants. The number of members did not change until the dawn of the day on which the strike began on September 14. The general history of the Anyuan Club also stated, ‘There were only a little over 700 members in the Club until midnight of September 13 before the strike’ (Liu and Zhu, 1980). In other words, from its foundation in May to the outbreak of the strike in September, the total number of members increased only from 300-plus to 700-plus, an increase of only about 400 members.

In this case, who were the first 300-plus members in the Club? Li Lisan once recalled that at first, he knew only Zhou Jingquan and Li Disheng, workers at the car repairing workshop in the Railway Bureau in Anyuan. He then asked them to mobilize other workers to study at the night school (Li, 1991a). Through the two workers at the Railway Bureau, Li Lisan was connected with Zhu Shaolian, a railway driver, and more railway workers (Li, 1991b). Zhu Shaolian worked over 10 years at the Zhuping Railway as a railway driver. He was also a graduate of the railway school. He had some prestige among railway workers. His appointment as Deputy Director demonstrated his power among railway workers. Because Li Lisan was first connected with railway workers, he and Zhu Shaolian, the railway driver, could only have connections with railway workers in the Railway Bureau.

The railway workers and coal miners in Anyuan included not only a small number of railway workers but also a great many coal miners. Why did the coal miners, who made up the main body of railway workers and coal miners, fail to participate actively in the Club? The reason is associated with the labor intensity, education level, and ideological awareness of the two groups of workers. Most of the railway technical workers had studied in upper primary schools or above, and some had even graduated from high schools or polytechnic schools (both Zhu Shaolian and Li Disheng graduated from polytechnic schools). They had higher educational levels, and they frequently took trains and were well-informed; they were the first to get the most important information about other railways and cities and were open to accepting advanced ideological trends. They had spare time after work, and thus they had the time and willingness to participate in Club activities. Coal miners, on the other hand, had a low literacy rate, and indeed many of them
were illiterate. They worked long hours underground in tough environments with high labor intensity, and thus, they enjoyed themselves with feasting and other kinds of entertainment after work and showed no interest in reading, learning, and Club activities. More importantly, the foremen and secret societies were the most important factors determining the lifestyles, accommodation, production, and collective behaviors of the coal miners in Anyuan. Records of the Mining Bureau of Ping Mine show that during the early period after the Pingxiang Mine was established, a labor contracting system was adopted in mining, propping and transporting in the gallery, and that later this system was expanded to cover loaders engaged in coal washing and coking. The production units such as the East-West Gateway and Straight Hole were undertaken by large contractors; often within mining engineering, the large contractors employed small contractors, while small contractors employed workers (Editorial Committee of Pingxiang Mining Bureau Chronicles, 1998). The contractors were responsible for the employment, salaries, accommodation, and working processes of workers, and thus, strong relationships of attachment and protection were established between contractors and workers (Ma, 2016a).

At the same time, secret societies (as secret social societies among the people) could attract a great many refugees. They were an important power that could control the lower classes in modern China. The secret societies were very active in the Ping-Liu-Li region and participated in the Ping-Liu-Li Armed Uprisings in 1906. Perry (2014: 37) also pointed out

The Society of Brothers took control of the laborers who lacked skills and were responsible for all kinds of revolts and group violence in Pingxiang during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Secret societies served as catalysts for most of the xenophobia events and periodic strikes that harassed life in Pingxiang.

After the establishment of Anyuan Coal Mine in Pingxiang, the secret societies seized some projects related to coal mining and transportation, and they also took control of trades around the coal mine, such as those along the wharf and in the station, shops, hotels and gaming houses. Many foremen and workers were members of the secret societies, and were protected by them. Therefore, in order to motivate the coal miners, it was necessary to connect with the contractors for the mines, but first the local secret societies had to be connected with to be able to come into contact with the contractors.

Under the influence of the flourishing labor movement in China in September 1922, especially the strike of workers in the Wuhan-Changsha Section of the Yuehan Railway at the beginning of September, the workers of Zhuping Railway, which was linked to the Wuhan-Changsha Section, also considered going on strike. However, without the cooperation of the coal miners, any strikes by the minority railway workers would have been suppressed by military police. Li Lisan returned to Anyuan from Changsha on 9 September, and Liu Shaoqi left the site of the strike at Wuhan-Changsha Section of Yuehan Railway to arrive in Anyuan on 11 September. They went together to organize the strike by workers.
in Anyuan, but on the eve of the strike, there were only about 700 members in the Club: how could they launch an orderly strike by motivating the coal miners? Li Lisan (1991:900) recalled,

> If workers didn’t join the most powerful secret society (Chinese Freemasons), they would not get a job. So, most of them joined it, and the contractors were chiefs in the Chinese Freemasons. If we hadn’t won over the Chinese Freemasons, we had no other alternative.

