

Words and Their Stories

Handbook of Oriental Studies

Handbuch der Orientalistik

SECTION FOUR

China

Edited by

Stephen F. Teiser

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VOLUME 27

Words and Their Stories

Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution

Edited by
Ban WANG



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2011

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Words and their stories : essays on the language of the Chinese revolution / [edited] by Wang Ban.

p. cm. — (Handbook of Oriental studies. Section four, China, ISSN 0169-9520 ; v. 27 = Handbuch der orientalistik)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-18860-0 (hard cover : alk. paper)

1. Revolutions—China—History—20th century—Terminology. 2. China—Politics and government—1949–1976—Terminology. 3. China—Politics and government—1912–1949—Terminology. 4. Revolutionaries—China—Language. 5. Political culture—China—History—20th century. 6. Literature and revolutions—China—History—20th century. 7. Politics and literature—China—History—20th century. 8. Discourse analysis—Political aspects—China. I. Wang, Ban, 1957– II. Title. III. Series.

DS777.56.W67 2010
951.04'2—dc22

2010023733

ISSN 0169-9520
ISBN 978 90 04 18860 0

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UNDERSTANDING THE CHINESE REVOLUTION THROUGH WORDS: AN INTRODUCTION

Ban Wang

While we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also...recognize the reaction of the mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being, and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.

Mao Zedong;
“On Contradictions”

When he returned from the Second World War to Cambridge, England, Raymond Williams was perplexed by a strange new environment. He found that people spoke a different language. This led him to ponder the nature of vocabulary change. The new language, as opposed to the pre-war one, had “different immediate values or different kinds of valuation.” Although it was the same English, he was acutely aware of “different formations and distributions of energy and interest.”¹ Usually, language changes took centuries, but the interwar years had changed English drastically.

This linguistic alienation motivated Williams to launch an investigation into keywords in the vocabulary of popular and intellectual discourse. One such word is “culture.” He noticed that in daily conversation, “culture” was often used to refer to social superiority and education, or to an artistic or media profession. More often the word refers to a general notion of society or even a way of life.

But in this linguistic disorientation, “culture” remains fraught with contradictory meanings. Williams became aware of the term’s connections with industry, democracy, and art. One day, as he casually

¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 11.

looked up “culture” in the *Oxford New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, he had a shock of recognition. The changes, he realized, had begun in the nineteenth century. His explorations of interconnected meanings of keywords took on “not only an intellectual but an historical shape.”² *Culture* itself now has a different, though related history. Thus began an attempt to understand contemporary problems by trying to understand tradition and by tracing words’ histories.

Raymond Williams’ focus on words and their histories is an inspiration for this book. Since China started economic reform, revolutionary language, invented by and built into the center of the Chinese Revolution, has experienced a sea change. Scholars and critics, in a grim mood of farewell to revolution, have tended to take a harsh view of the revolutionary experience from the early days through Mao’s era. The trashing of the revolution is manifest in such wildly popular books as Jung Chang’s *Wild Swans* and *Mao: The Unknown Story*. The meanings of certain terms as building blocks of the revolution also underwent tremendous alteration. Critics in China, in an attempt to rewrite literary history, have attacked the Maoist style of discourse.

In her recent article “Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution,” Elizabeth Perry notes that the Chinese Revolution these days has few admirers. Historians like Joseph Esherick and Mark Selden, previously sympathizers, now think of the revolution not as liberation but as “the replacement of one form of domination with another,” not as inspiration but as forming an authoritarian state.³ Jeffrey Wasserstrom and associated scholars in the early 1990s undertook an important workshop project entitled “Language and Politics in Modern China.”⁴ The participants looked into the ideological, historical, propagandist, and repressive functions of a number of keywords in revolutionary political culture. Of these studies, the essay by Tim Cheek stresses the centrality of language in shaping revolutionary personality, power, and reality. Focusing on the rectification campaign in Yan’an, Cheek seeks to understand the language of the Chinese Revolution, approaching

² *Ibid.*, 13.

³ Elizabeth Perry, “Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 4 (November 2008): 1149.

⁴ Jeffrey Wasserstrom et al., *Indiana East Asian Working Papers Series on Language and Politics in Modern China (1993–1997)*, East Asian Studies Center, Indiana University (1994). Some papers or parts of them in this series have been published. This source is accessible with password through the Indiana University Library. I thank Professor Lin Zou for helping me access these papers.

the function of discourse as CCP cadres' top-down, authoritative dissemination of meanings. While he acknowledges that the party elite was not homogenous and was fraught with internal fissures, thus calling for sensitivity to the ways meanings are contested, his focus on power struggles among individuals, with their own personal traits and backgrounds, may have narrowed the historical horizon. A broad view would require a systematic analysis not of personalized and instituted power, but of power on political, national, populist, and international scales. Reading through the working papers of this group, I realized that as good historians they rightly put the words in their historical contexts and political environments, but most seemed to be writing in the shadow of the Cultural Revolution, whose catastrophes are implicitly traceable to the early revolutionary formations. Perry was a member of this working group. But in her 2008 article in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, she sees a change of mind in scholarship that calls for a new assessment. Despite her attempt to reclaim something precious from the revolution, however, she seems apologetic about this new turn, professing youthful idealism as a valid motivation.

In current scholarship, the Chinese Revolution is still viewed in the light of the dire consequences of the Cultural Revolution, or from the perspective of an all-controlling party apparatus. This is understandable in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and amid the widespread sentiment of "the end of history." In an age supposedly free from politics and ideology, revolutionary movements and activities are readily associated with terror, brutality, propaganda, and totalitarianism. Although Perry's study attempts to find certain redeeming themes of reform and democracy—in workers' education and reasoned dialogue between labor and capital in the Anyuan coal mine—it does not take into account the active forces within the sociopolitical realm as a whole: the imperialist powers, the parties, the warlord regime, and rising grassroots movements. All of these conflicted and interacted, demanding a total purview of the political landscape. Her retrieval of reasoned, civil discourse in the Anyuan mine implicitly shuns violence as an aberration in revolution. Thus the mine workers' "democratic" unionist activity signaled an untapped liberal potential. But if we imagine ourselves in the historical context, the violence and reason of the revolution cannot be so easily separated. Violence (or counter-violence) has reason, sometimes good reasons: there is method in madness. On the other hand, dialogue in normal "deliberative" politics or even litigation may be a medium of hidden or insidious violence, in

the way expressed by the Chinese phrase, “Murder without blood” (*sharen bu jian xue*). One can easily condemn a peasant uprising or armed struggle in Chinese history as violent, but how about the organized, sustained, banal violence inflicted by the ruling class in the guise of law and order; the invasions of imperialist powers in the name of international law; the rights and privileges, acquired at gunpoint, granted to territories and concessions; and bloody crackdowns on workers and peasants? To account for violence as historical vicissitudes and as political dynamics is not to endorse it. But to condemn all violence from a moralistic high ground recalls Hegel’s remark that in the dark of night all cows are black.

Violence was ubiquitous in the interstate conflict that gave rise to the Chinese Revolution. No moist-eyed historian on the lookout for a soft revolution can wish it away by favoring gentrified, conciliatory behavior. In response to Western critics’ complaints that Chinese revolutionaries “yield[ed] nothing to reason and everything to force,” C. P. Fitzgerald half a century ago wrote, “In the amoral field of international relations between sovereign states, it would be difficult to find an example of one nation yielding any substantial portion of its power or sovereignty to reason.” Western critics only have to look at their own historical records to see that violence is a fact of life in international and social conflict. Chinese revolutionaries also knew at what point they could yield to reason. If you find out what things “the Chinese might reasonably concede,” says Fitzgerald, the charge of violence is pointless.⁵

In their important work on Yan’an’s revolutionary movement, David Apter and Tony Saich examine the ways revolutionary language enabled the masses to comprehend the changing world and to connect with other participants in the revolution to become an effective force. At the heart of their study is the logocentric model of political culture, with a new focus on symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of language. “Logocentric” entails a discourse-propelled mass movement, as opposed to normal deliberative politics of negotiation and compromise. Revolutionary discourse, both inspirational and realistic, provides the means and ends of a transformative politics, seeking “nothing less than to change the world by reinterpreting it.” Yan’an’s new culture proffers a good example of how a revolution

⁵ C. P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1964), 192.

based on symbols, words, and discourse can constantly work on and redefine itself and generate a language of hope and faith, bundling “it together with ideological, ethnic, religious, and linguistic strands.”⁶ But like many contemporary critics, Apter and Saich give no more than an analytical and nostalgic value to their important study and seem apologetic about their interest in Yan’an, yearning only for some elements of puritanism in a more corrupt contemporary age.⁷ This reluctance recalls Perry’s justification of her paper by an appeal to idealism, making the study of the revolution personal and academic and depriving it of relevance to the contemporary world.

This volume strives to continue these researches—without apology. To treat Chinese history seriously, the Chinese Revolution cannot be just a subject for antiquarian or academic study. The sea change that has eroded the revolutionary language need not be seen as final. Earlier meanings of words may persist in submerged status or coexist with non-revolutionary rivals. Recovery of the old words may suggest critical alternatives in which contemporary capitalist myths can be contested. The apologetic attitude reflects the current mind-set, forgetful of the revolution, signaling a China fraught with contradictions even when it seems to be burying the memory of revolution.

It has been thirty years since China’s market reform and twenty years since the so-called end of the Cold War. Starting in the 1990s, the euphoria of global capitalist modernity dispatched the Chinese revolutionary experience to the proverbial dustbin of history. In this atmosphere, modern Chinese history that really matters seems to be only thirty years young. The story of an inevitable historical telos has been told by transnational media and mainstream intellectuals: China has finally cut itself off from the erroneous revolutionary past. China is moving forward, albeit with growing pains, toward a future of wealth, power, and prestige. Dazzling are the images of a suddenly awakened giant that has been fulfilling its potential, thanks to the golden highway of global capitalism. Envious is a rising middle class, whose wealth and glamour not only grace *Forbes* and the *New York Times* but also promise a greater openness of civil society and democratic politics. Beneath this golden arch are collectible relics of the dusty revolutionary

⁶ David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

events, discarded, museumized, or put on display to ease the boredom of newly acquired luxury.

The verdict has come down roughly like this: Once upon a time there was a dominant revolutionary regime, starting in Yan'an and culminating in Beijing. The revolutionaries were power seekers and revolutionary history, for all its anti-imperialism, national independence drive and social transformations, is but a circulation (or circus) of power holders. The masses were duped and mindlessly led. Educated and enlightened writers were co-opted and complicit. From the barrel of a gun came the revolutionary state, which thrust the country into a dark, ever-tightening socialist era. No sooner was it on its feet than the New China began to sink quickly into the catastrophes and madness of the Anti-rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. These days an innocent bumping into talk shows, classrooms, or conferences may get an overwhelming sense that the entire history of modern China, prior to Deng Xiaoping's reform, was a vast, officially orchestrated deception or a mythical totem. A handful of monstrous figures behind the high walls of the imperial palace had been pulling the strings of a billion people of different ethnicities, interests, and aspirations, spread over a vast East Asian land mass. The socialist era is a record of conspiracy and manipulation or a trail of policy bungling and economic disasters. On this side of "post-socialism," many look back at this "Mao dynasty" with fear and trembling, as a past dark age, when people were duped, women subjugated, dissidents eradicated, everyday life stifled, laughter silenced, sex repressed, culture destroyed, private emotion cleansed, and minds administered.

But as China is joining the capitalist world economy and accumulating wealth and resources, the familiar problems of capitalist modernization are becoming pressing. The last two decades witnessed problems of social disintegration, class stratification, uneven development, erosion of the social fabric, and civil and ethnic strife. In dealing with and discussing the consequences of economic development, solved or unresolved problems of the revolution are resurfacing. In current opinion, critics focus on the present moment of growth, prosperity, and slowdown as if the present were all there is. The present has no past and will extend endlessly into the future. Many signs of economic, social, and political collapse in the contemporary world indicate, however, that it is by suppressing and forgetting past aspirations, struggles, and unfinished motifs that we enable the present to prevail.

Yet the forgotten keeps coming back. As in ancient China, far-sighted alarms are sounded first by the most sensitive gossip and forebodings. A recent film, *The Forest Ranger* (Tiangou, dir. Qi Jian, 2006), uncannily evokes a fight for social justice reminiscent of the revolutionary past. Set in the era of deepening reform and privatization in the early 1990s, the film depicts a lonely, tragic-heroic battle against the plundering of public property. Li Tiangou, a soldier and crippled military hero, comes to a village in Shaanxi province for a government job of protecting the forests. Three brothers of the village have built a business empire by plundering the forests for private gain. They are revered and feared as the “Three Dragons,” ruling over not only the market but also everybody’s livelihood. Their despotic control is absolute, a reincarnation of the exploitative autocracy of the landlord gentry in the past. Even the officials of the county government are in their service. Seeing Tiangou as a threat to their business, everyone, from ordinary villagers to the three “Dragons,” tries to buy him off by showering his family with gifts. Failing to dissuade him from his job, the gangster heads of the business cut off the family’s access to water and deploy many other tricks to make their survival impossible. The film depicts excruciatingly how the family struggles, and how the entire village is in the pay of the business to make them miserable, including by rape and the kidnapping of the child. Yet as a soldier, a public servant, Tiangou refuses to trade “one tree in exchange for one stalk of scallion,” state assets for life necessities. He refuses even to accept a stake in the company when the business chiefs make the offer. The conflict builds up to a final battle as the gangsters, the “security force” of the business, are trying to beat him to death. Wounded all over and grabbing a rifle (significantly, one made in 1938 and used by the Eighth Route Army in the War of Resistance against Japanese invasion), Tiangou crawls to the forest site, where the biggest trees are being felled by the “Three Dragons” according to plan. Surprised that he is still alive, they try to kill him, only to be shot, one after another, by Tiangou. The reality of this “murder” case comes to light only when the villagers, informed that the most feared third brother is dead, are relieved to tell the truth.

Neoliberal globalization, the financial crisis, and the emergent social movements of self-protection against the ravages of the blind market compel us to rethink the Chinese Revolution. That it arose as a national independence movement against imperialist encroachments has been largely forgotten. It could be said, for example, that the

Great Depression and the worldwide crisis of capitalism fueled Japanese imperialism in Asia. “The closing of Western markets to Japanese goods made Japan all the more intent on pressing a colonialist policy in its East Asia sphere of influence,” writes Joseph Esherick.⁸ Although this view places the Chinese Revolution in a geopolitical context, we may further consider the revolution’s place in the long-term systematic expansion of global modernity, the imperialist aggression of globalization, and the ravages to native communities in the last 200 years. The revolution can be seen in this light as the struggle of ordinary people to protect their own interests, take control of their own land, and keep their community together. The revolution does not mean simply violent change, but the people rallying their energy and courage to fend for themselves in the face of chronic economic crisis and the imperialist dispossession of their land and community. This involves not just military struggle and radical institutional overhauls, but nation-building, attaining sovereignty, the making of a new culture, economic independence, and massive changes in social and gender relations. Its basic goal is to combat ruptures in the social fabric and to rebuild society. In this light, we can see the continuity of the revolution in the ongoing grassroots social movements in China and its relevance around the world. We can also understand why the advance of global capitalism, which includes “post-socialist” China as a major partner, is eager to eradicate progressive social movements along with their revolutionary predecessors.

The global environment is putting revolution in doubt and altering the language that informed it. We embarked on this project with the belief that linguistic changes are bound up with fundamental ruptures and continuity in the world. In commenting on Walter Benjamin’s work of memory, Hannah Arendt wrote that any period whose own past has become as questionable as ours “must eventually come up against the phenomenon of language.”⁹ In the last century, the meaning of revolutionary language has undergone dislocations and breaks. To trace these ruptures is not to indulge in nostalgia, but to rethink history through sedimented layers of meaning and associations in words

⁸ Joseph W. Esherick, “Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution,” in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, ed., *Twentieth-Century China: New Approaches* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 47.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, “Introduction,” Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 49.

and discourse. It is far from our purpose to spell out the semantic and dictionary senses of words and phrases. We want to see how the words reflect social and political reality. But more importantly, we will follow Raymond Williams' advice and try

to show that some important social and historical process occur *within* language, in ways which indicate how integral the problems of meanings and of relationships are. New kinds of relationship, but also new ways of seeing existing relationships, appear in language in a variety of ways: in the invention of new terms (capitalism); in the adaptation and alteration (indeed at times reversal) of older terms (society or individual)... But also, as these examples should remind us, such changes are not always either simple or final. Earlier and later senses co-exist, or become actual alternatives in which problems of contemporary belief and affiliation are contested.¹⁰

Rather than viewing language as simply mirroring reality, we can see its ruptures within a submerged continuity. Abuse and misuse of language imply there is a historically legitimate use and communication. That we can still communicate with the past and with those who disagree with us means there is some tenacious inner core of meaning. Thus the question of meaning cannot dissolve completely into historical context, into individual users, and much less into abusers. A context-bound view of language, in disregard of its enduring values, is historicist, not historical, and risks rendering discourse a mere function dependent on shifting seats of power. The meaning of a word always retains a residual, resilient, or normative sense: an aspiration, an intention or truth value. Despite all the distortions of politics and democracy in the modern world, the Greek *polis*, Arendt notes, will always exist at the bottom of sea change—for as long as we use the word “politics.”¹¹ This is so in liberal democracy. The same is true of the keywords of the Chinese Revolution.

Our departure from Williams is that we trace more the jagged lines in the political and literary itinerary of a word or phrase. Here is an example of how a word goes through historical vicissitudes but can be brought to the surface, radiant with renewable, essential potential. In this volume, *geming* 革命, the keyword of keywords, is examined closely by Jianhua Chen in its different layers of meaning and its checkered career in the twentieth century. Unraveling into different

¹⁰ Williams, *Keywords*, 22.

¹¹ Arendt, “Introduction,” 49.

strands of politics, movement, schools of thought, and multicolored strata, *geming* offers a glimpse of what we mean by “Words and Their Stories” in the book’s title. It allows us to see how a word’s meanings derive from multiple stories and histories, dispelling the unthinking reflex of defining revolution as violence, terror, or monopoly of power. Pulling through historical ebbs and flows, through muddles and misuses, the term’s conceptual integrity, soundness, and legitimacy was compromised but never destroyed. Thus the word may resurface and become renewable.

The Chinese word *geming* originated in the *Yijing*, the *Book of Changes*. This classic Confucian notion denotes dynastic change in the name of heaven and on behalf of people. In this sense it denotes violent transformation of political rule with legitimate goals of redressing injustice. Yet the term was or quickly became suspect in the eyes of those in power, due to the word’s intrinsic demands for rights and transformation of the status quo. In the late Qing reform at the turn of the twentieth century, Liang Qichao and others used the term to denote social and cultural transformation. *Geming* was understood as reform, as in poetry revolution or fiction revolution. On the eve of the Republican Revolution, Sun Yat-sen also drew inspiration from the term’s justification of righteous rebellion for his anti-Manchu and nation-building activities. Between Liang and Sun, the term split to mean both nonviolent and violent strategies of revolutionary action. With the May Fourth movement *geming* became associated with the iconoclastic cultural revolution, militating against the feudal tradition and imperialist powers. After Chiang Kaishek’s massacre of the Communists and betrayal of the revolution in 1927, the word was radicalized, its meaning shifting, in literary circles for instance, from reformist revolution to revolutionary literature. But the term still retained its liberal reformist agenda as ideological transformation. In the 1930s left-wing writers were both soldiers and cultural workers. The emergent revolutionary literature aimed at mobilizing the masses in order to change Chinese society and build an independent nation-state. Left-wing writers experimented with a new popular language to help construct a new subjectivity among the peasants. In the cities, they evolved a variety of modern or modernist literary forms to win the support of urbanites. In this period the revolutionary tendencies were both militant and reformist, combining the May Fourth spirit with revolutionary armed struggle. These were crystallized in an emergent genre of revolution plus love, in which the private embrace of modern life negotiated and clashed with the need for deeper collective

involvement. After the victory of the revolution in 1949, the term kept being revised and reinvented. In Mao's era there was the motif of continuous revolution against bureaucracy, capitalism, and ossification of power—part of the drive for world revolution. Mao's interpretations of revolution entailed uses of the word contrary to his own thinking and to its essential meaning. The Cultural Revolution brought disasters but also exposed the problems of the post-revolutionary institutions that forgot the spirit of revolution. China might have been isolated at that time, but it was also vigorously pursuing international dreams and connecting with the third world as part of its revolutionary endeavor.

This sketch may offer a taste of what these collected essays try to do. I am not sure that they will uncover the hidden treasures of the Chinese revolution, and the political stances of the contributors may differ and contradict one another. Yet we share a desire to understand the revolution through its keywords. The essays take a close look at a select group of terms derived from the revolutionary and socialist experience. Far from a nostalgic backward glance, it is an attempt to rethink the present by looking into persistent motifs from the past. These terms, such as “socialist realism,” “revolution,” and “women's liberation,” have recently taken on a dusty, faded look. When they are evoked in current discussion, they are rarely meant to refer to the historical circumstances. They serve as evidence of an orthodoxy that ran bad, the sign of an always oppressive apparatus, the ideology and rhetoric of an always already constituted party-state. These words are used ideologically and at best serve as the whipping boy for affirming the ideology of the present. Used and understood in this way, they are detached from their history. Nietzsche said, “All concepts in which a whole process is summarized in signs escape definition; only that which is without history can be defined.”¹² This does not mean that back in the murky waters of the past, a word or phrase becomes transparent and definable. Rather it means the keywords came on the scene, were tested and contested in the struggle to define and shape reality, and got entrenched in discourse. Yet their meanings are not settled and final; this process will go on as reality changes. Thus the words have to be defined by their historical emergence, mutations, extensions, and varied uses. Words can be historically defined, and

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 60.

their meanings need to be assessed by their relation and tension with different historical junctures.

The essays in the volume trace the historical circumstances surrounding the varied uses of *geming* and other words, offering genealogical, conceptual, and narrative accounts of seventeen key words and phrases in Chinese revolutionary and socialist discourse. While there are other more important terms, and the contributors do not come to a consensus, the collection nevertheless represents a modest beginning. These are crucial concepts and phrases frequently used in Mao's writings, party documents, and discourse on culture, the arts, and literature. The assembled essays cover the various moments and circumstances associated with these words in modern Chinese history, from the nascent revolutionary period of the 1920s to the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

The words are key to the platform, discourse, concepts, theory, and practice of the Chinese Revolution. Some are also new inventions in the socialist continuation of the revolutionary legacy. Pivotal to the cultural, aesthetic, and literary components of revolutionary practice, phrases like the “literature and arts of workers, peasants, and soldiers” 工农兵文艺, “rectification” 整风, “use the past for the present; use the foreign for China” 古为今用, 洋为中用, and “socialist realism” 社会主义现实主义 structured and sustained a whole body of policy, perceptions, experience, and activity in the cultural realm. In recent scholarship, the privileged terms in revolutionary discourse are cast as ultra-leftist and condemned as ideological and propagandist. There has been little attempt to consider them in the context of the evolution of revolutionary and socialist experience and as products of a historical process. These terms arose as part of discursive and strategic responses to the exigencies of history and social upheavals. In the aftermath of the Cold War and the global expansion of capitalism, it has become important to ascertain the circumstances that gave rise to the impulses, aspirations, and strategy embedded in these words. Like the revolution, the terms arose as historical alternatives to capitalism and as vehicles of reform and renewal in the face of dire consequences of imperialism, colonialism, and a market-dominated society.

Each essay follows three lines of presentation. The genealogical analysis examines how a word or slogan sprang up from a specific circumstance; the ways it got reformulated, received, circulated, and spread. Genealogy examines the legitimacy, validity, and abuses of the words and their related practices. Looking into how language

becomes entangled with social forces and institutional powers, this analysis traces the mutation of words over time and in the context of political power and social movements. The second approach is conceptual clarification, identifying the relatively stable core of a word's meaning and motivation. The varied definitions of the words need not be relativistic, and will be balanced by different shades of meaning and interrelations with other discourses and schools of thought. Conceptual explanation will ascertain the presuppositions and imagination embedded in words and phrases. The third approach is narrative, and provides literary, textual analysis of how words and phrases unfold and unravel in fiction, drama, and personal narratives.

By unpacking these words in their histories, conceptualizations, and usages, we can find alternative and valid imaginaries that have been obscured by the selective forgetting and commodification of the Chinese Revolution in the era of reform and globalization. A more historically sensitive view will question the excessively traumatic and overwhelmingly negative interpretation of Chinese history. Some social democratic themes, of enlightenment, emancipation, and socialist reforms, can be revived and clarified by a reexamination of the legitimate pursuits of the Chinese Revolution.

In works by Mark Selden, Maurice Meisner, Stuart Schram, Arif Dirlik, and many others, the revolutionary discourse has been placed under serious scrutiny and historical analysis. While carrying on this historically sensitive approach to the Chinese Revolution, this volume gives a center of gravity to the cultural, aesthetic, and conceptual aspects of revolutionary discourse. The essays, written mostly by literary scholars, seek to retrieve the romantic, future-oriented desire, yearnings, and formulations embedded in these words, rather than their political, historical, or economic dimensions. This is a reexamination of the past in order to critique the present and to delineate alternative visions of a better world.

REVOLUTION: FROM LITERARY REVOLUTION TO REVOLUTIONARY LITERATURE

Jianhua Chen

Among the keywords widely circulated and used in modern China, *geming* 革命 as the translation of “revolution” was perhaps one of the most heroic, charismatic, and fateful. In 1902 the word captivated the public ethos to such an extent that Liang Qichao stated with alarm: “A few years ago, most people were terrified to hear the word *minquan* 民权 (civil rights). But when the word *geming* began to circulate, they no longer felt that way about *minquan* but feared *geming*.” In the next year, with the publication of Zou Rong’s 邹容 pamphlet *The Revolutionary Army* (*Geming jun* 革命军), a nationwide anti-Qing sentiment was aroused, as Qian Jibo 钱基博, a notable literary historian, described: “At the time everybody talked about *geming*!” Liang and Qian not only recorded that *geming* ideology had gained a foothold at the turn of twentieth-century China but also revealed in their hyperbolic tone that they were themselves under the spell of the word. Indeed, *geming* discourse sustained its magic power in China until the 1980s. Tired of “class struggle” politics in the post-Mao age, people were willing to get rid of the word, as epitomized by Liu Zaifu’s 刘再复 declaration: “Farewell to revolution!”

Modern China was often characterized by “revolution,” best exemplified by John Fairbank’s book *The Great Chinese Revolution, 1800–1985* (1986), in which the term is largely used as a metaphor for economic, social, and cultural transformation in modern China. But what of the word *geming*? What were its uses, meanings, and functions? As a linguistic component of the “great Chinese revolution,” the word had its own stories to tell. Like a red thread through the formation of ideology in twentieth-century China, *geming* carried with it discursive practices in variant forms across political, literary, and cultural realms in different periods, intertwined with a symbol of political legitimacy, the cry of national crisis, the spectacle of mass movements, rituals of totem and taboo, and a canon of literature and art. In short, without this keyword the Chinese Revolution might be boneless and soulless.

This paper will focus on several critical intersections in the historical trajectory of *geming*, emphasizing the connection between politics and literature. I will describe how the discourses of *geming* came to the fore at the turn of the twentieth century by being translated into the syntax of world revolution, how *geming* was called forth time and again when the nation needed new spiritual drive in its search for subjectivity in the modern era, and how the literary arena was shaped by that term in different periods.

The Translation of Geming at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The discourse of *geming*, or revolution, originated from dynastic crises in ancient China. The *Yijing* 易经, or *Book of Changes*, one of the most authoritative Confucian classics, includes one of the earliest uses of the term: “Heaven and earth undergo their changes, and the four seasons complete their functions. Tang and Wu made revolutions in accordance with the will of Heaven, and in response to the wishes of people. Great indeed is what takes place in the time of change.”¹ In the sixteenth century B.C., King Tang 汤 established the Shang dynasty after a military overthrow of the Xia dynasty, and in the eleventh century B.C., the same story was repeated when King Wu 武 founded the Zhou dynasty after defeating the Shang. The word *geming* in the *Yijing* was given a sacred aura, yet this Confucian legitimization of the Tang and Wu rebellions in the name of heaven and the people, despite contradicting Confucian ethical principles, implied a critique of as well as a threat to imperial power. Because of the word’s ambiguity, the discourse of *geming* was almost treated as taboo in historical writings and usually hidden between the lines. As an important part of traditional political culture, it was implied by the parallel word *panluan* (armed rebellion 叛乱) or *zaofan* (revolt 造反) in describing numerous suppressed peasant revolts.

In the late nineteenth century *geming* was awakened in the context of world revolution by way of Japanese translation. The Confucian *geming* discourse had been introduced in Japan in the eighth century and unquestioningly received as official ideology until the seventeenth century, when the Tokugawa royalists condemned Tang and Wu as dynastic traitors and claimed that revolution could only be endorsed

¹ *I Ching: Book of Changes*, trans. James Legge (New York: Bantam, 1986), 254.

by the emperor. Thus the word “revolution” acquired a new implication of evolutionary reforms under existing authority. It was on this basis that the Japanese word *kakumei* was used to translate the English “revolution” in the Meiji period. As Raymond Williams explained, in the nineteenth century in the West the use of “revolution” was not limited to its “specialized meaning of violent overthrow” in a political sense; it also indicated “fundamental changes, or fundamentally new developments, in a very wide range of activities.”² This combination of meanings was translated into *kakumei* while the Japanese enthusiastically learned from Western civilization during the Meiji period.

After the abortive reform movement of 1898, Liang Qichao was exiled to Japan, where he carried on his political agenda and became familiar with the Western humanities via Japanese translations. Enchanted by the new meaning of *kakumei*, which implied fundamental change in all social spheres, he fervently spread this idea of “revolution” in order to arouse reformist passion among his countrymen. Among many coinages he created with the suffix of *geming*, the most influential were “poetry revolution” (诗界革命 *shijie geming*) and “fiction revolution” (小说界革命 *xiaoshuojie geming*).³ In response to Liang’s call, numerous literary works were published in fiction magazines and literary newspaper supplements, which mushroomed throughout the country in the 1910s. These works zealously spread European ideas and at the same time severely criticized the Qing government. As a result, however, against Liang’s best intentions, the revival of the term *geming*, with its cultural memory of the past, encouraged anti-Qing sentiments; in other words, *geming* greatly aided Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary activities.

Sun Yat-sen also adopted the translated *geming* from Japanese and used it for his anti-Qing politics. How he encountered the word reads

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revv ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 273.

³ See Jianhua Chen, “Chinese ‘Revolution’ in the Syntax of World Revolution,” in Lydia H. Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 355–74. Liu Xiaobo asserted that “*geming* cannot be translated as a complete equivalent, into the English ‘revolution.’” See “That Holy Word, ‘Revolution,’” in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 310. Liu’s assertion was not wrong, as he discussed the meaning of *geming* based on its classical usage that meant the violent action of overthrowing dynastic power. But Liu ignored the fact that the modern usage of *geming* was fused with the English “revolution,” denoting peaceful and fundamental change in all walks of life.

like a legend. In 1896, after his confinement and trial as an anti-Qing rebel in London, he fled to Japan. When he arrived in Kobe he saw a newspaper report in which he was called a *geming dang* (革命党 revolutionary party). It reminded him of the canonical text about Tang and Wu, which had secretly aroused in him both fear and ecstasy. Having studied the *geming* text as a child, he knew well that no one had the right to call himself a “revolutionary” and that as a rebel he would be derogatively termed *zaofan* (rebellious). He therefore willingly accepted the Japanese term, which justified and glorified his anti-Qing cause, as it proved his *geming* slogan was far more effective than Liang’s use of *geming* had been in a reformist sense.

For Sun and Liang, *geming* as the central catchword represented their different solutions for China’s crisis. In 1905 a heated debate on its meaning occurred between the reformists and the revolutionaries. Liang and his partners persisted via nonviolent means to try to solve China’s problems; on the other side, Sun and his followers believed that not only was the Qing dynasty too corrupt to be rescued, but ~~was also~~, a regime of racial domination: the Han people must restore power in China. Finally the reformists lost. Nevertheless, after the debate, the *geming* discourse was interrelated with both tradition and modernity: while denoting political overthrow by force, it included fundamental change in all walks of life; political violence would be necessarily accompanied by a promise of a better tomorrow.

The May Fourth “Literary Revolution”

After the founding of the Republic in 1912, the whole country seemed devoted to building a wealthy and powerful nation-state under the constitutional polity. The successful takeover of the old regime was called the “Great Revolution” (大革命 *Da geming*), but such self-glorification soon vanished. Revolution turned to disillusionment when Yuan Shikai and his military government betrayed its original promise. Yuan ordered all to worship Confucius and read the Five Classics in schools, restoring the dynastic order by proclaiming himself emperor. As part of this restoration he signed a shameless compact with Japan. Earlier in 1913, after the assassination of Song Jiaoren, a KMT leader, Sun Yat-sen had called for a “second revolution” (二次革命 *erci geming*) aimed at overthrowing Yuan, but got little response, not only because

Yuan and his Beiyang Army were unbeatable but also because *geming* itself was not favored by the public at the time. Even in the KMT some people thought the Republican Constitution was more valuable than Yuan and might be ruined by another revolution, which would cause an endless crisis of political legitimacy. After Yuan's death in 1916, China fell into chaos. Provincial warlords fought each other, all attempting to gain supremacy through controlling the Republican parliament.

In this historical context, the May Fourth literary movement began, as generally acknowledged, with twin essays by Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu in the *New Youth* journal in 1917, ambivalently framed by the words *gailiang* (改良 reformation) and *geming*. The former essay was entitled "Preliminary Suggestions on Literary Reform" (文学改良刍议 *Wenxue gailiang chuyi*) and the latter "On Literary Revolution" (论文学革命 *Lun wenxue geming*); both relentlessly attacked the Chinese literary tradition, which was said to have nurtured a sick Chinese soul. Seemingly, the "Literary Revolution" inherited Liang Qichao's "poetry revolution" or "fiction revolution," signaling no more than a fundamental change in the literary field; *geming* in Chen Duxiu's use, however, was paradigmatically related to the traditional allusion of political violence. Intentionally distinguished from Hu Shi's "reform," meaning gradual evolution or piecemeal reforms, "literary revolution" indicated a total rejection of not only the literature but also the culture of the past. It was in line with this revolutionary cry that the May Fourth iconoclasm was forged. At this juncture a new intellectual consensus arose: the series of failures of reform or revolution since the late Qing made it imperative that the old culture, represented by Empress Dowager Cixi's and Yuan Shikai's militant regimes, be totally replaced by a new culture via revolution.

Such revolutionary refutation was figuratively embodied by Lu Xun's short stories, in which most characters, from intellectuals to ordinary people, are victimized by the old culture, especially by Confucian doctrine. In his 1918 short story "Diary of a Madman" (狂人日记 *Kuangren riji*), Lu Xun attacked the traditional society as cannibalistic. Usually set in local towns or the rural countryside, his stories depict people emotionally and spiritually diseased and oppressed by evil forces: corrupt politics, family ethics, the examination system, and religious superstition. In "Medicine" (药 *Yao*) and "The Story of Ah Q" (阿 Q 正传 *Ah Q zhengzhuàn*), Lu Xun criticized the 1911 revolution,

which compromised with the old culture and became a new oppressive order. Influenced by Nietzsche's "reevaluating the past," Lu Xun was more insightful and complicated than his peers. The madman in the "iron house" cries out his hope of "saving the children" and at the same time realizes that he is an accomplice to the wide-scale murder. By representing those victimized souls, Lu Xun showed deep sympathy for poor people oppressed by the hierarchical social order. The "children" as a metaphor for purity immune to the epidemic culture implied a utopian ideal as well as a critical criterion, by which he condemned not only tradition but also the developing capitalism in China.

With the impetus of May Fourth iconoclasm, Chinese literature and culture were revolutionized with new historical consciousness. A new literary field was established with Westernized generic categories of poetry, prose, fiction, and drama; numerous works were produced, imbued with the despair of the "iron house" occupants desperately longing for spiritual emancipation. The "new literature" was characterized not only by an ardent convergence with Western modernist movements but also, more importantly, by its substitution of the vernacular language (白话 *baihua*) for the classical language (文言 *wenyan*). This "linguistic turn" exerted far-reaching influences on Chinese cultural modernization.

From the late nineteenth century on, both the Qing and the Republican governments carried on the project of language reform, yet with little success. In the May Fourth period, the core members of the new literature movement, such as Hu Shi, Qian Xuanton 钱玄同, and Liu Fu 刘复, theoretically advocated the necessity of using colloquial speech as a literary language and at the same time actively helped the Education Bureau push the "national language" (国语 *guoyu*) movement. In the early 1920s the government promulgated a series of orders to substitute *baihua* for *wenyan* in the educational system. Indeed, the domination of *baihua* served the May Fourth goal of "science and democracy": assimilating modern knowledge and mobilizing the masses for national liberation in later decades.

While the new literature quickly moved to the center of the literary field, much indebted to the legitimacy of "national language," the May Fourth canon came into being through the debates among the new and popular literary groups. In 1921, Mao Dun 茅盾 was appointed by the Commercial Press as editor of *Short Story Magazine* (小说月报 *Xiaoshuo yuebao*), a prestigious fiction magazine in Shanghai; he instantly transformed it into a new frontier of the literary movement.

Fearing that the new literature would advance, Yuan Hanyun 袁寒云, the leading writer of *The Crystal* (晶报 *Jingbao*), a major tabloid in Shanghai, mocked the reformed *Short Story Magazine* for its poor artistic quality, accusing the magazine of promoting Western-style writing at the cost of *wenyan*, the essence of Chinese literary culture. In rebuttal critic Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 called popular writers “literary beggars” or “literary prostitutes” for their commercial motivation.

The polemic continued with growing heat, involving more writers and publications on both sides. On the May Fourth side were Mao Dun, Zheng Zhenduo, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, and Lu Xun; on the other side were Yuan Hanyun, Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鹃, and Bao Tianxiao 包天笑. Not limited by the central language issue, the disputes showed their different views on literary functions and different types of “imagined communities.” According to Mao Dun, “true literature (*wenxue*) should be literature in favor of historical progress,” namely a method of communication that led to universal understanding among all nations of the world. He disdained novels by popular writers, describing them as “accounting books” without historical consciousness and modern techniques. In particular he criticized Zhou Shoujuan’s love stories for lacking an artist’s conscience. In advocating the “literature of blood and tears,” Zheng Zhenduo stressed the literary task of mirroring the pain and sorrow of oppressed people. They both criticized the focus on “leisure” (消闲 *xiaoxian*) evident in *Saturday* (礼拜六 *Libailiu*) magazine, edited by Zhou Shoujuan, for avoiding dark reality and encouraging youth to deviate from the lofty cause of national salvation.

In defense, Zhou Shoujuan asserted that literary leisure is necessary for city dwellers, who seek relaxation amid the pressures of modernity. Holding that his magazines expressed the kind of universality found in the *London Magazine* or *Strand Magazine* in England, Zhou stated his optimism that Chinese urbanism would develop as urbanism had in capitalist countries in the West. Indeed, Zhou was confident in free trade principles, as he claimed: “New or old, it is up to the writer to choose his style, and it is up to the reader to choose what he likes to read.”⁴ Apparently, given its elitism and cultural capital in the higher education system, the May Fourth literary movement won over a younger generation aspiring to modernity and the moral mission of national salvation. It was no accident that not long after the popular writers stopped arguing, *baihua* was victoriously established as the “national

⁴ See *Shenbao* (March 27, 1921), 14.

language,” though the popular literary market still flourished along with popular culture in urban centers.⁵

Due to the wide acceptance of the concept of historical progress during the May Fourth period, the controversy between new and popular literature had special significance. From that moment onward, the banal concepts of “new” (*xin*) and “old” (*jiu*) were ideologically articulated; the former meant historically progressive with a promise of a bright future and the latter meant backward, decadent, and escapist. In the 1930s left-wing writers carried on the campaign against the old literature and further labeled it the literature of the “mandarin ducks and butterflies school” (鸳鸯蝴蝶派 *Yuanyang hudie pai*) favored by “feudal petty urbanites.” The popular writers kept silent not only because they were theoretically impotent but also because they felt guilty as national crisis increased. Finally their literary business ceased in 1937 when the anti-Japanese war broke out.

The “Revolutionary Literature” Polemic in the Late 1920s

Sun Yat-sen’s “second revolution” resurfaced to a roar of public applause, as evidenced by the increasing eagerness to end warlordism, the root of national chaos. In 1924, under Sun’s leadership and aided by Russia and the CCP, the Northern Expedition departed from Canton. Conquering one city after another, the Northern Expedition was hailed as the “Great Revolution,” but its aura quickly evaporated as cooperation between the KMT and CCP broke down in 1927. Seizing power, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the arrest and killing of many Communists. This setback forced Mao Zedong and his followers to turn to rural areas in pursuit of a peasant revolution. Meanwhile, many other Communists withdrew from the battlefield and found shelter in foreign concessions in Shanghai, where they organized underground resistance. Once again, in a moment of political crisis, literature was assigned an extraordinary mission. Having denounced Chiang Kai-shek’s betrayal of revolution, Guo Moruo, the head of the propaganda bureau of the Northern Expedition, fled to Japan. The “revolutionary literature” (革命文学 *geming wenxue*) that had appeared in his earlier

⁵ See Jianhua Chen, “An Archaeology of Repressed Popularity: Zhou Shoujuan, Mao Dun, and Their 1920s Literary Polemics,” in Carlos Rojas and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow, eds., *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalization of the Canon* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 91–114.

essay as a new slogan became an urgent call to Communist writers. As a founder of the Creation Society, Guo Moruo spoke on behalf of the May Fourth tradition; the inversion from “literary revolution” to “revolutionary literature” pushed May Fourth iconoclasm in a radical political direction. As it turned out, literature was to directly served the “revolution” and was closely tied to the CCP’s mass politics in both rural and urban areas.

An ideological campaign focusing on “revolutionary literature” was launched by Communist refugees in Shanghai in early 1928. It began with the essay “From Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature” by Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾, a veteran Creation Society theorist. Following Guo’s idea that literature should become a “gramophone” for the revolutionary cause, Cheng further pointed out that the shortcoming of the May Fourth literary movement was its narrow approach and that revolutionary literature should be armed with Marxism under proletarian direction. At the same time, Li Chuli 李初梨, Peng Kang 彭康, and Zhu Jingwo 朱镜我, new members of the Creation Society, inaugurated the journal *Cultural Critique* (*Wenhua pipan*), in which they passionately introduced Marx’s theory, influenced by Fukumoto Kazuo 福本和夫, then a popular Marxist in Japan, with a cluster of key concepts such as *Aufheben*, dialecticism, and ideology. They emphasized the importance of a subjective spirit and dialectical thinking in dealing with cultural problems. They also embraced the concept of ideology as a “critical weapon” in analyzing cultural phenomena and effectively propagating ideas. In alliance with Qian Xingcun 钱杏邨, the leader of the Sun Society, Li Chuli and Peng Kang targeted Lu Xun, the spiritual leader of May Fourth literature. In their cartoonlike depiction, Lu Xun is “a drunkard with misty eyes,” who is sentimental, pessimistic, and obsolete. From the viewpoint of “revolutionary literature,” Lu Xun the “stylist,” with his “individual taste,” was outmoded. In reply Lu Xun sharply criticized the young members of the Creation Society for their conceptual illusions and egoistic exaggeration of the “critical weapon” at the cost of real revolutionary action. He also questioned the so-called “proletarian literature,” a popular slogan at the time, as a product of the petty bourgeois imagination and not representative of real-life experiences. Despite their differences, all those involved in the debate shared a concern about the nature and future of “revolutionary literature” as they faced the KMT’s “white terror”; Lu Xun later admitted that he was pushed by those young Creationists to study Marxist literary theory, and eventually to translate the book *On Art* by the Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov.

The polemic of revolutionary literature seemed a timely campaign for the Communists, who wanted to recover from their setback before reorganizing a united literary front on a new ideological basis. Despite sharp words and even personal attacks, agreement was reached among most participants, leading to the establishment of the Left League in 1930, under the direction of Lu Xun and CCP cadres. This is recorded in the canonical history of modern Chinese literature as the moment when modern Chinese literature embarked on its correct track. Led by the CCP, literary production continued in the May Fourth tradition and shouldered the antifeudal and anti-imperial revolution. This “pivotal point,” in Mao Dun’s words, designated an intellectual shift from May Fourth individualism to May Thirtieth collectivism. In hindsight, it becomes obvious that the literary movement, guided by the principle of “revolutionary literature,” opened up political and cultural vistas colored by utopian ideals. Politically, in rejecting the KMT who was ready to reconcile with the status quo, the revolutionized literature primarily functioned to mobilize the masses in order to structurally change Chinese society (e.g., land reform launched in rural regions) and at the same time to struggle for a new nation-state free from semi-colonial conditions. Culturally, equipped with Marxism, the left-wing writers were actively engaged with mass culture in urban centers. They experimented with a kind of “mass language” for mimetic representation of proletarian subjectivity. To win the support of urbanites they created new literary forms such as the fiction of “revolution plus love,” mixing literary conventions, modernist techniques, and revolutionary ideas. Perhaps most successful was their achievement in transforming the Shanghai film industry into an entertainment and educational institution that produced many national films of high quality. For example, the 1933 film *Spring Silkworms* 春蚕, adapted from Mao Dun’s fiction, showed how local small businesses could hardly avoid bankruptcy in semicolonial China. The microcosmic tragedy provided the audience with a deeper view of the social structure under local and global capitalism.

Fiction of “Revolution plus Love”

In the late 1920s, while Chiang Kai-shek praised Wang Yangming’s philosophy of “knowing and acting” as his revolutionary motto, Mao Zedong led the “Harvest Uprising” in Jiangxi province with his

famous claim: “Revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.” At the time, the word *geming*, like a cliché, appeared in numerous newspapers and periodicals, in praise of the Northern Expedition but with varying purposes. The newspaper *Central Daily News* inaugurated a literary page entitled “The Modern” with a manifesto in which the KMT was acclaimed for its leadership of a “national movement” charged with “modern revolutionary spirit.” However, contributors like Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿, Tian Han 田汉, and many celebrated artists and writers actually cherished European modernist art and literature. Many translations of poems by Charles Baudelaire were published by the literary page. Another manifesto appeared in the inaugural issue of *Shanghai Caricature* (上海漫画 *Shanghai manhua*) magazine, cynically saying that its revolutionary model was a “little hooligan” symbolic of city dwellers’ common wisdom as well as their hapless complaints.

