

The Myth of the “Chinese Makhno”

Who is “Chu Cha-Pei”?

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Nestor Makhno was the leader of the Ukrainian Black Army and is famously known anarchist. But if you would open up your search engine and type in “Chu Cha-Pei”, you’ll make a surprising discovery of a man from Yunnan (☒☒) who is referred to as the “Chinese Makhno”.

So, who is “Chu Cha-Pei”? What did he do?

After a series of research, we can find that such a claim derives from a book titled *Anarchist Voices*, which documented the oral recollections of many anarchists. The information regarding “Chu Cha-Pei” can be found on page 409, from the words of “H.L.Weï”. To quote from the book itself:

I also knew Chu Cha-pei, a sort of Chinese Makhno from Yunan province in the south, near Burma and Indo-China, the son of a soldier. Following his father’s occupation, he too became a soldier and attended Whampoa Military Academy. He read Pa Chin’s translations of anarchist classics and became an ardent anarchist. He later met Pa Chin and visited me and my wife in Nanking in 1936. He told us that some day he would welcome us in an anarchist utopia in the south.

Chu Cha-pei actually knew about Makhno from Bao Puo, who wrote about him in the paper Kuo Feng (National Folkways) after returning to China from Moscow in 1923. Chu was tall, strong, intelligent. Like Pa Chin, he was a man of few words. He fought in turn against the Japanese, the Nationalists, and the Communists, just as Makhno had fought against the Austro-German occupiers, the Whites and Nationalists, and the Communists. Again like Makhno, his base of activity was in the mountains of his native district in the south, from which he continued to launch attacks against the Communist authorities throughout the 1950s. He is probably still there, still alive, hiding in the mountains of Yunan, though his precise whereabouts are unknown.

Other than this, there are no other existing documents that mention “Chu Cha-Pei”. Therefore, we need to start with the information that we already have and figure out who “H.L. Wei” is.

According to the context that was given before this interview, we can tell that the full form of “H.L. Wei” is “Wei Hwei Lin”, an anthropologist who was born in 1900, in Shanxi, China. Wei

actively participated in the May Fourth Movement and the May Thirtieth Movement. He was a good friend of Pa Chin¹, whom he studied abroad with in Paris. In 1949, Wei traveled to Taiwan.

Now, if you're a person who's knowledgeable enough about the Chinese Anarchist Movement, or the life of Pa Chin, you'll immediately think of a person named Wei Huilin (魏胡林). Despite that there is a minor difference between the recorded birth date from the book and other documents about Wei, every other piece of information fits well together, to the point that we can conclude that they are the same person.

Next, we must investigate the authenticity of the text provided, and one of the pieces of information that we can start with is if Pa Chin can be found in Nanking back in 1936. The answer is yes, Pa Chin did stay in Nanking during that period, and his purpose was to attend his friend's wedding. Two more things that were mentioned that we can work with are a person named "Bao Puo" and an article about Makhno that was published in a newspaper titled "Kuo Feng". From the fact that "Bao Puo" returned to China from Moscow, we can tell that he is Qin Baopu,² who is also the author of *A Journey in Red Russia* (魏胡林). "Kuo Feng" is likely to be the daily newspaper *Guo Feng* (国风) founded by Jing Meijiu (荆梅九). Because the original copy of the newspaper can no longer be found, we may never find out if there was an article about Makhno published on it. However, one of its supplements, *Xue Hui* (雪汇), did publish a series of articles written by Ōsugi Sakae (大杉 政), titled "The Anarchist General Makhno" (无政府主义者的马赫诺).

Thus, from the fact that the information provided by *Anarchist Voices* is almost flawless, and through the combined research of different sources, which reflects that Wei had no reason to lie, we can conclude that this person named "Chu Cha-Pei" did exist.

So, where should we begin? Since *Anarchist Voices* mentioned that "Chu Cha-Pei" had fought with both the Japanese invaders and the Chinese Communist Government, will there be any official records that mention him? The name "Chu Cha-Pei" should be romanized through the Wade-Giles system, and it translates to Zhu Zha-Bei (朱 哲 北) if it was in modern Mandarin Pinyin. Even though the actual name of this person might slightly differ, it should provide us with some clues.

Following this way of thinking, and through a brief survey on the Second Sino-Japanese War, we can tell that the main battlefield in Yunnan, during that time, was around north of the Nujiang (怒江). If we take a closer look at the local historical documents and many books written about the Second Sino-Japanese War in Western Yunnan, a person with a similar indeed name was found – a man named Zhu Jiabi (朱 吉 白), but he was a member of the communist party, instead of an anarchist, thus he was eliminated from our list of possibilities. After that, I took a look at some books that cover the Suppress Bandits Movement in Yunnan that happened in the first few years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, but there were still no matching results found.