The turning point came on the night of 13 September, when Li Lisan paid a visit to the Chinese Freemasons and sought their cooperation. That night, accompanied by several contractors who were skilled in martial arts and who had backgrounds as Chinese Freemasons, Li Lisan visited the boss of the Chinese Freemasons with Chinese liquor (Huang and Liu, 1982) and on the morning of 14 September, both railway workers and coal miners went on strike at the same time. Mediated by all parties, on the morning of 18 September, representatives of the Anyuan Railway Bureau and Mining Bureau and Li Lisan, representing the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners, officially signed an agreement, marking the victory of the five-day strike (Editing Group of Labor Movement of Coal Miners and Railway Workers in Anyuan by Pingxiang Municipal Committee of the CPC, 1991).

**The problem of unity after the reorganization of the Club**

After the victory of the strike, over 10,000 coal mining and railway workers joined the Club, causing a sharp increase in membership. Meanwhile, based on the agreement with the Club, the Mining Bureau and the Railway Bureau had to pay activity funds of over 10,000 yuan to the Club at regular intervals. To adapt to the reality of increased membership and funds, the Club had to be reorganized and reestablish its structural organization and elect new managers. According to *The General History of the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners*, the Club was reorganized in October 1922, and Li Lisan was elected General Director, Zhu Shaolian Director in charge of the Railway Bureau, Liu Shaoqi Director in charge of affairs outside the gallery, and Yu Jiangtao Director in charge of affairs inside the gallery. They formed the first of the Club’s boards of directors. Seven chiefs were selected for subsections, and over 30 people were selected as subsection members (Liu and Zhu, 1980). The board of directors was generally considered the supreme executive organization in the Club to manage all the Club’s daily affairs and ought to have played an important role in the Club after the strike. However, this was not the case. Liu Shaoqi made the following criticism of the board of directors on the anniversary of the strike concerning its work over the past year.

> The board of directors treated affairs too carelessly and unsystematically. Their whereabouts were unknown, so they could not understand the details of some affairs;
the board provided no centralized leadership over all subsections, and some subsections even carried out their affairs independently. It suffices to demonstrate their carelessness that they only held a few meetings during the year. They worked too little. Among the four directors, only two of them worked. Each of them undertook too many responsibilities to instruct and guide workers. (Liu, 1980: 120)

Surprisingly, the working status of the board of directors over the past year had been ‘too careless’ and ‘too unsystematic’, but this situation makes sense upon specific analysis: after the reorganization of the Club, Li Lisan, the General Director, did not stay long in Anyuan. He was the special commissioner dispatched by the Central Committee, and after his successful leadership in the strike by workers in Anyuan, he had to go out frequently to lend a hand to labor movements in other places. Zhu Shaolian, the Director in charge of the Railway Bureau, could only get in touch with railway workers. He had his job running trains every day, so he was unable to engage in daily affairs of the Club full time. Yu Jiangtao, the Director in charge of affairs inside the gallery, worked as study supervisor in the Gallery Work Division of the coal mine. He was promoted because he sought information for the Club during the strike, but he failed to maintain good relationships with workers (Liu, 1980; Yi, 1981). Liu Shaoqi, the Director in charge of affairs outside the gallery, went to Anyuan on the eve of the strike. He had no local resources in Anyuan and had poor working and mental status (this point shall be specified below). Li Lisan worked away for a long time, the other three directors had their own work, and without the equivalent prestige and resources of Li Lisan, none could unite the Club. This resulted in the disorder of the board of directors during the past year, and led to Liu Shaoqi making this criticism of the General Director Li Lisan on the anniversary of the strike,

Li Nengzhi is a very able man who is good at solving problems, but he is too careless and often omits small things. He is not good at putting things in order, not familiar with procedures of affairs, and the disorder in handling affairs within the Club and sloppiness of the board of directors might account for his faults (Liu, 1980: 121).

The condition of the board of directors during the year after the Club’s reorganization did not improve; on the contrary, the problems became more prominent after personnel changes in the board. After the 2.7 Massacre in 1923, the Club’s General Director Li Lisan was transferred to Hubei. Some cadres in Hubei and Anhui were transferred to Anyuan, and the personnel of the Club’s board of directors also changed. The Report of the First Officers’ Meeting includes the following statement.

After General Director Li Nengzhi left Anyuan in April, Liu Shaoqi, Director of affairs outside of the gallery, served as acting General Director; Yu Jiangtao, the Director in charge of affairs inside the gallery, also left Anyuan in April, and Liu Shaoqi also took over his duties; while since March, Lu Chen had served as acting
Director in charge of affairs outside the gallery (while serving as the Director in charge of affairs outside the gallery, Liu Shaoqi had remained in Changsha after he left Anyuan in January and was expected to stay there for a long time, so Lu Chen acted on his behalf). (Lu, 1980: 209)

That is to say, after Li Lisan left Anyuan in April 1923, Liu Shaoqi served as General Director of the Club and Director in charge of affairs inside the gallery, Lu Chen was the Director in charge of affairs outside the gallery, and Zhu Shaolian remained the Director in charge of the Railway Bureau. Zhu Shaolian could not work in the Club for long because of his duties in train operation; Liu Shaoqi went away to Changsha; and Lu Chen was the only member of the board of directors working full-time in the Club. Lu Chen used the two phrases ‘having nothing to say’ and ‘muddling with their duties’ in the second officers’ meeting in September 1924 to severely criticize the work of the board of directors from August 1923 to September 1924 (Lu, 1980: 341–342). This fully confirms the disorder of the board of directors, which became even worse after Li Lisan left Anyuan. After Liu Shaoqi left his post in January 1925 for Shanghai, Lu Chen succeeded Liu as General Director, and before long, the September Massacre in Anyuan broke out. The massacre had external causes, but it was also greatly associated with the disorder of the Club’s board of directors after its reorganization.