From this context of competing *geming* discourses arose the “revolution plus love” fiction of Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈, Ding Ling 丁玲, Hu Yepin 胡也频, and Mao Dun, ideologically related to the “revolutionary literature” debate. “Revolution plus love” fiction largely appeared in novel form, a genre not developed within the new literature until the late 1920s. A new desire to depict history was stimulated, partly by the failed “Great Revolution,” whose tragic ambition and human complexity challenged the limits of literary form, and partly by catering to urban readers who would be charmed by a fictional mixture of romanticism and heroism. The revolution plus love fiction featured a new type of proletarian hero with class consciousness. Lu Xun’s critique that the current imagination of proletariats had been created by authors unfamiliar with the lives of workers or peasants was accurate, yet it was just that imagination, largely charged by a passion for the Russian Revolution, that played a dynamic role in the flowering of the novels and turned over a new leaf for modern Chinese literature.

“Wei Hu wears a blue worker’s uniform.” This depiction opens Ding Ling’s novel *Wei Hu* 韦护. Returned from Russia, the hero strives to enlighten the masses with “revolutionary” ideas. In describing through his self-reflectivity, how Wei’s worldview and personality are transformed after reading Marx and Lenin, a new way of writing revolutionary subjectivity comes into practice, with theoretical and historical depth. Most noticeable in this novel is the public space filled with a free, joyous atmosphere, where Li Jia, Wei Hu’s girlfriend, and her companions admire Russian women and ardently talk about “freedom,

beauty, spirituality, and greatness.” These details hint at Russian influence, though Wei Hu’s idealism eventually fails because of unfavorable surroundings. The novel ends with his painful farewell to Li Jia as he decides to join the Northern Expedition in Canton. In endorsing his heroic decision, the author proposes a new ethic of revolution over love, subverting the code of “dying for love” in conventional romances.

Russian influence was more conceptually shown in Hu Yepin’s *Going to Moscow* (到莫斯科去 *Dao Mosike qu*). Su Shang is a “model new woman,” intelligent and enthusiastic, but as the wife of a high-ranking KMT official, she is bored with her meaningless life. She falls in love with the Communist Shi Xunbai, who ignites her passion and ideals. After Shi is secretly executed by her husband, Su Shang breaks with him and goes to Moscow in pursuit of revolutionary liberation. In contrast to *Wei Hu, Going to Moscow* focuses on the heroine’s intellectual transformation. Awakened by class consciousness, she despises the heroine in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* as a selfish person obsessed with vanity and amorousness. This episode conveys the author’s critique of the bourgeois lifestyle. As shown by the title, going to Moscow contrasts with going to Canton, ideologically linked to the KMT revolution.

In Jiang Guangci’s *Sans-culottes* (短裤党 *Duanku dang*) and Hu Yepin’s *Brightness Is Ahead of Us* (光明在我们的前面 *Guangming zai women de qianmian*), the center of gravity shifts to the mass movement. Rather than focusing on heroic individuals, these works stress the power of the proletarian class under the party’s guidance. In this carnivalesque celebration, volcanic emotions, a sea of flags, shouts and songs, an irresistible will for victory, and the consciousness of making history are vividly portrayed. The party leaders look like unattractive agents, shorn of personalities. Although the theme of love is threaded throughout the narrative, it is less charged with libidinal desire. Man and woman are comrades who learn about, understand, and love each other on the basis of a supreme revolutionary cause. The works by Jiang and Hu have not been favorably valued by more recent literary historians due to artistic weakness, but some prototypes in their fiction paved the way for “revolutionary literature” in later decades.

No doubt, the revolution plus love novel reached its peak in Mao Dun’s *Eclipse* (蚀 *Shi*) and *Rainbow* (虹 *Hong*). As an early member of the CCP and a spokesman for the May Fourth iconoclast tradition, Mao Dun took part in the Northern Expedition. Having witnessed the split between the KMT and CCP in 1927, he came back to Shanghai and began writing novels. Beginning in the early 1920s he tirelessly

wrote about European literature, proletarian literature, and theories of the novel, in hope that new works as great as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* would be produced in China.

When his first novel, *Eclipse*, was serialized by *Short Story Magazine*, it was acutely criticized by Qian Xingcun and Li Chuli for its lack of "revolutionary" consciousness. Mao Dun partly accepted their charge of "decadence" and "pessimism," which was due to his grim mood at the time, yet he argued that his novel was intended to appeal to the "petty bourgeois" class, who should be considered a crucial part of the revolutionary force. In fact, given the polemic, his effort to revolutionize the form by weaving historical consciousness into narrative and through sophisticated techniques in plotting and portraying characters was revelatory. A trilogy, *Eclipse* contains *Disillusionment*, *Vacillation*, and *Pursuit*; though loosely connected, they panoramically unfold the magnificence, complicated social relations, and tragic significance of a historical movement in turmoil. A gallery of spectacular "new women" characters appeared, including Qin Wuyang 秦舞阳 and Zhang Qiuli 章秋柳, who are attractive, romantic, and adventurous in the "Great Revolution," as if in a utopian space free from traditional restrictions on women; they are conceptually framed by a time scheme conveying that tradition must give way to modernity, by which Mao Dun ambitiously explores the harmony of historical force and individual desire, though mostly in vain. Believing in a philosophy of the *present*, Zhang Qiuli comes to rescue Shi Xun, a decaying dandy, from his dark *past*, but this transformation plan ends with a bitter irony: after their intoxicated intercourse on their wedding night, Shi dies of exhaustion and Zhang is infected by his syphilis. However, the author's familiarity with urban life allows details such as Qin Wuyang's taking birth control pills and socializing, without a bra, in 1920s Shanghai high circles, making her a "new woman" aspiring to sexual freedom.

The dialectic of history and the individual was more successfully represented in Mao Dun's 1929 novel *Rainbow*. Responding to the polemic of "revolutionary literature" and redefining the May Fourth iconoclast tradition, the novel reflects how Chinese intellectuals were gradually awakened and equipped with Marxist theories of class struggle during the period from the May Fourth to the May Thirtieth Incident. The heroine, Mei Xingsu 梅行素, a student in Sichuan, is enlightened by *New Youth* magazine, and with a longing for a new life she leaves her provincial hometown for metropolitan Shanghai. In the novel's ending, she joins the mass demonstration on May Thirtieth,

fearlessly fighting with colonial police. Allegorically Mei marches at the head of the crowd, plunging herself into the torrents of revolution and leading the masses toward future emancipation.

Rainbow opens with a scene in which Mei leans on the rail on the upper deck of a steamship about to pass through the Wu gorges on its way to Shanghai. The narrator begins: “She displays all the characteristics of a flawless Oriental beauty . . . two jet-black wisps of hair brushed the cheeks of her oval face, complementing a pair of long thin eyebrows, a straight nose, two teasingly beautiful eyes, and small, round lips.”⁶ Against the backdrop of the Wu Mountains, one of the most beautiful spots in China, Mao Dun creates a classically aesthetic landscape and image. Although cast as an “Oriental beauty,” Mei is a modern woman warrior devoted to national struggle. The narrator continues: “But her eyes revealed a vigorous straightforward spirit. And her small mouth, which was usually tightly closed, gave proof of her resolute disposition. She was the kind of person who knew her goal and never turned back.” The text is richly interwoven with the ancient Chinese myth in which the Emperor Chu dreams of making love to the Goddess of the Wu Mountains. But in *Rainbow* the goddess turns into a Western one, as Mei is identified with Verdandi, the Goddess of Fate in Norse myth, who is vital and brave and fixes her eyes on the path ahead, symbolizing a present guided by the future.

Termed a “disciple of the present,” Mei is still framed by the time scheme, but like the Norse goddess, which according to Mao Dun refers to Russia, she “knew her goal and never turned back,” following the Marxist notion of progressive history. The first chapter plays a crucial role in terms of narrative structure. The whole novel has ten chapters. It starts as she is embarking on a sea voyage, leaving Sichuan for Shanghai; the last three chapters pick up where the first chapter left off and describe her life in Shanghai. To Mei, leaving Sichuan means bidding farewell to her narrow provincial life: “The Yangtze was now struggling with difficulty to squeeze through the Wuxia Mountains. The river seemed a symbol of her past. But she hoped her future would be as open and surging as the Yangtze would be below the Kui Pass.” Here temporality and spatiality are rhetorically interchangeable, yet

⁶ Mao Dun, *Rainbow*, trans. Madeleine Zelin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2. In this paper all citations of the novel are from Zelin’s translation.

time concedes to space. While Mei is always “charging forward,” the narrative is controlled, moving toward the final revolutionary space of the May Thirtieth demonstration in Shanghai.

In Shanghai, Mei’s personality is split between love and revolution. She joins a revolutionary group and diligently studies Marxism; she also finds metropolitan life alluring. While wearing a *qipao* and high heels, she sits in a rickshaw running along the boulevard, like a middle-class woman busy with her daily routine. Nevertheless, she feels bored, lonely, and depressed, symptoms of an urban mentality under the pressure of modernity. Secretly in love with Liang Gangfu, the leader of a revolutionary group, she makes every effort to attract him. “Gradually Mei worked out a program of action for herself. She would be careful to read the newspapers, make contacts with people in all political groups, and put on an arrogant air in front of Liang Gangfu and his crowds.” This recalls the European *Bildungsroman*, in which a provincial youth goes to the big city, adapts to a new environment, and through “mobility and inner restlessness” realizes his or her dream.⁷ Despite similar motifs, what is different here is that with her dream of national emancipation Mei subordinates her sexual desire to her revolutionary ideals, as the narrator emphasizes: “her only ambition was to overcome her environment, overcome her fate . . . her only goal had been to rein in her strong feminine nature and her even stronger maternal instincts.”

Rainbow was considered by critics Mao Dun’s “finest” work, showing his mature techniques of “psychological realism” as “one of the earliest full-length modern Chinese novels.”⁸ It signifies the establishment of the novel form in China with its unprecedented newness, a complex mixture of traditional allusions, Western literary modernism, urbanism, and the Marxist theory of “historical necessity.” By radically framing Mei in an epic structure with a modern time consciousness, Mao Dun modernized the *xiaoshuo* tradition while creating a fictional subjectivity for national literature, thereby solving the problem of the ideal hero in fiction, which had persisted since the late Qing “fiction revolution.” With a cosmopolitan vision, the novel is politically

⁷ See Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 4–5.

⁸ See C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 148; David Der-wei Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 40.

and aesthetically derived from foreign sources. It not only depicts the struggle for China's liberation as connected to the grand narrative of nationalist movements in the world but also borrows from or appropriates the works of Zola, Maupassant, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky.⁹

In later decades vibrating with continual national revolution, the genre of revolution plus love canonically entered mainstream literature and art production. After the 1950s, exemplified by the novel *Song of Youth* and the film *Nie Er* 聂耳, the genre was deployed in making a myth of love and nation with a sophisticated aesthetics of politics and sexuality.¹⁰ Even after the 1980s, the tradition of revolution plus love literature was revived following its break during the Cultural Revolution.¹¹

Epilogue: The Great Cultural Revolution and Beyond

The word *geming* in modern China underwent a sea change as the linguistic system shifted from classical to vernacular language, burying the classical lexicon, grammar, and poetics. Yet ironically enough, it was *geming* discourse, residue of the very Confucian culture to which the May Fourth iconoclasts were so fiercely opposed, that played a decisive role in iconoclasm. Like an allegory of national survival, it was buried time and again and resurrected during moments of crisis, never losing its aura of heavenly will and popular support. Adapted and nourished by cultures of world revolution, *geming* was radiant with a promise for a better tomorrow. With the tension between tradition and modernity, or between the “cosmopolitan” and the “provincial” in Levenson’s terms,¹² *geming* discourse was dynamically propelled toward its climax, “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in 1966.

⁹ For a detailed analysis, see Jianhua Chen, “Mao Dun’s *Rainbow*: A Modern Epic and *Bildungsroman* Novel in 20th Century China.” In *L’Oriente Storia di una figura nelle arti occidentali (1700–2000)*, the Second Volume, eds., Paolo Amalfitano and Loretta Innocenti. Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2007, 57–77.

¹⁰ See Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 123–54.

¹¹ See Jianmei Liu, *Revolution Plus Love: Literary History, Women’s Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 193–209.

¹² See Joseph Levenson, *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Stage and the Chinese Stages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

It would be naïve to parallel Mao Zedong with the ancient kings Tang and Wu, yet from a linguistic perspective, the *geming* tradition connects them, as evidenced by Mao's interpretation of the word, his practice of "taking cities from the countryside," and the birth of Communist China following the violent overthrow of the old regime. The Cultural Revolution was motivated by Mao's moral idealism. By purging the "revisionism" or "capitalism within the party," he seemed to be seeking an alternative way of realizing Chinese socialism as a pure totality. Driven by his favorite slogans such as "To continue the revolution" and "You have the right to rebel," *geming* discourse was haunted by the trauma of the past; the May Fourth radical tradition unfolded its inner logic and finally reached its limits. The Cultural Revolution looked like a kind of "provincialism" in Levenson's sense; seemingly the Communist vision narrowed, as seen from the fact that the genre of "revolution plus love," subtly developed since the 1930s, was suppressed in the realms of art and literature. However, the "cosmopolitan" aspects of the Cultural Revolution, even in "model operas," can hardly be ignored. Western-style ballet, orchestral music, and other forms were adopted, though selectively and symbolically displayed. In a larger context, claiming to be part of the third world yet identifying the ancient Legalist philosophy as a cultural source, Mao's unique vision had both local and global dimensions.

After the Cultural Revolution, according to the new policy of "reform and openness," the ideology of revolution was no longer enforced by the state apparatus and gradually faded away. Nevertheless, the *geming* ideology was so deeply intertwined with social life and mass psychology that it played a crucial role in the 1989 tragedy. Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波, one of the leading intellectuals of the time, reflects: "The 1989 protest movement was once again the 'great revolution' of the army advancing toward democracy. In spite of its tragic, bloody end, the revolutionary enthusiasm that had lain dormant for nearly ten years once again ruled us; finally, it again revealed its vigor and dynamism."¹³ In his hindsight, this revolutionary "dynamism" implied blindness and naïveté on the part of the protesters. "We have come to see how, tempted by revolutionary righteousness, we abandoned our rationality."¹⁴ Tied to the logic of violence, this holy word "revolution"

¹³ Liu Xiaobo, "That Holy Word, 'Revolution,'" 311.

¹⁴ Liu Xiaobo, "That Holy Word, 'Revolution,'" 314.

proved no longer blissful in an age of reformation and finally taught a painful lesson.

As recently reported, the Chinese authorities ordered that the word “Revolutionary” be removed from the title of “Revolutionary Martyr” (革命烈士 *Geming lieshi*).¹⁵ In this farewell to the revolution, what was forgotten, consciously or not, was not only the pain or the dark side of revolutionary history; along with the discourse of *geming*, its sublime morality and utopian ideals were also lost. Such forgetfulness was accelerated by the rapid domination of global modernity. Revolutionary values were swept from local memory. However, the word has not disappeared; it is sometimes used in print media, metaphorically in the sense of “change” or “reform” in all spheres, a mainstream version of Liang Qichao’s usage a century ago. “Revolution” also appears at times as a central theme of academic conferences dedicated to historical reflection. Whether visible or hidden, *geming* discourse is institutionally and ideologically imprinted with existing power relations. How to commemorate and reevaluate the legacy of the modern Chinese revolution will certainly be an issue in the years to come.

¹⁵ Jane Macartney, “Revolutionary change for China’s heroes,” <http://www.timeonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3412469.ecc>.

THE LONG MARCH

Enhua Zhang

Chinese Communists built up revolutionary bases in the early 1930s in Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei, and neighboring provinces through guerrilla war. In 1931, they founded the Soviet Republic of China in Ruijin, Jiangxi. Meanwhile, the Nationalists were determined to annihilate the Communists and started five extermination campaigns between 1931 and 1934. In order to break away from the fifth extermination campaign, on October 16, 1934, 86,000 people, mostly Central Red Army (a.k.a. the First Front Army) troops and Communist officials, started retreating from Yudu, Jiangxi to the west. They passed through 11 provinces in one year, trekked zigzagging, back and forth, for 25,000 *li* (8,000 miles), and reached northern Shaanxi in October 1935. No more than 10,000 people survived the journey. Two other forces, the Second and the Fourth Front Armies, also retreated westward. These three groups joined finally in northern Shaanxi in October 1936. This is the so-called Long March (*Changzheng* 长征) in Chinese history.

Chased by the Nationalist troops and bombs, the Red Army had to march through rushing torrents, precipitous mountains, and treacherous swamps. From November 25 to December 1, 1934, they encountered the most severe attacks from the Nationalist Army along the Xiang River, a tributary of the Yangtze River. The Communists lost more than 40,000 men in this battle and the river was red with blood. By the time they crossed the river, the Red Army had been reduced to 30,000. In January 1935, they arrived at Zunyi, Guizhou province. From January 15 to 17, the Politburo held an enlarged meeting there to discuss the lessons from the retreat and the next move. Mao Zedong was elected a standing committee member of the Politburo, which restored a portion but not all of his power within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Red Army. Under his leadership, to shake off the Nationalist pursuit, the Red Army went back and forth over the Chishui River, a branch of the Yangtze, four times by the end of March. After crossing the Jinsha River around May 10, the Red Army broke through Chiang Kai-shek's encirclement. On May 21, the Red Army was confronted by

the Dadu River, where Shi Dakai, the King of Wing during the Taiping Rebellion, had suffered his final defeat in 1863. The Communist troops seized an iron-chain bridge in Luding and overcame the natural barrier by crossing the river at the end of May. In the middle of June, they climbed over the snowy mountains and in Maogong, met with the Fourth Front Army led by Zhang Guotao 张国焘, who had begun his westward retreat from the revolutionary bases in Hubei, Henan, and Anhui provinces in October 1932.

The celebration of the union of the two Red Armies was joyful and harmonious. The Fourth Front Army had 45,000 troops, while the First Front Army numbered fewer than 10,000. But disagreement surfaced between the two leaders over the leadership of the CCP in general and of the Red Army in particular. Mao's conflict with Zhang Guotao resulted in separation: Mao led the First and Third Corps of the First Front Army north after two months of rest. Zhang stayed and then headed south with the remaining forces. Mao and his followers reached a town called Wuqi in northern Shaanxi in November 1935. At the beginning of July 1936, the Second Front Army joined the Fourth Front Army at Ganzi (in modern-day Tibet). In October 1936, the Second and Fourth Front Armies arrived in Huining, Shaanxi, where they were welcomed by the First Front Army. Thus the three Red Armies reunited and concluded the Long March.

The Term

The term "Long March" did not exist when the event actually started. Originally called withdrawal or retreat (*zhuanyi* 转移 or *chetui* 撤退), the Long March was not thought of as such even as late as the summer of 1935, after the Red Army finished two thirds of their journey. The earliest extant written use of the term "Long March" is dated September 12, 1935; it is found in the document "Guanyu Zhang Guotao tongzhi de cuowu de jue ding" (Decision on comrade Zhang Guotao's mistake).¹ In October, after the Red Army crossed Mount Min, Mao wrote his spectacular poem "Changzheng".

¹ The decision was passed at the meeting of the Central Political Bureau held at Ejie (Gansu province) on September 12, 1935. Published based on the mimeograph version preserved in the Central Archive of China. http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-11/30/content_2276121.htm (retrieved March 6, 2005).

The Red Army fears not the trials of the Long March,
 Holding light ten thousand crags and torrents.
 The Five Ridges wind like gentle ripples
 And the majestic Wumeng rolls by, globules of clay.
 Warm the steep cliffs lapped by the waters of Golden Sand,
 Cold the iron chains spanning the Tatu River.
 Minshan's thousand *li* of snow joyously crossed,
 The three Armies march on, each face glowing.²

红军不怕远征难，万水千山只等闲。
 五岭逶迤腾细浪，乌蒙磅礴走泥丸。
 金沙水拍云崖暖，大渡桥横铁锁寒。
 更喜岷山千里雪，三军过后尽开颜。

——《长征·七律》

Since then, the Long March has been the standard term for this event. Two months later, Mao expounded on its significance in a public speech, which became the definitive evaluation:

It broke the expedition record... The Long March is unprecedented in the annals of history. The Long March is a manifesto... a propaganda team... a seeding machine. Since the time when Pangu³ divided the heavens from the earth and the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors reigned, has history ever witnessed such a Long March as ours?⁴

The Long March in Historical Writing

Writing about the Long March started before the march itself was over. In the Nationalist discourse, the Long March is referred to as the Communist bandits escaping westward.⁵ Besides the newspaper reports and messages on the Nationalist side, the earliest record of the Long March on the Communist side was *Suijun xixing jianwen lu* 随军西行见闻录 (Experiences of the march westward), written in 1935 and published in Shanghai in 1936. The author, writing under the

² Mao Tsetung (Mao Zedong), *Poems* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976).

³ A figure in Chinese mythology who created the universe.

⁴ Mao Zedong, "On the Tactics of Anti-Japanese Imperialism," in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), 65–87.

⁵ For the Nationalist record of the event, see Hu Yugao, ed., *Gongfei xicuanji* (An account of the Communist bandits escaping westward), 2 vols. (Taipei: wenhai chubanshe, 1982); Cai Xiaoqian, *Hongjun xicuan huiyi* (Memoir on the Red Army fleeing west), in *Taiwan ren de changzheng jilu* (Record of the Long March by Taiwan people) (Taipei: Haixia xueshu chubanshe, 2002).

pen name Lian Chen 廉臣, was a captured Nationalist Army doctor. This first-person narrative recounted his experience of marching with the Central Red Army as a prisoner.⁶ Most of the significant events along the way were recorded from a seemingly objective and nonpartisan point of view. Lian Chen's text introduced readers in the Nationalist-occupied areas to the ways the Red Army broke through the four blockades and passed through natural barriers like the Wu River, Jinsha River, Dadu River, and even snow-capped mountains. The narrative stops at the joining of the First and Fourth Front Armies because, according to the book, Lian Chen was then set free by the Communists.

Lian Chen may have been the first person who convinced Chinese people of the heroism and authenticity of the Long March, mostly because of his unimpeachable narrative perspective. But in fact, he turned out to be neither a military doctor serving in the 59th Division of the Nationalist Army nor a captive of the Red Army, as he claimed. He was Chen Yun 陈云, a member of the Executive Political Bureau of the CCP since 1931.⁷ In May 1935, after the Red Army crossed the Dadu River, Chen was dispatched to take command of the Communist underground organization in Shanghai. The narrator's identity became questionable when readers found that he was telling a legend of victory without a single detail on loss or failure. For example, he spent only a few lines on the battles along the Xiang River. According to his account, the Red Army crossed the Xiang peacefully without any loss at all. But as mentioned earlier, the Red Army suffered tremendous losses along the river; half of the troops died in the battles.

In 1936, the Red Army and the CCP had just finished their retreat and found a temporary Promised Land in northern Shaanxi. Edgar

⁶ The title was changed to *Cong dongnan dao xibei* (From the southeast to the northwest) in the edition published by Mingyue chubanshe. It was also included in *Changzheng liangmian xie* (Two faces of the Long March) together with E. Snow's *Changzheng erwan wuqian li* (The Long March: 25,000 li) published by Dawen chubanshe.

⁷ In commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the Zunyi meeting, *Sujun xixing jianwen lu* was reprinted under the name of Chen Yun (陈云) (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1985). Most of its original wording was retained, except for a few pejorative words about the Red Army. *Chijun*, for example, was changed to *hongjun*; *zhumao* (a homophone of pig's hair) to Mao Zedong and Zhu De; the term "Chief Commissioner" for Chiang was changed to Chiang Kai-shek. However, the overt error about the Xiangjiang battle was not corrected, even though the actual losses incurred had long been known. This was not rectified until the book was included in *Chen Yun wenxuan* (Selected works of Chen Yun) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1995).

Snow's arrival in Shaanxi and his passion for publicizing the Chinese Communists were indeed a blessing to Mao and his cohorts. Still considered by the official Nationalist government as "red bandits" (*chifei* 赤匪) and known as unorthodox rebels in the rest of the world other than the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communists needed somebody articulate enough to be their spokesperson. A reporter from Missouri sympathetic to the Chinese Communist revolution, Snow was more eligible for this role than anyone else. Mao knew too well that Snow's report would be his first public appearance on the stage of not only China, but more importantly the world. To use John Fairbank's phrase, "Mao was prepared to put himself on record."⁸ The collaboration with Snow proved fruitful. The journalist was happy to be a recorder of "history as lived by the men and women who made it" and claimed his reports to be "the first authentic account of the Chinese Communist Party and the first connected story of their long struggle to carry through the most thorough-going social revolution in China's three millenniums of history."⁹ His annals of the Long March are also the story Mao prepared to tell to Chinese outside the expedition and to people throughout the world.

The Red Army and the Long March were the seed money for Mao's long-run political capital. The experience in exile for twelve months offered the Communists necessary legitimacy in the production of the Long March discourse. Snow's book, *Red Star Over China*, targeted foreign audiences. Within China, while enjoying a temporary peaceful rest and recovery after an exhausting, year-long march, the Communists did not forget to compile an account of their "hard times." The project was one of their earliest efforts to shape the Chinese vision of the Long March.

As early as the spring of 1936, the editorial board of the Communist Party planned to gather a collection of documents and diaries of the Long March. The editing was done in February 1937, but the official account was not published until November 1942. Written in 1936, not long after the Long March ended, most of *Hongjun changzheng ji* 红军长征记 (An account of the Long March of the Red Army) kept the original flavor of the event, though selectivity in content and a partial

⁸ John K. Fairbank, "Preface to *Red Star Over China*," in Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove, 1968).

⁹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove, 1968), 16.

stance to the Communists were unavoidable. It recounted most of the important heroic battles against the Nationalist Army and presented the most arduous trials the Red Army had gone through, whereas little defeat or loss was noted.¹⁰

The historiography endorsed by the CCP in the late 1930s and 1940s succeeded in shaping the Long March into a foundational myth of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s. During the Cultural Revolution, the Long March became an inspiration for young people to participate in revolution. They mimicked the Red Army and traveled to Yan'an 延安 from far and near to pay their respect and to look for revolutionary truth. Meanwhile, historical writings continued to build up the halo around the event. The fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries in 1986 and 1996 marked the climax of systematic writings on the Long March.¹¹ Some sensitive or previously taboo topics were now open, such as the huge losses at the Xiang River and Tucheng, and this revisionism was a big step in confronting historical truth, especially a foundational national myth.

Besides the institutional compilation of the Long March history, various personal accounts, including diaries and memoirs by the Red soldiers and officers who participated, record the Long March from an individual perspective.¹² Since the 1980s, a genre similar to the traditional historical saga has flourished in Long March discourse. Under the guise of documentary literature (*jishi wenxue* 纪实文学), these

¹⁰ Balujun zhengzhibu xuanchuanbu (Propaganda Branch of Political Bureau of the Eighth Route Army), ed., *Hongjun changzheng ji* (An account of the Long March of the Red Army), 1942. The copy I consult was donated by Edgar Snow to the Harvard Yenching Library. It was originally given to Snow by the commander-in-chief of the Eighth Route Army, Zhu De.

¹¹ The CCP's two agents—the People's Liberation Army and the Central Party School—assumed the task of compiling histories of the Long March and the Red Army. There were more than 100 historical books about the Long March produced from 1986 to 1996. They include *Hongjun Changzheng* (The Long March of the Red Army) in the voluminous *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun lishi ziliao congshu* (Historical materials series of PLA of China) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1990–1993); *Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi diyi yanjiubu*, ed., *Hongjun changzheng shi* (The Long March history of the Red Army) (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1996).

¹² For instance, Chen Changfeng, *Gensui Maozhuxi changzheng* (Long March with Chairman Mao) (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1959); Cheng Fangwu, *Changzheng huiyilu* (Memoir of the Long March) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977); Tong Xiaopeng, *Junzhong riji: 1933–1936* (Military diaries: 1933–1936) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986); Huang Guozhu et al., eds., *Wo de changzheng: Xunfang jianzai lao hongjun* (My Long March: Interview with the old Red Army soldiers), 2 vols. (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2005).

writings confuse readers by conflating fiction and history. They also represent the embarrassing ambiguity of this particular genre—customarily called “reportage”—in China. Many unreliable specifics have been widely circulated because of failures in judgment and depiction. One typical case is accounts of the cipher telegram that directly led to the split between the First and Fourth Front Armies.¹³ In such accounts it is often difficult to distinguish the historical from the fictional. This plethora of publications produced a boom in purportedly “factual” writing about the Long March that did little to clarify murky records and uncertain details. Continued writing about the Long March in the 1980s and ’90s manufactured large amounts of text. Nonetheless, the deficit in quality proves the difficulty of and limits in constructing the historical truth so as to serve as the national myth.

The Long March has drawn considerable attention in the English-speaking world. Dick Wilson, a former director of *Far Eastern Economic Review*, provided a detailed account of the Chinese Communist exodus in the mid-1930s in *The Long March 1935: The Epic of Chinese Communism’s Survival*.¹⁴ Situating the Long March in a larger historical as well as global context, he explains both the causes and the consequences of the event in relation to internal and international affairs. Based on personal interviews with Long March veterans and never-before-seen documents, Harrison Salisbury’s *The Long March: The Untold Story* chronicles the massive military retreat with vivid narrative and archival details. Before the seventieth anniversary of the Long March, Sun Shuyun, a Chinese writer and documentary filmmaker

¹³ The actual copy of this telegram does not exist today. According to the accounts of the CCP, Zhang Guotao refused to go north after the armies joined together. On September 1, 1935, Ye Jianying, then the chief of staff of the front headquarters, reported to Mao a telegram from Zhang Guotao to Chen Changhao, saying Zhang ordered Chen to prevent the Central (Red Army and CCP) from going north by force if necessary. Mao led two corps north on the same night without informing Zhang, regardless of the fact that Zhang was the political commissar in general of the Red Army.

See Fan Shuo and Ding Jiaqi, *Ye Jianying zhuan* (Biography of Ye Jianying) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 1997), 154–202.

Many “documentary writings” on the Long March use the telegram to fabricate historical details during the Long March, e.g., Wen Xiantang, *Shifeiquzhi—changzheng zhong de zhengzhi douzheng* (The rights and wrongs—political struggles during the Long March) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1996); Shang Fangcheng, *Changzheng neimu: yige cong kuibai zouxiang huihuang de kuangshi shenhua* (The untold Long March: an unprecedented myth or from fiasco to glory) (Beijing: Zhongguo yanshi chubanshe, 1996).

¹⁴ London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971.

based in London, following the marchers' footsteps, traveled along the route and interviewed the survivors, who have been forgotten and live on limited pensions. Interweaving discoveries through museum and archival studies, personal stories by old Red Army soldiers, and her impressions of the historical sites, Sun presents a distinct, engaging, yet disturbing narrative that brings to light coercive military recruitment, pillaging of food supplies, and lethal power struggles.¹⁵ Although premised on the Long March as the founding myth of Communist China, her account thoroughly unfolds the unmythical side of this Communist odyssey, thus challenging the mainstream narrative and even rewriting Long March history.

Queries

a) *Whose Long March?*

Almost all records hold that the Long March started in October 1934, when the First Front Army set out from Jiangxi, and ended two years later in October 1936 with the joining of three forces: the First, Second, and Fourth Front Armies. The Long March we usually hear of consists of the route covered by the First Front Army. As the CCP's core military force, it was given the lion's share of credit: more than nine out of ten works about the Long March pertain to the First Front Army. To be sure, the CCP history books acknowledge the contribution of other armies to the final success of this military action. Here the question arises. Surely the Fourth Front Army participated in the expedition and deserves a chapter in the whole movement, but why is its story truncated and largely untold?

From May to July 1932, the Nationalists launched the fourth encirclement of the Red Army. The focus of attack moved from the revolutionary bases in Jiangxi to those in Anhui, Henan, and Hubei provinces. Zhang Guotao, then the vice-chair of the central Soviet government, was put in charge of the northern provinces in April. He led the main force of the Fourth Front Army to retreat toward the west in July. In November 1932, Zhang and his army arrived in northern Sichuan. For this they did not ask the Central CCP for approval.

¹⁵ Sun Shuyun, *The Long March* (London: Harper, 2006).

The Central CCP was infuriated to learn that Zhang had given up those bases and criticized him for his “rightist escapism.” Zhang finally managed to establish a United Northwest Government (*Xibei lianhe zhengfu*) for the sake of the unification of minorities in west China. After the First and Fourth Front Armies met at Maogong, because of the diverging evaluations of the CCP’s route and power struggles within the CCP and the Red Army, Mao went on to the north and Zhang returned to the south.

Zhang’s ambition was frustrated. After joining with the Second Front Army in July, he led his army to northern Shaanxi in October 1936. Later, the Western Legion (*Xilu jun*), mainly composed of the Fourth Front Army, was smashed by the Islamic minority cavalry troops in the northwest. Zhang was blamed for the death of the Fourth Front Army. But according to the political structure of the CCP, the Western Legion was directly commanded by the Central Committee, which was under Mao’s control. As he lost his political power in competition with Mao in Yan’an, Zhang finally chose to surrender to Chiang Kai-shek. Zhang thus came to be portrayed as a traitor in the CCP history books and his Fourth Front Army was not given the credit it deserved in the wars against the Nationalists.

The truth is that the Fourth Front Army had started on the road to the west two years earlier than the First Front Army. But this move was considered a politically wrong decision by the Central CCP at the time. Zhang’s decision was not appreciated until after the First Front Army and the CCP retreated from Jiangxi and went to the isolated west in order to survive. Zhang was thus the inventor and practitioner of strategic retreat, later endorsed and utilized by Mao. Zhang’s independent movement and conversion to the Nationalist side were separate issues.¹⁶ The earliest CCP publication on the Long March, *An Account of the Long March of the Red Army* (1942), centered on the First Front Army, even though a later edition in 1958 attended to the ambiguity about the Fourth Front Army in the Long March. Consequently the title of the book was modified to *Hongyi fangmianjun changzheng ji* 红一方面军长征记 (The Long March of the First Front Red Army).¹⁷ It contains most of the articles from *An Account of the Long March of the Red*

¹⁶ After Mao headed to north without informing Zhang, on October 5, 1935, Zhang established another Central CCP in Zhuomudiao as opposed to the original Central CCP.

¹⁷ Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1958.

Army and claims that the definition of the Long March was based on the directive by Mao in “Lun fandui riben diguo zhuyi de celüe 论反对日本帝国主义的策略” (On tactics of anti-Japanese imperialism) and “Lun lianhe zhengfu” 论联合政府 (On united government). Thus the compilers excluded the march of the Fourth Front Army from 1932 to 1933, together with some other earlier excursions of the Red Army, from the discussion of the Long March in this book.¹⁸

b) *Escape or Anti-Japanese Resistance?*

Many history textbooks depict the Long March as a mobilization toward the north in order to resist the Japanese. More and more evidence has shown that anti-Japanese resistance is a later embellishment added by the CCP propaganda machine. The northeast was lost to Japan after September 18, 1931. On January 28, 1932, the Japanese bombed Shanghai. On April 15, 1932, the temporary central government of Soviet China declared war with Japan. This was for show rather than action, especially considering that the Soviet China was still preoccupied with the anti-extermination campaign. At the beginning of July, the Seventh Corps of the Red Army was dispatched to Fujian, Anhui, and Zhejiang provinces as the Anti-Japanese Pioneer (*Kangri xianqiandui* 抗日先遣队) to wage guerrilla war, establish a Soviet area, and disseminate the CCP's anti-Japanese policy. The true goal of this action was to distract the Nationalist Army from the Soviet area in Jiangxi so that the Nationalist pressure on the Central Red Army would be relieved.¹⁹ The Pioneer was wiped out in only a few months, with the main leaders either killed in battle or captured. Thus the Anti-Japanese Pioneer campaign was actually intended to help the Central Red Army escape from Jiangxi. It could be easily exposed as false: at that time Japan occupied the northeast and Shanghai, but the Red Army was going in the opposite direction. Even after they arrived in Shaanxi and announced the anti-Japanese manifesto in December 1935, Mao did not take anti-Japanese resistance as seriously

¹⁸ “Zhongguo gongnong hongjun changzheng gaishu” (A summary of the Long March of the Chinese peasant and worker's Red Army), in *Hongyi fangmianjun changzheng ji*, 451–469.

¹⁹ *Hongjun changzheng shi* (The Long March history of the Red Army) (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1996), 21.

as expanding the Soviet area to compete with the Nationalists. The Fourth Front Army was sent west to occupy Gansu and Xinjiang instead of northeast to fight the Japanese.

The Long March in Literature and Film

“Someday someone will write the full epic of this exciting expedition”—thus predicted Edgar Snow in “The Long March” chapter of *Red Star Over China* in 1937.²⁰ The following half century proved his prophecy partially true: there have been numerous writings about the Long March, but the “full epic” Snow expected seems an impossibility and has yet to materialize.

The 1950s saw the first wave of imagining the Long March in various forms and genres including opera, drama, and fiction. Li Bozhao, a propaganda troupe veteran of the Long March, led the way in 1951 by writing the three-act, nine-scene opera *Changzheng*, which recounted stories of the Red Army’s valor with lyrics in the most archetypal way.²¹ The key events around Mao were highlighted with heavy strokes. While she had had professional training in music and dancing in the Soviet Union, Li did not seem to possess professional operatic knowledge. Her work is more a play of songs (*geju*, the equivalent of “opera” in Chinese) than a real opera. The melodic version could be taken as a genuine hallelujah for Mao and the Long March. Similarly, Chen Qitong drew a prototype of revolutionary geography for the Long March with his six-act play *Wanshui qianshan* 万水千山 (Hundreds of mountains, thousands of rivers, 1955). Drawing on his own experience of journeying with the Red Army from Sichuan to north Shaanxi, Chen’s work covers the critical trials that the Red Army overcame. Although Mao did not figure in the story, his influence was strongly felt in the dramatic world.

Wang Yuanjian’s series of short stories in the late 1950s about the Long March and early Chinese Communist Revolution feature a set of symbols of the Red Army and the CCP. These could be understood as the legacy of socialist realism, which emphasizes complying

²⁰ Snow, *Red Star Over China*, 206.

²¹ In collaboration with Yu Cun and others. The script of the first performance by the People’s Institute of Arts of Beijing was published by the institute in October 1951.

with socialist principles and being true to reality. These works brought Wang nationwide popularity; among them, *Qigen huochai* (Seven matchsticks, 1958) is the most representative piece. Its inclusion in Chinese textbooks for elementary education proves its political correctness in accordance with the party ideology. With no more than 2,000 Chinese characters, *Seven Matchsticks* briefly recounts the fate of two Communist soldiers who became separated from the rest of the army. On the verge of death, one of the soldiers passes his last seven matchsticks to the other, Lu Jinyong. The dying soldier uses his remaining energy to bring out a certificate of party membership, packing the matchsticks inside. This text is an example of rendering the official discourses of the Long March into figurative language. The symbols here are very straightforward and the whole narrative is oriented teleologically.

This cluster of Long March representations in the 1950s carried the mission of producing meaning. Works about the march without exception dwell on the bitterness and hardship that the Red Army endured, with slight differences in agenda: highlighting the sacrifice and wisdom of great leaders or presenting the difficulty of preserving humanity among the masses. They function like parables, teaching moral lessons through figurative sense making. The central message is that the Communist Party made huge sacrifices in order to shape the destiny of Chinese masses and the Nationalist Party was the oppressive other. Intriguingly, the oppressive other is very often absent, so the Long March storytelling appears to be a monologue, like that of an old hero recounting his glorious past.

Wei Wei's work did not go beyond that of Wang Yuanjian except in length. *Diqiu shang de hong piaodai* (The red ribbon on the earth, 1987) enlarges upon well-known battles and struggles within the party. The narrative recounts the whole story from the defeat at the riverbank of Xiangjiang to the significant meeting at Zunyi, the miraculous crossing of the Jinsha and Dadu Rivers, and the final joining of forces in north Shaanxi. Almost all major warfare against enemies and conflicts within the party are elided. When the first draft was finished at the end of 1986, exactly half a century had passed since the conclusion of the Long March. Wei Wei made his work a heartfelt offering to commemorate the march. He aspired to compile a complete document of the Long March from a writer's point of view rather than a historian's. He followed what history textbooks told him along the main plot line and created details around those narrative kernels. His

creative effort appears limited to filling the void in history by making characters speak—abundant direct speech is the primary feature of the novel. Although Wei Wei spent nine out of ten of the 470,000 words in depicting dialogue, the novel does not break out of the set pattern of representations of the Long March. Except for the enthusiasm of old Long Marchers and a nostalgic few who grew up with Wei Wei's *reportage*, *Red Ribbon* got a lukewarm response, although it won several awards from mainstream cultural institutions.²²

The Long March literature before the mid-1980s displays a blind spot. Loss and death are usually replaced with rhetorical ellipsis or intentionally deleted. From the very beginning, loss and defeat have been denied and became forbidden subjects. This blind spot began to be filled in 1986 when a special issue of the journal *Jiefangjun wenyi* (Literature and arts of People's Liberation Army) commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Long March was published. This issue displayed both the mighty influence of the dominant discourse and the alternative impulse to reveal the trauma and loss inherent in the event. The inside front cover and inside back cover were printed with two works by seal-carving artists. One was inscribed with Mao Zedong's poem "The Long March." The other was imprinted with the place names of twenty sites that the Red Army passed during the march.

Meanwhile, a special column, "The Long March Forum" (*Changzheng bihui*), in this issue collected three pieces written by a new generation of military writers after they visited the Long March sites. Acknowledging the miracle and sublimity of the march, these writings explore the historical condition of the epic formation, unmask the mythic aura around the Long March, and reveal the fictional nature of the event. They fill the void in the orthodox history with vivid details. Cheng Dong's *Xiyang Hong* (Red sunset) records interviews with old Red Army soldiers along the route and collects the scattered memories preserved among them;²³ Jiang Qitao's *Mati shengsui* (Sound of a horseshoe) describes how a squad of women soldiers of the Fourth Front Army overcame all kinds of difficulties to catch up with the main force;²⁴

²² It ranked as one of the ten books recommended for teenagers by the central Communist Youth League. Wei Wei was honored as a "Guide of Life" (*rensheng de lubiao*) and received an award from *People's Literature* for this book.

²³ In *Jiefangjun wenyi* (Literature and Arts of PLA) 10 (1986): 64–90.

²⁴ In *Jiefangjun wenyi* (Literature and Arts of PLA) 10 (1986): 34–63.

Qiao Liang's *Lingqi* (Mourning flag) tells of the vicissitudes of the small town Hongmaojing in Guangxi province over the half century since the Red Army passed through.²⁵ Despite distinctions in subject matter and narrative perspective, they share similar thematic concerns, stances, and historical reflections.²⁶

Compared to the orthodox Long March writings by Li Bozhao, Chen Qitong, and Wang Yuanjian, "the Long March Forum" series is more moderate and does not intend to construct a grand epic. The writers of the series played the role of mediator by inserting their observations and reflections. Therefore, unlike *Red Ribbon*, *Red Sunset* does not use any direct speech. All the interviewees' words are presented in the third person point of view. But the story remains fragmentary and even inconsistent. *Mourning Flag* goes one step further. The vicissitudes in the fifty years since the Red Army passed are presented through the gaze and speech of two characters respectively. Through their vision and stories, we see what we cannot see and hear what we cannot hear in history books. The main characters Grandpa Qingguo and Erguaizi are not spokesmen of the party. They do not know how the history books record what has happened around them. Unconditioned by the mighty historical discourse, they look from ordinary people's perspective and portray in detail individual petty characters, family, and rural everyday life. In this way, these writings present a nuanced picture of the Long March.

The Long March has been one of the main themes of cinema production since the establishment of the PRC. From the late 1950s to the early 1980s, all major sites where the Red Army successfully eluded or defeated the Nationalist troops naturally have become settings for PRC film producers to stage the heroism of the Red Army and the monumentality of the Long March, creating a grand revolutionary geography. The combination of geographical sites and human endurance bridges natural space and national solidarity. Since the mid-1980s, with the breakthrough in literary writings on the Long March, some films have begun to supplement, complicate, reflect upon, and

²⁵ In *Jiefangjun wenyi* (Literature and Arts of PLA) 10 (1986): 8–32.

²⁶ The loss, death, and cruelty are also present in films made since the mid-1980s, e.g., *Mati shengsui* (Sound of a horseshoe, adapted from the novella under the same title, dir. Liu Miaomiao, 1987), *Danofang* (Mill, adapted from *Morning Flag*, dir. Wu Ziniu, 1990), and *Jiejie* (Sister, dir. Wu Yigong, 1984).

even challenge previous mainstream cinematic productions. In terms of narrative scope, Long March films in the PRC can be divided into three categories: partial or single episodes of the revolutionary saga—films including *Wanshui qianshan* (Hundreds of mountains, thousands of rivers, dir. Chen Yin, 1959), *Tupo wujiang* (Breaking through the Wu River, dir. Li Shutian, 1961), *Jinsha jiangpan* (At the bank of the Jinsha River, dir. Fu Chaowu, 1963), *Daduhe* (The Dadu River, dir. Lin Nong, 1980), and *Si du chishui* (Crossing the red water four times, dir. Cai Jiwei, 1983); complete epics such as *Changzheng* (The Long March, dir. Zhai Junjie, 1996); and fragmentary sidelights like *Jiejie* (Sister, dir. Wu Yigong, 1984), *Mati shengsui* (Sound of a horseshoe, dir. Liu Miaomiao, 1987), and *Xindong suiyue* (Hard times dir. Guang Xinlan, 2004).

The Long March in Public Memory

The Chinese people have inherited more from the Long March than any other episode in modern Chinese history. The impact of the March has been long-lasting and far-reaching. Everyone who grew up in China from the 1950s through the 1980s is familiar with honors named after it, like the title “Long March Pioneer” (*Changzheng tujishou* 长征突击手) bestowed upon those with high achievement in socialist production. Not only is it revered as an essential part of the nation’s glorious past, the Long March also lived and continues to live with us today in everyday life. Most importantly, it works as a reserve of Chinese collective memory.