Since official documents have failed us, we must switch our direction. If Chu was an anarchist, would we find anything from interviews and memoirs of other Chinese anarchists who lived during that period? I did find the following information from *Nine Interviews with the Founder of CCP in Canton: Recorded Conversations with Li Changren* (魏胡林——魏胡林):

¹ 魏胡林, also known as *Ba Jin*, another famous Chinese Anarchist who was mentioned in the quote above.

² 魏胡林, otherwise known as Qin Diqing (魏胡林)

“There was a group of people in Yunnan (namely the Shi Brothers (XXX)) who also shared faith in Anarchism. They’ve been to Guangzhou and then returned to Longling Tengchong in Western Yunnan (XXXXXXXX). They had their publications, and sent me a letter about it.”

So, could “Chu Cha-Pei” be a person who comes from such an area, and had been influenced by the Shi brothers? We cannot confirm that yet, but that is indeed a direction that we can head towards.

We also found a Yunnan anarchist named Chen Chunpei (XX), as he was recorded in a book by another Yunnan anarchist Zhang Jing (X), titled *Excerpts from the Spread of Anarchism in China* (XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX). The names are phonetically similar, and Chen had connections with Wei Huilin, who was mentioned above. This caused some suspicion. However, it appears that Chen never attended the Whampoa Military Academy, and “Chu Cha-Pei” obviously did. Maybe we may find Chu from the list of Whampoa alumni? After searching on the Whampoa Alumni website (XXXXXXXX), there was still not one matching result. This is also probably because the website did not have the complete list.

After multiple attempts, I had to leave this project to the side. From there on, a few others mentioned Chu with me in their conversations, and I shared my process of investigation with them with the hope that they might have some clues. However, no one did, and no one managed to find who “Chu Cha-Pei” really was, until...

One day I was chatting online, and someone asked about the anarchist participation in the Second Sino-Japanese War. A friend of mine, with the username “SaTuo” (X) mentioned “Chu Cha-Pei”, and I shared my knowledge with them. At that point, it had been two years since I started searching for Chu. SaTuo was very inspired, and they also found Zhu Jiabi after their research and asked me if it was him. At first, I denied it, as Zhu was the first possibility eliminated.

Then, SaTuo, with great disbelief, found a biographical article about Zhu Jiabi that was published in Baoshan Daily (XXX), which includes the following excerpt:

In contrast to Fei Bing (X), Zhu Jiabi also made himself familiar with anarchist readings. Not only did he read them himself, but he also shared these books with his peers and communicated his thoughts with them. Tang Dengmin (XX), who served as director-general of the political department of the 9th detachment, ‘Border Column’ (‘X’ 9XXXXXXXX), recalls: ‘I first met Comrade Zhu back in 1935. At the time, he was a squadron leader in Long Yun’s³ sergeant corp, stationed in the north school ground barrack of Kunming (X). I was only in middle school at the time, and my peer from a higher grade, Yu Yunlong (XX) introduced me to him, Zhu already appeared to me as a young soldier with ambitions and an unusual demeanor. Zhu was an anarchist, he loved reading and sharing them with the students and youths around him. Through Zhu, I managed to read Kropotkin’s *The Conquest of Bread* and *Mutual Aid*, *ShiFu’s writings* by Liu Shifu (XX), Li Feigan’s⁴ *From Capitalism to Anarchism* and Turgenev’s *Threshold*.’

Meanwhile, internationally, German and Italian Fascism were on the rise. In 1936, Spain established the Popular Front to counter the rise of Fascism, and to protect the democratic republic. Zhu was confused by the fact that the Spanish anarchists chose

³ X, a Yunnan Warlord

⁴ XX, another name for Pa Chin

to join and fight for the Republican government and sent Yu Yunlong to find Pa Chin in Shanghai to learn what was going on. Yu did not find Pa Chin in Shanghai, nor did he find him in Nanking, so he went on to look for Wu Zhihui (吴稚晖), who was also an anarchist. Yu managed to find Wu, but Wu had already become one of the big officials in the government, which baffled Yu. Not only did Yu not find Pa Chin, but he was also noticed by the Kuomintang.⁵ He had to hide in the French Concession in Shanghai and told Zhu what he had been through when he returned to Kunming. After all of this, Zhu and Yu had serious doubts about Anarchism and went on to believe that Anarchism could not save China from its current situation, thus they gave up on it. Yu unhappily went back to his hometown Longling, and later died by deceased.

From the evidence provided above, we can confirm that Zhu Jiabi is “Chu Cha-Pei”. Wei Huilin’s misunderstanding of Zhu was likely caused by the lack of information. Many of Zhu’s previous activities were not seen as his works as a member of the communist party, so Wei continued to think that Zhu was still an anarchist, and thus interpreted Zhu’s activities as anarchist activities. Due to the fact that at the beginning of my research, I did not look into Zhu’s biography, I had to take the long way around. But after all this, it is fortunate that the historical truth has finally been uncovered.

⁵ 国民党, the party that ruled most of China at the time through a loosely organized military government.

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