It can be inferred from the above discussion that although Li Lisan, as the special commissioner in early stages of the CPC, was called the second-generation leader, he was actually the founder, developer and leader of the Anyuan labor movement. The victory of the Anyuan labor movement could largely be attributed to Li Lisan’s local resources and personal ability to call up all forces in Anyuan. However, the special commissioners of the CPC did not work for long periods in one place like regional revolutionary leaders or local cadres; they could be transferred to other regions or other posts based on the work demands of the CPC at any time. When Li Lisan was away working on the labor movement in other regions, especially after he was transferred away from Anyuan, his successor was unable to take over his local resources and, therefore, could not maintain the unity of the Club. The long period of disorder and lack of leadership created hidden perils leading to the September Massacre.

The internal and external dilemmas of Special Commissioner Liu Shaoqi in Anyuan

Liu Shaoqi, also called the third-generation leader of the Anyuan labor movement, took over the post of General Director after Li Lisan left his post and remained in that position until he left Anyuan in January 1925. However, during the two years when Liu Shaoqi administrated Anyuan, he had very poor working and mental status, and the Anyuan labor movement was at its low ebb. The report of the Second Officers’ Meeting of the Club included the following criticism: ‘As for the general status of the Club in the past year, General Director Liu Shaoqi was
frequently ill and could not undertake much work’ (Lu, 1980: 341–342) and used ‘having nothing to say’ and ‘muddling with his duties’ to describe the work of Liu Shaoqi in his first year of administration in Anyuan. As early as the anniversary of the strike, Liu Shaoqi (1980: 121) criticized himself as being ‘in a poor state of mind, too prudent, and showing unwillingness and sloppiness in talking with and interviewing workers. I did not concentrate on putting things in order’. The report stated that ‘Later, he [Liu Shaoqi] was not so responsible for the affairs in the Club and caused much misunderstanding among workers. That was all his fault.’

The facts show that during the years when Liu Shaoqi worked in Anyuan, he had poor working and mental status, poor communication skills, and poor relationships with workers. In addition, Liu Shaoqi was born in Ningxiang, a place adjacent to western Hunan (unlike Li Lisan, who was born in Liling, which is in eastern Hunan) and thus had few local resources in Anyuan. Furthermore, the labor movement in the whole country sank to a low ebb after the 2.7 Massacre. At that time, Anyuan was in ‘helpless isolation’. Lacking local resources and the ability to communicate with foremen and secret societies, with constant changes in the environment for a labor movement, Liu Shaoqi was beset with troubles internally and externally during his governance in Anyuan. It now seems baffling that on the eve of the strike in Anyuan, Li Lisan had the ability and resources to lead the strike. Who sent Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan on the eve of the strike? What was the person’s intention in doing so? What was Liu Shaoqi’s cadre identity: was he a local cadre or a special commissioner? How could Liu Shaoqi administrate the Club for so long despite his poor working and mental status and internal and external troubles?

First, let us look at the cadre identity of Liu Shaoqi during his stay in Anyuan. According to Liu Shaoqi’s Chronicles, in the summer of 1921, he and Ren Bishi were sent to study in Moscow by the Central Committee. They returned to Shanghai in the spring of 1922 and worked in the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department as arranged by the organization. After the Second National Congress of the CPC, Chen Duxiu, Secretary of the CPC Central Committee met Liu Shaoqi and sent him back to Hunan to work, instructing him to hand the documents of the Second National Congress of the CPC to the Executive Committee of the CPC in Hunan Area. After Liu Shaoqi returned to Hunan, he met the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the CPC in Hunan Area, Mao Zedong, and was appointed a member of the Executive Committee of the CPC in Hunan Area (CPC Central Committee Literature Research Office, 1996). After Liu Shaoqi had worked in Changsha for about two months, he went to Anyuan on 11 September. As one of the first young cadres to receive education in Russia, Liu Shaoqi was assigned by the Central Committee to work in an important organization, met Chen Duxiu after the Second National Congress of the CPC, and was later sent to work in Hunan and pass documents to Mao Zedong. The facts demonstrate that Liu Shaoqi was a special commissioner of the CPC, the same as Li Lisan, not a local cadre under the command of Mao Zedong.
In this case, who suddenly sent Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan on the eve of the Anyuan strike in September 1922? The prevailing view is that Mao Zedong dispatched Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan, as is recorded in Liu Shaoqi’s Chronicles. However, this view assumes Liu Shaoqi to be a local cadre who was under the command of Mao Zedong, an assumption which totally conflicts with his identity as a special commissioner in the early stage of the CPC. Furthermore, Mao Zedong had previously been to Anyuan and knew a great deal about the statuses of all powers in the Anyuan Coal Mine as well as that of Liu Shaoqi, so how could he have dispatched a person with no local resources to Anyuan? In addition, Liu Shaoqi’s transference to Shanghai, Wuhan, and Guangzhou from Anyuan was assigned by the Central Committee, which had nothing to do with Mao Zedong. Which leader in the Central Committee sent Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan? It seemed that both the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Chen Duxiu, and Director of the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department Zhang Guotao, might possibly have appointed him. After comprehensively reviewing the information on the posts of all parties and activities during that period, I believe that Liu Shaoqi was appointed by Zhang Guotao, Director of the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department to work in Anyuan, not by Chen Duxiu.