Since the founding of the PRC, the Long March has been an object of grand commemoration every five years. It inspired thousands of Red Guards to march to the revolutionary Mecca, Yan’an, to look for the truth of revolution.²⁷ Generations of people in China have been obsessed with walking the route of the Long March. Marching to Yan’an has become an integral practice of revolutionary worship. Westerners, like Harrison Salisbury, Andrew McEwen, and Ed Jocelyn, have also rewalked the Long March in search of truth and experience.

²⁷ As recorded in the documentary *Morning Sun*, dir. Carma Hinton, 2003.

The year 2002 saw a revival of interest in the Long March worldwide. In New York, the curator Lu Jie launched the Long March Foundation in New York and organized a series of events along the route titled “The Long March: A Walking Visual Display,” which includes exhibits of avant-garde painting, performance art, sculptures, workshops, etc. Almost at the same time in Berlin, another Chinese artist, Zhang Qikai designed another art event called “The Long March: Across Europe,” which sought to revive European memory of the Long March. Its subtitle, “Red Star Over Europe,” intentionally resonates with Snow’s *Red Star Over China* from sixty-five years earlier.²⁸

Seventy-odd artists from China and abroad participated in the “Walking Visual Display,” with works designed to be exhibited at twenty spots along the actual route of the Long March. The event was declared over after they reached the Dadu River, the twelfth site in their original plan. The curators explained that they had achieved their goal and foresaw that the rest of the exhibition would have less openness and more uncertainty—the original aim of the project. But the exhibitions and workshops continued at their base in Beijing. The innovation of tracking the route on foot initiated a heated discussion about the format of art exhibits, the current art exhibit system, and the relationship of the arts and audiences. According to the curators, “The Long March” was an exhibit about an exhibit, not a display juxtaposing objects of art in a traditional static space. The spatial exploration with artistic works was also an archeological adventure of local art along the route, so some unknown artists were brought to the spotlight.

Despite the organizers’ stress that the display was not necessarily related to the actual Long March, the most powerful and excellent pieces were, without exception, inspired by the march and relevant memories of socialist experience. The banner Xu Bing designed for this event echoed the Chinese Communist Party flag, with cartoonlike sketches of axe and sickle. The characters inscribed on the banner were the English “Long March” but in Chinese calligraphy. The walking performance went beyond the limits of representation and came up with different versions of mapping the Long March. The series of

²⁸ See www.longmarchspace.com and <http://arts.tom.com/Archive/1001/2002/8/23-81302.html> respectively for further information about these two events.

exhibits composed a picture of an artistic and cultural Long March. The map of the Long March tattooed on the back of an artist from Inner Mongolia, Qin Ga, physically created a site of collective and individual memory.

Around its seventieth anniversary in 2005, the Long March inspired all kinds of commemoration. More books were published to tell the Long March story,²⁹ to record the experiences of rewalking the route,³⁰ and to document march survivors' oral histories.³¹ Long March documentaries and TV drama series were aired during prime time.³² One of the most popular Internet groups designated a specific Web site for Long March archives and news, <http://news.sina.com.cn/z/changzheng70/index.shtml>. Since 2004, the path of the march has become the artery of "Red Tourism" promoted by party institutions. All of these phenomena show that the Long March continues to live as an integral part of Chinese history, a legend, and a national myth. In addition to serving as a prime source of inspiration for both mainstream and alternative cultural production, the Long March may well be explored more as a commodity in the market economy, as "Red Tourism" illustrates.

²⁹ The list of Long March books is long; it includes Sun Shuyun's *The Long March* (London: Harper, 2006) as the first Long March book by a Chinese author targeting an English audience.

³⁰ For example, Zhang Wei, *Chongzou changzheng shandi* (Rewalking the mountains on the Long March) (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2006); Wu Jinming, *He yeye chongzou changzheng* (Rewalking the Long March with my grandfather) (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 2006).

³¹ Huang Guizhu, et al., *Wo de changzheng: xunfang jianzai lao hongjun* (My Long March: Visiting the old Red Army soldiers still alive) (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2005).

³² CCTV anchor Cui Yongyuan launched *Wode changzheng* (My Long March) in 2006, leading twenty people of different backgrounds in rewalking the Long March. The CCTV news channel followed them throughout the journey and reported this event with extensive coverage.

RECTIFICATION: PARTY DISCIPLINE,
INTELLECTUAL REMOLDING, AND THE FORMATION OF
A POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Kirk A. Denton

The Term

In 1942, in the middle of a protracted war against Japan, Mao Zedong gave a speech called “Rectify the Party’s Style of Work” (*Zhengdun dang de zuofeng* 整顿党的作风, Feb. 1, 1942). In that speech, presented to Yan’an political cadres on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Chinese Communist Party Central Party School, he said:

What is the problem? It is the fact that there is something in the minds of a number of our comrades which strikes me as not quite right, not quite proper. In other words, there is still something wrong with our style of study, with our style in the Party’s internal and external relations and with our style of writing. By something wrong with the style of study we mean the malady of subjectivism. By something wrong with our style in Party relations we mean the malady of sectarianism. By something wrong with the style of writing we mean the malady of stereotyped Party writing. All these are wrong, they are ill winds, but they are not like the wintry north winds that sweep across the whole sky. Subjectivism, sectarianism, and stereotyped Party writing are no longer the dominant styles, but merely gusts of contrary wind, ill winds from the air-raid tunnels. It is bad, however, that such winds should still be blowing in the Party. We must seal off the passages which produce them. . . . Fight subjectivism in order to rectify the style of study, fight sectarianism in order to rectify the style in Party relations, and fight Party stereotypes in order to rectify the style of writing—such is the task before us.¹

The term Mao uses for “rectify” is *zhengdun* 整顿. What is to be rectified is the party “style” (*zuofeng*). The combined phrase *zhengdun zuofeng*,

¹ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), 3: 35–36.

often abbreviated to *zhengfeng*, from this point on became a key term in the political rhetoric of the Chinese Communist movement.²

The target of Mao's scorn is "subjectivism" (*zhuguanzhuyi* 主观主义), which he describes as an "improper style of study" that is "opposed to Marxism-Leninism and is incompatible with the Communist Party." "Style of study" is a "question of method of thinking in comrades of our leading bodies, of all cadres and party members, a question of our attitude toward Marxism-Leninism."³ Mao highlights two forms of subjectivism: dogmatism (*jiaotiaozhuyi* 教条主义) and empiricism (*jingyanzhuyi* 经验主义), the former a blind application of Marxist theory and the latter a purely perceptual knowledge of the objective world. Both of these forms of knowledge are incomplete, and true knowledge comes only from a dialectical interaction of theory with empirical knowledge.⁴ The goal, then, of rectifying party cadres was the achievement of this balanced unity of theory and practice, ideas and experience.

For Mao, dogmatism manifested itself in a formalistic writing style that he termed "stereotyped party writing," or "party eight-legged essays" (*dang bagu* 党八股), a reference to the highly regulated essay that was part of the imperial civil service examination. This kind of writing was empty of meaning, but it was also pretentious and dangerously elitist because it could not be understood by the masses. "Stereotyped party writing" also suggested a failed attitude that did not sufficiently investigate and study reality and relied on the explanatory power of theory.⁵

Alongside this elegant dialectic and appealing antidogmatist rhetoric was the specter of party politics and the effort by the CCP, fueled by Mao Zedong's political ambitions, to forge in Yan'an, its political capital during most of the war years, a politically pure community without ideological "maladies" or "gusts of contrary winds." For Mao,

² The key Maoist texts on the Yan'an Rectification are: "Reform our Study" (Gaizao women de xuexi; May 1941); "Rectify the Party's Style of Work" (Zhengdun dang de zuofeng; Feb. 1, 1942), "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing" (Fandui dang bagu; Feb. 1942), and "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature" (Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua; May 1942). These texts are all found in English translation in Mao, *Selected Works*, vol. 3. As early as 1929, Mao had written on the need to "Correct Mistaken Ideas in the Party." See *Selected Works*, vol. 1.

³ Mao, *Selected Works*, 3: 36.

⁴ Mao, *Selected Works*, 3: 37–42.

⁵ See "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing," in Mao, *Selected Works*, 3: 53–68.

subjectivism, as an inadequate knowledge of the world, could lead to political “sectarianism” (*zongpaizhuyi* 宗派主义) that would threaten the very interests of the party. Mao’s immediate concern was ideological conformity within the ranks of the CCP, which at the time of this speech he did not yet control with absolute surety.⁶ For intellectuals, a range of party cadres, and even the broad masses of the Chinese people, “rectification” would come to mean political purges and ironically, given Mao’s antidogmatic rhetoric, an extreme form of ideological dogmatism centered around Mao Zedong Thought.

The story of rectification is thus one of both political idealism (the transformation of people’s minds in the formation of a new political community) and political persecution, utopian Maoist philosophy and bald Maoist politics. Mao’s concern in the above speech was to erase ideological differences within the ranks of the party as a way of forging political unity, something arguably necessary to the waging of a war and a revolution. At its heart lies a faith in the “malleability of man”—the idea, perhaps inherited from the Confucian tradition, with its emphasis on study and education as routes to moral perfectibility, that men’s minds can be transformed in the creation of a political and ethical community. This community was not just something forced on disenchanted party cadres and intellectuals; they were for the most part willing participants who actively helped to shape the community and eagerly sought to join. By joining, they could contribute to the “prairie fire,” as Mao had once described the revolutionary movement, and gain a newfound sense of life purpose. If the party represented the “people” and if rectification allowed cadres and intellectuals to forge a sharper and more disciplined weapon, then rectification also meant a closer affinity with the people, who, in the Maoist scheme of things, were the motive force of history. Rectification thus offered individuals the appealing possibility of joining with the dynamic flow of history. As Apter and Cheek point out, the Yan’an Rectification shows at once the Janus-faced nature of the Communist movement—idealist and collectivist on the one hand, and repressive and intolerant on the other—and the complex interrelationship between these two

⁶ See Thomas Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution of the Chinese Communist Leadership* (Copenhagen: NIAS; Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

faces.⁷ Rectification is the principal tool, therefore, for forging a collective community with shared values, something necessary for mass mobilization and social transformation, but also for the foundation of a totalitarian state.

Yan'an Rectification (1941–44)

Although the Yan'an Rectification is commonly thought of as the prototype for the series of party rectifications that would follow in the postrevolutionary period, there were rectifications and political purges long before, the earliest and most horrific in 1930, when the Communist Party was based in Jiangxi. In China, this violent purge is generally represented as a justifiable action in the face of open opposition to Mao (though Mao was, of course, not the head of the party at that time). Scholars working outside China paint a different picture: the violent attacks were launched by Mao to help secure his very tenuous position in the party leadership, against what was referred to as the “AB *tuan*” (AB 团), or the anti-Bolsheviks.⁸ The purge was an attempt by Mao to gain political control over the Jiangxi soviet.⁹

What makes the Yan'an Rectification different from this early party purge is its coupling of purges with a new pedagogy centered on ideological reform. The Yan'an Rectification should be understood in the larger context of Yan'an hagiography. Yan'an was the place the

⁷ David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), xxv. The critic Li Tuo presents the Yan'an Rectification in starker terms: it was the pivotal moment in its history when the party embraced intolerance and adopted a dogmatic political style that sought the elimination of “enemies” and a new discourse he labels “Mao style” (*Mao wenti* 毛文体) that was the language of power. See Li Tuo, “Ding Ling de bu jiidan: Mao tizhi xia zhishifenzi zai huayu shengchan zhong de fuza jiaose” (Ding Ling, no simple matter: The complex role of intellectuals in the production of discourse under the Maoist system), *Jintian* 3 (1993): 222–42.

⁸ Liu Shiqi, married to Mao's wife's sister, was in charge of the Jiangxi soviet in 1930, when popular uprisings opposed taxes, etc. Mao blamed the uprisings on AB elements. With Mao away in Changsha, Li Wenlin fired Liu and denounced him for creating an “immense Red terror.” Mao then declared that the entire soviet was controlled by AB elements and began a purge, eventually focusing on Futian, where most of the Jiangxi soviet leadership lived. See Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 91.

⁹ Peng Xiaolian's family memoir, *Tamen de suiyue* (Their years) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 2000), includes discussion of her father, Peng Boshan, later a target of the anti-Hu Feng campaign, and his place in the purge of 1930.

Communists ended up after the Long March, and it has been portrayed as something of a utopia, with the “Yan’an spirit” coming to represent the essence of the revolution’s collectivism and self-sacrifice.¹⁰ Of course, this Yan’an is as much myth as it was reality. To this day, however, the rectification is viewed positively in official PRC forums (e.g., museum exhibitions): as a necessary tool in building a disciplined and unified party. One official text calls it a “a great thought liberation movement and enlightenment movement” (in the tradition of May Fourth) that sought to “rectify and establish our party in terms of thought, politics, and organization in order to lead the people in overthrowing the enemy’s oppression, gaining liberation, and establishing a new China.”¹¹ Liberating cadres from feudal and bourgeois thought and from “doctrinaire” Marxism would lead them toward “truth.” Without rectification, so the argument goes, the party would have been unable to achieve victory in the war against Japan and the subsequent civil war against the Nationalists; rectification was necessary to consolidate its power and thus increase its effectiveness as a political and military machine.¹² More recently, however, historians outside China and some within, most notably Dai Qing, present a very different picture that centers more on party purges and political ambitions than on a benign pedagogy in the building of a socialist community, party discipline, or the honing of a party machine. In the West, Chang and Halliday’s account is most notorious for this Machiavellian representation of Mao.

The Yan’an Rectification does indeed need to be understood in the larger context of party factional politics. The conventional story—

¹⁰ For a discussion of this purge, see Gao Hua, *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de: Yan’an zhengfeng yundong de lailong qumai* (How the red sun ascended: The direction and shape of the Yan’an rectification movement) (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue, 2000), 10–54. This has been the standard representation, of course, in the PRC scholarship, but it is a view that was also widely accepted in Western scholarship. See, for example, Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). Also, the view of Yan’an presented by Edgar Snow in his classic *Red Star Over China*.

¹¹ *Yan’an zhengfeng yundong jishi* (Chronicle of the Yan’an rectification movement) (Beijing: Qjushi, 1982), 1–2, 14.

¹² Recent party historiography, as Chen Yongfa points out, also conveniently separates the movement into the “rectification movement” led by Mao and the “salvation movement” (*qiangjiu yundong*) led by Kang Sheng. Whereas the former is characterized by a more benevolent re-education, the latter is characterized by political purges. Chen Yongfa, *Yanan de yinying* (Yan’an’s shadow) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindai shi yanjiusuo, 1990), 2.

Wang Ming himself would later call it a “fabrication”¹³—is that at the Zunyi Meeting in 1935, about halfway through the Long March, Mao wrested control of the party from the Comintern and its Chinese sympathizers, bringing an end to Wang Ming’s “left opportunism.” In fact, Mao’s control over the party continued to be uneasy even after the meeting. Wang Ming and Qin Bangxian (Bo Gu) of the Russian Returned Student group,¹⁴ but also Zhang Guotao, offered tangible threats to Mao’s supremacy even after arrival in Yan’an. As Kampen discusses, Wang Ming “clashed” with Mao after returning to Yan’an from the Soviet Union in 1937.¹⁵

Rectification, which involved study of texts and party documents, was also a response to the rapid increase in party membership during the war period in Yan’an. Party ranks had been decimated by the Long March, and the rapid increase in new blood came largely from peasant stock. Some new members, who had fled to Yan’an from urban centers like Shanghai, came from “bourgeois” backgrounds. The rectification was at least partly launched as an educational movement to train these new party members and transform their worldviews.

The rectification began with a series of speeches given by Mao in 1942, including the one discussed at the beginning of this essay. The speeches drew attention to “maladies” within the party and called for a rectification. The party then launched a massive study campaign, during which cadres were expected to read and discuss a set of designated texts: speeches and essays by Mao (including the speeches that initiated the movement), resolutions of the Central Committee regarding cadre training and strengthening party unity, essays by Chen Yun and Liu Shaoqi on how to be a good communist, views on the history of the party (representing Mao’s rise to power in a positive light), etc.¹⁶ With only one by Stalin (“The Bolshevization of the Party”), the documents mark a move, commonly considered one of the positive

¹³ Wang Ming, *Mao’s Betrayal* (Moscow: Progress, 1979), 27.

¹⁴ Zhang Wentian (Luo Fu) was part of this group of CCP members who had studied in the Soviet Union and were loyal to Comintern policy, but he lent his support to Mao at the Zunyi Meeting (1935) and was rewarded with the position of General Secretary of the party. Although Zhang held the party’s top position, it is generally recognized that Mao “called the shots” after 1935. See Chang and Halladay, *Mao*, 141.

¹⁵ Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution*, 111.

¹⁶ For English translations of these texts, see Boyd Compton, *Mao’s China: Party Reform Documents, 1942–1944* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1952).

aspects of the Yan'an Rectification, toward the sinification of Marxist ideology. The rectification's central thrust against "dogmatism" was at least partly an attack on Wang Ming's dogmatic adherence to Soviet (read: Stalinist) Marxism. Wang Ming's close association with the Soviet Union (he had studied there in the 1920s and had returned to live there from 1931 to 1937) and the Comintern (he was its Chinese representative) made him an object of Mao's scorn. In his struggle with Wang Ming, Mao had the critical support of leaders like Liu Shaoqi, Chen Boda, and Hu Qiaomu, as well as his "sharp knife," the "purge expert" Kang Sheng.¹⁷ Although Mao did not dare openly purge Wang Ming because the latter continued to have support from the Soviet Union, he did try, as Chang and Halladay have suggested, to secretly and slowly poison him to death.¹⁸

In the spring and summer of 1942, the rectification expanded as new targets emerged. In the process of enlisting cadres and intellectuals in the campaign to attack "subjectivism" and other problems in the "work style" of party cadres, a group of writers and intellectuals—Wang Shiwei, Luo Feng, Ding Ling, Ai Qing, Liu Xuewei, Hua Junwu, and others—openly criticized party rule in Yan'an. They hit hard at problems in Yan'an: inequality between men and women, party privilege, draconian methods of ideological remolding, the absence of democracy, etc. Although the others eventually succumbed to party pressure to renounce their criticisms, Wang Shiwei did not. As Fan Wenlan, head of the Yan'an Research Institute where Wang worked, allegedly said: "The Institute's party committee entrusted five comrades to talk with Wang to help him realize his faults but Wang cursed them throughout the meeting. There were also some comrades who volunteered to talk to Wang but none of them succeeded in waking him up."¹⁹ In his recalcitrance, Wang set himself up to be made an example of. Though Wen Jize points to a less defiant Wang, accusations that he was a Trotskyite were already in the air, and it was clear his days were numbered.

In response to the outpouring of discontent from the intellectual sphere, in May 1942, Mao gave a series of talks later published as "Talks on the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature." In them, he

¹⁷ Gao Hua, *Hong taiyang*, 220–25.

¹⁸ Chang and Halladay, *Mao*, 252–63.

¹⁹ Cited in Dai Qing, *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies": Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party, 1942–1944* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 40.

outlines a highly politicized role for literature (in the service of the revolution) and a subservient role for writers (under the auspices of the party). He concludes by calling for a rectification in the cultural realm:

The problems discussed here exist in our literary and art circles in Yanan. What does that show? It shows that wrong styles of work still exist to a serious extent in our literary and art circles and that there are still many defects among our comrades, such as idealism, dogmatism, empty illusions, empty talk, contempt for practice and aloofness from the masses, all of which call for an effective and serious campaign of rectification.²⁰

Although Wang Shiwei is not mentioned by name, it was already becoming clear that he was the key target of this rectification. Less than a month after the talks were given, articles began appearing in the party *Liberation Daily* attacking Wang's satirical essays.²¹ In June 1942, Wang was "tried" for his crimes (being a Trotskyite, an anti-party gang leader, and a spy for the GMD). The prosecution enlisted party cadres and intellectuals, some of whom were friends of Wang and had initially supported his criticisms, to speak out publicly against him. A June 1942 meeting of Yan'an literary and art workers concluded: "Everybody agreed that the Trotskyite Wang Shiwei was both a political enemy and an enemy of literary and artistic circles."²² The poet Ai Qing allegedly said:

Wang Shiwei's articles are impregnated with a gloomy spirit. Reading them gives me the feeling of entering the temple of a spirit that protects the town. His style is mediocre. . . . He depicts Yan'an as dark and sinister, he pits artists against politicians, old cadres against the young and stirs them up. His viewpoint is reactionary and his remedies poisonous. This "individual" does not deserve to be described as "human," let alone as a "comrade."²³

But participants were also expected to reflect on their own ideological backgrounds and to remold themselves. At one meeting, Ding Ling,

²⁰ Mao, *Selected Works*, 3:94.

²¹ Interestingly, the *Liberation Daily* was also the forum for many of the articles criticizing life in Yan'an. Patricia Stranahan has portrayed the rectification in terms of struggle for control over this important party newspaper. See Stranahan, *Molding the Medium: The Chinese Communist Party and the Liberation Daily* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1990).

²² Cited in Dai Qing, *Wang Shiwei*, 32. For samples of some of these anti-Wang Shiwei texts, see 99–155.

²³ Dai Qing, *Wang Shiwei*, 110.

previously a supporter of Wang Shiwei and also an author of articles critical of life in Yan'an, said: "Now I have begun to be clear about quite a few of the issues that used to confuse me. I have the experience of 'turn around, and you will see the bank of the river' . . . a feeling of suddenly realizing the whole truth."²⁴ If Wang Shiwei was a negative example and a focal point for the rectification, intellectuals like Ding Ling became models of "enlightenment" for the benighted. The fact that Wang Shiwei was alone in resisting the rectification suggests either that intellectuals were cowed into conformity or that they saw themselves as gaining something personally by complying. Most likely it was a combination of both.

Wang was not arrested until April 1, 1943, but he had already labeled the head of the "Five-Member Antiparty Clique," the core of the larger party purge of 1943–44. Thousands were arrested as spies and made to confess their own crimes and/or expose the crimes of others, thus creating an atmosphere of "terror"²⁵ in Yan'an that imposed conformity through fear and sought to eliminate any semblance of ideological autonomy. The party later recognized that these purges had gotten out of hand and blamed the excesses of this phase of the rectification on Kang Sheng. The Yan'an Rectification also spread to the GMD areas, where the writer Hu Feng and his subjectivist views of literature were the object of attack, but outside Yan'an the party was less successful in incorporating intellectuals into its "discursive community," to borrow Apter and Saich's term.

With the Yan'an Rectification, the party institutionalized a process for re-education that centered around not just reading and discussion of canonical texts but also public criticism (*pipíng* 批评) and self-criticism (*zìwǒ pipíng* 自我批评). Public criticism entailed public humiliation that psychologically broke down the "guilty" culprit, forcing him to recognize his sins and write them down or publicly acknowledge them. The psychological pressure to confess was tremendous: the threat of social ostracism in a culture that stressed the centrality of human relations was a terrible burden that many could not handle—suicides were common. As painful and awkward as this process could be, participants could gain from it a profound sense of belonging—to

²⁴ Dai Qing, *Wang Shiwei*, 50.

²⁵ Chang and Halladay, *Mao*, 236–51.

a tight-knit community of like-minded fellows and to a noble revolutionary cause.

The Yan'an Rectification would have profound implications for the Communist movement. First, Mao consolidated his power and effectively eliminated his enemies. Second, Mao's texts became the principal object of study for party cadres in their re-education, Mao Zedong Thought emerged as an ideology from this corpus of canonical works, and a cult of personality surrounding Mao took shape.²⁶ Third, a new culture was instituted that sought, through a combination of coercion and study, to instill party discipline. Finally, a style of thought reform was institutionalized and would become part and parcel of all subsequent movements and rectifications in the postrevolutionary period.

Rectification of Contradictions in Society

After "liberation," the party launched several campaigns that could, in the larger scheme of things, be considered rectifications, though the term *zhengfeng* was not always used. These campaigns differed from those of the prerevolutionary period in not focusing solely on party cadres and party intellectuals but extending to a broader range of people. Whereas previous rectifications were justified as critical to the elimination of dangerous deviations within the party (i.e., the Anti-Bolshevism of the early 1930s, Wang Ming's leftism, or Wang Shiwei's Trotskyism) or by the exigencies of the war period, the new campaigns were aimed at ending "contradictions" (*maodun*) among the "people."

Rectification, as Frederick Teiwes discusses, emerges from the ideological notion of contradiction (*maodun* 矛盾) at the heart of the Maoist philosophy.²⁷ If a historical period "teems with contradictions," then struggle will be needed to overcome them. As Mao developed in his famous essay "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the

²⁶ The term "Mao Zedong Thought" (*Mao Zedong sixiang*) was first used in 1943 in an article by Wang Jiaxiang. In the summer of 1943, preparations began for the first edition of Mao's selected works, and the five-volume edition appeared the following summer. Mao was officially made Chairman of the Politburo in the spring of 1943. Mao Zedong Thought was officially enshrined in the party constitution in 1945 at the Seventh Party Congress. See Kampen, *Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the Evolution*, 104–108.

²⁷ Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950–1965* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 14.

People,” which both ushered in and shut down the “rectification” of 1957, contradictions can exist even within a socialist society. How they are resolved depends on the “willingness of the people concerned to accept transformation,” something that is at the “heart of the rectification process.”²⁸ Rectification becomes a tool not only for party discipline but also for the resolution of social and political contradictions in society at large. It is therefore central to the Maoist vision of socialist transformation. Without periodic rectifications, the political elite, as well as the whole of society, will become static and complacent, and there will be no progress. Rectification, therefore, was critical to Mao’s notion of “continuing revolution” (*jixu geming* 继续革命).

Rectifications of one variety or another dot the history of the Mao era. A party- and military-focused rectification in 1950 aimed at party consolidation in the immediate aftermath of the successful revolution.²⁹ In the first three years of its existence, the PRC also launched the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries (*sufan* 肃反) campaign as well as the attacks on the Three Antis (corruption, waste, and bureaucracy) and Five Antis (bribery, fraud, theft from the government, tax evasion, and industrial sabotage). During the Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries, hundreds of thousands of people with real or suspected ties to the Nationalists or to foreigners were executed. The Five Antis campaign effectively destroyed China’s “capitalist class.” The Anti-Hu Feng campaign of 1955, centered around the literary critic Hu Feng, who had been targeted by the rectification in Chongqing in the mid-1940s, sought to purge “bourgeois individualist” elements from the cultural sphere.

In the intellectual sphere, the most far-reaching rectification of the postrevolutionary period was the Antirightist campaign. Like the Yan’an Rectification, the Antirightist campaign began with a call for intellectuals to expose problems in society. Initially reluctant, perhaps cowed by the memory of previous rectifications, intellectuals were pushed into speaking out. And they eventually did after Mao called (in February 1957) for a policy of letting “one hundred flowers bloom and one hundred schools of thought contend.” In letters to the Central

²⁸ Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China*, 15.

²⁹ The party document initiating this rectification is called: “Instructions Regarding the Opening of a Rectification Movement throughout the Party and the Military” 《关于在全党全军开展整风运动的指示》.

Committee, on campus posters, in published articles, and in demonstrations, intellectuals attacked many of the same things that Wang Shiwei and others had criticized in Yan'an: lack of democracy, the authoritarian rule of the party, its rigid control of the arts, etc. By July, Mao reversed his policy on the Hundred Flowers and began a rectification, summed up in a November 1957 speech given during a visit to the Soviet Union:

Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the Chinese people are carrying out a vigorous rectification movement in order to bring about the rapid development of socialism in China on a firmer basis. It is a movement for carrying out a nationwide debate that is both guided and free, a debate in the city and the countryside on such questions as the socialist road versus the capitalist road, the basic system of the state and its major policies, the working style of party and government functionaries, and the question of the welfare of the people, a debate conducted by setting forth facts and reasoning things out, so as correctly to resolve those actual contradictions among the people that demand immediate solution. This is a socialist movement for the self-education and self-remolding of the people.³⁰

The resulting Antirightist campaign marked a major rectification that affected hundreds of thousands of intellectuals, many of whom were not party members. Mao famously remarked that in any group of ten people in society, one is bound to be a rightist, which party cadres interpreted as meaning that the party was mandating a quota of 10 percent of the population to be found out and dealt with as rightists. The result was captured, comi-tragically, in Tian Zhuangzhuang's 1993 film *The Blue Kite* (Lan fengzheng 蓝风筝), in a scene in which a meeting is being held to determine who, among the assembled, is a rightist. One attendee leaves the room to go to the bathroom; as he returns, the sound of the flushing toilet in the background, it is clear that he has been selected the work unit's representative rightist.

The tool of rectification helped the CCP forge a totalitarian state that sought the elimination of dissent and alternative voices in the formation of a unified political subjectivity centered around Mao Zedong Thought. Some struggled to resist incorporation, but many eagerly sought it for the rewards it offered them personally. In her 1980s novel *Baptism* (Xizao 洗澡; also translatable as *Cleansing*), Yang Jiang portrays

³⁰ "Speech at the Meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution" (Nov. 6, 1957). *Quotations from Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 42-43.

beautifully—and comically—the psychological adjustments bourgeois intellectuals had to make in these campaigns as they “cleansed” themselves of their “backward” thinking through a seemingly endless process of criticism and self-criticism. At the beginning of the Three Antis campaign that rocks the research institute at the novel’s center, one official explains the need for cleansing this way:

Some comrades have old ideology and old consciousness which is so deep-rooted that it no longer seems like baggage which you can put down and be rid of. Rather it is like filth that has accumulated on their skin over the course of many years. If you don’t use water and scrub hard, you can’t get it off. Or perhaps it is like a festering sore in their flesh, or a hidden tail. Without surgery you can’t dig out the running sore, and you can’t remove the tail. The first priority is not to fear the shame of revealing those hidden, dirty parts. The second is not to fear the pain of scrubbing those parts clean, or of digging or cutting them out. . . . But it can only be accomplished voluntarily. Self-reform is each person’s responsibility to society. No one can force you to do it. The masses can help only if you possess consciousness and the will to change. If you do not have the consciousness and the will, if you try to cover up your festering sores, then others cannot cure the rot even though they can smell it. So everyone must first correct their attitudes. Only if your attitude is correct can you receive the help of others to scrub off the filth, to cut or dig out those hidden and shameful parts.³¹

In this character’s voice, we see something close to the “official” party view of the reason for and method of rectification. Several of the self-criticisms that follow this appeal, however, end up being comic performances of what was expected rather than products of sincere introspection. Yet some characters in the novel—and this is no doubt true of people in real life as well—embrace the process and gain from it a sense of real personal growth. Breaking down their intellectual autonomy, this cleansing brought intellectuals into the fold of the “new society.” It may have been a painful process of psychological and cultural adjustment, but many discovered a new sense of subjectivity and of being part of something grand and visionary, even if the grand vision never materialized.

³¹ Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, trans. Judith Armory and Yaohua Shi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 212–13.

WORKER-PEASANT-SOLDIER LITERATURE

Xiaomei Chen

The term “worker-peasant-soldier literature” 工农兵文学 refers to the literary movement that dominated the first seventeen years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1949–1966) and peaked during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1967). It was mainly inspired by a speech that Mao Zedong delivered in 1942 in Yan’an, the site of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) headquarters following the Red Army’s historic Long March and escape of encirclement by the Nationalist Kuo-mintang (KMT) troops in Jiangxi province. In a seminar on literature and art, Mao argued that both should be integrated into the revolutionary machine in such a way as to be made capable of uniting and educating the people as they faced their foes, the Japanese invaders and the KMT, enabling them to fight with one heart and one mind. To this end, Mao said, it was incumbent on writers and artists to adopt the perspectives of the CCP, the proletariat, and the masses. That is, they had to support the principle of exposing the enemy, promote the strategies of unity and criticism toward allies of the revolutionary forces in the United Front, and praise the people, the revolutionary army, and the CCP leadership. Mao advised Chinese writers to look to the masses for resources to reform their bourgeois ideology; only then, he declared, would they succeed in creating the kind of literary works that connected with and were appreciated by ordinary people.

The most significant aspect of Mao’s Yan’an speech on literature and art was his vision of a new socialist state in which the majority of the Chinese people would become masters of their own country. In that new nation-state, Mao gave a legitimate place to a worker-peasant-soldier literature. Rejecting the capitalist West for being imperialist, bourgeois, and decadent and celebrating the socialist East for its independence and freedom from oppression, he envisioned the nation bringing forth a literary landscape that was “fresh and lively” and that could readily be enjoyed by the masses for its “Chinese style and spirit” seldom seen in Chinese literary history.

However, looking past the revolutionary garb, one might discern that Mao’s assertion that “literature carries the Way” (*wen yi zai dao*

文以载道) was fundamentally Confucian in that it stressed literature's practical and ideological function of safeguarding traditional ethics. Nevertheless, despite its condemnation of Western capitalist culture, Mao's vision of socialist literature was truly "modern" insofar as it called for a break from traditional society and for promoting the spirit of the May Fourth literary movement.

The concept of using "worker-peasant-soldier literature" to build a new nation did not originate with Mao's Yan'an speech; his presentation was merely a timely exploration and summary of the literary theories and practices that had been developing since the May Fourth movement. In particular, Mao drew on the theoretical discussions in the leftist literary movements of the 1920s and 1930s, which debated such issues as "revolutionary literature" (*geming wenxue* 革命文学), "literary popularization" (*wenxue dazhong hua* 文学大众化), and "proletariat literature" (*puluo wenxue* 普罗文学). Moreover, major writers, confronted by foreign colonization, poverty, corruption, and internal strikes, had been concerned with the wretched fate of the Chinese masses since the beginning of the twentieth century. Lu Xun's short story "The New Year's Sacrifice" (*Zhufu*), for instance, depicted a poor countrywoman who blamed her disaster-filled life on her widowhood rather than awakening to the root cause of her sufferings. Even Shen Congwen, who later would characterize and reject as propaganda the political function of literature, achieved fame with his publication, in 1929, of "Xiaoxiao." In this masterpiece, he lyrically evoked the hard-won survival of a child wife in the patriarchal society of Hunan province, his hometown and the inspiration for his well-known "regional literature of Hunan."

In spite of these historical roots, the important moment in the history of contemporary Chinese literature was the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, when workers, peasants, and soldiers were expected to become masters of socialist China and therefore the proper focus of literary and artistic representation. People from other social classes and ideological backgrounds were to be gradually excluded from consideration as subjects. The same year saw the premiere of a new patriotic play, *Growing up in the Battlefield* (*Zhandou li chengzhang* 战斗里成长), collectively written by Hu Ke 胡可 and other dramatists. Taking up the concerns of soldier literature of the early PRC period, the play relates the stories of the peasants, who had constituted the majority of the CCP army. Little known outside dramatic circles, *Growing up in the Battlefield* underscored the sufferings of the rural poor before 1949—a

preeminent theme in the literature of the PRC—and to a much lesser degree, during the Republican period. Set in a remote village in northern China, the play traces the fortunes of a family of three generations of peasants in the calamitous years from 1935 to 1945, and their trajectory from poverty-stricken country paupers to class-conscious soldiers fighting to bring equality, happiness, and prosperity to poor people. The play demonstrates the way the old society broke up a close-knit family, and how the revolutionary war against the Japanese invaders and the KMT army reunited father and son, who had joined in the battle against their class enemies, eventually liberating their hometown and getting there just in time to rescue the mother. Despite its class-struggle theme, however, the play used a melodramatic plot of “sorrowful separation and tearful reunion” inherited from traditional operas.

Via its accounts of home, family, motherhood, and local and collective communities, *Growing up in the Battlefield* reflected the place of the soldier’s play in shaping national identity. The war epic *Defending Yan’an* (Baowei Yan’an 保卫延安), written by Du Pengcheng 杜鹏程 and published in 1954, was a different type of work. With a retinue of characters, it unfurled a panoramic view of several major military campaigns in northwestern China. A reporter embedded in the army units defending Yan’an from ferocious KMT attacks, Du based his fiction on his own earlier news stories, his more extensive reportage, other prose, drama, and diaries that he had penned while living with soldiers and army commanders during the war. Like many writers of soldier literature or writing with “military themes” (*junshi ticaì wenzue* 军事题材文学), Du was spurred by his personal war experiences and an urge to mourn in writing lost friends and fallen soldiers who had fought for the new China they never had a chance to live in. He skillfully applied an intimate knowledge of military history, his personal memories, and the grace, poetry, vivid characters, and well-knit structure of his fiction as he focused on a remarkable turning point in the civil war, switching back and forth between depicting a heroic company that won several deadly battles and following the fortunes of several generals, such as Peng Dehuai. The heroic narrative centering on Peng Dehuai was the first time in PRC literary history that a high-ranking leader figured as a character in a work of fiction. The novelist, however, had cause to regret his innovation; after Peng was denounced in 1959 for openly criticizing Mao’s radical agricultural policies, known as the Great Leap Forward, Du fell under attack. In this case, the appeal of

class struggle inspired a writer to embrace the Communist cause and join the army. Ironically, however, it was under the same banner of class struggle that the writer suffered denunciation.

A similar military backdrop, along with the familiar theme of eulogizing the army and the party's heroic spirit, characterizes *The Red Sun* (Hongri 红日) by Wu Qiang 吴强. However, the novel is unique in that it looks objectively at CCP army officials and soldiers courageously doing battle for a new China while daring to criticize their "peasant mind-set." The vividly conveyed lack of awareness, drinking binges after winning a major battle, and implicit disrespect for the political leader with an intellectual bent did much to fill out the realistic dimensions of the novel and provided rich material for the popular movie adaptation.

Wu Qiang did not present the enemy commanders of the Seventy-Fourth Division as cowardly antagonists, in the stereotypical mode of war fiction; rather, they were shown to have real emotions, a resolute spirit, and, like their opponents, a firm belief in what they thought was right. Moreover, Wu Qiang deviated from the general practice of PRC literature's Cold War rhetoric by incorporating love stories and hospital scenes whose relatively peaceful, quotidian tone contrast with the harsh war material.¹ As the novel calls attention to the primitive aspects of many of the participants in the war who came from the peasant class, it suggests the subtle response of Chinese intellectuals to mainstream glorification of peasant-soldiers. These subtexts ensured that both the novel and the movie version of *The Red Sun* would be publically denounced at the onset of the Cultural Revolution, when it was branded as an antiparty work that had seriously tarnished the image of the people's superb army while exalting the enemy of the people.

Another departure, this time from fiction giving a panoramic view of military battles, is Ru Zhizhuan's 茹志鹃 short story "White Lilies" (Baihe hua 百合花), a cherished piece of soldier literature in the PRC. Distinguished by an exquisitely feminine voice, the first-person narrator tells a tale of instant bonding between a young soldier and a newlywed young woman. In a tender moment she lends him a quilt, which, a few hours later, she uses to cover his body. The only dowry a

¹ Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi jiaocheng* (History of contemporary Chinese literature: a textbook) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1999), 63–64.

young wife from an indigent peasant family could hope to receive, the quilt has printed on it the image of white lilies, the symbol of purity and love. Set against the bloody war that had victimized the young and innocent, it could be seen as subverting the short story's apparent themes of soldierly heroic martial spirit and peasant support for the revolutionary war.

Paralleling the bonding between soldier and young wife is the narrator's own bonding with the young soldier, and her own lament for his sacrifice. Starting with the narrator's reminiscences of peaceful prewar days, the story moves to her first encounter with the soldier, when she learns that he hails from the region where she was born. The discovery touches off the nostalgic memory of a familiar scene in her home village: in her mind's eye, she sees a nineteen-year-old lad carrying bamboo poles and walking toward her in a green, misty forest. By midnight, however, the narrator has become anxious about imminent attacks from enemy troops and the terrible sacrifice that will be exacted from "our soldiers"; in her agitated state she comes to hate the bright moon in the night sky, since it can only benefit the enemy. Remembering that it was the mid-August moon festival when the moon shone brightest and her folks at home celebrated family reunions, she thinks of the young soldier at the front and wonders what has happened to him. These ruminations lead to the climactic scene, before the burial, in which the mourning young wife silently mends the hole in the young soldier's clothing. The ending encapsulates the awful losses inflicted by war—even a revolutionary war—that are shared by strangers whom these horrors have brought together. Small wonder, then, that Ru Zhizhuan's "White Lilies" could not get published until 1958, in an obscure literary journal in the northwest. Fortunately, it received high praise from Mao Dun, the Minister of Culture in the PRC and a major literary figure as of the May Fourth period; of the thousands of short stories published in recent years, it was one of the best that he had read, he said.

Contrasting with 1950s soldier plays that similarly revolved around war experience, *Soldiers Under Neon Lights* (Nihong deng xia de shao-bing 霓虹灯下的哨兵), written by Shen Ximeng 沈西蒙 et al. and premiered in 1962, reflects on the soldier's altered life in a "peaceful" China, when the call to the "battlefield" had been replaced by the call to resist the corruption of "bourgeois influence." Set in cosmopolitan Shanghai, the play directs its searchlight on the time period immediately after "liberation," around 1949. A company in the

People's Liberation Army is shown trying mightily to preserve its simple lifestyle and revolutionary spirit and to recoil from the temptations of materialism during patrols on Nanjing Road, at once the busiest commercial street in Shanghai and the stronghold of imperialist and bourgeois influence. However, among the various soldier characters on stage is Chunni, about to return brokenhearted to her home village after a brief reunion with her husband in the army unit. The letter she leaves behind for the company commander gives voice to her sadness about her husband's transformation from valiant revolutionary soldier to petty, weak man brought down by Shanghai's bourgeois lifestyle. Chunni's leave-taking, however, recalls the classics of socialist drama, in which a comparable departure suggested hope. Chunni can now look forward to recovering a sense of belonging in a new revolutionary family back home in the countryside.

Following the model of the foregoing soldier stories, peasant literature centering on true-to-life characters and their "heroic" feats in erecting a new, socialist China mushroomed. Zhou Libo's 周立波 *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* (Shanxiang juban 山乡巨变) is a paramount example of this development. First published in 1958 as a novel of more than 600 pages, it grew out of Zhou's own contacts with peasants of Hunan province during the national organization of the peasants into agricultural cooperatives. Throughout PRC literary history, *Great Changes* has been viewed as an important piece of socialist realist literature because of the light it shed on the difficult road along which peasants marched toward socialism under the CCP leadership.

Whereas his earlier work entitled *The Great Storm* (Baofeng zhoyu 暴风骤雨) had relied on class struggle theory to account for the hatred and confrontations among three generations of peasants and landlords and other members of the exploiting classes, Zhou's *Great Changes* more realistically examined the pain, sorrows, and hesitation of the peasants who, having just realized their centuries-long aspiration of owning their own land immediately after the land reform movement, were not inclined to relinquish the land as a precondition for joining the agricultural cooperatives across the countryside in the early 1950s. Even though with this later work Zhou Libo intended to promote the official socialist agenda for rural China, he was charged later, during the Cultural Revolution, with having written about characters who did not measure up to the selfless ideal of the new socialist peasant. Nevertheless, his realistic characters gave the novel a new life in the contemporary

era when scholars and readers re-read it as a “red classic” that reveals more about the grassroots sentiments and genuine humanity among the peasants than the radical official policies of the time.²

As alluded to before, worker literature, or “literature with an industrial theme” (*gongye tica* 工业题材), produced less successful works at first than those described as soldier and peasant literature. After all, as contemporary Chinese literary history has noted, China had been a mostly peasant country, led to socialism by a mostly peasant revolution, whose proletariat class had not yet matured in the classical Marxist sense of the word. In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, poetry—following the path blazed by fiction, drama, and film—expressed the pride of the emerging working class taking its place as new members of socialist China. Li Ji 李季, for example, was nicknamed the “petroleum poet” because of his poems about the aspirations and achievements of the petroleum workers in such works as *Collected Poems on Yumen* (*Yumen shichao* 玉門詩抄) and *Petroleum Poems* (*Shiyou shi* 石油詩). In his most representative poem, “Black Eyes” (*Hei yanjing* 黑眼睛), the first-person narrator tenderly asks why a pair of affectionate black eyes always follow him; is it because he has just received a medal for his outstanding work in the oil fields, or is it because the “black eyes” of the female character are drawn to the workers’ deeply felt pride? If she is interested in something else, the narrator says, he would like to tell her about a shepherd girl living at the foothills of the Qilian Mountains.³ In this five-stanza poem marked by simple language and poetic imagery, Li Ji skillfully connects the pride of the petroleum worker, his love for the shepherd girl, and his affectionate attention to another girl, who is following his career with compassionate interest.

The love theme and family stories gradually shifted in the mid-1960s, as demonstrated by a popular worker play, *Never to Forget* (*Qianwang bu yao wangji* 千万不要忘記), written by Cong Shen 丛深. Premiered in 1964, the play was soon put on by numerous drama troupes throughout the country and was later turned into a popular film. The leading character is a young worker whose romantic sentiments

² Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi jiaocheng*, 38–40.

³ Li Ji, “Hei yanjing” (Black eyes), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue zuoping xuan* (*Selected works of contemporary Chinese literature*), vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1998), 24–25.

and longing for a cozier material life with his family and his fiancée are held up for derision as a blatant example of a worker's family being "eroded" by bourgeois ideology. His purchase of a woollen suit that cost 148 *juan* and his hunting for wild ducks on the weekends to improve his diet and to make extra money are taken as proof of his decadence. To contrast with this problematic worker, the play presents a model factory hand who spends all his free time in the factory's lab, treating his workplace as his real home and evincing no interest in having a family of his own. The message of the play is spelled out: the younger generation of workers must be educated "never to forget" the bitter life of the workers before liberation, the revolutionary heritage of the working class, and "the class struggle" that supposedly still must go on, to forestall a return to the capitalist past. In many ways, *Never to Forget* foreshadowed the model theater of the Cultural Revolution period, when most commended theatrical works dealt exclusively with workers, peasants, soldiers, and the revolutionary war experience, and their perfect protagonists were noticeably unencumbered by family history or love relationships.

During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, when most of the literary and artistic works produced before 1966 were denounced as either feudalist or bourgeois and revisionist, worker-peasant-soldier literature and its typical concerns became the only legitimate subject of a small number of model theater plays, with a few radical films, novels, and short stories. In spite of the charge that the period did not produce any important works, several popular films released in the mid- to late 1970s explored visual images that audiences might have enjoyed as "works of art" or entertainment. While following the official dictate that artworks must be peopled by "tall, imposing, perfect versions" (*gao, da, quan* 高, 大, 全) of the proletariat, *The Pioneers* (Chuangye 创业) showcased handsome movie stars in powerful performances unseen since theaters and cinemas were shut down at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Set in the earlier 1960s against the backdrop of the break between the CCP and the USSR, the film depicts Zhou Tingshan 周挺杉, the leader of a flagship oil-drilling team that builds a first-rate oil field in the northeast. A coolie before 1949 and now a typical Maoist hero of the period, Zhou Tingshan molds his team into one of the industry's best and realizes his ambition, in the early 1960s, of ending China's reputation as "a country with poor oil reserves," a wrong verdict once imposed by U.S. imperialist scientists and statesmen, as the movie presents it.

This conventional anti-imperialist story line is overshadowed by the extraordinary star power of Zhang Lianwen 张连文, who plays the part of Zhou Tingshan, the model worker. In a blend of long and close-up shots that accentuate his beauty, charisma, and intellectual elite flair, he is shown walking and talking elegantly, and gazing at his friends and family with a magnetic depth of emotion. At the beginning of the movie, for example, the cinematography focuses on Zhou Tingshan riding alone in the Gobi Desert on a camel carrying supplies back to the Yumen oil field run by the KMT officials. A guard whips him when he stops to watch a police car transferring workers' strike leaders to prison. Several of the following close-up shots emphasize Zhou's angry but still handsome face and his bleeding clenched hand as he grabs hold of the oil field fence and watches the progress of a cart carrying corpses, the victims' relatives trailing behind. In the next fifteen minutes of the movie, Zhou utters only two short sentences during the following crucial events: his father is shot to death while trying to protect the oil field, which the KMT attempts to destroy before its retreat; Zhou calls off a workers' march to headquarters to avenge his father, the better to direct their efforts to protecting the oil fields. Hua Cheng 华程, an underground CCP leader, inspires Zhou to "bid farewell to the American adviser in his house," and to prevent him from taking away Chief Engineer Zhang and his geological data. Hua Cheng addresses Zhou by his formal name, which has never been used in the twenty-three years since Zhou's birth; as an indigent laborer without any individual identity, he was only known as "ten-pound boy" (Shijin Wa 十斤娃). Hua also educates Zhou about his political destiny: "to emulate the Communist Party in liberating the suffering people of the rest of the world, now that our Chinese working class is finally liberated." This scene is followed by a series of close-up shots of Zhou's tearful face and his gaze into the distance at the sublime mountain range "dancing" around him, echoing his excited voice: "We are liberated!" Notwithstanding the canonical ideological plot, the audience could, thanks to the scant verbal interference and the glamorous cinematic shots, enjoy ample views of a young, handsome man and his journey from nameless coolie to enlightened worker.

Equally fascinating to look at is the strikingly masculine and poetic Party Secretary Hua Cheng, played by Li Rentang 李仁堂. An intellectual who joined the Communist revolution at an early age, Hua Cheng is endowed with a manner, composure, and eloquence that made the audience forget the stereotype party bureaucrat they knew from real life or from other works of fiction and film. Another enjoyable

performance is that of Chen Ying 陈颖 as Chief Engineer Zhang, a patriotic scientist who learns to respect the wisdom of the workers. Zhang has refused to go to the West with his American boss, telling him that after graduating from college, he had traveled to Yumen on a camel, determined to use his knowledge in service to the coming strong, industrial China. Later in the movie, Zhang distinguishes himself as an upright, outspoken scientist who sets aside his professional opinions in order to carry out the Party Committee's ambitious plan of developing the entire oil field within a year.

Endorsement of an intellectual's integrity and honesty was rare in the literature and art of the Cultural Revolution, when workers and peasants in heroic roles dominated the stage and intellectuals and scientists appeared only marginally acceptable at best, if they appeared at all. As the leader and supporter of the workers, both Party Secretary Hua Cheng and Chief Engineer Zhang took center stage on the proletariat screen as brilliant intellectuals in a way seldom seen in the first seventeen years of PRC literary history since 1949, before the start of the Cultural Revolution. With the powerful performances of three male stars reappearing in Chinese cinema for the first time since the overhaul of feature film production in 1966, *The Pioneers* became a regular feature in the very limited schedule of television programs of the day. On small, black-and-white screens in some urban households, people (myself included) could enjoy the sexy, handsome film celebrities, since their personae validated the official promotion of the working-class spirit and heritage.

But the film's popularity came only after a series of setbacks following its release in 1975. It was banned by Jiang Qing 江青, Mao's wife, then in charge of Cultural Revolutionary affairs, especially in the spheres of literature and art. The ban accused the film of dealing with "real people and real events" (*zhen ren zhen shi* 真人真事), a taboo in socialist realist literature. Jiang Qing charged that several key lines spoken by Hua Cheng had been uttered by Yu Qiuli 余秋里 when he served as general director during the Daqing oil fields buildup in the early 1960s. Jiang's attack was driven by her anger at Yu Qiuli, who as deputy premier in 1975, had been entrusted by Premier Zhou Enlai with assisting Deng Xiaoping in reforming China's economy after the many years of chaos during the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Tianmin 張天民, screenwriter of *The Pioneers*, felt he had no choice but to send Mao Zedong a letter expressing his frustration. He granted that certain words had originally come from a certain leader, but these words were

also the received wisdom heard from the lips of ordinary workers, and still used by workers to the present day; how could they be put forth as excuses to ban the movie? Mao reportedly watched the film and was so moved that he shed tears during several parts of it. The upshot was that he criticized Jiang Qing and gave the film the green light. Thereafter its popularity surged, because now, besides being enjoyed and admired, it was playing a role in the unfolding political drama in which Jiang Qing and her “Gang of Four” were blamed for the radical policies of the Cultural Revolution. Although the film was itself a product of the Cultural Revolutionary period, coming out right before Jiang Qing and her radical policies were to be denounced, the off-stage drama lent it an extraordinary dimension that caused it to be viewed as one of the works criticizing Jiang’s radicalism and helped establish it as a classic.

From the feminist perspective, however, *The Pioneers* is glaringly weak in its treatment of women characters: both Zhou Tingshan’s wife and his mother, as well as a technician member of the oil-drilling team, are subordinated to their male family members or colleagues; they display no initiative of their own and thus form a striking contrast with the brilliant female leads of model theater. The Maoist upgrade of women’s social status and political impact, as reflected in model theater, was effected in the name of women’s liberation via the CCP, which stood to benefit from it. In spite of its limitations, however, *The Pioneers*, in my view, was one of the best achievements of worker’s literature and film to emerge between 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, in post-Maoist China when film became a dominant art form of the literary and artistic renaissance, very few films about workers were successfully produced and widely seen. Popular fiction about workers was also lacking, with a few exceptions, notably the short story “The Story of Factory Head Qiao After He Resumed Office” (Qiao Changzhang shangren ji 乔厂长上任记) by Jiang Zilong 蒋子龙.

The power of a dominant male star to guarantee a movie’s success is also evident in *Unforgettable Battles* (Nanwang de zhandou 难忘的战斗, 1975). Da Shichang 达式常 was already known before the Cultural Revolution for his role in the popular film *The Young Generation* (Nianqing de yidai 年青的一代), about college graduates giving up their personal comfort to volunteer for work in a distant part of socialist China. In *Unforgettable Battles*, Da charmed his audiences as Tian Wenzhong 田文中, a brilliant military commander who combines the enterprising spirit of the proletariat with the refined, elegant bearing of

the intellectual. The narrative begins in 1949 as Tian has just returned from the battlefields where he has been involved in the struggle to liberate the rest of China; now on the civilian front he takes up the more difficult task of purchasing grain from local merchants and rich peasants for the CCP government's state reserve, while combating KMT agents who are attempting to stir up unrest by cutting off food supplies on the eve of liberation. Tian leads his team in the drive to mobilize the local peasants by exposing the KMT's trick of hoarding grain so as to starve the poor people.

Directed by Tang Xiaodan 湯小丹, a master filmmaker of war movies (*zhandou gushi pian* 战斗故事片) before 1966, *Unforgettable Battles* boasts battle scenes that draw on the same talent displayed in his pre-Cultural Revolution work, such as *The Red Sun*, based on the novel discussed above. To enhance the dramatic suspense and a tightly knit plot, *Unforgettable Battles* presents quick-paced shots such as a galloping cavalry shooting at its enemies to save a granary from destruction by the retreating KMT troops; the film thus adeptly combines the best features of the PRC "counterspy" movies (*fante gushi pian* 反特故事片), or "detective stories," with those of the soldier's film, serving them up along with a charismatic Tian, who accomplishes his mission with bravery, intelligence, and an engaging personality. The second part of the movie centers on Tian's effort to transport grain to other parts of China in support of the war of liberation. Tian outwits Chen Futang 陈福堂, a KMT agent, by leaking false intelligence to the KMT troops as to when and where Tian's grain-transport team will begin its journey. But old-hand agent Chen orders his troops to stop marching five miles before reaching their destination and not to proceed until they see a light in the window of a restaurant, where Chen will hold a farewell banquet—the signal to proceed—after he can ascertain that his intelligence is accurate. Tension grows as Tian tries to analyze why the enemy's troops have stopped moving. A waiter from the restaurant rushes over to report that for some unknown reason, the banquet room windows remain closed on this hot summer night when everyone in the room is sweating. Inviting himself to the banquet, Tian throws open the windows to expose the light, which instantly lures the enemy troops into his ambush. With such exploits, Tian evokes the popular legendary character Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮 in the traditional fiction *The Three Kingdoms* (三国演义); a military strategist, Zhu was able, by virtue of his perspicacity and talent, to predict the enemy's moves, win

political allies, and become invincible in major battles leading to the establishment of a new kingdom.

To further justify the necessity of the Cultural Revolution, *Unforgettable Battles* created a “hidden enemy within the revolutionary ranks” in the person of a deputy district head named Liu Zhiren 刘志仁. Blackmailed by Chen Futang, who knows about his past liaison with the KMT, Liu agrees to send Chen intelligence about Tian’s grain-transportation schedule. Needing to outmaneuver both Liu and Chen turns Tian into a stunning James Bond figure and, in the process, transforms a heroic soldier’s story from the Cultural Revolution period into a kind of “superman” thriller. Explorations of traditional fiction like these, featuring popular figures culled from the literature, helped diminish the tedium of typical Cultural Revolution movies, which emphasized the need to wage “new battles” after the success of the Communist revolution. To highlight this theme, the movie ends with another moment of suspense: as Tian’s team celebrates the local masses and their victory, the camera shifts to Chen’s dimly lit grain shop and the lonely accountant working there; earlier on, he participated in the murder of one of the youngest and best soldiers on Tian’s team. The message seems clear: although Chen and his bandit troops have been apprehended, class enemies of socialist China remain hidden, quietly awaiting the return of the previous regime to “settle their accounts” with the CCP.

Although *Unforgettable Battles* resembles other movies of the period in its stereotypical portrayal of negative characters, it fares better in this regard than other films such as *Bright Sky* (Yanyangtian 艳阳天) and *Evergreen Ridge* (Qingsongling 青松岭), both released in 1973. These two movies’ one-dimensional class enemies seemed designed merely to illustrate Mao Zedong’s point that vigilance against the agents of the KMT was still essential many years after its retreat to Taiwan. By contrast, Chen Futang’s commitment to the KMT cause appears more complex and believable, since the story occurs in 1949, *right after* the KMT’s loss of power, when Chen, in addition to his political orientation, would still have had some stake in making a high profit from manipulating the black market for his grain-trading company. Furthermore, Chen is paired with an old landlord played by Chen Shu (陈述), a famous actor whose specialty had been playing the “enemy of the people” in movies made before the Cultural Revolution. He earned the nickname of “the head of the enemy’s intelligence bureau” (情报处长) from a role he had played in the stunning movie *Scouting*

Across the River (Dujiang zhencha ji 渡江侦察记) and his turn as the Japanese commander in *The Railroad Guerrillas* (Tiedao youji dui 铁道游击队). In 2006, upon hearing of his passing at age 85, netizens and other citizens shared their childhood memories of his roles: “During the Cultural Revolution when we were poor and lacked any luxury, Chen Shu provided us with laughter; all it took was hearing the line beginning ‘According to my intelligence...’ (*genju wode qingbao* 根据我的情报) from *Scouting Across the River*. This was in the Mao era when entertainment was scarce, and he livened things up for us, when he said, for example, ‘Only the heaven, the earth, you, and I share this one secret’ (*zhe shi zhiyou tian zhi, di zhi, ni zhi, wo zhi* 这事只有天知、地知、你知、我知) in *Unforgettable Battles*. In the historical past when there was no one who could serve as our idol, Chen Shu was our superstar.”⁴ In the slim years of the Cultural Revolution, soldier’s films did serve as popular entertainment, if only by creating negative characters—a development that certainly had not been intended by the PRC officials, who expected the exposure of class enemies in films to arouse popular hatred rather than hilarity.

As in *The Pioneers*, however, *Unforgettable Battles* gave its male characters the unquestionable edge over its several minor female characters, whose sole function it was to assist the heroic male soldiers. These problematic gender politics, however, were redressed by the peasant film *Young Shoots* (春苗), a popular work of 1975 about a barefoot female doctor in rural China. To bring basic medical care to the local peasants, the female lead, Chunmiao, must go up against Du Wenjie 杜文杰, the president of the hospital in the People’s Commune, and Qian Jiren 钱济仁, a “bourgeois doctor.” The new and beautiful young actress Li Xiuming 李秀明, who played the title role, joined the more established star Da Shichang as the charismatic doctor Fang Ming 方明. Chunmiao is schooled by Fang not only in medicine but also in Chairman Mao’s directive of “shifting the focus of medical care from the city to the rural areas” (*ba yiliao weisheng guozuo de zhongdian fangdao nongchun qu* 把医疗卫生工作的重点放到农村去).

⁴ “Chen Shu sanbu laopian Yiangshi xiazhou liangbo” (“Remembering Chen Shu: three classic movies will be featured in CCTV” October 19, 2006, <http://yule.sohu.com/20061019/n245885075.shtml> (accessed May 9, 2007).

Although there was no intentional love angle to the film, the attraction between Chunmiao and Doctor Fang seemed palpable to many viewers, and seemed also suggested by the skillfully posed close-up shots and the lighting of the two stars' faces in their scenes together. The traditional pairing of "talented scholar and beautiful woman," in which the former rescues the latter at crucial moments, was another chord struck and enhanced by the movie's lyrical theme, "Young Shoots from the Earth Embracing the Morning Sun" (Chunmiao chutu ying zhaoyang 春苗出土迎朝阳). The film launched the song's independent popularity, at a time when popular tunes and music were just as strictly censored as literature and the other arts during the Cultural Revolution.

Although the more straightforward evocation of contemporary politics—for example, the class struggle waged within the CCP—rendered the film problematic in post-Maoist China, in hindsight *Young Shoots* is a particularly interesting film for the reality it reflects of the dire situation at that time, when farmlands were seized by greedy real estate developers who did not grant proper compensation and rural migrant workers were exploited as cheap labor in booming cities. Given this outcome, one wonders if the idealist vision (and the real practice, in some areas) of providing free medical care for the poor during the Maoist and Cultural Revolution period would be a welcome measure now, where some impoverished peasants cannot afford medical treatment. No wonder *Young Shoots* became a "nostalgic film" (*huai jiu pian* 怀旧片) in the "new era," a period when the term "worker-peasant-soldier" was no longer the source of pride and inspiration it had been. In that bygone age, workers, peasants, and soldiers had enjoyed the status of "masters of our socialist country," at least on a movie screen.

The films discussed above were claimed as products of the Cultural Revolution with the assigned function of negating the counterrevolutionary arts of the previous period. Yet they paradoxically tapped into the very cinematic style and resources of the first seventeen years of the PRC, from 1949 to 1966, by combining dogmatic political themes with visual effects and artistic conventions from both traditional and Western cultures. Compared to some of the worker-peasant-soldier movies made before the Cultural Revolution, they also exerted a

greater influence, because of the scarcity of other literary and artistic works during the period.

In post-Maoist China after the Cultural Revolution (1976 to the present), “worker-peasant-soldier literature” has gradually become obsolete except as an objectionable term associated with the Maoist literary policies that suppressed freedom of writing. Subsequent literary movements that attempted to reverse these policies paradoxically perpetuated, in many cases, the attention that had been given to the life experience of the peasants and soldiers; they did so, however, with a dramatic twist that proved that Mao’s Yan’an talk was more relevant to contemporary Chinese society than critics and scholars had acknowledged. Whereas Maoist works depicted the peasants and soldiers as happy, fulfilled members of the socialist country, these characters were portrayed in “root-seeking literature” (*xungen wenxue* 寻根文学) and “reflection literature” (*fansi wenxue* 反思文学) as suffering subalterns who gave up love, family, and freedom in order to survive in a totalitarian society. The 1980 novella *The Story of Criminal Li Tongzhong* (Fanren Li Tongzhong de gushi 犯人李铜钟的故事) by Zhang Yigong 张一弓, for example, has the local Party Secretary Li Tongzhong, a thoughtful, courageous caretaker, provoking a confrontation with the authorities by opening up the grain reserves of the people’s commune to succor his starving villagers. Because of these “illegal,” “antiparty” activities, Li is arrested and tried, and in the end he dies in the “socialist countryside,” the setting for a cause in which he had once firmly believed. The symbolic meaning of Li’s name, “bronze bell” (铜钟), points to his intrepid resolve not to carry out the party’s policies with “iron fists” and blind faith, but rather to challenge it against all odds and at the expense of his own welfare and even his life.

Similar attention is paid to the disastrous fate of the peasants in a soldier’s story that has as its context the Sino-Vietnamese War of the 1980s. Unlike its literary predecessors, which depicted the People’s Liberation Army as pure, brave, and simply superior both morally and spiritually, Li Cunbao’s 李存葆 novella *Wreath at the Foothills of the Mountains* (Gaoshan xia de huahuan 高山下的花环, 1982) exposes corruption among high-ranking commanders. The commanders maneuver to have their children transferred from wartime battlefields to safe posts, while the soldiers from the poverty-stricken rural area are represented by one whose only belonging at the time of his death is a bloodstained list of debts he owes to other people, which he wants his family to pay. Again, contrasting with the 1960s theme of soldier plays that held up model units as being impervious to corruption, Mo

Yan 漠雁 and Xiao Yuping 肖玉萍 et al.'s *The Diary of Instructor Song* (Song Zhidaoyuan de riji 宋指导员的日记), a post-Maoist play that premiered in 1982, presents a dramatic eyewitness account of how much corruption really occurred within both the army and the party, as filtered through the diary of Instructor Song, who almost single-handedly takes on this scourge of corruption.

The appeal of the concept of literature for the masses, with its political and ideological implications, has nevertheless remained strong, as indicated by the term “red classics” (红色经典), which emerged in 1988 from discussions on the “rewriting of literary history.” Scholars and critics reexamined the impact of the previous seventeen years of literary production and reception of the major texts discussed above on the mind-set of the Chinese people. By exploring the subtexts, the middle-of-the-road characters, and the parts of the literary and artistic works that failed to implement the party’s policy—judging by the literary journals and criticisms of the period and the authors’ fates before, during, and after the Maoist era—critics and scholars arrived at new insights into revolutionary literature and its convergence with popular culture and traditional thinking, as well as its relevance to contemporary Chinese culture in the age of reform.

Very few people actually engaged in writing straightforward worker-peasant-soldier literature. Still, the constant warnings in Maoist literature against peaceful transformation from a socialist society to a capitalist and revisionist society give pause to those who resent the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in contemporary China. Economic progress and rising living standards aside, China’s current exploitation of workers and peasants no longer protected by a state-sponsored welfare system makes one reconsider whether Mao had a point after all in campaigning for “continued revolution” in socialist China. Once again, the question “Whom do we write for?” arises as writers and artists struggle to find a balance between representing their own selves and the majority of the Chinese people.

No wonder, then, that in April 2000, when the play *Che Guevara* 切·格瓦拉 opened, it was such a smash, primarily for its call to arms.⁵ The play shows Che Guevara, military hero of the Cuban revolution at the height of the Cold War period, at the point when he

⁵ Huang Jisu et al., *Qie Gewala*, in Liu Zhifeng, ed., *Qie Gewala: fanying yu zhengming* (Che Guevara: reception and debate) (Beijing: Zhanguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), 13–69.

has given his entire life over to bringing justice and equality to poor peoples in other countries of the third world. To the many people in contemporary China victimized by party corruption and exploited by the newly rich class, *Che Guevara's* call for a new armed revolution directed at liberating the disadvantaged and poor struck a deep chord. In highly poetic language, the cast asks the audience a number of questions: Given that forty years ago, Che Guevara gave up his medical career to join the Cuban revolution, do you think he would have had any regrets, had he known that the socialist revolution for which he eventually died would “change its colors” by the end of the twentieth century? What would Che Guevara say about the increasing gulf between rich and poor in contemporary capitalist China, for instance? Had he known about the eventual collapse of the socialist bloc, would he have sacrificed personal happiness for the noble cause of the Cold War?

The cast's answers to these questions are eloquent and unhesitating: Che would have had no regrets, since he had always believed in a society that was equal and free from oppression and Western imperialist domination. Had he to do it all over again, he would still have embarked on a military career in order to liberate all the poor peoples in the world. The play and all the pop cultural fetishes accompanying it, such as Che-brand merchandise (T-shirts, biographies, souvenirs, and the like), made Che a new role model whose values overlapped with socialist China's “old-fashioned” values. Indeed, the play can be seen as delivering a harsh critique of post-Maoist society's materialist culture—its agendas of globalization and capitalization—and a sharp mockery of the intelligentsia's collaboration with the government, which has resulted in the betrayal of the poor. Paradoxically, however, the Che international soldier play also met the requirements of the status quo. Despite its attacks on party corruption, it could be interpreted as supporting the party's own campaign against corruption and its much-touted desire of helping the majority of poor Chinese to eventually “get rich,” once “a small number of people have gotten rich first.”

Just as Che declares on stage that, as long as oppression and exploitation persist, he will never put down his gun, so one might conclude that as long as the dream of equality persists, both inside and outside China, military heroes, peasant voices, workers' protests, and nostalgic literatures will continue to remind us of that dream. In bookstores, classroom textbooks, in DVD and VCD form, and as gift items, “red

classics” of the Maoist era with exemplary images of the common people survive and still sell well. They serve to recall the idealist dreams of Maoist China, a complex era whose memory and celebration of laboring peoples and their heroic, selfless spirit have come down to the Chinese people as both a remarkable heritage and a burden.

STEEL IS MADE THROUGH PERSISTENT TEMPERING

Xinmin Liu

Seemingly a plain term used for tempering metal, *Bai lian cheng gang* 百炼成钢 in fact touts an opulent history of philological, cultural, and (lately) ideological refashioning. The word *gang* 钢 denotes a metallic alloy, but was used in classical Chinese interchangeably with a homophone, 刚, meaning firm and unyielding. Usually paired with *yang* 阳 to signify that which is masculine, aggressive, and sublime, *gang* has ethical, educational, and aesthetic meanings. 炼, the character with a fire radical, denotes an alchemist remolding amid blazing heat and cold liquid. The phrase *Bai lian cheng gang* means that steel is made through persistent tempering, and it attests to blacksmiths in ancient China who claimed to have made steel out of pig iron by continuously tempering the metal to not only blend with mixed ores but also rid itself of impurities. What drove the steel makers to temper the metal was a rich chronicle of ends and uses running the gamut of shamanism, Daoism, militarism and mysticism, which doubtless nurtured the roots of steel making and its extended meanings.¹ But it was in cultural and historical writings that the trope of tempering, through long and arduous trials and contests, came to imply the process of human character growth and maturation. As dynasties rose and fell and the modern age dawned, *lian gang* absorbed a new mixture of ethical and political significance.

China experienced a traumatic coming-of-age while entering the modern era. In the late nineteenth century, British gunships relied on superior cannons to crack open China's coastlines during the Opium War (1839–41). Japan invaded Korea and forced a naval war in the Yellow Sea on China in 1894–95, and then in 1900 the eight-power allies unleashed their armed intrusion and overran Beijing, the Qing imperial capital. These humiliating defeats at sea and on land left this

¹ For details consult K. C. Chang, "Shang Shamans," in Willard J. Peterson, Andrew H. Plaks, and Ying-shih Yü, eds., *The Power of Culture: Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), 10–36.

“Central Kingdom on Earth” reeling in shame and panic; her fate sank even deeper as the foreign powers demanded huge territorial privileges and costly reparations. Defeat, humiliation, and agitation fueled the educated elites’ urge to seek political and social reforms so China would be able to repulse foreign imperialists and, by mastering science and technologies from the West, to become a modern nation of power and wealth. These national crises prompted the eminent members of the literati to embrace the key ideas of Western learning—evolution, the nation-state, and individualism—widely believed to be the secret to Western nations’ material strength and technological advances. Foremost were evolution and individualism, which the reformist intellectuals explored and adapted as critical remedies for imperial China’s failures and vices.²

The drive for modernity also reinvigorated the notion of persistent tempering thanks to modern aspirations to breed a new type of individuals. The reformers affirmed individualism, but disagreed as to what should be the true and final aim of a valid self-realization. Yan Fu played a pioneering role in the *Yangwu yundong* 洋务运动 (Western affairs or self-strengthening movement, 1894–96) by translating into Chinese core ideas of English liberalism and Western philosophy from Herbert Spencer’s *A Study of Sociology*, Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics*, and Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. He introduced the ideas of evolution and the struggle for existence, taken from social Darwinism, to urge the Chinese to bring into full play their creative and assertive energy and wisdom, so that a reformed China would rise in power and wealth to equal the West. But his paraphrastic translation revealed his conception of the aspiring individual in quest of socially oriented goals—harking back to the ancient Confucian idea of *qun* (social grouping).

While national survival motivated Yan’s ingenious adaptations of evolution, what prompted Chen Duxiu’s idolization of evolution was the aspiration for a national rebirth. Born and reared on a scholar-gentry estate, Chen started his pursuit of moral goodness with harsh reality close at hand—as a rebel against his own patriarchal grandfather. His advocacy of Western science (including biological evolution)

² My view here draws on Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House, 2004), Part 1, Book 2 and Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity—China 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

was firmly aimed at replacing imperial China with a modern nation-state. Aware above all of the iconoclastic power of scientific laws, he led the New Culture movement as the editor of *New Youth* and other revolutionary journals, advocating science and promoting democracy as the ethical tenets for the people with valor and passion. Despite his elitist intellectual status, Chen organized street marches and labor strikes, infusing his belief in evolution with social activism. Ironically, it was his faith in moral perfectibility as the locus of self-development that earned him an unfair share of ordeals and setbacks in his career; he time and again denounced candidly the wrongdoings of both the Nationalists and the Communists, and was ready to sever his alliance with both even if it would end his call for a social awareness of seeking public good as pivotal in an individual's search for fulfillment.

Chen Duxiu's rebellious break from his privileged roots offered a preview of the oncoming sea change. With the spread of new knowledge of science, literacy increased among the commoners, which in turn kindled their desire for social equality and justice. The challenge Chen and his *New Youth* thinkers now faced was how the idea of social evolution could be applied to ensure fair and just values and rights for the public at large. Likewise, moral goodness as defined by the literati gentry now had to be reconstituted to meet the demands of vastly different settings. The May Fourth movement dealt heavy blows to the vestiges of the corrupt and repressive rulers, but did little to combat the social polarization of the "haves" and the "have-nots." For the New Culture to gain wider support, the broad masses had to be vigorously engaged in praxis at the quotidian level.³ Thus the goal for social changes had to shift from ethical legitimacy to resolving class conflicts and political supremacy.

The Chinese Republic saw its growth distracted and stunted during the 1920s: the warlords' divisive wranglings and subversive dealings with foreign powers, as well as incessant discord within the Nationalist Party (KMT) led by Sun Yat-sen, hampered the drive to overtake and stabilize the nation. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), founded in 1921, not only grew in size but also spread broadly to rural as well as urban areas. In 1927, wary of the CCP's growing threat, Chiang

³ I am using the term as it first appears in Karl Marx's *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and later in Georg Lukács' *The Process of Democratization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

Kai-shek led a bloody purge of CCP members inside and outside the KMT and forced the CCP to go underground with an ensuing reign of “White Terror” through most of the 1930s. Eagerly following the footsteps of the Russian Bolsheviks’ October Revolution, CCP leaders like Qu Qiubai and Wang Ming began to openly wage an ideological war with the KMT, embarked on a lockstep strategy for building labor unions and peasant associations as its power base, and recast the left-wing forces, including laborers, peasants, and activist intellectuals, as a proletariat-led armed revolution in the hope of eventually seizing national power.

Analogous to this partisan turn in national politics was a shift among the leftist writers from literary revolution to revolutionary literature. Led by Cheng Fangwu and Qian Xingcun, Left-wing theorists espoused a Marxist approach to literature as a discursive tool in trumpeting revolutionary ideas and actions at the behest of the proletariat; its leading function must first be *fuzi* 斧子 (a battle-axe) rather than *jingzi* 镜子 (a mirror), in the hands of the laboring underclass.⁴ It followed that radical literary associations, such as the *Creation Society* and the *Sun*, considered it imperative for bourgeois intellectuals to rid themselves of their class upbringing by way of “negating” or “denying” their “tainted nature” (for they were inevitably imprinted with the worldviews of the exploiting classes) in favor of a “collectivist” approach guided by the proletariat.⁵ In terms of literary methodology, likewise, these theorists stressed the need to “organize life” and “create life” and focus on the social mission of literary endeavors in order to gain ethical legitimacy for a vanguard force such as the CCP. To embody the *geist* of the age of revolution, they ardently declared: “Art is not a way to reflect life, but a way to create life; acknowledge no realism, acknowledge no objectivity; reject objective experience while embracing voluntarist acts; eliminate form while substituting purposefulness.”⁶ For all its tell-tale sloganeering, views like this not

⁴ These comments came from Mao Dun in a review published in 1932. He had notably renounced his earlier position of regarding literature’s main role as a mirror-like reflection of social reality. For further reading, see Lin Weimin, *Zhongguo zuoyi wenxue sichao* (Trends of thought in China’s left-wing literature) (Shanghai: East China Normal University, 2005).

⁵ For further detail, see Kirk Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 257–62.

⁶ Qian Xingcun, “On Jiang Guangci’s ‘On the Yalu River’.” Also quoted in Lin, *Trends of Thought*, 176.

only projected the urgent task of tempering intellectuals and artists of bourgeois origin into trusted comrades of the laboring masses but also endorsed it as a rite of passage—they must pass the test of “reforming” their social origin before they could mature into full-fledged fighters in the proletarian revolution.

Comparing revolutionary literature to a battle-axe surely resonates with Lu Xun’s famous mantra of his essays being likened to “daggers” and “spears.” But the analogy goes only this far chiefly because the use of this metaphor is now dictated largely by the will of the user. A largely instrumental role has fallen upon this trope: the progressive intellectual must allow his or her individual talent and desire to be harnessed, ordered, and, if necessary, sacrificed by the overriding agenda of the revolution; hence only when the individual willingly aligns the pursuit of personal fulfillment with the final goal of the proletarian revolution does self-realization become legitimate and feasible. Those with a “tainted” social origin have to endure additional rigorous tempering, which usually implies that the individual has to use the battle-axe to sever ties with the class of his or her birth. A severance like this, a betrayal of one’s own upbringing, became a favored conversion motif for left-wing fiction of the 1930s. Extolling such a disavowal as a ritual of political coming-of-age, writers such as Ba Jin, Jiang Guangci, Yang Hansheng, and Ouyang Shan depicted valiant revolutionists who had to stand the agony of vowing loyalty to the revolution by condemning their parents and families.

A case in point is a novella entitled *Paoxiao le de tudi* 咆哮的土地 (The land in uproar) written by Jiang Guangci in 1930.⁷ Jiang was himself a vocal leader of revolutionary literature in the early 1930s and had undergone a class conversion himself before leaving to study in Soviet Russia. In the novella, Jiang depicts a brave and noble character, Li Jie, the son of the wealthiest local landowner. Inspired by modern values at a young age, he escapes from home to join Sun’s revolutionists in the south, and then returns to his home village to lead the local peasants in getting organized and launching a land reform against his father. To convince the locals of his firm stand as a revolutionary, Li has time and again to suppress his moderate instincts in favor of the blunt and violent tactics put forward by the vengeful

⁷ Jiang Guangci, *Jiang Guangci xuanji* (Selected works of Jiang Guangci) (Beijing: People’s Literature Press, 1983), 378–576.

peasants. In the end Li agrees with their plan and burns down his father's mansion with his old mother and bedridden sister inside—an act of ultimate betrayal according to Confucian ethics, but deemed necessary to earn him a place in the ranks of revolutionary heroes. The plot ends with Li's fearless death, a premature end to his career dedicated to the cause of revolution, which ironically interrupts the long ordeal of self-reform through “persistent tempering.” Like those of his fictional heroes, Jiang's career of passionate and radical writing came to an abrupt halt with his premature death.

Deadly political strife between the KMT and the CCP in the following years fueled the rhetoric of revolutionary literature about tempering one's worth to achieve moral righteousness. Now bitterly contested, the trope of steelmaking was converted into a soul-searching apprenticeship to serve the CCP's agenda to educate thousands of youths who had been inspired by the ideals of revolution. In the Yan'an era, the CCP found itself barely able to hold onto its dwindling Red Army after the Long March (1935–36) and, holed up in the rigid loess highlands of northwest China, was compelled to regroup its forces and revamp its ideological scheme while staying engaged in the anti-Japan resistance. In the annals of its history since 1949, the party has perpetually exalted its political and ideological coming-of-age under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), tirelessly claiming that the CCP owed its rebirth to Mao's ability to perceive the “destiny” of socialist revolution; steer away from obstacles and dangers posed by its ideological foes, both foreign and domestic; and take the lead in persistently tempering himself while guiding the party through thick and thin. Indeed, in the years following the May Fourth movement (1919), Mao joined the CCP, organized a coal miners' strike in Jiangxi (1922), mobilized Hunan peasants in local revolts against landowners and warlords (1926), and personally led the Autumn Harvest Uprising against the KMT in Hunan (1927). None of these endeavors could escape the fate of a futile or fatal end, leaving Mao disoriented with his belief in Marxist tenets of constant struggle.

In groping for a solution, Mao looked the other way: he boldly inverted the order of Soviet-style revolution by plunging himself into praxis at the rural level—investigating peasants' poverty, organizing rural insurgencies, and leading guerrilla warfare. He deftly fended off orders from the Comintern in Europe, boldly deviated from the classical Marxist model of relying on the urban and industrial proletariat, and eventually secured his grasp of the CCP leadership. Mao's

country-rooted vision of social progressivism proved a far better fit for the indigenous conditions of early modern China, and his praxis-oriented strategies helped the depleted CCP recover. Relying on his folk knowledge and liaison skills with the mutinous peasants, he repeated his initial success working as the chief supervisor of the Ruijin Soviet in the Jinggang Mountains in Jiangxi (1931–35). He led the besieged Red Army in a desperate escape from several blockades set by KMT troops in Jiangxi and Hunan (1934–35); en route he presided over the Zhunyi Meeting, at which he secured his supreme authority over the CCP, and he planned and commanded the Long March through west China's frontier and wilderness regions to avoid frontal clashes with the KMT and Japanese troops (1935–36). A strenuous but effective series of military victories by the CCP's Red Army was believed to be the brainchild of Mao.⁸ From a decimating rout in Southeast China, the party emerged with a triumphant, though much smaller army at Yan'an in northwest China. Mao lost no time in rebuilding a Soviet-style base; firmed up his CCP leadership; unabashedly claimed territories, both geographical and intellectual, to be ruled by his ideological hegemony; and aggressively strove on political, economic, social, and institutional fronts for national dominance.

All these historical events were woven by the CCP into a mythological discourse aimed at an ideological coronation of Mao as a visionary leader of heroic stature.⁹ The ground had thus been prepared for Yan'an to become the allegorical cradle of a New China reborn and groomed by the CCP and for the life story of this home-grown revolutionary giant to symbolize China's successful coming-of-age. In the ethical and political realms, Mao claimed to have inverted the classic Marxist decree on a city-to-country course of revolution, and also to have covertly consented to the Confucian idea of interdependence between individuals and the society. But he shifted the focus onto the individual *agent*, who is at once uninhibited in his creativity and

⁸ The following account is based on my readings of a few sources, including Frederic Wakeman Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) and Li Rui, *The First Thirty Years of Mao Zedong's Life* (Sanshi sui yiqian de Mao Zedong) (Taiwan: Shibao wenhua chubanshi, 1993).

⁹ I am here indebted to David Apter's idea of a "Yan'an Republic" and the CCP's narrative construction of the Chinese Revolution as a "Maoization" in David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1–30.

compliant in his faith. This would enable Mao to negotiate between inner voluntarism and external determinism in future CCP movements. Above all, it gave legitimacy to a didactic “role model” that the party could telescope into an otherwise uncertain future for China. The allegorized hero, following the beacon of Mao, would inspire all revolutionaries to align “what is”—the erratic lesser being—with “what ought to be”—a perfected greater being, striving to ascend the path mapped out by the CCP ideology. Motivated by this teleological paradigm, revolutionary literature and art were urged to willingly subordinate their ideas and expressions to the CCP leadership, whose power soared to unchallenged heights alongside the apotheosis of Mao.

Mao himself led the way in dispelling dissenting views and rectifying divergence within the CCP ranks. In his addresses to the cadres and intellectuals at Yan’an in 1942, Mao took issue with the class origins of those who had lately arrived from KMT-held areas and chided them to “rectify” their lack of knowledge about the life of the masses, so that they could “fuse” their own identity with theirs.¹⁰ Mao then instructed them on how to “reform” their political views and methodology by wholeheartedly committing to portrayals of the working classes: “Writers and artists concentrate on such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them, and produce works that awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm, and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment.”¹¹

In a dictatorial tone, Mao not only reenacted many of the radical assertions made by theorists of revolutionary literature in the 1930s but also issued a clarion call to institute thought reform of the bourgeois-born intellectuals amid the proletariat’s revolt against unjust and abusive social systems. Thus he launched the CCP’s torturous *Zhengfeng* campaign (rectification) to stamp out ideological “impurities” within and outside the party. During the Yan’an era, those who bore the brunt of such harsh “tempering” were Wang Shiwei, Ding Ling, Xiao Jun, Ai Qing, and He Qifang. In a daring criticism of the CCP’s bureaucratic lapses in the base areas, these intellectuals lodged open complaints against cadres and voiced anger about curtailed freedom

¹⁰ See Kirk Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 458–63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 470.

and independence.¹² In the ensuing decades, they were perpetual political targets as the CCP kicked off round after round of thought reform to rid its ranks of liberalist views, artistic autonomy, and individualistic freedom.

Yet how did the average CCP member or sympathetic follower respond to such ideological tempering? How could he or she relate to Mao's mythical heroism in a way meaningful to his or her own work and life? Mao's extraordinary voluntarism did not easily translate into inspiration and emulation on the part of the individual CCP member unless through coercion and discipline. It took, among other things, tireless ideological self-education to internalize a willingness to endure such tempering. But heroic voluntarism also had an effective appeal to individuals desiring challenges, to excel by way of intense emulation. This element of personal fulfillment met the need to embrace social reality and echoed the spirit of social engagement in Confucianism. David Apter depicts how individual self-interest was absorbed by an "exegetical bonding" during thought reform to raise political consciousness the Yan'an way. Through reeducation, the aspiring individual "had transcended individual limitations, had 'overcome' one's deficiencies, and therefore had gained more from the collectivity than one had given up."¹³ Judging by a favorite CCP motto, "the power of a role model knows no limit," I believe such intersubjective transference was especially effective with individuals who had been deprived and disempowered.

Let us look at the illustrative hero of a Soviet Russian novel, *How Steel Was Tempered*, written by Nikolai Ostrovsky in the 1930s¹⁴ and translated from the English version (1942) into Chinese. The novel depicts the life story of Pavel Korchagin (based on the author's own), who makes an astonishing journey from a rural town to Moscow seeking social justice and individual happiness. The hero's lifelong pursuit coincides with the rise of the young Bolshevik state, and is an example of vigor, endurance, and dedication in an unceasing quest for the greatest good reflected through national salvation and personal

¹² I follow Merle Goldman's chapters on the Thought Reform Campaign during the Yan'an era. For further detail, see Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 18–66.

¹³ David Apter, "Yan'an and the Narrative Reconstruction of Reality," *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 208–11.

¹⁴ See Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How Steel Was Made* (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1964).

cultivation. Driven by his faith in communism, Korchagin matures as a fully tempered fighter in the struggle against social oppression, war, and his own terminal illnesses; his name thus becomes synonymous with iron-willed revolutionaries who never took no for an answer, and who could ascend to heights of social eminence and honor in spite of their lowly origins.¹⁵ Seeing the novel's vast educational value, the CCP did all it could to exalt Korchagin's heroism via its ideological affiliates like the Communist Youth League and every educational channel. The key message they delivered was that Korchagin's moral keenness matured primarily as a result of being doggedly tempered by the ordeals of harsh life, military strife, and class conflicts—all symbolic of the rites of passage to enlightenment under CCP tutelage. It was made abundantly clear that for the hero and all youths alike, only communism could embody the *télos* for reaching the ideal of public good and personal success.

It should come as no surprise that Korchagin was matched before long by a Chinese counterpart. His name was Wu Yunduo (1917–91), a self-taught army ordnance specialist groomed and honored by the CCP, whose life displayed a buoyant and persistent progress. Wu's autobiography portrays an iron-willed fighter beating the odds of lowly birth, poverty, class exploitation, a high-risk profession, and a maimed body in his pursuit of revolutionary heroism. His superhuman qualities bring to a fruitful close a passage of staged growth that seamlessly fit the CCP's tenets on "persistently tempering."¹⁶ Born in a poor coal miner's family, he had an early taste of class oppression from the mine owners' foremen, who treated him like dirt. Being framed by one foreman for damage to machines he didn't cause leaves him in profound rage and despair. When a CCP labor activist opens his eyes to the root of class disparity and injustice, Wu begins to see his misery and sufferings in the light of class conflicts and resolves to win equality and freedom for those suffering like him, under the guidance of the CCP.

Becoming a CCP member in 1939, Wu embraces the goal of selfless dedication to the party-led war against the Japanese and other oppressors, seeks to mend his rash and aberrant ways, and works tirelessly

¹⁵ Yu Mingling has published a lengthy study of Korchagin's influence on the Chinese in the PRC since 1949 in *New Historiography*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2001): 25–74.

¹⁶ Wu Yun-to, *Son of the Working Class: the Autobiography of Wu Yun-to* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956).

for what he believes to be the most just and noble social cause. Once motivated by the moral good, he is willing to cast aside any selfish concerns and is even ready to sacrifice his physical being. He devoted all his mechanic's skills and knowledge to building the Red Army's arsenal, repairing jammed rifles, taking apart unexploded bombs, inventing makeshift weapons, and risking his life to test weapons of their own design. He confronts every life-threatening instance as if it were a test of his faith in the CCP and of his resolve to pursue its goal, and time and again he sustains critical physical injury or deformation. In the end he loses his left eye, left hand, and right leg and has numerous pieces of shrapnel buried in his body. But, like a hardy cog in the machine of revolution, he is undeterred by physical torments or threats of death. Ironically, his undaunted will, incomparable tenacity, and extraordinary gifts are sadly eclipsed by his unwariness and gullibility in terms of social and political behavior. Without leisure, emotions, romantic love, or personal fitness, Wu's life story, albeit recounted as intimate experience, seems anything but personal or quotidian. It is no mere incident that Wu's life at this point mimicks Ostrovsky's *How Steel Was Tempered*. In the end, with the birth of New China in 1949, Wu's arduous tempering comes to a triumphant close: the CCP sends him to Moscow for health rehabilitation, promotes him to high official positions, and rewards him with national honor and an opportunity to meet the great leader Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1951.

All this helped put Wu in the CCP's Hall of Communist Heroes. But ironically, it also set Wu the human mortal worlds apart from the reality of genuine, day-to-day humanistic values. Revolutionary heroism of such legendary stature enhanced the aura of a Communist utopia that was essential to the CCP propaganda during times of war. Superhuman feats such as Wu's proved most effective in mobilizing multitudes of the lowly and the oppressed to rise up and form a broad basis for unseating the KMT from national rule. But as the era of socialist China arrived and such revolutionary heroism was canonized as a mini-apotheosis of Maoist voluntarism, chasms already open between its didactic loftiness and the genuine expectations of CCP followers would soon widen, for in times of peace and urban/industrial construction, "tempering" of the CCP cadres did not take such acute forms as "hunger and cold" or "bloodshed." Instead they were entrusted with unprecedented power and influence in work and life, which inevitably made them accountable as well as vulnerable.

Herein lies the stark dilemma: only in the name of the people were they supposed to rule, but they now believed they were entitled to overrule people.

To live up to people's expectations and preserve its legitimacy, the CCP seemed for a while to prioritize educating its cadres in guarding against moral laxity, corruption, and abuse of power, which, in all probability, would lead to a fatal tumble just like that of the KMT. Despite the party's tight control in the early 1950s, it showed no shortage of just, egalitarian, and ennobling policies and deeds, such as mopping up the remnants of social injustice, dismissing corrupt CCP officials, and battling against fraud, overspending, and decadence by those inside the CCP. The party's awareness of political and ethical progress provided the newly liberated Chinese with ample reason to keep up their vigilance against moral failures in the people's government and remain confident in the ability of the CCP to continue to pursue social justice and ethical well-being for the public at large. This belief deeply cherished by the public would time and again prompt aspiring intellectuals of Maoist China (after 1942) to step up in defiance of erroneous leadership at the risk of losing their careers and even their lives; they would go against political trends, voice their conscience, and lead one populist dissent movement after another in the decades to follow.