One direct and most important piece of evidence is that Liu Shaoqi’s speech on ‘Criticism on the past of the Club and future planning’ on the anniversary of the strike in August 1923 began with the sentence, ‘It has been one year since I was ordered by the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department to come to Anyuan to help railway workers and coal miners’ (Liu, 1980: 119) (italics added by the author). The Director of the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department was Zhang Guotao. When Liu Shaoqi was studying in Moscow, he met Zhang Guotao, who was then head of the Chinese delegation for the Congress of the Communist Parties in Far-eastern Asia and National Revolutionary Groups. Liu Shaoqi, as a working staff member, did clerical work for the Congress. After Liu Shaoqi returned to China in 1922, he was immediately appointed to work in the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department. Although Chen Duxiu met Liu Shaoqi after the Second National Congress of the CPC and sent him back to Hunan to pass Congress documents to Mao Zedong (who had not attended the Congress), in view of the activities that Chen Duxiu was involved in, Chen had little chance of suddenly sending Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan in September. In August and September, after the Second National Congress of the CPC, Chen Duxiu was busy discussing Kuomintang-Communist cooperation with Ma Lin, and at the beginning of October, he attended the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in Russia and returned at the beginning of the next year (Tang and Lin, 1988). During Chen’s stay in Russia, Zhang Guotao was acting as the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, and the directorship of the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department was taken over by Deng Zhongxia (Zhang, 1998). During this period, the chief task within the Party was still carrying out the labor movement, and Zhang Guotao also served as a leader in providing assistance to the Movement of Labor Legislation, the Beijing-Hankou railway strike and in
the 2.7 Massacre. By comparing the activities of Chen and Zhang around that September, we can infer that there was little possibility for Chen in sending Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan, while Zhang had the greatest possibility of doing so. Moreover, since Chen Duxiu had sent Li Lisan, an able cadre with resources to promote the work in Anyuan, it was not necessary to send Liu Shaoqi, who had no local resources in Anyuan.

Since Anyuan had the able leader Li Lisan to lead workers’ strikes, why did Zhang Guotao send Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan? It should not be ignored that Zhang Guotao was born and raised in Pingxiang. His understanding about local coal mines, secret societies and warlords was surely no less than that of Li Lisan. The Anyuan Coal Mine in Pingxiang was an important coal-mining area in modern south China, belonging to a Hanyeping Company such as the Hanyang Iron Works. Zhang Guotao, who was in charge of the national labor movement, and also a Pingxiang native, knew well the importance of the labor movement in this region to the movement in Hunan and Hubei provinces and even throughout the country, and he would naturally send important cadres to Anyuan for the labor movement. As a matter of fact, Zhang Guotao had previously sent Xu Baihao and Lin Yunan to the Hanyang Iron Works to lead the labor movement there (Bao, 1983) and published an article with the headline ‘Tens of thousands of workers in Hanyeping will lose their jobs’ (China Labor Movement History Research Office of All China Federation of Trade Unions, 1984: 593). This shows that he attached great importance to the labor movement in the subordinate plant of the large-scale joint venture for steel and coal in modern China. Zhang Guotao might have been aware that Chen Duxiu had sent Li Lisan to work in Anyuan and well knew the respective abilities of Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, but it would have been better if a person without local resources had been sent to Anyuan to lead the labor movement there. Liu and Li were fellow townsmen; they were both special commissioners of the CPC and had previously co-organized a labor movement in Changsha. It was thus not unnatural that Chen Duxiu would send Liu Shaoqi to Anyuan from the Wuhan-Changsha Section of Yuehan Railway to co-organize the strike by coal miners and railway workers in Anyuan and support the strike by Yuehan Railway workers, with the intention of expanding the influence of the labor movement in Hunan and Hubei provinces.