However, changes on the international front in the wake of the Cold War soon caused a drastic turn in the ideological orientation of the CCP. The United States and other Western nations jointly intervened in military conflicts in Korea in the early 1950s; later, Soviet Russia showed distrust in Mao's independent and self-sufficient policies, suspected the CCP of separatist intentions, and devastated China with a massive pull-out of its aid mid-decade. By the 1960s, Mao had sensed enough danger of his supreme authority being weakened or subverted by hostile international forces and by ideological differences within the party. To counter both, he relentlessly stressed the supremacy of socialism over capitalism, thereby reiterating the irreversible teleological cause of progress to communism. Likewise, he made political loyalty to the correct CCP line, i.e., Mao's line, the utmost virtue of revolutionary heroism. While sinking deeper in his dour voluntarism, Mao succeeded again in yoking the ethical aspirations and idealistic enthusiasm of CCP followers to the cause of inner-party power struggles. In so doing he calculatedly collapsed the complexity of moral legitimacy into a one-sided hegemonic tenet, namely, leaving no

choices in ethical consideration except one: how *ought* one live and act according to CCP decrees? For all his iconoclastic rhetoric, Mao could not escape the same impasse his enemies once ran into—exerting his authority unconditionally and suppressing dissent crushingly—and he did it so rigidly and willfully that he turned ideological correctness into a personal cult. He steadily enforced a complete break between revolutionary heroism and genuine pursuit of well-being for the society at large; he replaced the iconic hero with a mythical leader demanding a nation of abidingly loyal followers. With an iron hand, he hauled the party and the nation onto a path of stifling self-barricade and unceasing internal power strife.

What this entailed for the CCP's tempering of its heroes in order to rid them of the ideological "impurities" needs little explanation. Emulating revolutionary heroes now called for a conscious and vigilant effort to model one's life, on the whole and in specific deeds, on the heroes' impeccable idealism and be inspired to not only overcome one's own weaknesses, deficiencies, and biases but also make sure that others did so in terms of thought and behavior. This collective surveillance and self-censure induced pervasive feelings of fear and trepidation among CCP members whenever a new political campaign or thought reform was launched. Compared acerbically to "being bathed in public,"¹⁷ such rectification campaigns descended on the CCP members who were under duress to "come clean." They were a menacing hammer in the hands of Mao, who would crush political dissent or curtail inner-party debate to keep his unchallenged authority in the post-1949 years.

In the decades leading up to the 1966 Cultural Revolution, Mao never ceased denouncing book learning and individual moral refinement as "decadent" and "baneful" because they were allegedly cut off from political contingency and social needs. At his behest, the CCP revved up its ideological gears to a frenzied pace; terms of revolutionary heroism were broken down into a select body of formulas, sternly guarded by ultraleftist ideologues. New heroic paragons were christened, usually after the facts of their lives were carefully sanitized and reordered. There arose an inundation of Maoist heroes like Lei

¹⁷ The term was first used by the novelist Yang Jiang who, as a bourgeois-born writer, has personally gone through numerous rounds of thought reform and gave a most revealing depiction in her *Xizao* (Taking baths).

Feng, Wang Jinxi, Ouyang Hai, Wang Jie, and others whose growth epitomized a formulaic passage, whose deeds spelled out an illustrious union of “theory and praxis,” and whose lives, all conveniently already terminated, were resurrected by CCP media, books, and documentary films endorsed as canonical CCP works and studied by millions. But while revolutionary hero worship was growing ever more frequent and its rhetoric ever more fanatical, the chasm further widened between the haloed cosmos of the heroes and the unforgiving world of the ordinary people. Free from any ethical checks and balances, Mao made a mockery of the *télos* of human progress. This also heralded the onset of his own unraveling.

Far from rebutting Mao’s self-aggrandizing strategy, many tales of revolutionary heroism circulated during China’s socialist era brimmed with upbeat and unbound force, and the raw spirit of these tales instilled heartiness, valor, and uprightness in characters who in turn enlivened the pages of modern Chinese history with verve, originality, and a fullness of reality.¹⁸ To dismiss the stories as totally phony, dishonest, or contrived propaganda would be a grave oversight that could blindfold us to the fact that ethical impulses had always endured in public awareness, and that it was characteristic of Chinese civilization to have long nurtured an ethical watchfulness on behalf of society. What has often revived the public memory of Korchagin’s heroism in the Maoist era is Korchagin’s keen sense of what is right and wrong and his fearless resolve to see justice served in every kind of daily situation and political “microcosm.” Rather than his political loyalty and ideological faith, people are ready to evoke Korchagin’s fearless determination to be fair, just, and self-effacing when toiling in the real-life world full of inequity, corruption, greed, and other grievances. Facing a reality sliding toward a gaping moral void, people seem to find in Korchagin and other heroes of the past an everlasting repository of human ideals such as fairness, honesty, and integrity. They believe that, nurtured by their deep roots in the ancient heritages of human decency, these individuals have stood the test of persistent moral tempering. Little wonder why to this day the image of Korchagin is still so deeply etched in popular memory that he ranks with such legendary

¹⁸ I have drawn on Ban Wang’s comments on the sublime ethos in revolutionary literature and films even though my comments have a slightly different focus, as has been hitherto demonstrated. See Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 123–32.

folk heroes as *Lülin haohan* 绿林好汉 (Robin Hoodlike outlaws) and *Bao Qingtian* 包青天 (the Incorruptible Judge Bao). A case in point is the public online debate hosted by *China Youth Daily* in March 2000. The Beijing-based Web site displayed the question “Who Is Your Hero, Bill (Bill Gates) or Bao’er (Pavel Korchagin)?” and asked its readers to cast votes online. The results surprised all: not only were the votes evenly divided (50/50), but a considerable number recommended a combination of the two as an ideal model for the youths of China today. What better testimony to the resilience of ethical being than an ever-renewed Korchagin?!

SOCIALIST REALISM

Ban Wang

“Socialist realism” (*shehuizhuyi xianshi zhuyi* 社会主义现实主义) describes much more than a style of fiction in Chinese literature. The term marks the fundamental principle of the aesthetic conception of revolutionary politics. This principle emerged in the 1930s, was established in the Yan’an era, and became dominant during Mao’s age. After the Cultural Revolution, it was discredited, but the concept carries a vitality that calls for rethinking. The term came to the attention of Chinese intellectuals via the new Russian socialist state. Officially adopted by the First Congress of Writers of the Soviet Union in August 1934 as the guideline for art and literature, the principle states:

Socialist realism demands a true, historical, and concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. The realism and historical concreteness of the artistic rendering of reality must be tied to the ideological re-education and training of workers in the spirit of socialism.¹

This statement contains two key elements that would lead to controversies: historical particularity and ideological generality. Fraught with tension and open to misconception, this conceptual pair appeared in later uses and debates. Influenced by the Russian Revolution, the Chinese literary theorist Zhou Yang introduced and elaborated the term in 1933. In his seminal article “Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism” (*Shehui zhuyi xianshi zhuyi he geming langman zhuyi*), published in the journal *Les Contemporains* (*Xiandai*), he pays more attention to realism, the term of historical and empirical particularity, than to the then vibrant ideas about a future socialist society. Keeping in mind the debate among Soviet writers and critics concerning the importance of historical materialism in the creation of art, Zhou proposes that socialist realism does not mean a schematic illustration of Marxist or socialist dogma, or socialist art as a handmaiden of politics. Rejecting the idea of artistic creation strictly from a preconceived

¹ See *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934*, ed. and trans. John Bowlit (New York: Viking, 1976), 296–97.

dogmatic stance, he charges that it is wrong to assess works of art according to doctrinal notions. Critics should instead assess the works' "objectivity, realism, and emotional power."² While it is true that a writer's general outlook shapes his or her observation and rendering of the world, the passage from the philosophical outlook to the actual depiction is tortuous, complex, diverse, and unpredictable, due to widely varying circumstances. The artistically rendered outlook comes into being by way of imagery and imagination, a process that cannot be determined by any political directives. A theorist, however mature and sophisticated, cannot produce a powerful work of art. Art comes from an intimate understanding of reality. "What orients and motivates the artist is not entirely his philosophical stance (worldview), but rather a continuous growth of his philosophy, art, and artistic quality as well his practice in a certain society and class."³

While stressing artworks' realistic, densely imagistic, and imaginary character, Zhou does not try to purify art of politics and ideology. Rather, he repudiates the direct, mechanical correspondence between artworks and ideological convictions. In speaking of socialism as a historical vision, Zhou views social change as a dynamic process of reality. In this light what comes through as artistically compelling is derived from a related registering of the actual situation: the artwork that is historically and socially real. Writers turn to socialism not because they are enlightened by reading books and absorbing doctrine, but because they are compelled by the exigencies of life to see the world as developing irrevocably in a certain direction. Some such world-historical trends include the economic crisis in capitalist countries, the completion of the five-year plan in the Soviet Union, the victory of collectivization, and the worldwide disillusionment about the capitalist system.⁴

Zhou Yang's article contains a notion of socialist realism often dismissed by critics. The emphasis on the immediacy and vividness of lived reality, often associated with crude naturalism and realism, aligns with the general sociohistorical trends of a worldwide movement for change. In the 1930s, the calls for change in China were not dogmatic or arbitrary, imposed as top-down decrees by the Soviet Union or the Chinese Communist Party, but a response to exigencies of a groping,

² *Zhou Yang ji* (Collected essays by Zhou Yang) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

living, moving reality. And for revolutionary art to be real, the artist has to be part of that moving reality.

Remarkably, Zhou Yang's use of "socialist realism" was inspired by the October Revolution and its new culture. The term points to the impact of that victory on the Chinese Revolution. The birth of a socialist state in World War II created a watershed between the first bourgeois or old democratic revolution and a new phase containing the aspirations of socialism. Mao Zedong's essay "On New Democracy" is essential for comprehending the meaning of "socialist" in "socialist realism" beyond a mere aesthetic concept. The old democratic revolution, headed by Sun Yat-sen and the bourgeois ruling class and modeled on European bourgeois revolutions, was a national self-determination movement of a colonized people against imperialism and feudalism. Its goal was to build a modern capitalist society and an independent bourgeois nation-state. This old revolution had some success in the Northern Expedition, curtailing the warlords and propagating the Three Peoples' Principles and other democratic measures. But with increasing imperialist encroachment, the bourgeoisie leadership proved unable to continue: the Guomindang broke up the united front with the Communists and succumbed to imperialist pressures. With the Japanese invasion, a new epoch began in which the colonized Chinese people, led by the Communist Party, would be the driving force of the national liberation movement. Thus, the new phase of revolution departed from the old in that the leadership of the Communist Party represented the will of a coalition of classes of "proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie."⁵ In addition to anti-imperialism and antifeudalism carried over from the old revolution, the new one was also part of the worldwide social movement "against the international bourgeoisie or international capitalism."⁶ It was "no longer part of the old bourgeois, or capitalist, world revolution," Mao wrote, but "part of the new world revolution, the proletarian-socialist world revolution. Such revolutionary colonies and semi-colonies can no longer be regarded as allies of the counter-revolutionary front of world capitalism; they have become allies of the revolutionary front of world socialism."⁷

⁵ Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 46.

⁶ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Vol. II (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 345.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

This new phase was but a transitional stage to socialism. There were socialist elements in the new democratic revolution, but the new democracy was by nature a national independence movement. To the extent that the Chinese Revolution joined the world proletarian-socialist revolution, China's new national culture was on track with the world proletarian-socialist new culture. However, its identity was not socialist, but "the anti-imperialist and antifeudal new democratic culture of the broad masses."⁸ Rising above the actual conditions, the "socialist" culture was to lead the masses toward socialist goals, to look ahead to a new era after the victory of the new democracy, and to develop the ideology of socialism. This would be made possible by cultural, subjective factors, the historical hope for socialism. The agents of the new democracy would be educated to be the self-conscious members looking ahead to a new socialist system.

This conception implies the dual task of revolutionary culture: both national and international. Socialist realism may also be divided into a dual agenda of national mobilization and ideological transformation. The ideological side gradually prevailed over the national component as the revolution progressed. Thus "socialist realism" signals a transformative style, or a realism of social change. It compels us to revisit Mao's Yan'an talk, in which the most prominent transformative potentials are discernible. China was at the stage of "democratic revolution" marked by anti-imperialism and national independence, but "socialist realism" was used by Mao to mobilize the broadest cross-sections of the population and forge a united front, which would involve all classes in mass politics. A large number of passages in the talk point to this broad social class alliance that could be rallied to support the democratic revolution and herald the art of socialist realism. The thrust is to argue for a new form of art and literature that would serve the military effort in the War of Resistance against Japanese invasion. Meanwhile, the socialist-inspired revolution in land reform would facilitate the tasks of national independence and self-defense. The rural transformations in the revolutionary base and the cultural and educational needs of the workers, peasants, and soldiers as well as the urban petty bourgeoisie were to be fitted into an art whose purpose would be both mobilization and transformation. Linking class politics with military resistance to Japanese imperialism implied that the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

goal of cultural production was what Antonio Gramsci calls “national-popular.” The “popular” classes constitute the major political force of a nation-building movement.⁹ In the Chinese context, “national,” rather than referring to an elitist ruling class of the nationalist government, meant the “popular” class, comprising “90 percent of our total population,” as Mao indicates.¹⁰ Under the rubric of “the people,” popular groups were not only the agents and emergent force of the national liberation movement, land reform, and class struggle but also the audience to be educated and enlightened about a nascent reality and socialist hopes. The arts in the service of workers, peasants, and soldiers would strive to promote the broadest involvement of a national people. This was to become the principle of socialist realism in Mao’s China in the social and artistic realms.

In order to serve the people so that they could converge into a unified national force, artists were obliged to create forms familiar and acceptable to popular taste. In the revolutionary era, the majority of the population was the peasants, and to them the indigenous forms of art and popular language, rather than the bourgeois, comprador culture of colonial modernity, were readily acceptable and appropriate. Derived from the existing resources of folk and traditional culture, the indigenous form had diverse variations: wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folk tales, and dances. Although Mao pits this “nativist” and populist approach against the bourgeois and antiquated feudal forms, a socialist, cosmopolitan element is intertwined with national forms. At three points in the talk Mao mentions the traditional legacy and foreign resources, and embraces both as part of the emergent new culture. He states, “The literary and artistic works of the past are not a source but a stream; they were created by our predecessors and the foreigners out of the literary and artistic raw materials they found in the life of the people of their time and place.” Artists “must on no account reject the legacies of the ancients and the foreigners or refuse to learn from them, even though they are the works of the feudal or bourgeois classes.”¹¹ This remark highlights the character of the people (*renmin xing* 人民性) and points to the creation of the people’s art by drawing on indigenous as well as foreign resources.

⁹ *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. and intro by David Forgacs (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 366–67.

¹⁰ *Mao Tse-tung on Literature and Art* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

The concept of “people” also denotes peoples of the world in struggle against exploitation, autocracy, and foreign rule. On that common ground of victimization and liberation, different cultures can resonate and exchange despite incompatible state systems. The notion of international peoples and their cultures once again signals socialism as a worldwide, inherently international phenomenon. The reference to mixed cross-cultural traditions later became the principle of “Use the past for the present; use the foreign to serve China” (*gu wei jin yong; yang wei zhong yong*).

The fusion of art with mass politics, crystallized in the concept of national-popular, challenges the customary view that socialist art is subordinate to politics. For many critics the subservient position of art to politics and the artist to the party, and worse, the sacrifice of the individual to the collective, is a recipe for the demise of art. But if we read Mao’s talk in close relation to the emergent national, social movement of broad popular participation, it is difficult to claim that politics commandeers art. In Mao’s nuanced conception, revolutionary politics is not elitist politics conducted by individual statesmen; it is not sectarian conflict, not politicking of the Machiavellian kind. Far from the “activity of a few individuals” working “behind closed doors,” national-popular politics takes the form of mass movements: class struggle and campaigns of convergent groups involving the vast majority of the Chinese people, both revolutionaries and nonrevolutionaries. It is only in this manner that politics, as much as art, becomes representative of the people’s identity and expressive of their emancipatory aspirations. Mao writes, “The revolutionary struggle on the ideological and artistic fronts must be subordinate to the political struggle because only through politics can the needs of the class and masses find expression in concentrated form.” The unity of art and politics, however, does not mean politics unilaterally dictates artistic creativity. Instead it suggests a reciprocal or mutually implicated relationship: art and literature may be subordinate, but “they in turn exert a great influence on politics.”¹² Art functions to raise consciousness, fire passions, and unify the thought of the people. This energy mobilized by means of aesthetic education means art and politics are rolled into a dynamic moving force.

¹² Ibid., 25.

The actual practice of art and politics, however, often strayed from this theoretical scenario. In the seventeen years from 1949 to 1966, when dynamic social mobilization for armed struggle was no longer the order of the day, the insistence on the relation of art to politics, especially state policy agendas, tended to take on a dogmatic, arbitrary ring, and art was frequently reduced to a mere function of party policy. This led to the impoverishment of art and literature, conventionally regarded as the fault of socialist realism. But one need not rescue an imaginary, unblemished art from politics too quickly, blaming bad art on its close ties with politics. There are good policies and bad policies. If art has a part to play in promoting a politically desirable world, the mere fact of policy-related, politicized artworks cannot be equated with the ruin of art. Like art—broadly understood as culture—politics envisions and changes social reality and institutions. Thus if a policy is derived from a realistic, accurate assessment of reality and is responsive to the demands of the society and people, it may prove to be a democratic expression of the popular will. Striving for the common good rather than allowing a handful of elites to grab power, this realistic policy could claim a corresponding realistic art, resulting in a healthy union of art with politics. Indeed, artworks in progressive social movements around the world suggest that by being part of popular politics, by engaging in the rough and tumble of everyday struggle, art may become richer, inspirational, and transformative as well as popular. However, art dictated by unrealistic or bureaucratic policies of an elite group or a power-seeking party out of touch with the lived reality of the population is a betrayal of the unity of politics and art.

The artist's relation to the people is a variant of the relation between consciousness and reality in socialist realism. In Mao's analysis, art and literature originate from social reality in its richness and immediacy, and the current reality is the authentic source from which artists can draw inspiration. Artworks as mental forms are products of reflection on certain social experiences. Revolutionary art is therefore a reflection of the people's life experience in the minds of revolutionary artists. But raw data and inchoate experience should not be equated with reality. Only the reality of a transformative social movement is rich and amenable to good artistic treatment. Vibrant revolutionary reality can be more fundamental and dramatic, and often outshines finished art productions. From this realistic assessment emerges the imperative for artists to absorb the plain language of grassroots populations and to incorporate folk art forms by going to the people, because an

intertwining of aesthetic forms and indigenous content would be both real and authentic. A good and enterprising artist should live together with the masses, get involved in their struggle, and observe, study, and analyze classes, people, and forms of struggle.¹³

Art should be realistic because it promotes real politics and serves the agents of political movements. Mao stressed observation of life forms and the need for the artist to be familiar with the folkways and centuries-old customs of the peasants. This view confirms the closest possible correspondence between art and life in socialist realism. Socialist realism indeed privileges the representation of the most vital and emergent political forces in the national liberation and social movement. In Mao's formulation, the objective dimension, derived from a notion of things and traditions as given or inherited, is not the goal of realism. Realism is about the realistic understanding of the world and the drive, inspired by that understanding, to change the status quo.

Although fidelity to the political reality is a measure of artistic value, this does not mean the artists simply hold up a mirror and register its various aspects and textures. In Mao's view, art and artists do not simply remain passive; they must play an active role. Based on the artwork's extensive inspirational power, a streak of romanticism emerges. Hence the association of realism with romanticism. Even though the term was not used at the time of Mao's talk, romanticism was to become connected with socialist realism. Mao notes that even though social reality is a rich source of inspiration for art, the audience will not be content with reality as it stands but will instead demand creative representations of it. Why settle for a creation deemed secondary to the real? Mao answers that even though both reality and art are beautiful, "life reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, near the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual daily life."¹⁴ Evident here is a romantic notion of art's power to dramatize and transcend the current reality. This shift toward a romantic conception of art and imagination suggests an artistic ascendance to an envisioned order of reality. It is true that realism will expose the harshness of reality, like hunger, suffering, and conditions of exploita-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

tion and oppression. But these facts are ubiquitous and a lot of people take them for granted. Artworks, in contrast, will jolt the audience out of this lethargic acceptance. Through their works, artists “awaken the masses, fire them with passion, and impel them to unite and struggle in order to transform their environment.”¹⁵

Art as a rallying focus for emotional arousal and a vehicle for raising consciousness has the ability to transform and indeed transcend reality. It is important to note here a change of meaning in romanticism, conventionally understood. The concept here is not marked by subjective whims, fantasy, love, or imaginary freedom, but understood as a renewable power to create a different narrative and to project a different image of the world, provoking the audience to make that image a reality. This sense of romanticism links Mao’s remarks to Marxist aesthetics. Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre have explored this radical romanticism of utopian revolutionary change. Lefebvre portrays the French writer Stendhal’s romanticism as a mode of passion, expression, utopian hopes, and radical imagination and describes revolutionary art as moving “towards a new romanticism.” It is a kind of Faustian “will to power of individuals and groups” This will to power that “finds expression in their written or spoken messages and in their acts of mutual defiance is but a pinpoint in the intensification of living which the work of art brings even further and even higher.”¹⁶ As activities by the agents of social movements and as inspiring visions of future society, realism and romanticism are closely allied.

As a literary mode introduced from the West to China, realism often brings to mind fiction works by Mao Dun, Lao She, Ba Jin, Shen Congwen, and others who were active from 1928 to 1937. In Europe, fictional realism arose in the modern, market-driven society in the eighteenth century. Derived from a realist epistemology and the notion of the egocentric individual as a self-realizing, self-interested agent, the realistic turn in fiction is a hallmark of literary modernity in the West. Realism broke with the religious, medieval worldview. As Ian Watts notes, “In the literary, the philosophical and the social spheres alike the classical focus on the ideal, the universal and the corporate has shifted completely, and the modern field of vision is mainly

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, tr. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 239, 257.

occupied by the discrete particular, the directly apprehended sensum, and the autonomous individual.”¹⁷

In the transition from the Qing to republican China, Chinese realist writers of the May Fourth culture evinced a similar break with the Confucian ethico-political order. With this break as part of their new understanding of reality, writers began to approach the world not from inherited moral presumptions, but through direct personal experience and by rigorously investigating what they encountered as real. Mao Dun is considered to be the master of realism in the prerevolutionary period. Deeply influenced by European naturalism, he excelled, in Leo Lee’s words, in “meticulous gathering and deployment of material” and portrayed his characters as victims of socioeconomic forces.¹⁸ Although he offered an epic vision of Chinese society in flux, there was hardly any indication in Mao Dun’s novels that the society was to be altered and restructured by human agency as part of an idealistic-transformative agenda. This could be attributed to his preference for naturalistic realism. His novel *Eclipse* (Shi) drew upon his own personal experience as a bourgeois intellectual seeking self-realization. In *Rainbow* (Hong), Mao Dun offers a portrait of a young lady who as urban-educated individual suffers from disappointment and frustrations. Mao Dun wrote about what he knew intimately and described his bourgeois milieu and his friends. His realistic focus reveals the bankruptcy of the individual pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment in a politically chaotic, morally confusing, and economically deprived society. While his narratives of the urban bourgeoisie in Shanghai are highly realistic portrayals of social and economic situations, the tone is one of tragedy and despair. When he turned to the countryside to register its reality, as in the three important stories “Spring Silkworm,” “Autumn Harvest,” and “Winter Ruin,” Mao Dun again painted finely textured circumstances of the Chinese peasantry—their customs, superstitions, survival instincts, folkways, and myriads of everyday details. With rugged, earthy realism, these rural stories present a “landscape of despair.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 62.

¹⁸ Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 224.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

Mao Dun's realistic novel of the urban middle class may be characterized, at best, as a form of critical realism. This is a sober-minded viewpoint that sees no hope in social degeneration. If realism of social movements projects political visions coupled with active implementation, critical realism seems lacking in that transformative impulse. While it is critical of social ills, critical realism also reaffirms and perpetuates the degenerate contemporary reality. This critical edge took a more transformative turn in the hands of left-leaning writers. In the 1930s realism's focus turned away from the predominantly urban scene to look at the rural conditions and the plight of the peasantry. Wu Zuxiang 吴组缃 is a case in point. Like Mao Dun, Wu was also adept at realistic portrayal of the urban bourgeoisie and spiritually impoverished city dwellers. But his Marxist ideas compelled him to critique the artistic and narcissistic posture of urban intellectuals indulging their aesthetic tastes in Shanghai's coffee shops and salons. Wu's story "The Master Gets His Tonic" ("Guan Guan de bupin") offers an authentic depiction of both city scenes and rural people. Why did fiction writing take a rural turn in the 1930s, and what kind of realism does this turn imply? Mao Dun, for example, was able to offer realistic portrayals of urban scenes and finely individuated, rich characterization, but his realism is more circumstantial, empirical, and testimonial. In contrast, writers like Wu Zuxiang offer more than realistic details and authentic circumstances. In Wu's story "The Master Gets His Tonic," it is evident that the author understands reality not as a confusing morass of empirical and sensuous details, but as shaped by the relations of exploitation, oppression, class stratification, money, and struggle. Global economic crises and the alliance of colonialism, the native bourgeoisie, and the rural gentry also constitute a stultifying, oppressive reality. In other words, the fictional reality in Wu's writings is conceptually articulated and organized on Marxist terms, which in the 1930s were guidelines for revolutionary awakening and social action. Unfolding within a thinly veiled conceptual framework or intuition, realism deepened.

Turning to the countryside and describing the plight of the peasantry had far-reaching implications for the vision and political strategy of the Chinese Revolution. The rural turn is much more than a literary and critical issue. The Chinese Revolution differed from the Russian Revolution in its mobilization of social forces. While the former included support from the "national bourgeoisie" and the urban middle class, the agrarian nature of Chinese society and the weakness

of the urban workers made the proletarians an unlikely revolutionary force. Repeated failures of urban and industrial actions led to Mao's reassessment of Chinese reality and compelled the revolutionaries to turn to the countryside. Land reform and political mobilization of the peasantry changed the millennia-old social structure of inequality and exploitation in the countryside. The rural revolution rallied the support of the vast majority of the nation's population, leading to victory. The grand strategy of the revolution, encircling the city via the countryside, was based on a realistic analysis of the Chinese situation and was at work in the 1930s. Interestingly, the rural issue as the quintessential Chinese problem was intuitively felt in the rural turn in literary realism. As in Wu Zuxiang's writings, the emphasis shifted from circumstantial accuracy toward a structural, systemic analysis of Chinese society. Realism was to become an artistic depiction of social change guided by historical materialism, a theory of history based on the diagnosis of capitalist social reality and premised on the possibility of generating an alternative.

Wu Zuxiang's works, though open to a reading as historical materialism, belong to a leftist realism, which is not yet socialist realism. Lin Chun notes that China's postrevolutionary project of socialist modernization had three key components: social, national, and developmental.²⁰ The national and developmental dimensions were to consolidate newly won national sovereignty while deploying state power for the development of a national economy. The social component was more "socialist" and populist in that it sought to achieve equality, social justice, and the people's political participation. The nationalization of the means of production was only the more institutional part of the "socialist" project, whereas the cultural task was to remove the traditional mentalities and behavior that blocked the emergence of a new subjectivity consonant with the new system. It may be helpful to distinguish "socialist" from its revolutionary, nationalist, and developmental dimensions and to stress its cultural, mental transformation. From the earlier distinction between old and new democracy, we recall that the "social" component implies socialist and international dimensions, because it proffers an alternative to capitalist society.

²⁰ Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 62.

The novel of land reform well illustrates the social and cultural revolution in the countryside. Although the land reform program was implemented before the officially designated landmark date of economic socialism in 1956, its goal of systematic and mental transformation reveals the initial signs of socialist art. In Mao's new democracy, land reform was part of the nationalist and social project to distribute land more equally among the peasants, so that the vast majority could become owners and farmers of their own land. Long deprived of means of production, they finally got a chance to improve their life condition and participate in social change. From the earlier revolutionary period through the War of Resistance against the Japanese invasion to the large-scale reform movement lasting from 1946 to 1952, land reform was a tool to mobilize the social constituents for the revolution and to bring about political participation of the peasantry. It paved the way for the later collectivization of the means of production and strengthened the alliance between workers and peasants, the basis of a new socialist republic.²¹

Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines Over the Sanggan River* (Taiyan zhao zai sanggan he shang 太阳照在桑乾河上), Liu Qing's *History of Pioneers* (Chuangye shi 创业史), and Zhou Libo's *The Storm* (Baofeng zhoyu 暴风骤雨), to name just a few, belong to this genre. The novels depict the way the land reform campaign destroyed the gentry class and ended the unequal distribution of land in the rural economic structure. Reform greatly expanded the new regime's base of popular support by giving the "land to the tillers" and met the demand of the peasants. Deeply attached to the individual family farm, a structure of feeling informed by traditional morality, the peasants benefited greatly.²² The land reform novels portray the bloody excesses and struggle sessions against the landlords but also depict the peasants as active participants in the process of changing the rural power structure. "If the ends of land reform were determined from above," Maurice Meisner writes, "the process itself was carried out from below, providing peasants with a sense that they themselves were changing the conditions under which they lived and that they could be the masters of their own

²¹ Li Yang, *Kangzheng suming zhi lu* (Road of struggle and fatality) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi press, 1993), 96–97.

²² Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China: A History of the People's Republic* (London and New York: The Free Press, 1977), 150.

destiny.”²³ Land reform, however, only created small individual farmers, and it is not until the novels of rural collectivization would there be a clear socialist turn in realistic fiction. Among many novels, Zhou Libo’s *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* (Shanxiang ju bian 山乡巨变), completed in 1957, is significant in featuring the aesthetic and compositional principles of socialist realism.

Land distribution restored the peasants as the rightful owners of their land and put them on the way to prosperity through self-reliance and hard work. Yet since farming was done by private, scattered families, the smallholder’s way of life was not conducive to socialist modernization. What followed was a new party program: agricultural collectivization. Rather than private farmers, a socialist economy required a highly organized and cooperative workforce, high productivity of agriculture to support industrialization, and rural mechanization. Yet the social and economic results of the land reform were not encouraging in the early 1950s. The countryside saw a growing polarization of rural classes, the rise of new landlords, and new poverty. These were hurdles on the road to realizing socialist notions of equality and balanced development. As a corrective, the campaign for collectivization of land, private tools, and assets—productive means—was to lead the peasants from the individual, family way of farming to the more productive socialist organization of labor.²⁴

Contrary to the view of the fiction of collectivization as illustrating party policy, *Great Changes* addresses in realistic fashion the tremendous resistance to collectivization among the peasants. This resistance reflects the debate within the party, which could not arbitrarily impose its agenda but had to work through the people. The point was not whether and when to collectivize, but how. The party was fully aware that peasants’ individualism, age-old strong attachment to their own land, and self-serving, private habits posed challenges. The peasants’ unwillingness to join the cooperatives gave rise to a new focus on what is called “middle-of-the-road characters” in fiction. These characters, in Joe Huang’s apt phrase, are “neither heroes nor villains.”²⁵ Wavering and facing tough choices, they are neither exemplary figures nor stick-in-the-mud renegades. The fictional scrutiny of the mentality,

²³ Ibid., 101.

²⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵ Joe C. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life* (New York: Pica Press, 1973), 238.

ambiguity, and eventual change in these characters signals a deepening of realism.²⁶

Great Changes depicts how the peasants and team leaders work together to implement collectivization policy and to organize the individual peasants into cooperative farms. Rightly called a “novel without a hero,” it is distinct from the sharply defined fictional portrayals of antagonistic landlords and peasants, villains and heroes. Zhou Libo captures the patient, slow change of mentality among the peasants as they move to a collectively organized economy and communal ownership of land, assets, and tools. This is a daunting task, given the long-entrenched cultural and mental habits of China’s peasantry. Contrary to the view of socialist realism as a program to create the mythical socialist man, in the novel the socialist politico-economic agenda is not thrust on the peasants. Led by the work team sent down from the party organization, the self-taught and younger peasants carry out the collectivization task with newly awakened political consciousness. It is a project of persuasion, which works through the peasants’ understanding, experience, and consent. The cadres, team leaders, and activists work and live with peasants under one roof and try to show them the new horizon of a better future. This is the continuation of the mass-line working style of the past.

Although the policy of collectivization is designed to enhance the productivity of the rural economy; bridge the gap between rich and poor, strong and weak; and prepare for rural mechanization, it is not clear how it is to be implemented. The work team, headed by Deng Xiumei, a self-taught woman new to the scene of rural reform, has a stiff learning curve. Nor do the peasant cadres, born and bred in the village, fare better. They are not immune from mistakes, excesses, and miscommunication. Even the policy itself is subject to change as new problems come up.

There is a strong sense of groping for a way to collectivization. This puts leaders and peasants on an equal footing, leveling out characters with believable, intimate human traits and weaknesses. Those who are supposed to be positive figures are portrayed as constantly embroiled in family trouble, bickering with their spouses, worrying about trivial matters, and short-sighted regarding the big picture of social change. Deng Xiumei, the team leader assigned by the county government to

²⁶ Ibid., 269–70.

implement the collectivization program, is apparently an independent, hardworking woman. Yet she evinces backward “feminine” traits, indulging her private feelings and longing for a child of her own in the midst of struggle and campaigns. On her arrival at the village, she reveals her tearful hurt feelings and vanity when she fails to engage an unimpressed audience about the upcoming campaign. As Chinese critic Lan Aiguo points out, Deng’s speech does not fit her revolutionary profile, and her mentality betrays signs of weakness and traditional residues.²⁷ While she sympathizes with the village women who have trouble with their husbands, Deng does not try to encourage them to assert their “feminism” or independence. Rather, she asks them to be tactful and forgiving, and her language of persuasion smacks of traditional virtues of silent, suffering womanhood.

The most interesting characters are not those who carry out the revolutionary project, but those who resist it. And they have sound reasons. For well-to-do, well-equipped, and able-bodied peasants, collective work with the poor and weak means charity on their part and free riding by the “poor slackers.” The peasants each have their own calculation of self-interest and rational choice. How can they not clash when merging into one group? For those benefiting most from the land reform and geared to realize the dream of past generations for family prosperity, collectivization stands in the way and dampens their entrepreneurial spirit.

In his earlier novel *The Hurricane* Zhou Libo focuses on a top-down rural revolution that changes the political and social landscape of the Chinese countryside. In *Great Changes*, the revolution is portrayed as happening on the ground and in everyday life. This mundane aspect makes the novel an exemplary case of socialist realism. Commenting on the writing of this novel, Zhou expressed his intention to bring the party’s collectivization policy into the narrative. Native to the rural area that he revisited in order to write the book, Zhou might have shown an intimate, nostalgic attachment that allowed him to invoke myriads of fascinating details about rural customs and conditions from his childhood memory. Yet while the immediacy or authenticity of rural life may be impressive and realistic, the circumstantial details

²⁷ Lan Aiguo, *Deconstructing the Seventeen Years* (Jiegou shiqi nian) (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2003), 129.

themselves are insufficient as a manifestation of social change. Socialist realism requires a narrative in which the socialist agenda and the peasants' needs and inherited mental habits intertwine and work together. The peasants must come to terms with the agenda, which in turn must appeal to their sense of the common good. Persuaded, the peasants will then voluntarily warm up to the new concepts and willingly transform their lives.

Chapter 9, "Applications," depicts different motives for joining the cooperative. An old man, apparently a member of the traditional literati in the village, touts the benefits of the cooperative by resorting to Confucianism. Ready to serve the times as he often did in the past, he submits his house deed to the work team, which quickly returns it to him. On hearing that the cooperative cares for the old, he remarks that this is indeed socialism with ancient roots: "As Mencius said, 'Treat the elders of others as you would treat your own.' Our ancestors long ago wanted to establish socialism."²⁸ Although this paradoxical statement incurs a smile from Deng Xiumei, she nevertheless shows sincere respect for the old scholar. After all, the communitarian ethos in Mencius' remark and in the rural tradition resonates with the notion of mutual help promised by the new cooperative. An old female applicant, whose family fortune has declined, offers a different reason for joining. She tells a story of patriarchal prejudice against women and the injustice of her suffering. Her nine female children died by infanticide or starvation and she suffered from misogyny. As her husband and sons died and other adult children left her, she had to take up farming to feed her remaining children: "How could I work the few bits of field as well? Spring sowing, autumn harvest, and work in the fields, I had to ask for help from others for everything. The little rice we got was given to others, and year after year I owed people their wages. Now Chairman Mao has started something fine; the fields are for everybody to work, and the food is for everybody to eat." The reason for collectivization is most clear in this woman's story. As each applicant tells a different tale in this chapter, the narrative takes on a naturalistic, authentic feel of realism.²⁹

²⁸ Zhou Libo, *Shanxiang ju bian* (Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 1983), 109. I use the translation by Derel Bryan: Chou Li-po, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962), 115.

²⁹ Zhou Libo, *Shanxiang ju bian*, 111 (the English edition, 120).

Converting individual farmers into socialist-minded, cooperative subjects is a slow, pedagogical process. The mental changes are effected tentatively. And the team leaders themselves are often not sure how to implement the policy. *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* can be characterized as a cultural revolution on the ground of everyday life. The slow, wide-ranging depiction of the multifaceted rural lifestyle, customs, psychologies, and productive work, and the intractable backwardness, inertia, self-interest, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and fatalism invite the term “realism.” But these descriptions of the status quo herald change—in a socialist direction. In this light the novel works toward not just realism but socialist realism, which encompasses cultural, mental, and economic transformations. The transformative realism discussed earlier is shorn of its militant and power-struggle aspects and becomes a milder, more intimate form of the mass-line approach. It blurs the line between good and bad characters and attempts to reform the meticulously textured life of entrenched rural custom and tradition.

POLITICAL LYRIC

Xin Ning

To readers unfamiliar with the turbulence of modern China and enamored of the intrinsic quality of art, the concept of political poetry may be both amazing and appalling. It may seem either an inferior form of poetry used as propaganda or, by yoking two apparently contradictory and incompatible elements together, a crude violation of art's independence and creative freedom. Although almost every distinguished poet has written political poems, understood loosely as poetic writings dedicated to specific political and historical events and employed for utilitarian purposes, they are seldom taken seriously in the West by mainstream literary critics, historians, and readers of "elite" taste who feel more comfortable with "highbrow" literature.¹ These readers might grudgingly acknowledge that occasionally it is possible to find a fairly good work among political poems—for instance, Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," or some of Walt Whitman's poems written during the American Civil War. In general, however, to them poems connected with politics are inherently mediocre. Among different subgenres and categories of poetry, lyric is supposed to be the furthest from politics, and the idea of linking the two, for some readers of poetry at least, seems abominable. This denial of the connection

¹ There were, of course, certain historical moments in the West when political poetry became popular among common readers and even drew the attention of major critics, such as the "red" 1930s or the 1960s. Yet even in these times the academia's enmity against political literature did not dwindle, but in many cases increased. In recent years, however, interest in political literature has been to some extent revived in Western academia, and a number of important works have been devoted to this topic. See, for example, Cary Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (New York: Routledge, 2001) and Michael Thurston, *Making Something Happen: Partisan Political Poetry in the U.S. Between the Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). However, in mainland China between the 1950s and the early 1980s, the historical era on which this work focuses, the situation was the opposite: being political has served as the supreme standard in literary criticism. Hence the reading habits of the public and the tastes of literary critics were also totally different from Western ones in the same period.

between the lyrical and the political, along with its implied hierarchical value system privileging art over social life, is held by many as self-evident and universally true.

These readers would be utterly surprised to find that in the early People's Republic era,² a type of verse known as *zhengzhi shuqing shi* 政治抒情诗 (political lyric) quickly developed in mainland China and in almost no time became the most popular form of modern Chinese poetry. Although some alternative and dissenting voices began to emerge in the form of private writings and underground literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s,³ the popularity of political lyric in the public sphere did not decline until the beginning of the reform era of the 1980s. The rise and fall of political lyric is worth close examination from both an empirical and a theoretical perspective. As an integral part of the history of modern Chinese literature and culture, the political lyric is good case for a more theoretical inquiry into the relationship among art and politics, ideology, and society. It marks the achievements as well as limitations of revolution in the modern age. Hong Zicheng has noted that the concept of political lyric first appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁴ However, the practice of political lyric writing started much earlier. It can be traced back to the beginning of the left-wing literature movement in the 1920s and 1930s, and its originators included such writers as Guo Moruo (1892–1978), Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935), Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈 (1901–31), Yin Fu 殷夫 (1910–31), and Pu Feng 蒲风 (1911–43). Here, I focus on the political lyric in the early People's Republic era, not only because this is when the genre enjoyed a privileged environment for its fullest development but also because there are subtle differences between political lyric poetry written after 1949 and its predecessors.

Scholars in both China and West have long noticed the close connection between political radicalism and the rise of modern literature in

² In this work, the “early era” of the People's Republic covers roughly the years between 1949 and the early 1980s; in other words, the time between the founding of the new republic and the beginning of the reform era.

³ Some examples of this new dissident voice may include the poetic works of Shi Zhi (real name Guo Lusheng), Bei Dao (Zhao Zhenkai), Mang Ke (Jiang Shiwei), Duo Duo (Li Shizheng), Gen Zi (Yue Zhong), etc. For a more detailed study of these writers, see Yang Jian, *Wenhua da geming zhong de dixia wenxue* (The underground literature during the Great Cultural Revolution) (Beijing: Zhaohua, 1993).

⁴ Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi* (The history of contemporary Chinese literature) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 74.

China. Besides various comprehensive studies of Chinese radical political movements in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whether communism, anarchism, socialism, or nationalism, a lot of academic works have been devoted to the relation between folk literature and modern literature, the propaganda function and social application of literature in the modern Chinese milieu, the metropolitan left-wing cultural movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mao Zedong's 1942 Yan'an "Talks" and consequent debates on "national forms," and the entangled connections and interactions between literature and various political events. Chang-tai Hung, in his continuous exploration of the role of folk literature and popular art in modern Chinese culture, discusses both the "discovery" of folk art by May Fourth intellectuals and the foregrounding of popular art in the Sino-Japanese War era.⁵ Bonnie S. McDougall's pioneering introduction and translation of Mao's 1942 Yan'an "Talks" not only provides Western readers with a reliable text of this later canonized article but also discloses the complexity of Mao's revolutionary ideology—a form of localized Marxism-Leninism "with Chinese characteristics" that also contains novel ideas and avoids "the later vulgarizations of Marxist theory by Krushchev," as Mao refuses to rank literatures of different historical eras and classes in an order of merit "according to modes of production or material conditions."⁶ Edoarda Masi relates the debates regarding "national form" before and after Mao's "Talks" to the campaigns of "popularization" of Chinese left-wing literature in the early 1930s and further back to the dominant idea of "socialist in content, national in form" in Soviet literature required by Stalin and Zdanov.⁷ David L. Holm's essay on the same subject, in contrast, provides a detailed analysis of different responses to and interpretations of Mao's "Talks" among Yan'an

⁵ See Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985) and *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). His discussion of "Popular Culture in the Communist Areas" in the latter work is of special interest to our study of political lyric.

⁶ See Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), 25–26.

⁷ See Edoarda Masi, "La discussion sur les 'formes nationales' dans l'art et la littérature, 1938–1942," in *La littérature Chinoise au Temps de la Guerre de Résistance contre le Japon (de 1937 à 1945)* (Paris: Éditions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1982), 205–13.

intellectuals despite their seeming ideological unanimity.⁸ Kai-yu Hsu's study on contemporary Chinese poetry's search for the "ideal form" addresses the issue of "national form" and presents several different experiments by Chinese poets from the 1950s to late 1970s, some of which were actually first developed with the political lyric.⁹ All these works contribute to my study of the political lyric in one way or another; however, they do not single out lyrical poetry either as a unique genre or as a specific cultural phenomenon in modern China, or they fail to illustrate the connections among its artistic characteristics, its ideological implication, and its historical context. In the following, I aim to emphasize the poetic quality of the works concerned as well as ~~and~~ illustrate their political nature.

Most literary works published in the early People's Republic era can be regarded as highly "political" in general. They explicitly endorsed the official ideology and self-consciously adopted a utilitarian standard for art and literature, and the political lyric was no exception. During this period, Chinese artists, from countless grassroots amateurs to many acknowledged writers, unanimously took the collective will kindled by the revolutionary movement as their main source of inspiration and willingly accepted the new ideology of "Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought" as the guiding principle in their writing career. Mao Zedong's 1942 "Talks at the Yen'an [Yan'an] Forum on Literature and Art," which bluntly asserts that art and literature are only ideological forms and subjugates them to politics, was revered. As Mao claims in his talks,

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine.¹⁰

⁸ See David L. Holm, "National Form and the Popularization of Literature in Yen'an," in *La littérature Chinoise*, 215–35.

⁹ See Kai-yu Hsu, "Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Its Search for an Ideal Form," in Bonnie S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 244–65.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-Tung), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking [Beijing]: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 3:86.

In the ideology of the new era, art was no longer a self-sufficient and autonomous domain, but should always be decided by and employed to serve the needs of politics. The ultimate standard of good literature is whether it successfully serves the interest of the “workers, peasants and soldiers,” or the “people,” and the policies of the Communist Party. Nonetheless, Chinese writers’ self-adjustment in accordance with Marxist ideology did not always guarantee a harmonious relationship with the new state apparatus. Clashes between writers and the state reflected the state’s increasing manipulation of artistic creation, and indicated that between artists’ understanding of revolution and the official interpretation there is always an implicit disparity. Thus, until the official ideology finally took hegemonic control of the entire public sphere in the frenzied Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution era (1966–76), there was still limited space for artists to negotiate for creative freedom under the general ideological umbrella. This relationship between writers and the state also inevitably affected the writing of the political lyric.

In spite of the uniformity of its ideological background, the political lyric in modern China is a rather multifarious and exuberant literary movement. Major poets in this genre include writers of different generations and different backgrounds. For instance, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 and Ke Zongping 柯仲平 (1902–64) started their literary careers in the late 1910s and early 1920s, while Hu Feng 胡风 (1903–85), Zang Kejia 臧克家 (1905–2004), Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–96), and He Qifang 何其芳 (1912–77) came onto the literary scene in the early 1930s. Poets like Ruan Zhangjing 阮章竞 (1914–2000), Tian Jian 田间 (1916–85), and Li Ji 李季 (1922–80) first established works during the Anti-Japanese War (1937–45) and the Chinese Civil War (1946–49), and worked primarily, if not exclusively, in Communist-controlled areas under the direct leadership of the Communist Party. Guo Xiaochuan 郭小川 (1919–76), Weng Jie 闻捷 (1923–71), He Jingzhi 贺敬之 (b. 1924), and Li Ying 李瑛 (b. 1926) became prominent only after 1949 with their poems about the vigorous life in the new society, though some of them (like Guo and He) were also trained by the party during the anti-Japanese war era and had begun their literary careers about the same time as Ruan, Tian, and Li Ji. Among these poets, some began as self-conscious left-wing writers while others started out as individualists with liberal aesthetic tastes and turned to Marxist ideology and participated in the Communist revolution later. For many, Japan’s invasion of China and the resulting war for national

liberation served as the catalyst for this change. It is worth mentioning, for example, that many of them spent part of their anti-Japanese war years in Communist-controlled areas and personally experienced the cultural atmosphere created by Mao's theory on art and politics through his 1942 Yan'an "Talks." Their concept of authorship hence was closely intertwined with their self-image as revolutionary soldiers, and they began to work as the "cogs and wheels" in the "revolutionary machine" contentedly long before 1949.

Along with the multiplicity of its authorship, the subject matter of the political lyric is also diverse, and poets had favorite topics and special fields of expertise. For example, Li Ji made his debut in the left-wing literary movement in the mid-1940s with his narrative poem "Wang Gui yu Li Xiangxiang," 王贵与李香香 which focuses on the misery of peasants' lives and their subsequent liberation in the Communist revolution. Li turned to more authentic "proletarian" topics after 1949 and took the lives of oil workers as his major theme. Wen Jie was a keen observer of the lives of Chinese ethnic minority groups in the Xinjiang area and one of few Chinese poets of his generation to openly include the theme of romantic love in political lyrics—obviously the result of his constant exposure to the buoyant life of minorities. Li Ying is best known for his poems on military life, and his self-appointed mission is to hail the loyalty, altruism, bravery, and stamina of soldiers as well as the glory of the revolutionary army. Guo Xiaochuang and He Jingzhi, widely regarded as the major writers of the political lyric, have written on a wide range of topics in the lives of "workers, peasants and soldiers" as well as important political events. They sang of the building of the Sanmen Xia Reservoir on the Yellow River, the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, the meeting of the Communist Party's National Congress, etc. In political lyrics, nonetheless, the variety of subject matter is constantly counterbalanced by the requirement of "political correctness," and poets' apparently free choice of topics is always conditioned by the invisible work of the Althusserian ideological state apparatus. The authors either censored themselves or were forced to conform to the imperatives of the state machine and public criticism.

The ideological requirement of political lyric affected not only its content but also its form. Political lyric poets' styles in the early years of the left-wing literature movement in the 1920s and 1930s were less ideologically restricted and more open to both the influence of Western modernism and contemporary Chinese poets of different schools.

For instance, Zang Kejia's early poetry was composed and polished under the direct tutorship of Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899–1946), the major poet of the Crescent Society, and Ai Qing's lyric poems were heavily influenced by late French symbolism and had an innate connection with the *les Contemporains* School in metropolitan Shanghai. The search for appropriate forms in this period demonstrates a strong "intellectual" inclination. An early poem of Ai Qing illustrates this subtle connection between left-wing poetry and Western avant-garde art. The long poem "Bali" (Paris) was written in 1933 when he was in the KMT (Nationalist Party)'s prison in Shanghai. By that time he had already become a self-conscious revolutionary writer and an active member of the League of Left-Wing Artists. However, a close reading of this poem shows two seemingly contradictory attitudes toward this paramount example of the modern metropolis. Under Ai Qing's pen, Paris is personified as a "hysterical yet beautiful prostitute" who "Loosens the scarlet blouse, / Exposes the succulent flesh / And willfully indulges in promiscuity" to "tirelessly send to me / And to hundreds and thousands of immigrants / That irresistible temptation."¹¹ The personified/feminized city is endowed with a life of its own. It is both a symbol of decadence and a source of temptation, and the poet despises yet simultaneously is fascinated by the "degenerate" sensuality of the modern, exotic (to a young Chinese) urban experience. It is not difficult to notice the similarity between Ai Qing's vision of Paris and the depiction of the modern city in French symbolist poetry. Later in the poem Ai Qing intuitively catches the rhythm of the modern city and successfully reflects it in a unique writing style: "The cantos of iron and steel— / Buses, trolleys, and subway cars become resounding letters, / Asphalt roads, railways, and trottoirs are nimble sentences, / Wheel + wheel + wheel are bouncing punctuation marks / Whistle + whistle + whistle are exclamation marks!"¹² These hilarious lines not only describe but also embody the boisterous life of Paris, and the poet, by the process of writing, shares and possesses the amazing energy of city life. There is an echo of Italian futurism in these lines. Even at the end when the poet finally shows his "revolutionary" side and claims, "When the right time comes /

¹¹ Ai Qing, *Ai Qing quan ji* (Collected works of Ai Qing) (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chuban she, 1991), 1:34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

We will consolidate the troops / And fight back,” the victory of the revolution, for him, means to “Let you hang on our arms / Laugh and sing ecstatically!”¹³

A dramatic change occurred during the Anti-Japanese War era when Mao Zedong openly required a “mass style” in his 1942 “Talks.” In Mao’s words, “the thoughts and feelings of our writers and artists should be fused with those of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers. To achieve this fusion, they should conscientiously learn the language of the masses.” Mao’s value system denigrated the modernist literary style of intellectual writers as “insipid” and full of “nondescript expressions . . . which run counter to popular usage” and upheld the language of the masses as “rich” and “lively.”¹⁴ Behind Mao’s attempt to privilege the language of the masses over that of the intellectuals was not only his utilitarian understanding of the function of literature (using the language of the masses to appeal to the widest audience and to achieve the best propaganda effect) but also a deep skepticism about the new literary tradition since the May Fourth era and an implicit distrust of the intellectuals as a social class. The effect of Mao’s quest for a mass style was not completely negative; it pointed to a new direction of modern Chinese literature and art, poetry included, and directly led to a group of important poetic works in folk song style in the 1940s. However, while opening a new path it also severs the possible connection between political lyric and avant-garde art, which had seemed very promising in the 1920s and 1930s. Mao’s argument is not only an official statement of the revolutionary ideology of the proletariat class but in a broader sense also part of the nationalist discourse that was dominant in the Sino-Japanese War period (1937–45). Nationalism, which could either be temporarily fused with Marxist ideology or take a totally different form,¹⁵ was a powerful collective movement. With the intellectuals’ embracing of this idea, which was natural during a war that would decide the fate of the nation, titillating experiments with avant-garde style as well as attention to the individual subject were inevitably marginalized. The

¹³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, 3:72.

¹⁵ A good example for the former is the National Defense Literature movement in the mid-1930s; for the latter, the nationalist-statist school of *zhanguo ce pai* is an important example.

style change of political lyric hence also reflected a general change in the literary milieu.

The question of proper style for new poetry was raised again after 1949. This was in part the continuation of the old discussion on “mass style” in the early 1940s and in part a response to the exhilarating sense of a brand new epoch heralded by the founding of the new republic. There were two waves of debate on the proper form of new poetry in the 1950s. The first wave occurred in the early 1950s and mainly included two discussions organized by *Wenyi bao* (Literature and art journal) in 1950 and by the Division of Poetry of the Creation Committee of the Chinese Writers Association in 1953. The second wave, initiated by Mao himself, came a few years later at the high points of the Great Leap Forward movement. In 1958, Mao stated in a speech, “The way ahead of Chinese poetry lies first in folk songs and second in classical poetry. New poetry should build itself on this basis. It should be in the form of folk songs, and its content should be the dialectical synthesis between realism and romanticism.”¹⁶ This theory of new poetry was immediately elaborated by literary critics and put into practice by poets. A “New Folk Song” movement quickly swept the country and folk song style became the model for modern Chinese poetry. These debates in the 1950s inevitably influenced the works of political lyric poets. The style of free verse was gradually marginalized, and most political lyric poets turned to regular (though not necessarily strict) rhythm and rhyme patterns as well as vernacular language and folk song style. For example, researchers have listed four different poetic forms that Gao Xiaochuan tried: the “staircase” form after Mayakovsky; the “folk song” form that purposely imitates the colloquial style in modern folk songs; the “new *fu*” form inspired by *fu* 赋, a type of descriptive prose interspersed with verse in classical Chinese literature that employs long and complicated parallel structures; and the new “*san qu*” 散曲 style derived from *san qu*, or patterned vernacular songs that first developed during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).¹⁷ Guo’s practice to a large extent represents the general formal features of political lyric in his generation.

¹⁶ See Hong Zicheng, ed., *Dangdai wenxue yanjiu* (Research on contemporary literature) (Beijing: Beijing chuban she, 2001), 143.

¹⁷ Yang Kuanghan and Yang Kuangman, *Zhanshi yu shiren Guo Xiaochuan* (Guo Xiaochuan: A soldier and a poet) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chuban she, 1978), 161–64.

Knowing the general ideological background of political lyric as well as its specific authorship, subject matter, and style is useful but not sufficient for defining it as a unique genre embedded in historical context. A conventional understanding of lyrical poetry defines a poem as lyric when it simultaneously fulfills the following requirements: first, it is “meant to be sung” and at least bases part of its beauty on its musical quality; second, instead of developing a dramatic plot and full-fledged characters, it focuses on creating a certain mood and atmosphere through imagery, symbolism, and other play of words, and appeals directly to the feelings and emotions of readers; third, it is supposed to “directly express the poet’s own thoughts and sentiments”¹⁸ and reflect his or her inner consciousness. Checking the political lyric with these standards, we find that the first one is still partly relevant (in the folk song style poems, for example) yet no longer regarded as a major and decisive feature. The second one is faithfully followed by most political lyric poets and the most conspicuous sign of the “lyrical” quality of the genre. The third standard, which links the speaking voice in lyrical poems (usually a first-person narrator) with the individual consciousness of the poet, seems most problematic when applied to political lyric poetry of post-1949 China. This question of the relationship between the speaking voice in political lyric and the individual consciousness of the poet can further entail the questions of political lyric poets’ concepts of revolution, time, and history; their interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the collective; and the nature of the speaking voice in political lyric poems and the role of the poet.

A group of works on the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 may serve as a good starting point for our analysis. The founding of the People’s Republic, which marked a new beginning in Chinese history, was not only as a significant political event but also a source of artistic inspiration. A number of poets took it as the subject for their new works, and the results include Guo Moruo’s “Xinhua song” (The hymn of the new China), Ke Zhongping’s “Gaoju zhe women de wuxing hongqi” (Holding our five-star red flag high), Ai Qing’s “Guo qi” (National flag), He Qifang’s “Women zui weida de jieri” (Our greatest festival), and probably most illuminating, Hu Feng’s “Shijian kaishi le” (Time begins). In these writings,

¹⁸ David Lindley, *Lyric* (London: Methuen, 1985), 47.

the founding of the new republic, signifying the victory of the Communist revolution and undoubtedly the climax of this mass movement, is not only a solemn, monumental moment but also a great carnival that evokes ecstasy. It is a time for people to “forget themselves,” an occasion to dissolve their specific individual identity in collective life through active participation in revolution. As He Qifang proclaims in his poem, “Let us hail! Let us sing! Let us dance! / Let’s go into the streets, / Let’s go to the public squares, / Let’s go under the sunshine of new China, / And celebrate our greatest festival!”¹⁹ On becoming a member of the revolutionary movement, an individual subject is paradoxically changed into a nameless and faceless atom in the mass and simultaneously the epitome of the enormous “body” of the people, hence realizing the self in the fullest way. For these poets, the sublimity of revolution is either projected onto the icon of the revolution (national flag) or personified by the consecrated leader of the movement, Mao Zedong. However, the revolutionary sublime is not simply a Kantian concept that inspires awe and leads to the negative exhibition of the idea of human reason, but a dynamic movement with mesmerizing power that lures individuals to lose themselves in it and share its glory:

The marching mass holding red lanterns flow in the street as a grand river.
The moon in the sky loses its glamour, and stars hide.

Oh! How glad we would be if we could stay here and hail for a whole night!

How glad we are to devote our entire lives to our own country
In the glow of Mao Zedong!²⁰

Hu Feng’s “Time Begins” reveals the political lyric poets’ understanding of time and history from another perspective. The title is a spontaneous response to Hegel’s idea of the end of history. According to Hegel, history is the purposeful and progressive development of Spirit through dialectical movements of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; when the Spirit’s journey reaches its final realization in the idea of freedom, history comes to its “end” since all contradictions, which are regarded as the impetus for the march of history, have been resolved. This idea was later taken up by Marx in his philosophy of history. As

¹⁹ He Qifang, *He Qifang wen ji* (Collected works of He Qifang) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982), 1:217.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

French philosopher Kojève explains, for Marx the “end of history” means a flight from the “Realm of necessity (*Reich der Notwendigkeit*)” in which “man (‘classes’) fight among themselves for recognition and fight against Nature by work” to the “Realm of freedom (*Reich der Freiheit*)” beyond history in which “men (mutually recognizing one another without reservation) no longer fight, and work as little as possible (Nature having been definitively mastered—that is, harmonized with man).”²¹ The “beginning of time” and the end of history are obviously two sides of the same coin. For Hu Feng, the founding of the People’s Republic is not only the victory of one particular revolution but also the entry into the “Realm of freedom”; the empirical beginning of a new historical era and the metaphysical “Beginning” hence coincide in this event. As Hu Feng sings in his poem: “Oh homeland, / My homeland, / Today / In the sacred moment of your rebirth / The whole earth is paying homage to you / The entire universe is saluting you.”²² This “sacred moment” later in his poem is further elaborated: “Time begins! / The homeland gets its rebirth! / People stand up! / ... / Hails to the blissful prospect down the road of perpetual history / to the working people who have passed through miseries and are conquering miseries, have created the world and keep creating the world / People-Immortal! / Labor-Immortal! / Love-Immortal! / Struggle-Immortal! / Creation-Immortal! / Truth-Immortal! / Stars-Immortal! / The Grand Universe-Immortal!”²³

A quick survey of political lyric works by Guo Xiaochuan and He Jingzhi may further our understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective in the new society, the subject of He Qifang’s poem. The works of Guo and He cover the entire spectrum of subjects, from the individual lives of model citizens of the new times, either heroes or ordinary people, to magnificent historical scenes or the panorama of the whole society. These two ends are always harmoniously united based on one grand historical narrative that underlies the phenomenal world and is revealed from a macrocosmic angle. However, each individual is an embodiment of the spirit of history and

²¹ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 158–59 no. 6.

²² Hu Feng, *Hu Feng quan ji* (The complete works of Hu Feng) (Wuhan: Hebei renmin, 1999), 1:107.

²³ *Ibid.*, 255–56.

a dynamic agent who consciously pushes history toward its predestined conclusion through his or her work. The conflict between individual and society, the private and the public has been resolved, so the song of one is at the same time the song of millions. As Guo Xiaochuan sings at the end of his poem “Zai da shamo zhongjian” (In the midst of the big desert), “Ah, only with the whole world in mind would I wield my writing brush on the trivial, / If it is only for my own enjoyment, I should compose verses no more; / Ah, when one makes a euphoni-ous sound, millions are pleased, / If it is only for one’s own pleasure, singing, compared with silence, is no better.”²⁴

This new interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the collective or the historical subject and the grand narrative of history in the political lyric calls for a redefinition of the nature of the speaking voice in the poems and of the role of the poet. It should be pointed out, first, that the easy identification of the speaker in a lyrical poem with the individual consciousness of the poet is only a recent phenomenon in the history of literature.²⁵ In the West, it was only in the romantic era that spontaneous expression became an essential part in the understanding of lyrical poetry. On the one hand, it is the result of “the poets’ growing sense of alienation from the urban, materialist world and the retreat to the solitary world of the mind” and “the erosion of stable religious, social and political belief.”²⁶ On the other hand, the individual subject that “reinterpret[s] the world with reference to itself” is a product of bourgeois society “which a ruling class requires for its ideological solidarity.”²⁷ In other words, the identification of the speaking “I” with the individual consciousness of the lyrical poet and the consequent consecration of this genre is a historically specific phenomenon—a critical response to the capitalist society yet at the same time the unconscious naturalization of the status quo. With the altered historical as well as ideological context, the speaker in political lyric in most cases is not an individual subject but the representative of a social class or “people” and self-conscious spokesperson of the *zeitgeist*. In Ai Qing’s words, “the ‘I’ of the poet seldom refers to himself.

²⁴ Guo Xiaochuan, *Guo Xiaochuan shi xuan* (Selected poems of Guo Xiaochuan) (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1985), 1:273.

²⁵ For a brief survey of the history of lyric poetry in the west, see Lindley, *Lyric*, 52–80.

²⁶ Lindley, *Lyric*, 69.

²⁷ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 70, 75.

In most cases, the poet should convey the feelings and wills of an era through this ‘I.’”²⁸ Paradoxically, this does not prevent the speaking “I” from identifying with the poet, for the poet has already managed to transform himself into an committed member of the revolutionary movement and lyrics are his way to fulfill his mission as an agent of history. The merging of the individual into collectivity can be a helpful antidote to the sanctification as well as isolation of the individual in capitalist society. Yet it may either be mutually enriching or become a matter of collectivity crushing the individual. In political lyric as well as revolutionary literature in general—indeed, in all forms of revolutionary movements—the two tendencies may coexist and constantly be in tension.

The burgeoning of political lyric in the 1950s and ’60s did not come as a surprise. The works of Western romantic poets, especially of the group of so-called *Mara* poets discussed by Lu Xun in his “Molo shi li shuo” (On the power of *Mara* poetry), can be regarded as a remote influence on political lyric. As Ban Wang points out, they are characterized by two aesthetic features, “*da* 大 (great, vast, gigantic) and *gang* 刚 (vigor, strength, power)”;²⁹ more importantly, in Lu Xun’s interpretation, *Mara* poetry “serves to provoke readers into a state of spiritual elevation and emotional outburst by making them identify with a collective ‘poetry,’” which is the figurative body of the nation.³⁰ Both the aesthetic characteristics and the social function of *Mara* poetry echo in the post-1949 political lyric. To the list of *Mara* poets we can add names from the literati of the Soviet Union, of whom Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930) is the most outstanding example, imitated by many Chinese political lyric poets. In a more tangible way, political lyric in the People’s Republic era is the direct continuation and expansion of the left-wing poetry of the 1920s, ’30s, and early ’40s. As I have mentioned, nonetheless, there is a subtle difference between early left-wing poetry and post-1949 political lyric. Many early poets of the left-wing literary movement still held a secret sense of superiority and a romantic understanding of revolution. As Guo Moruo proudly declares in his famous essay “Yishu jia yu geming jia” (Artists and revolutionaries) in

²⁸ Ai Qing, *Ai Qing quan ji*, 3:40.

²⁹ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

1924, “All authentic revolutionary movements are artistic movements, all passionate practitioners [of revolution] are sincere artists, and every ardent artist who aims to reform the society is therefore a genuine revolutionary. . . . We are simultaneously revolutionaries and artists. We would be the martyrs of our own art and at the same time the reformers of human society.”³¹ Guo later revised his idea and turned to a more “orthodox” version of Marxism,³² yet his understanding of the relationship between art and revolution and the role of the artist was still inherited by younger left-wing writers.³³ These innocent ideas were apparently not in accord with the spirit of Mao’s “Talks” and regarded almost as heresy in the new age. Political lyric poets in the post-1949 era still experienced revolution as a mass festival and imbued it with aesthetic quality, yet they humbly retreated from the privileged position and managed to identify with the “proletariat and peasant” class to exculpate themselves from the original sin of the intellectuals.

The popularity of the political lyric began to decline at the beginning of the reform era (late 1970s and early 1980s). China’s turn toward a market economy, the collapse of the hegemonic rule of official ideology, and the public’s growing distrust of grand historical narrative made political lyric sound less convincing. Its afterglow still lingers in contemporary China, however, in the memories of many who feel disoriented in the changed society. For example, in an interview conducted in 2001, He Jingzhi still ardently defends political lyric in a clear, nostalgic tone:

³¹ Guo Moruo, *Moruo wenji* (Collected works of Moruo) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1957), 10:77–78.

³² The “orthodox” theory of Marxism, which emphasizes economic determinism, class struggle, and proletariat consciousness, is indeed an oversimplified version of Marxism mainly imported from the Soviet Union (sometimes via Japan) rather than a faithful reflection of Marx’s own ideas. Nonetheless, this version later becomes the mainstream theory of the Chinese Communist Party and after 1949, the new state ideology. Guo’s 1926 essay “Geming yu wenzue” (Revolution and literature) is normally regarded as the landmark of his change. In this article, Guo claims that revolutionary writers have to completely “uproot” individualism and liberalism and to resolutely resist “antirevolutionary romantic literature” in order to “get liberated from economic oppressions.” See Guo Moruo, *Moruo wenji*, 10:323.

³³ For example, Ai Qing, who started his literary career as a self-conscious left-wing writer in the 1930s, still maintains in his famous essay “Shi lun” (On poetry) written between 1938 and 1939, “poets and revolutionaries share a common compassion, and both of them would put their compassion into action—whenever a great times comes, they would work hand in hand as brothers.” *Ai Qing quan ji*, 3:44.

Good political lyric poems of our country are not based on “concealment and deception,” but on “truthfulness and sincerity.”... That [the early era of the People’s Republic] was an age of great liberation and great change; an age marked by the eruption of the passion of the entire nation; an age marked by crystal-like transparency and fiery passion. Most people felt happiness and joy from the bottom of their hearts. They vigorously sang for the party and for socialism. This was the sincere feeling of the people.³⁴

It is easy to argue with He that the “truthfulness and sincerity” of the author’s subjective feelings do not guarantee an authentic and reliable reflection of the objective world, and that his impression of the early People’s Republic is rather oversimplified and ignores many fundamental conflicts of society as well as miseries in people’s lives. Yet He has grasped the quintessence of political lyric: spontaneous and unmediated identification of the individual with the collective and consequently, a sense of belonging. For contemporary Chinese who waver between what Isaiah Berlin calls claustrophobia and agoraphobia for cultural identity and spiritual home, the achievements and limitations of political lyric can still provide good lessons.

³⁴ He Jingzhi, *He Jingzhi wen ji* (Collected works of He Jingzhi) (Beijing: Zuojia chuban she, 2005), 4:520.

WRITING THE ACTUAL

Charles A. Laughlin

If you think of realism as a recuperation of immediate experience from the dualism of Enlightenment thinking, the Chinese term *zhenshi* 真实 offers rich possibilities. If one were to try to translate *zhenshi* into English, one would immediately confront a variety of related terms in both Chinese and English, none of which corresponds perfectly. The usage of *zhenshi* suggests “reality,” but *xianshi* 现实 is the best candidate for that meaning—there is no phrase *zhenshi zhuyi* for “realism,” only *xianshi zhuyi*. *Zhenshi* is different; it brings something more to the table: the real, or actual. A realist novel may be entirely fabricated, but then it would not be *zhenshi*. Thus *xianshi* and the literary techniques it mobilizes are more like “verisimilitude,” or “plausibility.” The element of *zhen* denotes “truth,” but it is not the philosophical-religious truth of existence of *zhenli*. By being combined with *shi* (“concrete, full, solid”), the aspect of *zhen* in *zhenshi* can only be called “historical truth” or more precisely “the truth immanent in the actual.”

From this we can see some slippage between “truth” in English and *zhen* in Chinese. The idea that truth—with all its subjective and normative force—might be apprehended in “objective” reality runs counter to the Western tradition of abstracting and sublimating truth to a transcendent plane of ideals. From classical philosophy to the Enlightenment, truth has been something to be sought amid (and despite) the dark morass of concrete details of history, experience, and feeling, and only uncovered, discovered, or realized with great difficulty. But putting true together with concrete in one word—*zhenshi*—brings truth back into the immediacy and texture of real experience, not behind, below, or above it.

Writing actuality in modern China must be understood as having two major phases. The first was the heyday of social realistic fiction and reportage literature in the 1930s, largely under the influence of the international proletarian literary movement and writings on the Spanish Civil War. The second was investigative and social critical reportage literature after 1949, specifically in the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956–57 and the early years of the reform and opening

period, roughly 1978 to 1986. Ever since the earliest articles promoting reportage were published, the term *zhenshi* has figured prominently in the enumeration of the genre's attractions. Yuan Shu's *Baogao wenxue lun* "报告文学论" (On reportage literature)¹ is possibly the first published article, after the Left-Wing League's August 1930 resolution promoting reportage along with other genres, to define reportage and link it with recent worldwide literary trends. Interestingly, the language Yuan uses and the specific points he makes about the genre's origins in the milieu of modern industrial production are remarkably similar to that of Kawaguchi Hiroshi's more extensive treatment of the genre (translated by Xia Yan), which was published the following year.² It seems quite likely that Yuan Shu was familiar with Kawaguchi's article in 1931, and based his comments on it. Ah Ying's (Qian Xingcun's) preface to the 1932 *Shanghai shibian yu baogao wenxue* (The Shanghai incident and its reportage) includes a short section defining reportage based largely on Kawaguchi's account, with many passages almost identical to Xia Yan's translation.³ From this it is apparent how seminal Kawaguchi's article was in the early 1930s to contemporary Chinese writers' understanding of the genre.

Writing actuality relates to more than reportage: it is a fundamental orientation in modern Chinese literature toward writing about the contemporary world with a view not to exploring timeless truths or artistic innovation, but rather to uncovering and fleshing out the living truth of history. This attitude informs the aesthetics of realist fiction in China as well, but reportage claims to offer the additional guarantee of actual people, places, and events. Fiction by nature can deliver only verisimilitude, but reportage can deliver reality; at least it is read that way. Fiction is still relevant to writing actuality, though, because it may convey or illustrate the same truths a piece of reportage can. Moreover, in practice, realistic fiction and reportage are often scarcely distinguishable from each other, as can be noted from the inclusion of several excerpts from novels in the early 1980s reportage journal,

¹ *Wenyi xinwen* (News in literature and arts) 18 (July 13, 1931).

² "Baogao wenxue lun" (On reportage literature), *Beidou* 2, no. 1 (Jan. 20, 1932); BWYX 2:1182–91. Kawaguchi Hiroshi is the pen name of Yamaguchi Tadayuki, 1905–84, a Marxist literary theorist some of whose writings from the 1920s are included in his 1933 book, *Puroetariya bungaku gairon* (Elements of proletarian literature).

³ "Cong Shanghai shibian shuo dao baogao wenxue" (From the Shanghai Incident to a discussion of reportage literature), *Shanghai shibian yu baogao wenxue* (Shanghai: Nanqiang shuju, 1932).

Shidai de baogao (Reports of the times, which changed its name to *Baogao wenxue*, or Reportage, in 1983).

The first post-1949 magazine devoted to reportage literature, *Reports of the Times*, begins its first issue with an editorial statement deploring the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and fills its pages with loving, heroic portraits of revolutionary leaders. This demonstrates not only that by 1980, reportage was not largely about reflecting contemporary reality, but also that it carried the heavy subjective weight of “actuality.” Though the motto of “real people, real events” seems to emphasize the objective aspects of the genre, in the title of an article published in the early 1980s by veteran reportage author Huang Gang about recent reportage writing, he refers to “*zhenshixing*” 真实性 (actuality) as “a [Communist] Party principle that must be obeyed.”⁴ It is a moral principle, whose purpose is to ensure the correctness of the perspective that judges the people and events, not to ensure a scientific objectivity.

In the 1930s, during the first heyday of reportage, *zhenshi* was an important value but was not much discussed, and readers and critics would not have often thought to question the authenticity of the people and events described. One reason is that the subjective element, the injection of emotion and judgment into the narration, was not thought to diminish the truth value of the text. The reason reportage could be compelling to Chinese readers is that it is *not* dispassionate. The truth of society and history is understood as being inherently tendentious; fully depicting people and events in their actuality necessarily entails painting them in a positive or negative light. The narration of reality, like fiction, necessitates a moral perspective, just as a realistic drawing must have a visual perspective. Like visual perspective, this moral perspective must be aligned with or measured against a common standard that gives it legitimacy. The uniqueness or individuality of its perspective does not make its truth relative—its moral truth is absolute for the audience that already accepts the legitimacy of the moral perspective.

In the case of Chinese reportage, this moral perspective evolved in public discourse and creative writing since the late nineteenth century. The writing and circulation of works about world events and

⁴ Huang Gang, “Baogao wenxue de shidai tezheng jiqi bixu yanshou zhenshi de dangxing yuanze (Reportage’s times and the principle of actuality that must be followed),” in Wang Ronggang, ed., *Baogao wenxue yanjiu ziliao xuanbian* (Selected research materials on reportage) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1983).

cultural commentary under the conditions of imperialism, national humiliation, and the emergence of the modern military, commercial, and industrial spheres generated common views about China and its place in the world that implicitly conditioned the reception of such writing. The public discourse of the May Fourth Movement consolidated this moral perspective; it was not universal, but functioned as a system of political correctness. That is, readers were obliged to bring a hatred of imperialism and a deeply felt nationalism to narratives of current events and commentary. Most writers thereafter could take it for granted that readers would apply this perspective to the world described in their works because it would be shameful not to, so that even attempts to subvert this moral authority are bound to work from within it. Except for a degree of evolutionary change, Chinese literature written for an elite, socially conscious audience throughout the rest of the twentieth century was dominated by and had to orient itself to this moral perspective. The moral norm thus had the effect of conferring historical truth on objective people and events in reportage, yet usually without empowering the author (not to mention the reader) to be the arbiter of this truth.

A good example from the history of reportage is literary reporting on harsh working conditions in foreign-run factories, mostly in Shanghai, such as the anonymous “Great Tragedy of Workers Killed in the Tangshan Mine,”⁵ Xia Yan’s famous “Indentured Worker,”⁶ Yang Chao’s “Written on a Full Stomach,”⁷ and Peng Zigang’s “Beside the Machines.”⁸ In my book on Chinese reportage, I analyzed the aesthetics of these works to demonstrate a certain revolutionary way of constructing historical reality.⁹ However, like these authors and most of their readers, I took for granted that the agents of exploitation had to be either foreigners (imperialists) or class enemies (bourgeois/capitalist Chinese). Thus one has to adjust one’s perspective when confronted with systems of slave labor in Shanxi brick kilns uncovered in 2007 or inhuman working conditions and child labor in toy factories revealed

⁵ “Tangshan meikuang zangsong gongren da canju,” *Laodong yin* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 7, 1920).

⁶ Xia Yan (Shen Duanxian), “Baoshen gong,” *Guangming* 1, no. 1 (June 10, 1936).

⁷ Yang Chao, “Bao fan zuo,” *Tai bai* 1, no. 8 (January 1, 1935).

⁸ Peng Zigang, “Zai jiqi pangbian” (Beside the machines), *Funiu shenghuo* 3, no. 1 (1936).

⁹ Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

some years before, not to mention absurdities and atrocities of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

Reportage on factories and labor conditions was typical of the writing of *zhenshi* in the 1930s in China. Novelists writing about the working class (peasants, workers, and soldiers), like Mao Dun in his magnum opus *Ziye* 子夜 (Midnight) and influential story “Chun can” 春蚕 (Spring silkworms), were influenced enough by reportage to adopt its methods of research and participant observation. Mao Dun’s collective creation project *Zhongguo de yiri* 中国的一日 (One day in China) was an ambitious exploration of *zhenshi* as it was understood at the time.¹⁰ He assembled an editorial board and issued a call for people of all walks of life to provide a document of their experiences on the arbitrarily chosen date of May 21, 1936. These contributions could be in the form of diary entries, short stories, reportage, one-act plays, or any other form of the author’s choosing. The response was huge, thousands of entries, most from people who were not professional writers, including students, teachers, shop clerks, and businesspeople across the country. The committee selected only a fraction of them in order to control the volume’s size and price and maintain a balance among the regions and cities represented. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the resulting mosaic of texts also displays a significant consistency on matters such as the national situation, relations with Japan, and social contradictions within China. The kind of *zhenshi* represented by *One Day in China* is very much the actuality of the historical moment in a time of turbulence and change for the people of a nation.

Reportage writers of the time were, as far as possible, obeying the Left-Wing League’s call to go into the factories, help the proletariat, and tell their stories, thus penetrating deeper into this historical *zhenshi*. The most famous piece of this type is Xia Yan’s “Bao shen gong” 包身工 (Indentured worker), which narrates in excruciating detail the hellish daily life of a frail country girl sold into service at a Shanghai textile mill by unscrupulous fellow villagers. The system and processes of capitalist exploitation and imperialism are fleshed out and vivified in the physical and mental suffering of the girl, both from personal abuse by her overseers and the inhuman regulation of space, time,

¹⁰ Mao Dun et al., ed., *Zhongguo de yiri* (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1936). For a partial translation with informative introduction, see Sherman Cochran, Andrew C. K. Hsieh, and Janis Cochran, ed., *One Day in China: May 21, 1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

and labor power in the textile mill's otherworldly factory conditions. The concrete discourse of bodily suffering alternates with descriptions of systems of exploitation and analysis of the plight of indentured laborers.

Peng Zigang wrote a similar piece on a Chinese-run textile mill. It is not as compelling because it does not tightly focus on a specific individual, but Peng also indicts the firm's hypocritical stance of superiority over foreign firms by emphasizing clearly ineffective child care and educational programs and the dull, mechanical movements of the alienated women laborers there. Peng's handlers at the mill make excuses for their mismanagement that attempt to appeal to the journalist's nationalism. Yang Chao's "Written on a Full Stomach" is attributed to an anonymous American reporter, and focuses exclusively on the living conditions of young girls also working for a factory, not entering the shop floor at all. It is a text about hunger, cold, and illness without relief. Beset by bedbugs at night and feverish and lifeless by day, the underage girls are pale and red around the eyes and noses. As they struggle to lick the drippings of gruel from the outside of their bowls they happen to glimpse—and smell—the rich meat and vegetable dishes being enjoyed by the managers in the next room.

The kind of *zhenshi* achieved in texts like this is the realization of historical processes of capitalism and imperialist exploitation in the form of physical suffering, vividly described and conveyed to the reader through a structure of sympathy. It is a metonymic expression of the reality of China's situation in the world, or of relations between social groups within China, true simultaneously on literal and figurative levels. Fiction, reportage, and drama written about the War against Japan and the Chinese civil war usually placed contemporary events and people, real or imagined, into the same symbolic structure.

The path of writing *zhenshi* in China split when the Chinese Communist Party began to create cultural policy within its sphere of political power. This process started in Yan'an during the 1930s, when reportage writers were trained by indoctrinated writers and through visits to villages and later to the battle fronts of the war against Japan. They were now to write in positive terms about the emerging socialist political authority and social relations under its direction. This process was deepened and broadened after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to become the norm for all forms of narrative writing. Yet all along there were writers who felt the writing of *zhenshi* must maintain distance from and even a critical view of political authority, even if that authority claimed revolutionary legitimacy.

The most prominent examples in the Yan'an period were Ding Ling and Wang Shiwei, who were both persecuted (the latter at the cost of his life) for attacking elitism among the leadership of the Communist Party. After 1949, perhaps the strongest voice of this kind was that of Liu Binyan 刘宾雁 (1925–2005), a newspaper journalist who restored the socially critical function to reportage starting in 1956, and then again as one of the leading writers of the early reform and opening period in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the remainder of this chapter, I will take a closer look at Liu's 1956 work "Zai qiaoliang de gongdi shang" 在桥梁的工地上 (On the bridge construction sites) and 1979 piece "Ren yao zhi jian" 人妖之间 (Between people and monsters) to illustrate his role in transforming the writing of *zhen-shi* in China, and thereby emphasize the key features in the genre's evolution.¹¹

In both "On the Bridge Construction Sites" and "Between People and Monsters," Liu Binyan attacks unhealthy social and political phenomena in the behavior of individuals. This was rare in pre-1949 reportage.¹² Liu's works became well known because the cases he uncovered were conspicuous in the news media, and real people got in trouble. This was never true before 1949. Liu is operating from within a concept of journalism familiar to U.S. readers, in which investigative reporters uncover illegal and immoral behavior that ends up tarnishing the image of sometimes well known people, or has sinister systemic ramifications—this latter point, as is often observed, is the reason Liu Binyan's works are not generally circulated in mainland China even today.

What links Liu Binyan to the tradition of writing the real is the use of literary techniques including vivid imagery, the unfolding of dramatic plots, and key moments that are certainly embellished far beyond what the journalist could have known. On the rhetorical level, Liu uses a combination of showing rather than telling to get his points across, but also irony and sarcasm to drive home the moral import of his descriptions

¹¹ "Di er zhong zhongcheng" (A higher kind of loyalty) was another prominent special reportage piece by Liu Binyan of the post-Mao period; this and other texts of this type are available in translation in E. Perry Link, ed., *People or Monsters? And Other Stories and Reportage from China After Mao* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) and *Two Kinds of Truth: Stories and Reportage from China* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). See also Liu Binyan's autobiography, *A Higher Kind of Loyalty* (New York: Pantheon, 1992).

¹² One exception that comes to mind is Huang Gang's "Kaimaila zhi qian de Wang Jingwei" (Wang Jingwei on camera), *Wenyi xinwen* 1, no. 4 (1939).

and narrations. Perhaps because of their greater proximity to the legacy of highly literary reportage before 1949, Liu's works from the 1950s, of which "On the Bridge Construction Sites" is the most prominent, are much more conspicuously and deliberately literary than his later works from the beginning of the period of reform and opening. By contrast, the new or unusual feature of his 1950s work—the investigation and detailed contemplation of a social or moral ill—became in the post-Mao period all the more pronounced, almost taking over the entirety of the later work without giving much space at all to literary embellishment on the level of imagery and description. The irony and sarcasm are still there, but they serve the task of unraveling the system.

Liu Binyan appeared on the literary scene in 1956 with the publication of his story "The Inside News of the Newspaper" and his reportage piece "On the Bridge Construction Sites."¹³ As meticulously documented by Rudolf Wagner, Liu Binyan's reportage is less a continuation of the genre that had evolved since the 1930s as a principal revolutionary form, a means of training socialist writers, and a vehicle after 1949 for extolling socialist modernization, and more a Chinese version of the socially critical investigative reporting in the Soviet Union called *oçerk*, practiced by Liu's friend Valentin Ovechkin, among others.¹⁴ Liu Binyan referred to the form in Chinese as *texie* 特写 (close-up) rather than *baogao wenxue*, perhaps to emphasize this distinction. However, except for the text's explicit reference to "Stak-honovism," this connection would not be immediately evident to a reader of "On the Bridge Construction Sites" who is familiar with earlier Chinese reportage. On the contrary, Liu must be credited with resurrecting the *zhenshi* or actuality of Chinese reportage from the banality of propaganda that had become the genre's norm. To this end, Liu uses many of the familiar literary techniques from the pre-1949 era: placing himself as a character squarely in the middle of the narrative, frequently breaking into lyrical passages containing images and symbols that resonate with the narration and its themes, flashbacks, and the skillful construction of dramatic or climactic scenes.

¹³ Liu Binyan, "Zai qiaoliang de gongdi shang," *Renmin wenxue* 4 (1956); "Ben bao neibu xiaoxi," *Renmin wenxue* 6 (1956).

¹⁴ Rudolf Wagner, "Liu Binyan and the *Texie*," *Modern Chinese Literature* 2, no. 1 (1986): 63–98; *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 147–324.

“On the Bridge Construction Sites” indicts conservative bureaucratism on the part of revolutionaries (often ex-soldiers) who have taken positions of leadership and responsibility in the early years of the People’s Republic. The phenomenon is embodied in Luo Lizheng, a former comrade of the narrator who leads the most ambitious bridge-building projects on the Yellow River. In the war years, Luo worked with the narrator, “Old Liu,” in battle zone construction and engineering projects. He stayed in construction after 1949, while Liu began working in newspapers. The projects Luo leads are conspicuous examples of the vast strides China had taken in heavy industry in the 1950s, and he has much to be proud of at the moment of Liu’s visit. But there is a growing tension in these projects, and this is what has really brought Liu to the work site.

Luo has an engineer working under him named Zeng Gang who constantly improves productivity and efficiency beyond what projects call for. As a manager, Zeng takes on many decisions by himself instead of asking for permission from higher authorities. He takes pains to understand the situation among the workers on site and allows workers’ opinions and suggestions to guide his decision making. Luo Lizheng, in contrast, in his years as an administrator has learned to always make sure he has covered all his bases in getting permission and guidance from above, and above all, to “never make mistakes!” His work has long since separated him from actual engineering problems and the day-to-day situation of the workers. Liu uses an ironic rhetoric to help drive home the freshness of this tension between professionalism and bureaucracy, an irony that proceeds from the author’s personal friendship with Luo Lizheng. Throughout the text, even when it is obvious to the reader that the purpose is to reveal Luo’s tragic apathy and incompetence, he still refers to Luo as “my old friend,” and often uses laudatory adjectives.

Zeng Gang represents what Liu Binyan characterizes as a revolutionary commitment to increasing productivity in harmony with the wisdom and interests of the laboring force. The *zhenshi* or actuality Liu is constructing here is the tension between this energetic, revolutionary force and the now much more conservative organizational leadership. As a literary artist (though he consistently denied any literary identity or ambitions), Liu Binyan takes what professional journalists would feel are unacceptable liberties with the facts, fabricating dialogue and internal musing on the part of his characters in scenes the author did not witness, using lyrical description of natural scenery to bring home

the emotions and themes of the text. Yet journalism under socialist regimes traditionally encouraged the subjective element to illustrate the revolutionary truth immanent in concrete facts and events.

Another literary feature prominent in "On the Bridge Construction Sites" is that Liu includes dramatic set pieces to illustrate the practical problems created by bureaucratism. One is a lengthy meeting in which Zeng Gang proposes that quotas be raised in step with the accomplishments of his workers and his new management methods; another narrates Zeng's invitation to dinner at Luo Lizheng's house, during which the latter takes Zeng aside to try to talk him out of his zeal for productivity. The climactic episode is the detailed narration of the two bridge sites' responses to the unexpected early flooding during Liu's visit.

Liu brings the lines of tension in the narrative together in this climactic and tense story of early flooding threatening the bridges being constructed in the area. As a result of the friction between Zeng Gang and the more conservative engineering office on the site Liu is visiting, Zeng is reassigned to the Lingkou bridge site downriver. Before the flooding sequence begins, Zeng's team is regularly surpassing quotas and getting ahead of schedule, at times incurring the wrath of Luo and his superiors in the Engineering Bureau for raising the bar higher than other units can reasonably meet.

The flood creates drama because the rising water may damage or flood the bridge foundations being laid in the riverbed using temporary tubular barriers ("wells") to keep the water away from the workers. The speed of the water's rising makes it impossible to continue work at the scheduled rate, so the site managers have to decide whether to step up the pace of building or abandon construction and shore up the unfinished structures they have already built. Zeng Gang's choice is to put his workers in overdrive and finish the bridge columns before the floodwaters overcome the dry wells, and he is successful, not only because of his efficiency and good planning but also because of the enthusiasm and loyalty of his work team. Luo Lizheng takes the more conservative course of stopping construction, but this is greatly aggravated by the chief's interminable delay of his decision until he has directions from his superiors, who are not answering their phones as the water rises. The consequence of this delay is that an entire bridge support that his crew had been working on for months is washed away, resulting in a tremendous economic loss and setback in the progress of the bridge. But Luo is relieved because he was able to get on record that he submitted a request for instructions (thus shifting responsibility to his superiors), and because there were no casualties.

Like pre-1949 works on worker and factory conditions, Liu's *texie* relies on considerable literary embellishment, including the liberal use of lyrical passages, ironic rhetoric, and the creation of internal and external dialogue for the characters in dramatic set pieces that drive home the text's central themes. It could be argued that Liu's text goes further than pre-1949 works in this last respect. Despite these literary and thematic similarities, Liu Binyan's 1956 *texie* has introduced something new into the writing of the actual that becomes more prominent in his later work and that of other writers of the genre in the 1980s: a sustained discourse of analysis and reflection that departs at length from the concrete and emotive (for the most part) layers of the text. This poses a challenge to the critic looking for *zhenshi* in the text. In previous reportage it was readily available in the form of real people and events presented in vivid, sensual imagery. What Liu Binyan introduces into the genre is an impassioned, yet analytical moral indictment of irrational patterns and systems in post-1949 productive labor and social life. Even in "On the Bridge Construction Sites," the author goes on at some length and technical detail to lay out the problems he is investigating, musing over the principles involved and weighing the actions and judgments of characters against each other, although this discourse is alternated and enmeshed with vivid description, narration, and dramatic tension.

By the late 1970s, after his rehabilitation along with most other intellectuals of his generation after their persecution in the Antirightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution, Liu returned to reportage again without a moment's hesitation, and was much more prolific than before. His 1979 piece, "Between People and Monsters," was one of the most controversial and influential works of the culture of the reform and opening period that followed Deng Xiaoping's rise to power. "Between People and Monsters" explores the case of Wang Shouxin, the general manager and branch party secretary of a state-run coal distribution company in Heilongjiang who was arrested for being the ringleader of a mature and widespread network of bribery and corruption. The arrest was already an accomplished fact by the time the article appeared, so Liu cannot be credited with revealing Wang's crimes to the public. The real impact of the work, though, was that it dug up the roots of Wang's behavior in her own history and that of Bin county. The author begins in the 1960s and narrates the evolution of the cast of characters who became the power factors in Bin county throughout and after the Cultural Revolution. It is a story of groups of friends or factions who vie for proximity to and the

confidence of the county party secretaries, who come and go in the narrative's background. The attitudes and behavior of these secretaries are also described as key in creating the conditions of corruption.

"Between People and Monsters" belongs almost entirely to the category of detailed analysis and reflection, with the reader thinking through the system as Liu unfolds it in the narration of numerous incidents and the description of characters' backgrounds, without much in the way of literary embellishment. Unlike in "On the Bridge Construction Sites," the author does not write himself into the narrative, and the narrator is a less conspicuous voice except for the occasional direct appeal to the reader's judgment, which was conventional in narrative literature of the time. One literary feature preserved from the aesthetic of the 1950s text is the playful pose of sarcastic admiration for the text's central character, who as usual is in fact the object of the author's relentless moral assault. In such cases the narrator will assume the pose of a commentator who takes the naturalness of exchanging favors for personal gain in a socialist system for granted, and assigns credit to Wang for her community spirit and contributions to society and the economy.