However, Liu Shaoqi was in a poor working and mental state in Anyuan and experienced internal and external troubles after Li Lisan left Anyuan, so how could he lead the Anyuan labor movement for nearly two years? I believe this has much to do with changes in the position of the labor movement clique represented by Zhang Guotao, in the party before and after the Third National Congress of the CPC. After the resolution to carry out the labor movement was issued by the First National Congress of the CPC, led by Zhang Guotao, General Director of the China Labor Combination Secretary’s Department, the first climactic period of the labor movement emerged in the country. During this process, cadres who were engaged in affairs of the labor movement, from the Central Committee to local party committees, received more attention, and an important power consisting of
the labor movement clique led by Zhang Guotao was gradually formed. However, after the 2.7 Massacre in 1923, the labor movement of the whole country sank to a low ebb. Where the labor movement was now to go and whether it was the chief path to realizing revolutionary goals became questions in urgent need of addressing and subsequent discussion. Although the Communist International passed a resolution that required the CPC to join the Kuomintang in the name of individuals and carry out a national movement, at the Third National Conference of the CPC in July of 1923, there were fierce disputes on some issues, such as whether there was a need to start a national movement and how to launch it; if there was a need to stop the labor movement; and if there was a way out for the labor movement. The labor movement clique headed by Zhang Guotao maintained at the Third National Conference of the CPC that the Chinese workers were powerful and raised suspicions regarding the future of Kuomintang-Communist cooperation and the national movement. The attitude challenged the authority of the Communist International and Chen Duxiu, the General Secretary the CPC Central Committee, and naturally it received criticism at the Third National Conference of the CPC. Chen Duxiu criticized Zhang Guotao in the conference report ‘Undoubtedly, Comrade Zhang Guotao is loyal to the Party; however, he is very narrow-minded and has committed many errors. He organized a small group within the Party. This was a big mistake.’ (The State Archives Administration, 1989: 172). In a report written by Hendricus Josephus Franciscus Marie Sneevliet, he explicitly described the activities of Zhang Guotao’s group and its status in being ejected from the Third National Conference of the CPC.

During the past year, constant conflicts took place among comrades in the Party. At first a ‘small group’ headed by Zhang Guotao, member of the Central Committee, was organized within the Party. Zhang divided party members into two categories, good party members and bad party members, and intended to strengthen party activities through his group. When I came to China for the second time in August 1922, four of the five members of the Central Committee were in this small group... Most of the conflicts in some branches were caused by the tricks of this small group, so Zhang Guotao received only 6 out of 40 votes in the election of members of the Central Committee at the Third National Conference of the CPC. He and the other two organizers of the small group failed in winning the election to become members of the Central Committee. Only one remained among the members of the Central Committee, the Editor-in-Chief of the News Weekly. He was much better than the other four people.(Translated by the First Research Department of Party History Research Centre, 1997: 476–478.)

Obviously, Zhang Guotao and Gao Junyu, members of the Second National Congress of the CPC lost the election and failed to be elected as alternate members of the Central Committee. Deng Zhongxia was demoted to be an alternate member of the Central Committee. After the Third National Conference of the CPC, the key task of the CPC was to carry out the national movement, while Zhang Guotao
and Gao Junyu were sent to northern China for the labor movement. Deng Zhongxia was elected a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China at the Second National Congress of the Youth League. The demotion of members in Zhang Guotao’s group at the Third National Conference of the CPC inevitably affected Liu Shaoqi, who was a special commissioner in the labor movement system. According to document records, the original representatives of Hunan at the Third National Conference of the CPC were Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi (The State Archives Administration and The Hunan Provincial Archives Administration, 1983: 85); however, it turned out to be Mao Zedong and the worker representative Zhu Shaolian who were present as representatives of Hunan province; moreover, they were elected as members of the Central Committee at the Third National Conference of the CPC. After Li Lisan was transferred away from Anyuan, having been affected by the downfall of the cadres in the labor movement system, Liu Shaoqi encountered internal and external difficulties and could not be transferred to other regions for more important work. He had to work in Anyuan for two more years in ‘helpless isolation’. After the Fourth National Congress of the Communist Party of China met in January 1925, the CPC realized for the second time that the foundation of the working class could not be discarded in the Kuomintang-Communist cooperation, and that the labor movement should be enhanced. In this case, the cadres of the labor movement system were again put in important positions and Liu Shaoqi was transferred to Shanghai to organize a labor movement there right away.

It is thus clear that although Liu Shaoqi and Li Lisan were both special commissioners in the early stages of the CPC, they were very different in terms of work performance as leaders of the Anyuan labor movement. On the one hand, this was closely related to special commissioners’ personal local resources; on the other hand, it had to do with special commissioners’ positions within the Party. The Central Committee was not a uniform body: the divergence and disputes among different groups, systems and cliques within the Central Committee could affect the focus of work during different periods of the CPC, and the changes of position among the different cliques, and the consequent effect on the appointment of special commissioners within different cliques, would affect their working performance.