From an account clerk in the coal distribution company to its manager and party branch secretary, Wang Shouxin used alliances of convenience, currying favor, and a growing exchange of gifts and favors to get herself into a position where she (whose own qualifications were once in doubt) could hand-pick people for party membership without higher permission or input, ran a farm and supermarketlike storehouse for producing gifts for favors and cooperation, and, most fatally to her, had a stash of hundreds of thousands of *yuan* amassed from the illicit sale of government-produced coal as more expensive, individually produced coal. It was her eagerness to make loans and presents of this money that eventually got her caught. Although Liu Binyan's method is a kind of analytical moral assault, attacking individuals is not the objective of his reportage. Liu devotes pages at the end of "Between People and Monsters" to emphasizing the systemic nature of the phenomenon Wang Shouxin represents, not her own personal flaws.

In a 1980 article in *Renmin wenxue* (People's literature), Liu Binyan addresses the question of *zhenshi* directly.¹⁵ In answer to the question

¹⁵ Liu Binyan, "Guanyu 'Ren yao zhi jian' da duzhe wen" (Answers to readers' questions about 'Between People and Monsters'), *Renmin wenxue* 1 (1980).

whether all the people and events in “Between People and Monsters” are actual, he answers, “The people and events are all actual. Although the form of *texie* permits the author to embellish facts in a limited way on the basis of fidelity to the basic facts, I did not do this at all. Regarding the sins and errors of some people, my reflection was inadequate rather than exaggerated.”

Liu Binyan’s voluminous and influential reportage of the 1980s was at the core of a general renaissance of the genre, including Xu Chi’s “Gedebahe caixiang” (The Goldbach conjecture)¹⁶ and Qian Gang’s full-length *Tangshan da dizhen* (The great Tangshan earthquake).¹⁷ But unlike most other writers, Liu continued to focus on problematic Communist Party members, issues of bureaucratism and corruption. Though as a result Liu (a party member himself at the time) is explicit in his loyalty to socialism and the party in all these texts, their combative and critical nature gave him a tenuous political status in the PRC, which collapsed when Liu was stripped of his party membership as a result of his support of the democracy movement in the late 1980s. This caused him to leave China for the United States, never to return.

In retrospect, whether he intended it or not, Liu Binyan shepherded a transition from writing *zhenshi* concretely to writing it more analytically and with psychosocial penetration. Liu’s *texie* are no less detailed than older reportage, but they are less sensually explicit. The referent is still irrational social forces and systems, but the process of reading is more like reading in-depth investigative reporting; it is a process of thinking through the problem, the evidence, and possible solutions with the author, instead of feeling a visceral response to a vividly realized concrete scene or character. In this light, “On the Bridge Construction Sites” is transitional in nature, whereas “Between People and Monsters” has fully developed into analytical investigative reporting. The only really literary moment in the text is the narration of the “poetry contest” in which Wang Shouxin tries to ferret out the person who anonymously reported her to the authorities, a scene set up like the staff meeting in which the contradiction between Zeng Gang and Luo Lizheng emerged in “On the Bridge Construction Sites.” Yet there is not as much dramatic tension in “Between People

¹⁶ Xu Chi, *Gedebahe caixiang: baogao wenxue ji* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978).

¹⁷ Qian Gang, *Tangshan da dizhen* (Beijing: Jiefang jun wenyi chubanshe, 1986).

and Monsters,” because the reader already knows that Wang Shouxin is guilty, and what she is guilty of, long before this scene unfolds.

The reportage trend of the 1980s was the culmination of writing the actual in modern China. Reportage is still written today, but it does not attract the same attention as in those days when the socialist system was under close scrutiny by critics and readers. At least in terms of writing, the value of *zhenshi* has been diminished since 1989, and literary writing has taken a turn toward either entertainment or pure aesthetics. Where it is real, or actual, it is the reality of individuals in a globalizing commercial society, not the historical reality of a struggling nation or evolving tensions between social groups and classes that had been the ontology of *zhenshi*. But the pursuit of that actuality, the actuality of social existence imbued with a strong sense of historical truth and judgment, flourishes in the form of independent and documentary filmmaking. Documentary filmmakers and their commentators do not, to my knowledge, often talk about writing *zhenshi*. This may in part be because the subjective element in photography is often underestimated, and the actuality of the subject matter is taken for granted. But the motivation of independent documentary filmmakers like Wu Wenguang, Wang Bing, Yang Tianyi, and Du Haibin is similar to that of reportage writers: to find actual people and situations that embody contemporary issues, especially those not receiving media attention. There are basically two different types of documentary film in China now. The first is officially sanctioned works that usually appear on CCTV broadcasts, exploring significant historical figures, distinguished contemporary figures dedicated to public service, natural sciences, and ethnic minority cultures. They have high production values and consistent stylistic and formal conventions, and straddle the line between journalism and entertainment. The other type is independent documentaries. This form exploded in popularity after the introduction of DV technology, which made films much more easily accessible for all kinds of people concerned with documenting contemporary realities. The contrast between these two types of documentary could be profitably compared with the contrast between orthodox reportage in Yan'an and the People's Republic before Liu Binyan's intervention and Liu Binyan's *texie* and other writers' works influenced by it. Both Liu Binyan's writing of *zhenshi* and the earnest, impassioned aesthetic of independent documentary derive from a perception of the lack of *zhenshi* in orthodox socialist culture.

NOWHERE IN THE WORLD DOES THERE EXIST LOVE
OR HATRED WITHOUT REASON¹

Haiyan Lee

ROSALIND But are you so much in love as your rhymes speak?
ORLANDO Neither rhyme nor reason can express how much.
—William Shakespeare

By itself, the statement “nowhere in the world does there exist love or hatred without rhyme or reason” 世上决没有无缘无故的爱, 也没有无缘无故的恨 may not raise many eyebrows. But if Mao Zedong, the originator of this Communist truism, were right, then the world might well be a duller place: a world without the enchanting tales of Romeo and Juliet, the Butterfly Lovers, or Cinderella, in which love, instead of conquering all obstacles, groveled before the irreconcilable enmity between antagonistic classes. Mao made this aphoristic pronouncement in his talks on literature and art at the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) wartime headquarters in Yan’an as part of the rectification campaign of 1942–43. In these talks, Mao elaborated a quasi-Marxist theory of human nature, emotion, and aesthetics, refuting what he deemed to be the bogus tenets of bourgeois humanism that held sway among Yan’an’s transplanted intellectuals from coastal cities. Mao made his point bluntly: there is no such thing as universal human nature, and likewise there is no such thing as universal, unconditional love of mankind. Human society is divided into antagonistic classes and love is strictly circumscribed by class division. Class identity is the ultimate fount of all emotions; it leaves one with no choice but to love fellow class members and hate those in the antagonist classes. A peasant cannot love a landlord, and a worker cannot love a capitalist; between them there is only hatred. As a *Southern Daily* (Nanfang ribao) article declares: “Real love cannot exist between a

¹ I would like to thank Ban Wang and Arif Dirlik for their critical comments on the earlier drafts of this essay.

feudalistic and progressive person.”² The “feudal” and the “progressive” are locked in a world-historical struggle the outcome of which is predetermined by the Marxist law of history.

The immediate ramifications of Mao’s Yan’an talks hardly need to be rehearsed: a number of outspoken writers and artists were targeted in the rectification campaign and not a few recanted, including Ding Ling and Ai Qing. Wang Shiwei, author of “Wild Lilies” (Ye baihehua), held his ground and was persecuted and eventually executed. David Apter and Tony Saich characterize Yan’an as a discourse community that used storytelling and other discursive and theatric techniques to build a deep reservoir of symbolic capital that, combined with military know-how and political pragmatism, delivered the CCP from clandestinity, defeat, and privation to victory and power (though not plenitude).³ They argue that Mao constructed himself as a cosmocrat, or the embodiment of the highest truth, by systematically eliminating the “lapsarian alternatives” represented by his military, administrative, ideological, and intellectual rivals. The recalcitrant Wang Shiwei was brought down as an intellectual rival whose espousal of an abstract notion of love deposited him on the wrong side of history. The rectification campaign, or what Apter and Saich call “exegetical bonding,” was the first systematic application of a Maoist conception of the political that would a few decades later have reached monstrous proportions.

Literary historians have often spoken of the first thirty years or so of the People’s Republic (1949–79) as a barren age with little creativity, subtlety, or romance.⁴ They attribute this to the Maoist politicization of literature and art, the subordination of aesthetic criteria to ideological doctrines, and the conversion of intellectuals to Party apparatchiks. The period, to be sure, was not without emotionally

² February 12, 1952; quoted in Neil J. Diamant, “Boundaries and Belonging in Conditions of Extreme Politicization: The Chinese State in Public and Private Places, 1949–1968.” In Joel S. Migdal, ed., *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 209.

³ David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁴ For an overview of literature and the performing arts in the first three decades of the People’s Republic, see Bonnie McDougall, “Writers and Performers, Their Works, and Their Audiences in the First Three Decades.” In idem ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 269–30.

powerful works that have greatly shaped the experience of the 1950s-'70s generations.⁵ Yet in the post-Mao era, these works have come to be regarded as profoundly compromised and impoverished, in large part because they are grounded in the denial of a humanist conception of emotions. From the vantage point of academic cultural studies that distrusts the idea of aesthetic autonomy and describes "politics" in even the most ostentatious instances of *l'art pour l'art*, the question then becomes: How is the Maoist conception of the political different from our own? And what is so scandalous about the alliance of politics and art in Mao's China? Why do we bemoan the Maoist politicization of aesthetics while insisting on reading politics into (or out of) contemporary literary and artistic works that apparently aspire to be apolitical? And more specifically, what does it mean to say that Mao was wrong about human emotion and about love? This chapter attempts to tackle these questions first by revisiting Mao's Yan'an talks and Wang Shiwei's prickly essay "Wild Lilies" (1942), and then by illustrating how literature and film exemplify and then revolt against the Maoist theory of emotion through the examples of Hao Ran's socialist realist story "Firm and Impartial" (1971) and two very different films by the veteran director Xie Jin, *The Red Detachment of Women* (1960) and *Hibiscus Town* (1986). My purpose here is not to delineate the evolution of Mao's thought or even to review Marxist debates on human nature, but to understand the ideological impetus and aesthetic ramifications of socialism as a hegemonic project and its critique in the postsocialist, neoliberal era.

The Maoist Conception of the Political

Carl Schmitt, a prominent political philosopher of the Weimar Republic and the "crown jurist" of the Third Reich, famously defined the political as the essential distinction between friend and enemy. He maintained that the ability and authority to make this distinction

⁵ See Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Xueping Zhong, Zheng Wang, and Bai Di, eds., *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing up in the Mao Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

enable a sovereign state to go to war, if need be, in order to defend its way of life. A state that is not able or not willing to recognize its enemy or whose citizens are not willing to kill or to be killed to defend its mode of existence ceases to be a politically viable entity and will likely become a protectorate of a stronger state.⁶ Schmitt addressed his theory to liberal thinkers who sought to delimit the political to a realm parallel to ethics, aesthetics, and economics. Instead of standing above society and subsuming its dichotomies (good/evil, beautiful/ugly, profitable/unprofitable) to the overarching one of friend/enemy, the state in a liberal-individualist, or pluralist, society is to be a necessary evil, reduced to administrative functionality and subject to the supervision of its citizenry. Pluralist politics relies on procedure and emphasizes discussion and compromise, making decisions through negotiation rather than by fiat. It also operates on the assumption that there are no sectional differences that cannot be reconciled on the basis of universal human values. For Schmitt, however, politics is about identity, about defining and defending who one is in a collective sense. It entails making life-and-death decisions and taking life-and-death actions, not indulging in endless discussion. Now consider Mao's celebrated definition of revolution: "Revolution is not a dinner party, nor writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."⁷ In a different text, his definition is even more concise and evocative of Schmitt: "who are our enemies, who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution."⁸ Michael Dutton writes: "For nigh on fifty years this deadly division between friend and enemy framed revolutionary politics and life in socialist China."⁹

⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁷ Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. I. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961), 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ Michael Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics: A History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3. The resemblance might strike some as merely formal since Schmitt was addressing international politics while Mao was tackling the problem of fitting the grid of class analysis onto the messy and complexly stratified Chinese society for the purpose of revolutionary mobilization. But Nazism was as much a domestic (genocidal) program as a doctrine of foreign aggression. Likewise, as the discussion below on Mao's three overlapping stories shows, domestic and international politics cannot be

During the Yan'an Rectification Campaign, this deadly division was first brought to bear on politics and life. When Mao articulated his theory of emotion and laid down the rules for literature and art, he was targeting a universalist understanding of human nature and its attendant theory of ethics and politics that had been popularized by urban intelligentsias since the May Fourth movement. As I have shown elsewhere,¹⁰ the language of love was the most powerful weapon of May Fourth universalism against what it perceived to be parochial forms of identity: family, native place, and social class. Romantic love was celebrated for its impetuous disregard for the trappings of conventional marriage and its resolve to transcend the social barriers of lineage, status, class, and even nationality. It became the most compelling metaphor of modern citizenship in rendering every fellow citizen (of the opposite sex) a potential marriage partner. This is also why the May Fourth discourse of love lent itself so well to nationalism that represented the nation as a universal, egalitarian community despite being bounded. But romantic love began to be eclipsed in the 1930s and 1940s by a revolutionary discourse that posited the supremacy of class love and denounced romance as the myopic preoccupation of the bourgeoisie. The proletarians would love only fellow proletarians (and the vanguard Communist Party) on the basis of a shared experience of oppression and revolutionary struggle.

In "Wild Lilies," Wang Shiwei alludes, in a gingerly manner, to the difficulty of loving certain Party officials in Yan'an who failed to show any tenderness or concern for their subordinates. He veils his criticism by putting it in the mouths of two women whose private griping about a superior he claims to have accidentally overheard: "Class love [*jiejī you'ái*], phew! What nonsense. There doesn't seem to be even basic human sympathy in him [*ren duì ren de tongqingxin*]. . . . He does not love others at all, and others of course do not love him either."¹¹ At the end of his fateful essay, Wang confesses that it is probably owing to

neatly partitioned. Indeed, the genius of Mao the storyteller is his ability to convince his audience of the essential oneness of internal and external enemies. His willingness to make strategic alliances with different enemies at different times does not obviate the foundational necessity of the friend-enemy distinction.

¹⁰ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

¹¹ Wang Shiwei, "Ye baihe hua" (Wild lilies). In Zhu Hongzhao ed., *Wang Shiwei wencun* (Selected writings of Wang Shiwei and historical documents) (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1998), 127–8.

his “bourgeois sentimentality” (*xiao zichanjièi ganqing zuoyong*) that he is always harping on “love” and “warmth.” For this, he awaits criticism. And he did not have to wait long before an avalanche of public denunciations rushed in.¹² Mao had the following to say about bourgeois sentimentality:

“The fundamental starting point of literature and art is love, the love of mankind.” Love may be one starting point, but there is a more fundamental one. Love exists on a conceptual level, as a product of objective practice, and it is a fundamental principle that we do not start from concepts but from objective practice. The fact that our workers in literature and art who come from the intelligentsia love the proletariat stems from the fact that society has sentenced both to a common fate and integrated our two separate lives into one. Our hatred of Japanese imperialism stems from the fact that Japanese imperialism oppresses us. *Nowhere in the world does there exist love or hatred without cause or reason.* As for so-called “love of mankind,” there has never been this kind of unifying love since mankind split into classes. The ruling classes, Confucius, and even Tolstoy all upheld it, but no one has genuinely practiced it because it would be impossible in a class society. A genuine love for mankind will be possible when classes have been eliminated all over the world. Classes cause splits within society, and only when classes have been eliminated and unity restored in society will love for the whole of mankind exist; at the present time, however, it doesn’t yet do so. *We cannot love fascists, the enemy or all the ugly and vicious things in society, since our aim is to eliminate them;* this is just common sense; it is hard to believe that some workers in literature and art still can’t understand it!¹³

Like Schmitt, Mao grounded his conception of the political firmly in the friend-enemy distinction. In the 1950s, he seemed to complicate the picture by allowing for the possibility of nonantagonistic conflicts, or “contradictions among the people” (*renmin neibu maodun*). But throughout the Mao era, it was the friend-enemy distinction that, in Dutton’s words, “carved out a revolutionary path and paved that path with endless empirical exemplifications and permutations of this politico-philosophic distinction.”¹⁴ The high points of Maoist politics were just as Schmitt defined them: “the moments in which the enemy [was],

¹² See Dai Qing, *Wang Shixue and “Wild Lilies”: Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party, 1942–1944* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).

¹³ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980), 79. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics*, 4.

in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy.”¹⁵ As Apter and Saich have shown, Mao achieved clarity of vision by telling three interlocking stories that amalgamated and “sinified” Marxism and Leninism to produce the picture of a semifeudal and semicolonial China under the crushing weight of the “three colossal mountains”: imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism. Specifically, the Japanese imperialists were enemies because they, on the heels of Western imperialists, were intent upon robbing the Chinese of their patrimony, thereby threatening the very existence of the Chinese nation. The Nationalists (KMT) were enemies because their social base—the bureaucratic capitalists, financiers, compradors, and landlords—aligned themselves with the imperialists in their common oppression of the Chinese masses. The Trotskyites, opportunists, putschists, and “mountain-topists” within the Party ranks were enemies because their refusal to toe the correct “line” (*luxian*) rendered the revolution vulnerable to subversion and defeat, in effect giving aid and comfort to the imperialists and the KMT. The enemies within were the “ugly and vicious things” that could not be loved and had to be destroyed, along with the Japanese and the KMT.

The protagonists of Mao’s three stories were starkly divided into friends and enemies, and such moral clarity enabled his stories to attain mythic proportions and wield tremendous suasive power. The rectification campaign in which Mao blasted away bourgeois humanism with the tonnage of the friend-enemy dichotomy was the key moral moment that would define the basic tenor and contours of Maoist politics in the next thirty years. Insofar as the first volleys targeted intellectuals, they also marked the beginning of the Maoist politicization of literature and art. Writers and artists were enlisted to elaborate the three stories in endless iterations and to reaffirm the friend-enemy distinction in the face of a volatile and always messy reality where moral clarity was a sheer act of will.

But Mao faced two difficulties. First, if emotions were circumscribed by class, how could the intellectuals of bourgeois or petit-bourgeois extraction be trusted to love the proletarians? Mao’s response was to demand a form of class transvestitism that would ultimately eliminate the intellectual self capable of exercising judgment and discrimination in matters of affect and taste. In his formulation, literature and

¹⁵ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 67.

art would have to be not only for the masses—the peasants, workers, and soldiers—but also from them and of them. In this way, love and hate would be a matter of immutable class nature, instead of moral choice. Intellectuals were to be scribes, drawing emotions, values, and life experiences from the masses and producing what the masses were fond of seeing, hearing, and reading. However, and this was the second difficulty, the masses did not necessarily know whom to love and particularly whom to hate. Their experience of misery and suffering had certainly taught them about resentment and enmity. But their feeling was often directed at private, personal enemies and entwined with kinship feuds and personal vendettas; they could not have a conception of a class enemy, for they did not understand that society was “split into classes” and that the relations of production determined the antagonism of class oppression and class struggle. To hate the landlords and their imperialist and capitalist allies as a *class*, they would have to be taught Mao’s three stories by proletarianized intellectuals-turned-“workers of literature and art” (*wenyi gongzuo zhe* 文艺工作者).

Mao’s answer to this dual challenge was the so-called mass line (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线), which demanded that intellectuals go to the front lines of class struggle and revolutionary war in order to merge their emotions and thoughts with those of the masses and achieve clarity of vision for both. Mao’s trusted cultural tsar, Zhou Yang, explained the mass line as the essence of artistic praxis:

The relationship between art and life is similar. You must be able to “enter” as well as “leave.” This is a delicate relationship. One must have the ability to penetrate life, yet transcend it at the same time. Transcending life can only come after penetrating it. To drown in a sea of facts, unable to view human life in its entirety or see its essence from a defined ideological level, is what we call “not seeing the forest for the tree.” In philosophy this takes the form of narrow empiricism, in literature, naturalism. We adopt neither.¹⁶

Apter and Saich call this process the simultaneous “leveling up” of the peasants and “leveling down” of the intellectuals;¹⁷ they were to converge at the collective blossoming of class consciousness, or the ability to love and hate the right object with the right reason. In the next section, I examine a film and a short story produced under the

¹⁶ Quoted in Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*, 251.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

imperatives of the mass line to show the problematic dialectic between “entering life” and “leaving life” in the Maoist praxis of art.

To Hate and to Die For

Based on a true story set on Hainan Island, *The Red Detachment of Women* (1960) chronicles the transformation of Qionghua from an indomitable slave girl to a Communist militia soldier and commander of the Red Detachment of Women.¹⁸ The film skillfully uses contrasting mises-en-scène to depict this transformation. As Shuqin Cui points out, the scenes in Coconut Village are usually shot at night and in confined spaces such as the torture chamber and the water dungeon, and extremely low lighting is used to create layers of shadow.¹⁹ After several failed attempts to escape from the house of her master, Nan Batian, Qionghua is rescued by the Communist cadre Hong Changqing, who disguises himself as a wealthy overseas Chinese merchant. As soon as she reaches Red Stone County, bright sunshine floods the screen and buoyant music fills the soundtrack. Here she trains and learns and is inducted into the discourse community of the CCP. Crucially, her initiation is a process of sentimental education centered on the authentication and transcendence of experience.

At the beginning of the film, we witness Qionghua being flogged by Nan’s minions and then thrown into a tenebrous water dungeon. We also see how bodily torture sets her eyes ablaze with bitterness and hatred. The injured and contorted body constitutes the somatic-material basis of the Maoist political because the body supposedly

¹⁸ The film represented the high point of Xie Jin’s early career. It won the Best Feature Film Prize at the first Hundred Flowers Awards in 1962 and the third place Bandung Prize at the Third Asia-African Film Festival in 1964 in Indonesia. During the Cultural Revolution, the ballet film version was one of the eight revolutionary Model Works sponsored by Jiang Qing. Elizabeth Perry notes in her recent book on militias that the film served to popularize military service for women (*Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). Emily Honig also argues that similar artistic works promoted and glorified the martial spirit among women and in large part contributed to acts of female militancy during the Cultural Revolution (“Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards.” In Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, 255–268. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.).

¹⁹ Shuqin Cui, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 81.

makes no mistake in telling those who inflict pain apart from those who heal its wounds. Upon arriving at the militia base and seeing a file of uniformed women in a marching exercise, Qionghua and Honglian (a peasant woman Qionghua meets on her way to Red Stone County) attach themselves to the rear straightaway, though they are still in civilian clothes.²⁰ When asked why she wants to enlist, Qionghua furiously tears open her blouse to reveal the lash marks and welts on her chest. She blurts out: “What for? You want to know what for? For this! Revolt! Revenge! Kill the officials! Cannibals! Skin them alive! I...I...”²¹ Irrepressible hatred is thus her ticket to the revolutionary ranks and the guarantee of her revolutionary credential, but her sentimental education must continue so that as she hates, she also learns to love.

The lesson of love comes in two installments. When the detachment prepares an assault on Nan Batian, Qionghua and Honglian are sent on a reconnoitering mission. They hide on a hillside where they unexpectedly spot Nan being escorted by his militiamen to visit his family grave site. Upon seeing Nan’s sinister figure, Qionghua is unable to suppress her rage; she impulsively pulls out her pistol to aim at him, thereby exposing herself and thwarting their mission (while failing to wound Nan fatally). For this she is confined to quarters and made to ponder Hong’s rhetorical question: “Do you think that only you feel such hatred? What proletarian’s heart is not steeped in tears?” In the second raid, the militia succeeds in capturing Nan, but he manages to escape and Qionghua is wounded in the chase. After her convales-

²⁰ This is clearly an instance of sincerity (or authenticity) trumping ritual, a typically modernist gesture, according to Adam Seligman et al., that valorizes the individual feeling state (Qionghua’s rage) at the expense of allegedly empty, meaningless ritual (the ceremony of induction involving oath-taking and sartorial makeover). See Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2008). However, Qionghua’s sentimental education is also the ritualization (ideological remolding) of sincerity. For further discussions of the problem of ritual versus affect and the socialist grammar of emotion in the Chinese context, see Haiyan Lee, “Tears that Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 1 (February 2005), 35–65; *Revolution of the Heart*.

²¹ David Wang devotes an entire chapter (“Of Scars and National Memory”) to the use of scar symbolism to register “acute testimonials” to the national trauma of war and separation in PRC and Taiwan literature in *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

cence, she returns to Red Stone County and runs into Hong at the spot where Hong first granted her freedom and directed her onto the path of liberation. Here “they have not a love scene but a scene of instruction,”²² which is continued at Hong’s residence where he shows her a map of China and asks her to find her village, which she fails to do. She is then surprised to discover that even Hainan Island is just a tiny dot on the map. Hong asks her rhetorically, “With the bravery of one person, can you liberate such an enormous country?” He then tells her about his sailor father and his family’s suffering in the hands of “reactionaries” who sabotaged the seamen’s union. This time she quickly grasps the lesson: “In other words, every proletarian’s heart is steeped in tears!” Hong recapitulates the lesson: “Every proletarian dares to set fire to a landlord’s house and burn it down. But to set a big fire to burn down the Old Society, we have to rely on the collectivity, the entire class!”

The lesson is that love and hate must cease to be private, individual, and contingent. In revolutionary politics, emotions are of national-historical significance and must be orchestrated by the Party. The film places the Party and the masses clearly in a pedagogical relation. The Red Army colonel giving a pep talk at the militia commencement rally is given an exaggeratedly low-angle shot while the women soldiers are shot from a high angle. Throughout the film, Qionghua gazes *up* to Hong and Communist symbols such as the hammer and sickle flag. Critics are fond of noting how the many two shots of Qionghua and Hong tantalize the audience with an incipient romance between a nubile female acolyte and a handsome Communist hero. But Hong’s role is not to affix a personalized gaze on Qionghua as a private, desirable, and desiring woman, but to facilitate her deliverance to the Maoist political. She clearly loves Hong, though not as an individual male but as the representative of a larger enterprise, the harbinger of a new world. Once his role reaches its goal, he is made to die a martyr’s death (being burned alive by Nan) while Qionghua looks on from a distance, clutching her newly approved Party membership application. Hong is a quasi-intellectual character who “levels down” effortlessly only because he has “leveled up” from a proletarian background prior

²² Robert Chi, “*The Red Detachment of Women: Resenting, Regendering, Remembering*,” in Chris Berry, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus II* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 189–96.

to the narrative frame of the film. Class transvestitism is thus both assumed and disavowed. Moreover, in plunging the audience at the outset into Qionghua's life of persecution and defiance, the film itself enacts the entering of life before it narrates the process of leaving or transcending life.

But to speak of "entering" and "leaving" life is to imply that anyone can ever be outside of life. Of course "life" here is not just any individual life but that of the masses, specifically their toiling and suffering. Entering life requires the intellectual physically to go among the masses so as not only to witness but also to experience life firsthand by participating in material production (labor) as well as narrative production (*suku*, or speaking bitterness). This is "a romantic primitivism" that regards peasant wisdom as "a reservoir of deep knowledge" and "sole source of authenticity for creative work."²³ In his Yan'an talks, Mao unambiguously declares that peasant life itself is already a work of art, "crude but also extremely lively, rich, and fundamental, making all processed forms of literature and art pale in comparison."²⁴ Life is necessarily and "incomparably more vivid and interesting" than art, even if the latter is more satisfying for being more organized, concentrated, and idealized, thereby having greater universality.²⁵ Mao's romantic primitivism is redolent of the Marxist cult of experience, or the faith in the experiential authenticity of the working class. Represented by British Marxist humanists such as E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, the cult of experience grants automatic recognition to knowledge gained in the crucible of production and struggle. As Martin Jay puts it, "the humanists saw experience itself, emotional as well as cognitive, gained in struggle with the forces of oppression, producing class solidarity over time, situated in a holistic and communal way of life, as worthy of approbation in its own right."²⁶ If working-class experience is inherently correct and free of false consciousness, then it should have little need to level up. Indeed, socialist realist works increasingly played down the pedagogical plot. Instead, the inherent probity of peasant wisdom elevated the peasants high above the intel-

²³ Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse*, 252.

²⁴ McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks,"* 69. Translation modified.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶ Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 214.

lectuals, who must undergo the baptism of life in order to shed their ideological mystifications, their misgivings, and their vacillations.

This is the premise of Hao Ran's short story "Firm and Impartial."²⁷ The intellectual narrator witnesses a concatenation of small events that first leave him with a bad impression of his hostess, Grandma Hou, and subsequently allow him to see the shining truth behind the superficial impression. At the outset, the narrator tells us that he is staying in the village for a short period "to temper [himself] through physical labor" (FI 149) and to "receive an education, to become familiar with the peasants' new life and new outlook, and later to eulogize them in writing" (FI 150). Priming himself for "a new life" and "new gains" (FI 147), he hopes to find someone with "advanced thinking, a noble character, and a strong revolutionary spirit" (FI 150). Instead, Grandma Hou appears small-minded and quarrelsome. Yet in the course of a few pages, he is proven completely wrong. Grandma Hou's words and actions are firmly grounded in her bitter experience as a member of the oppressed class in the Old Society (*jiu shehui*) and are therefore spontaneous expressions of her emotive intelligence—her selfless love for the Party, socialism, and the commune, as well as her unstinting hatred for and vigilance against the class enemies. The central drama concerns the small courtyard behind Grandma Hou's house, which borders that of the former landlord Small Hand Hou. One day Grandma Hou catches Small Hand stealthily enlarging his yard by digging a new ditch. She halts his action with a command: "You stay put, just stay there! I want to call the cadres and brigade members to take a look, to analyze, to sharpen vigilance and learn!" Small Hand entreats her to let him off the hook with endearing terms of neighborliness and (fictive) kinship, to no avail. The narrator soon learns that this is not a petty squabble over a few inches of soil between neighbors. Rather, "that small courtyard has a history of blood and tears and enmity!" (FI 151). In the Old Society, Grandma Hou and her husband were allowed to reclaim it from half a reed pond after years of hard labor for Small Hand. Their experience of combating adversarial forces has lent the courtyard an indelible aura of authenticity. Indeed, it is now the brigade's designated educational site. After Grandma

²⁷ In Helen F. Siu, ed., *Furrows: Peasants, Intellectuals, and the State—Stories and Histories from Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 147–55. Cited in the text as FI.

reports on Small Hand, the Party leadership plans to hold “an on-the-spot meeting” the next day to educate the masses about class oppression. Presumably, she will speak bitterness at the meeting to reanimate the Maoist cult of experience and the friend-enemy dichotomy.

The story then relates an episode in which Grandma Hou helps dislodge a freight cart stuck in the curving muddy road hugging her courtyard. Here we are also given an arresting image of a contorted female body, but not a body in pain or in rage. Rather, it is the ecstatic body of a socialist subject engaged in the sacred struggle against the brute force of nature. As such it is simultaneously rousing and innocent: “[her] body was practically lying in the mud, and due to the exertion, the white shirt was tightly stretched across the back, a rip at the shoulder was opening into a large tear, and a scarlet bloodstain oozed amid the sweat and mud” (FI 153). It is a sight that immediately moves the narrator to action. However, the story takes care not to reduce peasant characters to passive, dumb physicality. Tellingly, it is in response to Grandma Hou’s speechifying about bearing in mind “the interest of the larger collective” that the narrator’s heart “beat[s] vigorously” (FI 152) and scales fall from his eyes. Immediately after the episode of the cart, the narrator witnesses Grandma Hou sawing down her beloved peach tree in the middle of the courtyard and is asked to assist her in pulling down the fence, for, as she explains, the only way to prevent more carts from getting stuck is to straighten out the road right through her yard: “In order to make the road unimpeded, if it means destroying this small bit of family property, or even cutting out flesh from my body, I should not hesitate” (FI 155). Again, her words set his heart “ablaze” (FI 155) and he springs to action. Clearly, Grandma Hou knows where to draw the line between friend and enemy, whom to love and whom to hate. For her, the political embraces the entire sphere of life, so that nothing—a watt of electricity, a lump of earth, a peach tree, or half a courtyard—is too trivial or too precious to be put through the exacting test of the friend-enemy distinction. Small Hand is not her private enemy, even if he may have treated her cruelly in the Old Society. Having merged her private life with public/political life, she has only public enemies, just as her courtyard now doubles as the communal thoroughfare through which “carts, cars, the production brigade in a line, all [pass] . . . heading due east where the sun rises!” (FI 155). Traditional notions of kinship, neighborliness, and private property all fall by the wayside as the Maoist political abolishes the public-private distinction and comes to inhabit life itself.

Written at the height of the Cultural Revolution, the story dramatizes only the leveling down of the intellectual without its dialectical counterpart: the leveling up of the peasants.²⁸ In this way, it obviates what Ban Wang calls the “circular logic of artistic creation”: artworks are only supposed to bring out what is already beautiful in the revolutionary masses, to make manifest the inherent aesthetics of political life.²⁹ In other words, art is to be sublimated by life, not the other way around. The peasant characters—the embodiments of aesthetico-political life—are already fully leveled up and have ample lessons to offer the intellectual, corporeally, emotionally, and cognitively. The image of the village idiots (à la Marx) is revealed to be an intellectual fallacy. The leveling up, therefore, is a fictional *fait accompli*: writers create larger-than-life peasant characters as the moral constant in whose mirror of clarity intellectual characters dust off their thinking and undergo ideological rebirth. The narrator in the story appears to “enter” peasant life without ever “leaving” it, only because the writer has already left prior to the act of writing and has consecrated his text to the Maoist cult of experience. In high socialist realism, peasants, workers, and soldiers are “tall, imposing, and perfect” (*gao da quan*), their raw life experience no longer in need of ideological edification or artistic sublimation. Like the peasant-actors of the model village Xiaojinzhuang,³⁰ they are the barefoot replicas of Mao the statesman-cum-artist, who can spout *The People’s Daily* editorial-like speeches as if “in daily small talk” (FI 152) and can make revolutionary verses and sing arias as readily as they can till the fields and foil enemy plots.

What socialist realism circumvents via a leap of faith is what troubles Marxist humanists in their effort to defend the foundational status of experience against the structural Marxist position that all experience is

²⁸ See Michael Egan’s sensitive reading of Hao Ran’s three major novels: *Bright Sunny Skies* (1960–65), *The Road of Golden Light* (1972–74), and *Sons and Daughters of Xisha* (1974) in “A Notable Sermon: The Subtext of Hao Ran’s Fiction,” in B. S. McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 224–43. Egan draws a trajectory of increasing politicization that culminates in the last title, which “is so unremittingly political that it reduces the idea of socialist literature (or even of ‘revolutionary romanticism’) to caricature” (243).

²⁹ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure*, 211.

³⁰ Jeremy Brown, “Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The City in the Countryside, 1974–1976,” in Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 153–84.

always already ideological. E. P. Thompson, for example, split experience into “experience I” or lived experience and “experience II” or perceived experience. Lived experience is still the domain of direct truth and is always in excess of the concepts that articulate it.³¹ For Louis Althusser, however, lived experience is the domain of ideological illusions whose debunking requires a Marxist science that he believed he was advancing. Socialist realism goes a step further by simply closing the gap between ideology as lived experience and “the real.” False consciousness is no longer an epistemological possibility among the working class, for they have become the very embodiments of scientific truth. It is now the exclusive property of the reactionary class, whose instinct for self-preservation and lust for power structurally blind them to the truth and turn them against the tide of historical progress. The class enemies must be destroyed not just because they are, in the Maoist paranoid imagination, always plotting to sabotage the new socialist state, but also—and this is where Mao goes beyond Schmitt as well—because they impede the realization of a moral, aesthetic, economic, and above all, universalist ideal—communism.³²

Politics in Mao’s China was still about identity, but the Maoist identity politics aligned itself with the Law of History. Class enemies had become what Hannah Arendt calls “objective enemies,” because they were, from the “objective” perspective of scientific Marxism, on the wrong side of History. Their extirpation was thus the objective precondition for the forward motion of historical progress. Whether a particular person was guilty of a specific crime or not was no longer meaningful. The need to identify objective enemies regardless of innocence or guilt rendered everyone a potential enemy within.³³ In the end, the Maoist political showed the greatest contempt for experience.

³¹ Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 210.

³² Commenting on the fascist movement in Germany, Arendt observes that Nazi propaganda transformed anti-Semitism into “a principle of self-definition,” thereby removing it from “the fluctuations of mere opinion.” Arendt, *Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 54. Presumably, Carl Schmitt joined the Nazi Party to defend the German way of life, but what he defended was nothing less than racism, which was peculiarly adept at dividing humanity into “us” and “them” and simultaneously assuming the guise of a social ideal and an exemplary program to justify genocide. In spite of his tirade against universalism, Schmitt was unable to disentangle the mutuality of existential crisis and racist paranoia, and of the chimera of racist particularism and universalism.

³³ For a fuller discussion of the notion of the objective enemy and its operation within the Maoist political, see Haiyan Lee, “Figuring History and Horror in a Provincial Museum: The Water Dungeon, the Rent Collection Courtyard, and the

The wisdom and authority of experience were still appealed to, but policies were formulated and implemented that took no account of the heterogeneity and discrepancy of lived experience. Mao presented himself as a cosmocrat, or the interpreting agent of the Law of History, and announced his political intentions as prophecy for a communist future—thereby, to adapt an insight from Arendt,³⁴ removing the ultimate test of what he did beyond the experience of the masses.

Love without Rhyme or Reason

We began this essay by asking what was particularly scandalous about the Maoist politicization of aesthetics and how it was different from the scholarly practice of ideology critique in the contemporary Western academy. In an article on Chinese socialist cinema of the 1950s, Esther Yau ponders the disjunction between the widely held view that the use of class as “a creative focus” has made socialist realist works overly naïve and the conviction that “a critic’s awareness of class can produce sophisticated criticism of bourgeois art.”³⁵ She reminds us that in “speak bitterness” sessions where the oppressed were encouraged to indict the Old Society, class consciousness was for them “the key to self-representation and self-liberation.” The problem, she admits, is that the theatrically choreographed class consciousness was part and parcel of the *chengfen* classification system that was “backward looking, hierarchical, and prone to abuse.” Hence, “as soon as they appeared, the liberating effects of a politicized consciousness became enmeshed with the authoritarian effects of a state technology.”³⁶

When class is used to perform against-the-grain criticism of bourgeois art, it has to be teased out of texts that deliberately deny its validity as a principle of identity. Oftentimes such texts are wont to disavow the claims of any collectivity over and above the supreme autonomy of the individual, even in situations where individual fate is clearly overdetermined by impersonal, systemic forces. Oliver Stone’s film *World*

Socialist Undead.” In *Writing of History in East Asia*, ed. Axel Schneider and Viren Murthy (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming)

³⁴ Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 81.

³⁵ Esther Yau, “Compromised Liberation: The Politics of Class in Chinese Cinema of the early 1950s,” in D. James and R. Berg, eds., *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 142.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

Trade Center (2006) is a case in point. It depicts the harrowing experience of two Port Authority policemen trapped under the rubble of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The two-hour-long film dwells almost exclusively on the two men wedged in between massive slabs of concrete and twisted metal, their distraught families, and those trying to rescue them, cutting back and forth between their heroic resolve to stay alive and the emotional upheavals that grip their loved ones. Trying not to drift off into a coma, the men begin to tell each other about their respective families, particularly their wives. Not a word about the nation, the enemy, or revenge passes through their parched and crusted lips; no rage or resentment shines forth from their bleary eyes. As soon as the older man is pulled out of the rubble, he tells his wife that it was she who kept him alive. The point is unambiguous: although these men may have rushed into the towers out of a sense of public duty and honor, it is private love that sustains them as they lie in the liminal space between life and death. Herein lies the core tenet of bourgeois humanism: human beings may be swept into political turmoil and may willingly die for whatever collectivity has hegemonized their identity or captured their sense of honor, but in the last instance, it is the love of one individual for another *qua* individual (and for the family it begets) that sustains one's humanity.³⁷

In bourgeois art, private, romantic, and familial love is the arch-sign of humanity. An astute critic may be able to identify unspoken assumptions and hidden biases informed by the hegemonic ideologies of class, gender, race, and nation, but such categories have to contend for dominance not only with one another but also with a romantic ideology that equates the individual with the universal and regards the claims of all collectivities as superficial, parochial, and

³⁷ The assumption that human emotion and sexuality ultimately transcend artificial boundaries is also prevalent in the academy. Neil Diamant argues that for all the CCP's effort to politicize love and marriage in the 1950s and 1960s, people willy-nilly followed their "innate" sexual impulses rather than paying too much heed to the class status or political credentials of their potential spouses (*Boundaries and Belonging*, 215). In the intimate sphere, "the state-erected political boundaries were not necessarily accepted as legitimate, proper, or desirable by many ordinary citizens... despite campaigns, despite political study sessions, production drives, and the like" (217). Diamant believes that intimate life remained little changed from before the revolution, when it had been centered on individuals and governed not by political categories but by passion and sexuality. For a different take on this issue, see Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949–1999* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

potentially oppressive. Socialist realism, however, enshrines class as the singularly legitimate and meaningful identity, to the exclusion of all other ways of boundary making. Not only is individualism as such highly suspect, gender and ethnic consciousness too must be rendered irrelevant. Thus, whatever emancipatory role class may have played, it is quickly turned into a governmental technology that interpellates people, renders them as ideological abstractions, and compels a uniform emotional life in which love and hate are a matter of state policy. At its most extreme, the ideology of class scorns and threatens to demolish the last redoubt of bourgeois humanism: the family and its life of emotions. It was mostly in response to the destruction of intimate life that post-Mao intellectuals composed their indictments of the Maoist political.

Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* is one of the most prominent examples of such post-Mao critique. Based on a 1981 novel by Gu Hua, this much-commented-on film is set in a small town in southwestern China and spans the tumultuous period from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. It is centered on a female restaurateur named Hu Yuyin who is labeled "a new rich peasant" (*xin funong*) during the Four Clean-ups campaign (and "a counterrevolutionary" in later campaigns) and who loses her house, her business, and her husband as a result. She is ordered to sweep the streets. When she falls ill, Qin Shutian, the town's resident "rightist" (*youpai*) who is also ordered to sweep the streets, comes to her aid and offers her emotional consolation and companionship. The state of exception to which they are condemned, however, fails to rob them of their humanity. On the contrary, by falling in love and forming a family with each other, they manage to salvage their humanity in ways that are denied to the characters who embrace Maoist politics as a vocation. In this film, the intellectual may be down and out, but it is he who teaches the Party a lesson. In one scene, the persecutor of Yuyin, Li Guoxiang,³⁸ is being denounced and humiliated by Red Guards in an unexpected turn of the political wind. As the belligerent youngsters manhandle and taunt her, Qin Shutian walks up to her and offers his broom for her to practice with. Unmoved, she spits at him and barks shrilly: "You reactionary! Rightist!" To this he

³⁸ Jerome Silbergeld considers Li Guoxiang "a creature of ideological ferocity" modeled on Jiang Qing (*China Into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. London: Reaktion Books, 1999, 206).

replies calmly: “You’re a human being, too [*ni ye shi ren*].” Near the end, a rehabilitated Qin runs into Li on his way home after spending eight years in a labor reform camp; he urges human decency on her and admonishes her to leave the common folks alone: “Now you high Party people should be more kind to us commoners.” Judith Farquhar argues that the film and the novel it is based on are unabashedly pro-reformist, affirming the neoliberal creed that government should be minimalist and restricted to its night watchman’s role. So long as the state and politicians do not meddle in ordinary people’s lives, family values, communitarian ethics, and entrepreneurial spirit will prevail and people will flourish. In a word, “only with a return to free markets are the citizens of Hibiscus able to return to fully human status.”³⁹

Xie Jin’s tribute to Deng Xiaoping’s reforms is inseparable from his affirmation of the innate humanism of ordinary people—a direct reversal of the theory of human nature articulated in *The Red Detachment of Women*. Here, there is no clenched fist or piercing gaze; an ordinary couple become prosperous through hard work (lovingly portrayed in the opening sequence) and their downfall has nothing to do with any crime of class exploitation or oppression, but with a rival’s (Li Guoxiang) jealousy and political opportunism. It is true that the town has its shabby set of “five black elements” (*hei wu lei*: landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, hoodlums, and rightists) and that they bear the brunt of every political campaign that sweeps through. But to the extent to which they can get away with it, the townsfolk merely go through the motions of class struggle, without the prescribed discerning emotions—love and hate with a cause. In Charles Hayford’s words, “the enduring humanism of the village and the recurring good sense of the villagers rebukes the agenda of class struggle.”⁴⁰ At the beginning of the film at least, Qin Shutian can get his bowl of rice custard at Yuyin’s restaurant and eat it peacefully in a corner. The Party branch secretary, Yuyin’s old flame, delegates to Qin the task of corraling and drilling the “five black elements” for upcoming struggle sessions. Qin even fills the role of the town scribe responsible for painting revolutionary slogans on the town walls, which infuriates Li Guoxiang, who asks her audience indignantly at a mass rally: “He [Qin] is a class

³⁹ Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-socialist China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 101.

⁴⁰ Charles W. Hayford, “*Hibiscus Town*: Revolution, Love and Bean Curd,” in Chris Berry, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes* (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 126.

enemy, but do you hate him?" The townsfolk's panicked and averted eyes cue us to the fact that there is too much open and subterranean affection and interdependence for them to care much about the business of hate. Even after Yuyin and Qin are cast out as class enemies, they refuse to let hatred overtake their lives. Qin tutors Yuyin in the art of street sweeping, turning what is meant to be degrading punishment into a graceful aesthetic exercise. If labor reform as communist discipline condemns the class enemies to the status of *animal laborans* whose backbreaking work produces nothing of lasting significance and whose experience holds no aura of authenticity and promises no ideological redemption, Qin and Yuyin amply subvert their punishment by becoming *homo faber*.⁴¹ They produce not socialist monuments that glorify the collective and obliterate the individual, but an enduring relationship, solidified in marriage and family, that saves them from despair and redeems their humanity. It is here that love comes closest, *pace* Mao Zedong, to being unconditional, without rhyme or reason.

⁴¹ For the distinction between *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 136–59.

PROMOTE PHYSICAL CULTURE AND SPORT, IMPROVE THE PEOPLE'S CONSTITUTION

Xiaoning Lu

The phrase, *Fazhan tiyu yundong, zengqiang renmin tizhi* 发展体育运动, 增强人民体质, first appeared as an inscription brushed by Mao Zedong for the inauguration ceremony of the All-China Sports Federation in June 1952, and was soon published in the widely circulated monthly magazine *New Physical Culture*. It not only called attention to the significance of physical culture and sport in the Chinese people's daily life but also indicated the importance of mass fitness to the new nation. At once a personal and a public expression, Mao's inscription revealed his persistent interest in physical activities and more importantly, served as a directive in the newly founded People's Republic of China (PRC). It also suggested that developing physical culture and sport for the people was the overarching principle of the fledgling *xin tiyu yundong* 新体育运动 (New Physical Culture movement), one of numerous socialist campaigns bent on building a new China in the Mao era.