The relationship between the system of special commissioners and the rise and fall of the Anyuan labor movement

For the Anyuan labor movement, an important base of the labor movement in the early stages of the CPC, from the inspection period of the local leader Mao Zedong, to the foundation period of Special Commissioner Li Lisan, to the maintenance period of Special Commissioner Liu Shaoqi and the teacher Lu Chen, there was a progression from prosperity to decline, and the movement was ultimately suppressed. In the small hours of 21 September 1925, Sheng Enyi, General Manager of the Hanyeping Company, together with troops led by Li Hongchen,
the Western Jiangxi Commander and military police in coal mines, staged a surprise attack on the Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners and conducted the Anyuan September Massacre, which shocked the whole country. The Club was closed, the Workers’ Consumer Cooperative and workers’ school were ransacked, over 10,000 workers were dismissed, and the Deputy Director of the Club, Huang Jingyuan, was murdered. The massacre produced disastrous losses (Liu and Memorial Hall of Labor Movement by Anyuan Railway Workers and Coal Miners, 1993: 259). In a specific response to the massacre, the Hunan Provincial Party Committee of the CPC passed the ‘Resolution on the Andi Event’ on 4 January 1926. The resolution severely criticized three aspects of the Club: weak leadership, completely exposing all forces by publicizing work, and stressing only peace in workers’ education and economic reforms (Editing Group of Labor Movement of Coal Miners and Railway Workers in Anyuan by Pingxiang Municipal Committee of the CPC, 1991).

As for looseness in leadership, it was pointed out in a document criticizing the Club by the Hunan Provincial Party Committee of the CPC,

Till the date of the massacre, Andi hadn’t made any specific preparation. On the date when the massacre took place, the person in charge ran away, and that resulted in the big failure. The person in charge in Anyuan indeed committed severe mistakes at this point. (Editing Group of Labor Movement of Coal Miners and Railway Workers in Anyuan by Pingxiang Municipal Committee of the CPC, 1991: 542)

However, based on the analysis in this paper, the looseness within the organization of the Club was not formed right before the massacre, it was not merely the individual problem of Lu Chen, the new General Director, it was not even only the problem of the Anyuan labor movement. It was greatly associated with the working methods in leading the labor movement of the CPC, especially the system of special commissioners. Special Commissioner Li Lisan obtained the legal qualifications for publicly establishing a workers’ school and Club by relying on his own local resources; moreover, he won the support of the foremen and secret societies. On this basis, he finally launched the big strike by workers in Anyuan. After the victory of the strike, Li Lisan could resolve divergence among foremen and secret societies within the Club and the revolutionists outside the Club when he was the General Director of the Club. After he left Anyuan, his successors, Liu Shaoqi and Lu Chen, could not take over Li Lisan’s local resources among the Mining Bureau, foremen, and secret societies. All powers within the Club gradually became divided, and the unity of the Club could not be maintained. This posed huge perils that led to the cruel suppression of the Club.

It is thus clear that, although special commissioners were used in developing the labor movement in the early stages of the CPC, the system of special commissioners could mobilize workers extensively; however, there was a risk in relying too much on the personal resources of special commissioners. If one special commissioner wanted to work long-term in the region, the risk of localism and sectionalism might easily increase; and if the special commissioner left the region, the work could not
be sustained and instead might be severely damaged. The outbreak of the 2.7 Massacre and September Massacre in Anyuan were strongly related to this point. Deng Zhongxia made the following comment in summarizing the lessons learned from the 2.7 Massacre.

The comrades in charge of the labor movement made a very big mistake, which is that they failed to develop Party organization within labor unions. The Beijing-Hankou railway strike was undoubtedly led by the CPC; however, the leadership was not down-to-earth, and the impact of the CPC could hardly be found among the lower-class people. There were no more than 50 communists among railway workers at that time. How could this small number motivate the vast multitude? Moreover, the organization of labor unions was not completed. Although the labor unions were organized, most of them were in the initial stages, to say nothing of becoming well-organized. Indeed, if there had been a strong communist party and well-organized labor unions, even though the power would not be strong enough to fight against armed forces, it would not face such a devastating defeat. (Deng, 1983: 512)

The Hunan Provincial Party Committee of the CPC criticized the Anyuan labor movement for its complete publicity without proper confidentiality. However, there were military police of the Mining Bureau walking around and troops of warlords outside the Anyuan coal mine, and also different cliques and types of work among workers as well as the patron-client relations between secret societies, foremen and workers within the coal mines. In the face of the mighty secret societies, military police, and warlords, if Li Lisan had not carried out activities through public and legal means by getting the legal qualifications for starting workers’ schools and organizing a workers’ club, the Anyuan labor movement could not have been mobilized and developed; if good relationships had not been established with all parties, such as the Mining Bureau, secret societies, and workers, the Anyuan labor movement would not have been sustained. This was not only the case for the Anyuan labor movement, the labor movements in other regions were in the same situation. Although the labor movement of the whole country suffered a defeat in the 2.7 Massacre of 1923, the CPC did not at first completely realize what the relationship was between public and confidential work. Until the failure of the Great Revolution, especially in the Yan’an Period, Liu Shaoqi and Zhang Wentian began to systematically discuss and elaborate on the links and differences between the two points in working in the White Area.

In addition, the Hunan Provincial Party Committee of the CPC also criticized the Club for practising a peaceful route of developing education and improving economic life, rather than political struggle. Anyuan Club of Railway Workers and Coal Miners attached great importance to educating workers and spent a great amount of funds purchasing equipment for the workers’ continuation school and school for the children of workers, as well as teachers’ salaries. The fourth-generation leader of the Anyuan labor movement, Lu Chen, was a key member of the Liqun Publishing House. Deeply influenced by Yun Daiying, he attached
special importance to educational activities among workers during his leadership in the Anyuan labor movement. However, both illiteracy elimination among common workers and political education had undesired effects on the mass of illiterate coal miners. The Education Department of the Club pointed out in its first-year working report,

They had to work over ten hours during the daytime, so how could they keep in good spirits at night? The workers who had families had to take care of their families, and as a result, there were a lot of absent students. Nothing can be done in this situation. (Cai, 1980: 242)

Liu Shaoqi (1980: 121–122) also pointed out in the Anniversary Album for Strike Victory of the Club in August 1923, ‘The workers’ continuation school, we can say it was a complete failure’.

Although great troubles would emerge in the real practice of educating workers, and this method could hardly resist the armed suppression by military police and warlords, we should not judge the ideological significance of workers’ education by actual and temporary success or failure. Yun Daiying (1984: 226) pointed out at first

The enthusiastic revolutionists should understand that revolution is not a remedy for all diseases. In terms of its destructive forces, it takes effect only when some requirements are met. In this case, we should never act recklessly and carry out revolution without learning and cultivation. I still expect braver and more practical men engaged in the fundamental resolution of our society, which lies not only in fierce destruction, but also in obscure but contributing construction undertakings.

According to Yun Daiying, revolution should be carried out in long-term, peaceful and constructive ways rather than transient, violent and destructive ways; the realization of revolution should rely on the massive majority, rather than a minority of people.

The idea and assertion of Yun Daiying proposed a problem that merits reflection: in the revolutionary conflict, what is the relationship between the minority of professional revolutionaries and the masses? What does revolution rely on, the organization of the minority of professional revolutionaries, or the rise and consciousness of the masses? The system of special commissioners, in leading the labor movement in the early stage of the CPC, originated theoretically from the theory of the communist party as a vanguard organized by a minority of professional revolutionaries under the strict disciplines in Lenin’s What is to be done? (1986), published in 1902. At that time, Rosa Luxemburg criticized the theoretical view of Lenin during the international communist movement and believed that there was a possibility of the centralism of a minority of revolutionaries by the Central Committee; revolution relied more on obedience to discipline, rather than on the awakening and class-consciousness of the mass of proletariats (Luxemburg, 2012).
In the long-term course of revolution, commandism, centralism and bureaucratism appeared repeatedly in the CPC and produced great setbacks to revolution. This point can also demonstrate the complexity of the questions. These questions failed to define the relationship between the communist party of a minority of revolutionaries and the mass. While Yun Daiying proposed the ideas very early that ‘revolution is not a remedy for all diseases’ and ‘revolution lies not only in fierce destruction, but also in obscure but contributing construction undertakings’, which at least serve as reminders for us to note the complicated relationship mentioned above in understanding the system of special commissioners that took centralism as its core spirit.

Conclusions

In the past studies on the history of the labor movement led by the CPC, not only the analyses of class struggles in the history of revolution, but also studies of how the Kuomintang dealt with the question of labor and capital, maintained that the CPC, with the proletariat as its base, could inherently carry out a labor movement and win the support of the mass of workers for its definite class basis (Tian, 2009). After studying the ups and downs of the Anuan labor movement, I believe that the labor movement led by the CPC could hardly achieve success by merely depending on its class basis; it required a certain method of organization that could directly affect the rise and fall of a labor movement in a specific period.

First, the labor movement in the early stages of the CPC was actually not triggered by the class-consciousness of the mass of workers, nor by a unified command from the Central Committee, it relied on the personal resources of the special commissioner: the Anyuan labor movement was launched based on the local resources of Special Commissioner Li Lisan. Elizabeth J. Perry believed that the workers’ education activities implemented in Anyuan by early revolutionaries of the CPC cultivated the political consciousness of workers and created the tradition of ‘red scholars’. However, in reality the political education of workers encountered great difficulties and reaped poor benefits. Starting workers’ schools and teaching basic culture and knowledge in popular and easy-to-understand language among workers was a common method in the labor movement of all regions. Such a method was greatly influenced by the mass education in the period of the Republic of China, especially after the ‘May 4th Movement’, rather than being a creation of the CPC. The revolutionary youths of the CPC tried political education of workers, but in actual practice the coal miners showed no interest in even the simplest reading, to say nothing of political education. It is hard to say how much effect the young cadres achieved in motivating the workers’ strike and improving their class-consciousness through political education. In reality, the labor movement at that time could only be carried out through the local resources of labor movement leaders, rather than merely political education of workers. Therefore, the theory of ‘red scholars’ is not convincing at all.
Second, although the CPC pushed forward a labor movement through the Central Committee’s system of special commissioners, there were great discrepancies between the working performances of different special commissioners which affected the rise and fall of the local labor movement. In this paper, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, two special commissioners as professional revolutionaries, were analyzed. In their working periods as leaders of the Anyuan labor movement, there were great differences in terms of local resources, factions of the party, and focuses in the work of the Central Committee, which resulted in great discrepancies in working performance. After the Central Committee passed the resolution to carry out the labor movement, Li Lisan as a special commissioner with local resources in Anyuan was sent to Hunan by Chen Duxiu, the highest leader of the Central Committee, and Li Lisan launched the Anyuan labor movement; while Liu Shaoqi, without any local resources, was sent to Anyuan on the eve of the Anyuan strike by Zhang Guotao, a leader in charge of the labor movement system. After the 2.7 Massacre, the CPC shifted the focus of its work to the national movement, and the proportion of cadres in charge of labor movements decreased considerably. During Liu Shaoqi's entire two-year leadership term in Anyuan as the successor of Li Lisan, he was beset with troubles internally and externally for lack of local resources and the low ebb of the labor movement system, which hindered him from being transferred to more important working posts. By relying on the local resources of Special Commissioner Li Lisan, the labor movement of Anyuan was launched; inversely, as his successor, Liu Shaoqi could not take over the local resources of Li Lisan, and the Anyuan labor movement experienced a progressive decline.

Third, in the organization of the labor movement with the system of special commissioners, there was a huge internal tension between the unified leadership and personal resources of special commissioners. In this study it was pointed out that the Anyuan labor movement in its early stages and the labor movements in other regions were launched with the help of the personal resources of special commissioners, which also created great difficulties for the stability and sustainability of the CPC’s leadership in the labor movement. If one special commissioner wanted to work long-term in the region, the risk of localism might easily occur; and if the special commissioner left the region, the work could not be sustained and instead might be severely damaged. After that, the CPC tried to reinforce concentrated leadership by gradually establishing a set of bureaucratic organizations with clear hierarchies and the power to ensure the unified and effective leadership of the CPC. However, in its early revolutionary practices, the CPC was faced for a long period with the internal tension between the effectiveness of organizational discipline and individual autonomy (Ying and Li, 2014). In this sense, specific analysis of the early system of special commissioners of the CPC helps us to pay attention to the organization of the CPC in leading the labor movement and to understand the early forms of organizational development and evolution of the CPC.

Finally, one specific shortcoming of this study, due to lack of space, is the lack of specific analysis of the ins and outs of the fourth-generation leader of the Anyuan
labor movement, Lu Chen and his actual working performance. Yun Daiying’s revolutionary theory was mentioned briefly in this paper. However, studying Lu Chen’s work is very important for us to understand the system of special commissioners. Lu Chen was different from both the special commissioners who were typical revolutionaries, such as Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, and the local revolutionary leaders like Mao Zedong; Lu Chen was more of a cadre in the labor movement with the identity of a teacher under the leadership of Yun Daiying based on the teacher–student relationship. Although workers’ education failed to achieve the desired effect and the Hunan Provincial Party Committee of the CPC criticized the Anyuan labor movement for its neglect in the political struggle, we should not simply judge the idea of workers’ education based on success or failure in actual practice, nor criticize it by labeling it a ‘peaceful route’. This is because if we consider the affair within the circumstances at that time, these young people had different expectations and ideas regarding routes to revolution and ideal prospects for the future. Yun Daiying held that a stable and thorough revolution should rely on long-term construction and a solid foundation of the vast masses rather than on the strength of one person or minority. This encourages us to further reflect on the complicated relationship between the violent revolution launched by a minority of secret professional revolutionaries and the moderate, long-term construction route taken by relying on the working masses.

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Notes

1. ‘Cultural positioning’ refers to the function of revolutionists’ ‘strategic application of a series of suitable resources in political persuasion (e.g. religion, rituals, rhetoric, costumes, drama, arts, etc.)’; ‘cultural patronage’ refers to the ‘operation of official resources by local and central government officials, since the capital benefits obtained in the Anyuan labor movement were applied for different purposes’. See related studies by Perry (2014, pp 4, 10).
2. A specific analysis on the two labor movement leaders in the Anyuan labor movement can be found in Ma’s (2016c) doctoral dissertation.
3. Li Lisan attended the Federation of Trade Unions of Hunan in Changsha in November 1922, hosted the inaugural meeting of the Hanyeping Labor Union in Wuhan in December, and went to Beijing to provide assistance to the Tangshan workers’ strike.
in January 1923. After the 2.7 Massacre broke out in February, he was transferred to work in Wuhan from Anyuan. See the introduction to First Research Department of Party History Research Centre (1999: 634–635).

4. Zhang Guotao recalled the Ping-Liu-Li Armed Uprisings that he experienced in the first two chapters in My Memories (Vol. 1) (1998) and described the Chinese Freemasons in the region, as well as the changes to Pingxiang brought about by coal mining and railway traffic.

5. It was clearly mentioned in this article that Zhang Guotao attended the Railway Meeting in Zhengzhou held in July 1922 together with Lin Yunan and Xu Baihao and met with objections from Bao Huiseng, who was a subordinate of Chen Duxiu.

6. The letter of Hendricus Josephus Franciscus Marie Sneevliet to the Communist International had a very detailed record of notes of the statements and arguments at the Third National Conference of the CPC (see First Research Department of Party History Research Centre (1997: 461–475), which especially entailed the views of the four key figures, Hendricus Josephus Franciscus Marie Sneevliet, Chen Duxiu, Zhang Guotao and Mao Zedong.

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