In the early years of the PRC, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) spared no effort in promoting physical culture and athletics for the people. For instance, the Common Program, the provisional constitution of the PRC, stipulated "advocating the people's physical culture."¹ Between 1953 and 1956, the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission of China (SPCSC), an executive organization devoted to promoting fitness and health for the public, organized 75 national sports meets, eight times the total number of national sports competitions in Republican China. Among these, the largest event was the national industrial workers' sports tournament, in which 1.2 million workers participated.² Furthermore, a large number of public gymnasiums and stadiums were constructed in provinces, cities, and counties to create

¹ Article 48 of The Common Program. Stipulated on September 29, 1949, The Common Program was the provisional constitution for the PRC. http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-12/07/content_2304465.htm (accessed January 5, 2008).

² Shirley Reekie, "Mass Fitness," in James Riordan and Robin Jones, eds., *Sport and Physical Education in China* (London: E & FN Spon, 1999), 244.

a congenial environment for all levels of sports competition as well as mass recreation. Physical training schools were also built in order to meet the needs of professional athletes, amateur sportsmen, children, and teens. All these remarkable changes were integral parts of the New Physical Culture, which the CCP proclaimed to be drastically different from the physical culture in the Republic of China: the former, informed with socialist ideology, was new and progressive, whereas the latter, imbued with bourgeois ideology and serving only a privileged few, was old and backward.

Certainly, the New Physical Culture movement had as its specific focus responding to the ever-changing social reality in the Mao era. As Feng Wenbin pointed out in his opening speech for the inauguration ceremony of the All China Sports Federation, “the physical culture movement advances with the development of economic construction and the improvement of the people’s material and culture lives.”³ In the early 1950s, when the remnants of the Nationalist army still occupied parts of China and the military crisis in the Taiwan Strait loomed, the new physical culture primarily served the purpose of enhancing China’s defense capacity. In 1954, the Chinese Communist government initiated the Labor-Defense system, which was modeled after the Soviet sports program “ready for labor and defense,” to integrate physical education into the schools and factory system so that Chinese citizens could be well prepared for national defense. When the national crisis abated and large-scale socialist campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward took off, the CCP’s propagation of physical culture was redesigned to improve mass fitness, and consequently socialist productivity.

Within socialist culture worldwide, the New Physical Culture movement in the PRC does not seem unique at first sight. Other socialist countries such as the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba made efforts to promote sports for all and integrated physical culture into their respective socialist causes.⁴ What is different about Mao’s directive is that it reveals a persistent conceptualization of Chinese modernity throughout the twentieth century that emphasizes an intimate connection among

³ Feng Wenbin, “Opening Speech in the Inauguration Ceremony of All-China Sports Federation by Fen Wenbin”, in Xin Tiyu She ed. *Promote Physical Culture and Sport, Improve the People’s Constitution* (Beijing: Qingnian chubanshe, 1952), 5.

⁴ See James Riordan, ed. *Sport Under Communism: The U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, the G.D.R., China, Cuba* (London: Hurst, 1978).

tiyu (physical culture), nation, and modern citizens. As Feng Wenbin elucidated Mao's official endorsement: "The people's physical culture movement aims to improve the people's health and strengthen their constitution. In so doing, the Chinese populace can build a strong and healthy body and foster unswerving will, thereby well preparing themselves for national defense and construction."⁵ These discourses of *tiyu* are variations of the grand narrative of physical fitness and education, which highlights its transformational power in building a competitive nation-state and constructing desirable citizens. In what follows, I will first trace early discourses of *tiyu* that oscillate between two ends, an obsession with the correlation between the body and the nation and the education and construction of modern citizens. I will then examine how such discourses were transformed in the PRC and took on new historical significance.

Genealogy

Tiyu, a loan word from Japan, first appeared in China in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of Japanese monographs on sports and physical education.⁶ Late Qing Chinese intellectuals' effort to follow the Meiji Restoration in order to modernize China accounted for the initial development of *tiyu* as a new discipline as well as the dissemination of the modern notion of physical endeavors. Composed of two Chinese characters—*ti* 体 (body) and *yu* 育 (education)—the term *tiyu* indicates "sports and exercises," "physical education," "body cultivation," or "the totality of physical activity." Not surprisingly, public discourses of *tiyu* in China seldom focused on recreational physical activities or professionalized sports, but showed consistent interest in exploring *tiyu*'s role in Chinese modernization.

With respect to physical activities, *tiyu* originally denotes Western-style sports such as track and field, ball games, and gymnastics, and stood in contrast to the indigenous mode of physical activities—*wushu* (武术 military skills or martial arts) such as archery, wrestling, and fencing, and a variety of activities involving clubs, spears, and swords.

⁵ "Opening Speech in the Inauguration Ceremony of All-China Sports Federation by Fen Wenbin," 5.

⁶ Li Ning, "Tiyu yi ci zai woguo youlai xinzheng" (The origin of the term *tiyu* in our country), *Xin Tiyu* (New physical culture) 5 (1985): 24.

Nevertheless, the modes of physical activities of *tiyu* and the appropriate ways of propagating it were under debate, particularly when *tiyu* became a constitutive part of various political programs at critical historical moments, ranging from the anticolonial movement in late imperial China, the anti-Japanese resistance movement in Republican China to socialist reform in the PRC.



Early Discourses of Tiyu: Physical Prowess, National Strength, and Self-Cultivation

The strong concern with mass fitness in the new China, as revealed in Mao's endorsement of *tiyu*, has a specific history. Increasing awareness of the close connection between the body and the nation gave a great incentive to the early development of *tiyu*. Despite the rich Chinese cultural heritage of martial arts, pervasive attentiveness to the body did not arise until the late nineteenth century, when colonial powers such as Great Britain and Japan invaded the country and ridiculed it as "the sick man of the East."⁷ Comparing a weak country to a frail body, this figurative speech revealed the colonial powers' superiority, crystallized colonial observers' prejudice against the Other, and brought scientific rationality to the forefront. This rhetoric emasculated China by viewing it under a biological, racial gaze. Coupled with the then prevalent social Darwinism, the implied binary opposition between the wholesome and the sick conveniently justified colonial powers' encroachment on China.

Late Qing intellectual-reformers soon translated and appropriated the colonial rhetoric of the body and the nation to awaken Chinese people to the country's crisis. Social Darwinism, which provided philosophical rationalization for colonial expansion, in turn influenced these intellectuals' perception of international relations and informed their specific programs for modernizing China. For instance, in his 1895 essay "Yuan Qiang" 原强 (On the source of strength),⁸ Yan Fu 严复

⁷ This is a direct quotation from an article originally published in *Annual of London Academies* in 1896. The article was reprinted in *News of Current Affairs* in the same year. See Wang Zhi, *Twentieth-Century China—The Volume of Sports and Health* (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 2000), 3.

⁸ Yan Fu, "Yuan Qiang" (On the source of strength), first serialized from March 4 to 9, 1895, in *Zhi Bao*, reprinted in Niu Yanshan, ed., *Yan Fu Wenxuan* (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 12–48.

maintained that a nation and an individual body function in a similar way—both are “weakened by leisure and strengthened by exercise”⁹ Yet, considering the severity of China’s illness, Yan Fu proposed gradual self-strengthening reform rather than radical revolution for fear that overworking the sick country would hasten its demise. Specifically, he prescribed “enhancing people’s physical strength, enlightening people’s thoughts, and updating people’s morality” as a remedy to rejuvenate the nation and thereby ensure the survival of China in a new world system.¹⁰

Liang Qichao 梁启超 concurred with Yan Fu’s view on the correlation of individual physical prowess and national strength by promoting military citizenship for a modern China. In his essay “On the New People,” Liang proposes the notion of *shang wu* 尚武 (upholding military spirit), for it is crucial to maintain the people’s vitality, to protect national sovereignty, and to sustain civilization.¹¹ He praises Sparta’s rigorous physical training program for fostering its citizens’ strong characters and attributes the rise of Germany in early twentieth-century Europe to Bismarck’s policy of blood and iron. In the meantime, he laments that the Chinese are not physically fit and that China, lacking the military spirit, lost its capability of self-defense. What Liang brought to the heated discussions on *tiyu* in relation to national salvation was his advocacy of military spirit as a new social value and his promotion of *tiyu*’s military use for China. First, he suggests substituting military spirit for an entrenched Confucian value—*zhong wen qin wu* 重文轻武 (revere the literary and despise the martial)—for a modern China, because the latter had led to the deterioration of China’s military might and the decline of the people’s morale. Second, Liang regards military spirit as a foundation for institutional reform and technological advancement. As he claims, all efforts spent to purchase ships and train troops, to set up factories and manufacture machinery, and to reform the military in recent decades did not prevent China from being defeated, for these were merely the form of *wu* (military force). A fundamental way of strengthening the country is to cultivate

⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 25.

¹¹ Liang Qichao, “Xinmin Shuo • Shang Wu” 1903, reprinted in The State Physical Culture Committee on History of Physical Culture, ed., *Selected Modern Chinese Works on Physical Culture and Sport*, vol. 17 (Beijing: Renmin tiyu chubanshe, 1992), 7–17; qtd. at 7.

the essence of *wu*, namely, the military spirit. Liang further specifies that *xin li* 心力 (the power of will and mind), *dan li* 胆力 (courage), and *ti li* 体力 (physical strength) are three forces indispensable to cultivating such a spirit.¹² The importance of *ti li* lies in its close connection with *jingshen* 精神 (spirit). “Not until the man has vigorous health and strong physical constitution can he have a preserving and unyielding spirit.”¹³ It comes as no surprise that Liang encourages the Chinese to emulate people of military nations in Europe, actively engaging in Western sports and military calisthenics, in order to strengthen *ti li* and consequently to foster military spirit.

Evidently, at the turn of the twentieth century, *tiyu* was an iconoclastic social practice. It not only introduced the Chinese people to new modes of training, displaying, and using the body but also promoted modern social values such as self-mastery and competitiveness. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, *tiyu* gradually lost the iconoclastic appeal that late Qing intellectuals ascribed to it. However, the discourse of *tiyu* that promised the attainment of social progress and national salvation through individual physical endeavor perpetuated itself well into the 1930s and 1940s. In particular, military nationalism that Liang Qichao introduced into the *tiyu* discourse reverberated in public discussions of its nationalization in the Republican era.

As China engaged simultaneously in an intermittent civil war and the anti-Japanese war (1931–45), physical educators and theorists proposed nationalizing *tiyu* as a means to save China. Compared to their predecessors, ardent advocates of *tiyu* at the time such as Liu Shenzhan and Chen Dengke were strongly influenced not by social Darwinism but by Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People, in particular the principle of ethnic nationalism. Consequently, they were less concerned with issues such as strong physique and vigorous health than with *tiyu*’s potential to preserve China’s national character and to enhance self-confidence. For instance, Liu Shenzhan promoted national physical culture in his 1935 essay “On *Tiyu*’s Role in Saving the Nation” on grounds that employing *tiyu* to improve Chinese people’s health would neither eliminate the civil war nor help the country to resist foreign invasions.¹⁴ The goal should extend from improving the people’s health

¹² Ibid., 14–16.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Liu Shenzhan, “*Tiyu* Jiuguo Lun” (On *tiyu*’s role in saving the nation), *Qinfen Tiyu Yuebao* 5 (1935): 519–22, reprinted in The State Committee on History of Physi-

to the rejuvenation of the nation. Therefore, it is essential to sinicize or nationalize *tiyu*.¹⁵ Furthermore, *tiyu* can foster firm will and resolute character. It cultivated *bushido* in Japan and the principle of iron and blood in Germany. However, current *tiyu* in China failed to nurture national spirit. This was particularly worrisome when Western sports were popularized in remote locales in China, as they might jeopardize Chinese national character. As discussions of the nationalization of *tiyu* unfolded, the denotation of the term changed—it no longer merely indicated Western sports and physical education but became an all-encompassing term for the totality of physical activities. As for how to nationalize *tiyu*, Liu proposed making martial arts or national skills scientific, sinicizing Western sports, and militarizing physical activities in general, since national defense was the most pressing issue for China at the time and there was already a trend of militarizing *tiyu* in Europe and America. Along with Liu Shenzhan, Chen Dengke, a physical educator trained in Germany, forcefully advocated militarizing *tiyu* as a new direction of physical culture in China. He held that nationalized physical culture, a combination of indigenous and foreign physical culture, should seek to increase China's defense capability and remove the denigration of China as the sick man of the East Asia. In particular, he argued that the militarization of sport and the incorporation of military training into sport and exercise are the essence of nationalized physical culture.¹⁶ Militarizing sport would prepare citizens to fight against enemies and incorporating sport and exercise into military training would improve the army's perseverance and combat efficiency.

Chen's proposition found an unexpected practitioner. From 1928 to 1945, a military, sports-centered physical culture developed in the Communist revolutionary base areas. Largely composed of exercises, games, and informal physical education programs, the CCP's physical culture at the time attracted a large number of common people who were not acquainted with professional athletics. The significance of this particular physical culture is twofold: it was essential for boosting

cal Culture ed., *Selected Modern Chinese Works on Physical Culture and Sport*, 17:283–96, qtd. at 286.

¹⁵ Liu Shenzhan, "On *Tiyu*'s Role in Saving the Nation," 293.

¹⁶ Chen Dengke, "Women Shifou Ying Tichang Zhongguo de Minzu Tiyu" (Should we promote national *tiyu* for China?), *Qinfen Tiyu Yuebao* 10 (1936): 2, reprinted in The State Committee on History of Physical Culture, ed., *Selected Modern Chinese Works on Physical Culture and Sport*, 17:343–45, qtd. at 344.

morale and preserving the combative spirit during a period when the CCP had to struggle for its own survival; and functioning as an efficient means of mass mobilization, it was also instrumental in creating a political community.

In addition to relating *tiyu* to national salvation, public discourses that focused on *tiyu*'s power in reforming Chinese citizens have also prevailed since the introduction of the term to China. In 1912 the leading liberal educator Cai Yuanpei wrote an essay entitled "On *Tiyu* as the Foundation of Self-Cultivation" to emphasize *tiyu*'s educational value. Subverting the traditional hierarchy of the physical and the intellectual, Cai remarked that improving one's health and strengthening one's body provided the foundation for developing one's intellectual capacity and moral caliber, for "one who has no strong constitution and vigorous health cannot achieve what he intends."¹⁷ Accordingly, he repudiated the notion that exercise is a willful and self-indulgent undertaking, and argued that it is a necessity for health and in preparation for industrious study.

Cai's emphasis on physical education, intellectual education, and moral education in a modern program of self-cultivation was echoed by young Mao Zedong in his 1917 essay "A Study of Physical Education." In order to motivate the public to exercise, Mao underscores the interconnection of the physical, the intellectual, and the moral: "It is the body that contains knowledge and houses virtue . . . Physical education really occupies the first place in our lives. When the body is strong, then one can advance speedily in knowledge and morality, and reap far-reaching advantages."¹⁸ What is unique about Mao's early essay is his pragmatic approach. In addition to explaining the utility of physical education, he elaborates on various methods of exercise and offers advice on a proper exercise regimen. Mao's view of *tiyu*'s importance to the development of the self proved crucial in shaping socialist physical culture decades later. For instance, in a speech delivered at the Second National Congress of the Democratic Youth League of

¹⁷ Cai Yuanpei, "Tiyu Wei Xiu Ji Zhi Ben" (On *tiyu* as the foundation of self-cultivation), in *Selected Modern Chinese Works on Physical Culture and Sport*, 17:19–22, qtd. at 19.

¹⁸ Twenty-eight-stroke Student, "Tiyu zhi yanjiu" (A study of physical education), *New Youth* 3, no. 2 (1917). Mao took the pseudonym "Twenty-eight-stroke Student," the number of strokes required to write his name. For English translations of excerpts from this essay, see Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 94–102.

China in 1953, Mao Zedong suggested the youth league take account of the characteristics of youth in its work and emphasized the importance of health for young people. His assertion that “Young people should be enabled to keep fit, study well, and work well”¹⁹ became a motto for a well-rounded education.

Overall, the vision of *tiyu* as a transformational force in modernizing the nation and shaping the self, as manifest in early discourses, continued into the Mao era when the CCP endeavored to create a “national, scientific, and popular physical culture” for the masses.

Discourses of Tiyu in Mao's China

In addition to developing infrastructure, the CCP adeptly deployed different media and skillfully used rhetoric to advocate the New Physical Culture as progressive and emancipatory. Founded in 1950, *Xin Tiyu* 新体育 (New physical culture)—the most influential and popular sports magazine in the Mao era—played a crucial role in advocating popular physical culture and sports. Targeting cadres and teachers in physical education, athletes, and sports enthusiasts in the army, factories, and schools, this magazine published news stories about sporting events in the PRC, featured photographs of folk exercises, introduced athletics in other communist countries, and set up such columns as “exchange of pedagogies of physical education,” “short stories,” and “science of exercise and physiology.” In 1957, the CCP established an English-language journal, *Chinese Sports*, as a major venue for publicizing the achievements of New Physical Culture internationally. Besides print media, radio broadcasting was crucial in popularizing New Physical Culture. As wireless signals were less subject to geographic restrictions than other media, radio effectively promoted *guangbocao* 广播操 (calisthenics set to broadcast music) as a major form of daily exercise all over the country. Last but not least, the CCP employed cinema as an essential medium to create and disseminate a popular discourse of physical culture. Cinema not only created widely recognizable icons and images and thus built an aesthetic; it also influenced the Chinese

¹⁹ Mao Zedong, “The Youth League in Its Work Must Take the Characteristics of Youth Into Consideration.” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) V: 96–97.

people's perception of physicality as well as the ethos of physical strength. More significantly, visuality began to play a prominent role in the formation and circulation of a social discourse of physical culture in modern Chinese history.

In addition to documentaries on sports meets and performances, an unprecedented new genre, *tiyu pian* 体育片 (the sports film), began to thrive in postrevolutionary Chinese cinema. From 1956 to 1965 major state studios, including Shanghai Haiyan Film Studio, Beijing Film Studio, and Changchun Film Studio, steadily produced no fewer than nine sports feature films. These capture the wide scope of New Physical Culture, ranging from physical education of amateur athletes, children, teens, and sports fandom to mass mobilization for physical exercises, as evidenced by such titles as *Liang ge xiao zuqiu dui* 两个小足球队 (Two young soccer teams, dir. Liu Qiong, 1956), *Nü lan wu hao* 女篮 5 号 (Woman basketball player no. 5, dir. Xie Jin, 1957), *Qiuchang fengbo* 球场风波 (Incidents on the playground, dir. Mao Yu, 1957), and *Qiu mi* 球迷 (Soccer fans, dir. Xu Changlin, 1962). Despite their diverse narrative structures and filmic styles, all *tiyu pian* produced in the Mao era repetitively convey the same message: far different from the commercialized and morally degenerate Republican physical culture, New Physical Culture is an affirmative, elevating, and transformative socialist enterprise for the masses and for new China.

Xie Jin's two films—*Woman Basketball Player No. 5* and *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li*—particularly deserve attention. The former, an exemplar *tiyu pian*, weaves patriotic messages with stories of individuals' self-transformation. Its focus on female athletes not only set a trend of portraying female athletes in Chinese sports films but also helped construct the most recognizable icons of the New Physical Culture. The latter, a film that brilliantly portrays physical movement as an attractive undertaking entertainingly propagates sports and exercise for the masses. A close look at these two films will cast light on how the discourse of *tiyu* at this particular time was bound up with other social demands.

The film *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* tells the story of a young woman basketball player's individual transformation from a wayward and self-centered athlete to a disciplined and resolute team player. Evident in the film are two interwoven narrative trajectories. One concentrates on the life of the young basketball player No. 5, Lin Xiaojie, in a sports school in the new People's Republic. A gifted but conceited female athlete, Lin often thinks of herself as the decisive

factor in the team's success in competitions. Yet she is irresolute in pursuing a career path as a professional athlete, partly because her family pressures her to become a college student and partly because of her own prejudice against *tiyu*. A newly appointed middle-aged male coach for the basketball team, Tian Zhenhua, soon discovers Xiaojie's talent and limitations. With a dramatic twist, he finds that she is the daughter of his past girlfriend. Thereafter, this surrogate father figure spares no effort to educate her on the meaning of athletics in the new China. The other trajectory, mainly composed of flashbacks, tells of an unconsummated love story between two athletes in the old China, Tian Zhenhua and Xiaojie's mother. In those days Coach Tian was a young, upright basketball player in a sports club run by the Lin family. Lin Jie—like her daughter—was player no. 5 on a women's basketball team. Their genuine love was surreptitiously thwarted by Lin's father, after Tian refused to follow his will and intentionally lose a basketball game to an American team.

These two narratives converge at a symbolic family reunion where all internal and external obstacles to Xiaojie's growth into a good athlete are overcome. This reunion is set within the scene of a solemn farewell ceremony for Coach Tian and women basketball players about to leave China to compete overseas. Political symbols in the ceremony, such as the Chinese national anthem and national flag, accentuate the connection between *tiyu* and the nation and stir a strong patriotic feeling in each participant. The celebration of New Physical Culture is unmistakable. It not only elevates China's status in the world but also compels individuals to transcend their personal interest and compete for national glory.

Woman Basketball Player No. 5 skillfully integrates the CCP's official vision of *tiyu* into a melodramatic narrative of an athlete family. Highlighting the drastic difference between the old and the new *tiyu*, it denigrates the old *tiyu* as a profit-driven business without any intention of moral improvement, and celebrates the new *tiyu* as a socialist enterprise that achieves national glory and cultivates ethically sound athletes. In particular, it efficiently mobilizes a nationalistic sentiment for socialist China by ascribing the perpetuation of the indelible humiliation of "the sick man of East Asia" to the old physical culture and its profit system.

Xie Jin's second sports film, *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li*, deals with the issue of mass sports. Set in a meat-processing factory, the film revolves around Big Li's efforts to propagate sports activities among

workers, regardless of their age and gender. Different from the majority of sports films of its time, the film focuses on the conflict between love and distaste for physical exercise, instead of the tension between individualism and collectivism. Considering that the film was made in 1963, it is clear that this new thematic focus on mass sports was a response to an urgent social demand for fitness and even for a steady supply of workers. In the preceding three years, natural disasters and severe famine on the mainland had heavily afflicted the Chinese people. Consequently, the development of sports and exercise drastically slowed down. As the economic situation stabilized and living conditions gradually recovered in 1962, mass fitness became a major concern for the party and an essential motivation for rejuvenating sports and exercise. Thus, while sports films continued to be made, nationalistic and patriotic discourse linking individual athletes to the national cause gave way to the pleasure of everyday life.

Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li also illuminates conflicts and tensions within the New Physical Culture. The film title suggests a possible family lineage and kinship among the main characters, symbolically representing a larger Chinese populace. Moreover, the film employs generational differences to map out the complex interrelations among “the residual, the emergent and the dominant” within New Physical Culture. In Raymond Williams’ analysis, “the dominant” embodies the hegemonic meanings and values in current culture; “the residual” refers to the distilled residues of the lived experience of a community that are still active in the present; and “the emergent” are new meanings and values, new practices, and new relationships that are continually being created yet not fully articulated.²⁰ These concepts call attention to fissures in the New Physical Culture and are reminders that even a social campaign launched by an authoritarian state involves a constant negotiation of contesting cultural forces. Addressing the residual, the emergent, and the dominant forces in the New Physical Culture, *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* creates various characters with whom the audience can easily identify, and thus functions as an important tool in persuading the audience to participate in mass sports.

²⁰ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–35.

Within the film narrative, Young Li is a hot-tempered and restless sports activist. His colleague, Big Li, is a middle-aged man in poor health. His rheumatism, caused by a lack of exercise, accurately predicts the weather. Hence, he is nicknamed “Weather Station.” Old Li is the father of Young Li and the head of a factory workshop. He stubbornly refuses to take part in sports and exercise because it seems frivolous and inappropriate for his age, and a distraction from productive work. These excuses are simply disguises of a residual element from the past, the entrenched Confucian notion of revering the literary and despising the martial. Repeatedly, Old Li foils Young Li’s attempts to organize an exercise regimen for the workers. Old Li’s ally, an obese worker nicknamed “Hercules,” is another stubborn opponent of physical activities. Only after Big Li becomes the organizer of the workers’ sports activities and promotes mass sports with unflagging patience and moderate means do Old Li and Hercules begin to take an interest.

Distinctive among Chinese sports films, *Big Li, Old Li, and Young Li* reflects the breadth of media technologies involved in propagating the New Physical Culture. These media technologies include radio broadcasting and propaganda posters. The film references them in order to disseminate the official vision of physical culture, propel individuals to enhance their awareness of physical fitness, and encourage them to adopt the preferred attitude toward exercise. The use of these media constitutes the film’s narrative and also gives the viewer some ideas of persuasion techniques. A good example is the sequence where Big Li and his son use propaganda posters to persuade their wife/mother to get involved in sports. Big Li’s wife joins in and overcomes her concerns that physical exercise is inappropriate for her as a mother of five children and a productive worker.

The sports films in the Mao era served propagandistic and educational functions. They spurred the development of the New Physical Culture movement and intensified the existing trends of adopting physical practices as part of everyday life. They teach audiences two lessons. First, the New Physical Culture cultivates athletes who are sound in body and mind. Second, participating in sports and physical culture is crucial for mass fitness.

A constituent as well as a product of the New Physical Culture movement, the discourse of *tǐyù*, whether circulated in print or on screen, reveal a new significance of “training the body for the nation.” In early twentieth-century China, training the body was essential to

rescuing and rejuvenating the nation; in Mao's China, it was to transform oneself into a good citizen of the socialist nation. Together with physical practices, the discourse of *tiju* during this period became a regulatory force for forging the socialist subject. Seen in this light, Mao's inscription "Promote physical culture and sports, improve the people's constitution" expresses a concern with building ideal citizens, citizens tempered by physical culture. The essence of this culture lies in its transformative, ideological power. Through adopting a preferred attitude toward physical action, learning a set of physical skills, and acquiring knowledge of New Physical Culture, one can modify one's attitude and habits, transform oneself from a self-centered individual into a person embracing collectivism, becoming a healthy, productive socialist worker.

TYPICAL PEOPLE IN TYPICAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Richard King

The formulation, rendered in Chinese as *Dianxing huanjing zhong de dianxing renwu* 典型环境中的典型人物, originates in Friedrich Engels' celebrated letter of April 1888 to Margaret Harkness. Engels was responding to her otherwise unmemorable novel *A City Girl*, which had been published the previous year.¹ Nelly Ambrose, the "City Girl" of the title, a working-class Londoner deserving of better than her current poverty, is seduced by Arthur Grant, a shallow and opinionated married man with ruling-class origins and radical political views, after she hears him speak at a meeting she attends with her admirer George. For the hypocritical Grant, Nelly is merely an amusing diversion: "Intrigues with married ladies he knew to be dangerous; he quite forgot that 'hands' [manual laborers] had hearts."² Nelly bears Grant's baby after being cared for by the Salvation Army, but the child dies after she takes it to the hospital, and she returns to the faithful George. Engels accepts the novel's pretensions to realism (it is subtitled "A Realistic Story") and offers as his only criticism the suggestion that it is "not quite realistic enough."³ He continues, in the sentence that was to establish this letter as a founding work in the canon of Marxist writing on the arts: "*Realism, to my mind, implies, beside truth of detail, the truth in reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.*"⁴

Engels' formulation was accepted as an incontrovertible truth by subsequent Marxist champions of realism, including those in the Soviet Union and China; there was general agreement on which writers had been most successful in the representation of the "typical circumstances" of their day, based in part on their commendation

¹ Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness" (dated "beginning of April 1888"), in David Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 269–71; John Law (pseudonym of Margaret Harkness), *A City Girl. A Realistic Story* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984; facsimile of the first edition, published London: Vizetelly, 1887). Engels refers to the novel simply as *City Girl*.

² Law, *A City Girl*, 77.

³ Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness," 269.

⁴ Engels, "Letter to Margaret Harkness," 269, italics mine.

by preeminent political authorities: Balzac, endorsed by Engels as a “master of realism”;⁵ Tolstoy, hailed as “the mirror of the Russian revolution” by Lenin;⁶ and Lu Xun, praised by Mao Zedong as the “standard-bearer” and “commander” of the May Fourth movement.⁷ The pantheon of literary figures generally held up as “typical characters” included Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Cervantes’ Don Quixote, and, in the Chinese context, Granny Liu, the comic peasant visitor to the Grand View Garden in chapter 6 of Cao Xueqin’s eighteenth-century masterpiece *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and, most frequently, Lu Xun’s most famous creation, the good-for-nothing village layabout Ah Q 阿 Q.

These agreements notwithstanding, the definition of the typical was a matter of considerable contention. In the debates within the literary left in republican China, and again in the People’s Republic following the Communist victory, the question of typicality arose in political campaigns over cultural issues; this was particularly the case at times of heightened tension within the ranks of the revolution, such as during the Japanese occupation of the mid-1930s, the Antirightist Campaign of the later 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution in the last decade of the Mao era. Factional rivalries and personal vendettas between members of the Communist cultural hierarchy led to disagreements over literary terminology escalating into vicious feuds, resulting in the condemnation, ostracism, and persecution of many of the protagonists.

Certain areas of disagreement recur in the Chinese debates over typicality:

1. the meaning of “typical” in the continuum between “representative” and “exemplary”: that is to say, where the “typical” character fits between the “familiar stranger” recognizable to the reader on first encounter from accumulated personal and literary experience, and preeminent heroes and heroines like the central figures of the Revolutionary Model Works of the Cultural Revolution sponsored by the latter-day “standard-bearer” Jiang Qing 江青, and the “lofty, large, and [by homophony] complete” Gao Daquan 高大泉, the

⁵ Engels, “Letter to Margaret Harkness,” 270.

⁶ V. I. Lenin, “Articles on Tolstoy,” in Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature*, 346–362, qtd. on 346.

⁷ Mao Zedong, “Xin minzhu-zhuyi lun”, in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1968), II:658; “On New Democracy,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), II:372.

- hero of the great work of Cultural Revolution fiction, Hao Ran 浩然's *Jingguang dadao* 金光大道 (The golden road);⁸
2. the relative weighting of the agreed constituents of the typical: individuality (*gexing* 个性) and universality (*gongxing* 共性);
 3. the question of whether typical characters are “social types” representing the broader spirit of the age and circumstances that produced them, or necessarily members of a specific social class engaged in a struggle with other classes.

This chapter will provide an introduction to the “typical” aside from its introduction to China, present the opposing sides in key debates among Chinese literary theorists, and follow changes in the official view of the typical from the 1930s to the end of the Cultural Revolution, when the portrayal of “proletarian heroic types” was declared to be the “basic task” of the socialist arts.⁹

Genealogy

As Raymond Williams notes in *Marxism and Art*, the opposing views of the typical as the representative and the exemplary have their antecedents in European thought. The idea of the typical in the sense of exemplary, that is, ideal or heroic, dates back to Aristotle; Williams cites Georg Lukács' concept (adopted from Hegel) of “world-historical individuals” as an example of this definition of “typical characters.”¹⁰ On the other side, Williams cites the nineteenth-century Russian critics Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Dubrolyubov as interpreting the “typical” as the characteristic or representative: “the specific figure from which we can reasonably extrapolate; or to put it the other way

⁸ Hao Ran, *Jingguang dadao* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1 1972, vol. 2 1974). The full four-volume novel was not published until 1994.

⁹ Chu Lan, “Suzao wuchanjieji yingxiong dianxing shi shehuizhuyi wenyi de genben renwu” (Portraying proletarian heroic types is the basic task of the socialist arts), *Renmin ribao* (July 16, 1974), reproduced in numerous collections of Cultural Revolution essays, including *Tan “santuchu” de chuanguo yuanze* (On the creative principle of “The Three Prominences”) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1974), 23–30.

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 101–102. Darko Suvin notes that for Lukács, both Balzac and Stendahl “undertook their typification not on the basis of the average, but of the ‘extraordinary man’ of extreme cases”; Suvin, “Lukács: Horizons and Implications of the ‘Typical Character,’” *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986–87): 97–123, qtd. on 107.

round, the specific figure which concentrates and intensifies a much more general reality.”¹¹

In his letter to Margaret Harkness and in his earlier canonical letter to Minna Kautsky, Engels leans toward the representative rather than the exemplary concept of the typical. He praises Kautsky for the “sharp individualization” of the characters in her fiction: “Each of them is a type, but at the same time also a definite individual, a ‘*Dieser*’ as old Hegel would express himself, and that is how it should be.”¹² His discussion of typical characters in his letter to Harkness focuses not on an ideal or heroic character but on Arthur Grant, the villain of *A City Girl*. Engels insists that shifts in historical reality make for changes in the “typical circumstances” that literary works should depict; in the case of *A City Girl*, he maintained that the proletariat of the late nineteenth century were no longer the “passive mass” they had been in the first decades of that century, and that their spirit of rebellion “must therefore lay claim to a place in the domain of realism.”¹³ For Engels, the typical in Balzac’s portrayal of prerevolutionary France is representative of that age alone, a view with which Lukács concurs in *Balzac and French Realism*, suggesting that something is typical “because all the moments of a historical phase which are determining factors from the human and social point of view converge and multiply within it so that the creation of type reveals these moments at their highest point of development.”¹⁴

Later socialist literary theorists were to demand that realism conform to a predetermined view of historical progression toward the utopia of communism—the “reality in its revolutionary development” codified as the subject of socialist realism at the Soviet Writers’ Conference in 1934¹⁵—and to condemn as untypical and unscientific works in which it might be construed that socialism would not triumph. Marston

¹¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 101. For selections from the three Russian critics, see Ralph E. Matlaw, ed., *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Dostoevsky: Selected Criticism* (New York: Dutton), 1962. These three, with the theater director Stanislavsky (the “three—sky’s and one—ov”) were condemned in Cultural Revolution writings on literature as the originators of pernicious theories.

¹² Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Minna Kautsky” (dated 26 November 1885), in Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature*, 267–68, qtd. on 267.

¹³ Engels, “Letter to Margaret Harkness,” in Craig, ed., *Marxists on Literature*, 270.

¹⁴ Qtd. in Henri Avron, *Marxist Esthetics*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 51.

¹⁵ Qtd. in Rudolf G. Wagner, *Inside a Service Trade: Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 11.

Anderson observes in his study of Chinese May Fourth realism that the presumption of a shared vision of historical progression between author and reader, the implicit consensus of socialist and other didactic writing, makes the particularity of events “no more than a pretense, as the theorists of realism themselves concede in their discussion of ‘typicality,’ where they indirectly acknowledge the conventionalized or even allegorical nature of realist fiction.”¹⁶

Debates about the Typical in Wartime China: Hu Feng vs. Zhou Yang

A sharp exchange between the Shanghai-based leftist critics Hu Feng and Zhou Yang in the mid-1930s on the issue of the typical focused on the relationship between generality and individuality in the composition of typical characters, and between “writer’s subjectivity”—personal observation and evaluation of society—and “correct worldview”—application of received political judgments—in establishing what is and is not typical. In establishing the context for his analysis of this debate, Kirk Denton notes an animosity that already existed between Hu Feng and Zhou Yang, arising from conflicts within the League of Left-Wing Writers (*Zuolian* 左联) in the early 1930s. Hu Feng was a protégé of the fiercely independent Lu Xun, and was identified with Lu Xun and Feng Xuefeng in bitter exchanges with Zhou Yang and other young Communist Party cultural enforcers in the years leading to Lu Xun’s death in 1936; Zhou Yang, consolidating his own position within the league, blocked Hu Feng’s bid for membership of the Communist Party, leading to an institutional disenfranchisement that may have encouraged Hu Feng to express his opposition to party orthodoxy. Personal dislike may well have exacerbated differences in interpretation of critical theory on the subject of the typical, as in other exchanges throughout the period under study.

In 1935, Hu Feng had written an entry entitled “*Shenme shi dianxing he leixing*” 什么是类型典型和类型 (What are ‘type’ and ‘model’?) for a collection of essays on literature. In it, he held up Lu Xun’s Ah Q as a distinctive character both individual and typical, embodying the less desirable characteristics of the Chinese personality. (This

¹⁶ Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 16.

assessment of Ah Q was followed by William Lyell in his 1976 study of Lu Xun as a realist writer; Lyell concludes that “Ah Q is to be taken as an everyman.”¹⁷ For Hu Feng, type was, as Denton summarizes it, “a union of the objective (the particular) with the subjective (which infused it with universality).”¹⁸ Zhou Yang responded to Hu Feng’s entry with an article titled “*Xianshizhuyi lun*” 现实主义论 (Thoughts on realism), published on January 1 of the following year. Zhou Yang took on the role of defender of communist orthodoxy, quoting extensively from Engels (the letters to Harkness and Kautsky cited above) and the Soviet novelist and literary authority Maxim Gorky; Zhou had been among the first to introduce Soviet writing on the arts, including socialist realism, to China, and drew on it extensively for authority from the 1930s to the ’50s. While Zhou Yang allowed that “subjective honesty is of course an indispensable prerequisite for artistic creation,” he also insisted on knowledge of a rapidly changing reality, which requires a “correct worldview” (also referred to as a “correct modern worldview”). Zhou claimed his own current worldview to be “integrated, consistent, and free from contradictions.” In other words (although Zhou Yang does not make this explicit) the realist writer must be governed by the Communist Party’s understanding of the current typical circumstances. On these grounds, Zhou Yang challenged Hu Feng’s reading of the character of Ah Q: while Ah Q may have possessed “universality” in the period around the time of the 1911 revolution (when the story is set), his value at the time of Hu Feng and Zhou Yang’s writing was his individuality or uniqueness, as an example of Hegel’s “*Dieser*” quoted by Engels.¹⁹

In a rejoinder, published within a week, Hu Feng challenged not only Zhou Yang’s reading of types but also his implicit claim to **owner-**

¹⁷ William A. Lyell, *Lu Hsin’s Vision of Reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 228. For Lyell’s translation of the story, as “Ah Q—The Real Story,” see Lu Xun, “*Diary of a Madman*” and *Other Stories* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1990), 101–72. A Chinese text of the story, *A Q zheng zhuan*, dated December 1921 and published in Lu Xun’s first volume of stories, can be found in any anthology of Lu Xun’s fiction; for an annotated edition, see Lu Xun, *Nahan* 呐喊 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976), 96–156.

¹⁸ Kirk A. Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 83. For this debate, see also Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 62–65.

¹⁹ Zhou Yang, “Thoughts on Realism,” in Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 334–44.

ship of the Marxist authorities, particularly Gorky, and his interpretation of the strategically crucial ground of the character of Ah Q. In “*Xianshizhuyi de xiuzheng*” 现实主义的修正 (Realism: A correction), Hu Feng accuses Zhou Yang of confusing the issue of typicality by insisting on the individuality and denying the universality of Ah Q, and of misinterpreting both Engels and Gorky on their definitions of type. He does not explicitly address the question of “correct worldview”; rather, he emphasizes the author’s personal responsibility to analyze reality, stressing that “a realist artist’s intuition “must have *undergone long-term training and must be controlled by real-life knowledge.*”²⁰ In his subsequent response, titled “*Dianxing he gexing*” 典型和个性 (Types and individuals), Zhou Yang again used Gorky to support his claim that typical characters had individual characteristics as well as those held in common with members of the group they represented; he insisted that his focus on the uniqueness of Ah Q did not mean that he ignored his embodiment of a more general weakness among a segment of the peasantry of his day.²¹

The key difference between Hu Feng and Zhou Yang in this exchange is over who has the authority to evaluate both the typical circumstances realist literature is agreed to reflect, and the typicality of characters within these circumstances. For Hu Feng, it is the critic himself, based on personal observation and evaluation; for Zhou Yang, the critic must be guided by “correct worldview,” which is provided for him, implicitly by the Communist Party.

Zhou Yang was, politically at least, the victor in these exchanges: he retained his position as the leading Communist cultural authority for the three decades that followed, until his overthrow in the mid-1960s and his condemnation by his *de facto* successor Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 as a “counter-revolutionary double-dealer.”²² While Hu Feng spent much of the war in the Nationalist capital Chongqing, Zhou Yang traveled from Shanghai to join the Long Marchers in the revolutionary base areas, becoming head of the Lu Xun Academy in Yan’an;

²⁰ Hu Feng, “Realism: A Correction,” in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 345–55, qtd. on 352, emphasis in the original.

²¹ Zhou Yang, “Dianxing he gexing” (Types and individuals), essay of April 1, 1936, *Zhou Yang wenji* (Collected works of Zhou Yang) (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1984), 1:163–69.

²² Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, “Ping fangeming liangmianpai Zhou Yang”, *Hongqi* (January 1967):14–36, translated as “On the Counter-revolutionary Double-dealer Chou Yang,” *Chinese Literature* (March 1967), 24–71.

his view of the party's authority and its "correct worldview" determining the writer's interpretation of reality, and thus presentation of the typical, became generally accepted. Zhou's influence is evident in the document that, although constantly subjected to reinterpretation, was accepted as the definitive statement of Chinese Communist Party policy on the arts: Mao's Yan'an "Talks." In the section of the "Talks" that mentions the typical, an elegant passage later known as the "six even mores", used in the Cultural Revolution to justify the portrayal of preeminent heroes, Mao rules that "Life as reflected in a work of art can and should be even more lofty, even more intense, even more concentrated, even more typical, even more ideal, and thus even more universal than actual everyday life."²³ Here Mao follows Soviet cultural doctrine in his implication that it is the responsibility of the vanguard to define what constitutes life, and thus what creates the conditions that make for typicality. In the context of the literary debates at Yan'an and elsewhere during the war years, leaving such crucial definitions with the inheritors of May Fourth subjectivity and ambiguity at Yan'an would not have been conducive to the unity desired by the party. That this passage, and others in the "Talks," would be subject to such radical reinterpretation at the end of the Mao era could not have been anticipated at the time.

The fortunes of Hu Feng and Zhou Yang diverged further in the early 1950s. Hu Feng was a victim of the first major political campaign in the arts following Communist victory, resulting in imprisonment and prolonged mental illness, as Zhou Yang was securing his leadership role. Zhou was again to cite changing times and consequent changes in typical circumstances in his recrafting of the meaning of the typical for the People's Republic: in a speech to the second Writers' and Artists' Conference in 1953, he called on writers to portray

²³ Mao Zedong, "Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua", in *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 3:804–35, qtd. on 818, translation mine. For a translation of this text, see Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 458–84; the "six even mores" passage is on 470. The earliest extant text of Mao's "Talks," from 1943, is reproduced in Takeuchi Minoru, ed., *Mo Takutō shū* 毛泽东集 (Tokyo: Hokubō sha, 1970–72), 8:111–48; this edition notes differences between the 1943 text and the revised version included in post-1949 mainland editions of Mao's works. Here, as in the version of the 1943 text translated by Bonnie S. McDougall as *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1980), there are only five "even mores," the first, "lofty" *gao* 高, being a later addition, and "organized" *you zuzhixing* 有组织性 in the 1943 text being replaced by "intense" *qianglie* 强烈.

the “lofty spiritual quality of ordinary people” and the “positive characteristics of the typical” as models for emulation. For Zhou Yang, as Li Xiuqin observes, ordinary people were no longer ordinary in socialist China, and there was a tendency for typical characters to become typical heroic characters, drawn exclusively from the ranks of the workers, peasants, and soldiers.²⁴ The representative was giving way to the exemplary.

Typicality and Class: He Qifang, Li Xifan, and Others in the Continuing Debate over Ah Q

In an essay written during the Hundred Flowers movement of 1956 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the death of Lu Xun, the poet and critic He Qifang focused on what he judged to be Lu Xun’s most important work, “The True Story of Ah Q,” and its central character, the “immortal type” Ah Q. He Qifang reviewed and discounted a number of opinions on Ah Q: first, that he is not a peasant because he claims to be the scion of a noble family—He Qifang asserted that Ah Q has nothing in common with the landlord classes and cannot be one of them; second, that he is an ideological type only, a monster constructed of all the faults of the Chinese people—in He’s opinion, Ah Q is a real flesh-and-blood individual; and third, that he is typical only of the backward peasant classes—He Qifang believed that this is too narrow a view and that Ah Q has representative qualities that go beyond his class.

He Qifang focused on Ah Q’s outstanding trait, his capacity for spiritual victory (*jingshen shenglifa* 精神胜利法), the use of devious logic to claim victory when he has been humiliated. He claimed that this quality represents the national character, as distilled by Lu Xun from contemplation of his fellow nationals while studying in Japan. For He Qifang, Ah Q was a type that transcends class, as all typical characters must: “if typicality is entirely equivalent to class nature, then only one typical character can be written about per class, and after classes are done away with, it will never be possible to write typical characters

²⁴ Li Xiuqin, “Dianxing renwu” (Typical characters), in Nan Fan, ed., *Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenxue piping 99 ge ci* (99 [Key]words in twentieth-century Chinese literary criticism) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 2003), 256–60, qtd. on 257.

again.”²⁵ He Qifang condemned those who begin from preconceptions of class identity and behavior in analyzing characters in either literature or real life.

He Qifang’s views on typicality and class were challenged almost immediately by Li Xifan, a young critic who had made his name two years earlier by means of an attack, coauthored with a fellow student, on the scholar Yu Pingbo 俞平伯, whom they accused of failing to read the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* in terms of class; that essay had gained the attention and approval of Mao Zedong.²⁶ It was thus to be expected that Li Xifan would insist on viewing the acknowledged typicality of Ah Q in class terms. Li Xifan’s essay “*Guanyu A Q zhengzhuan*” 关于阿 Q 正传 (On “The True Story of Ah Q”) begins by characterizing Lu Xun as the Chinese equivalent of Lenin’s Tolstoy, the mirror of revolution. For Li Xifan, Lu Xun’s story had to be read in the context of the 1911 revolution; to regard Ah Q as a more general portrait of the Chinese peasantry would be to deny the advances made in the intervening years, especially since the establishment of the People’s Republic. Li asserted that all typical characters, however unique and complex their personalities, “still belong to a race and a class in a definite historical period.”²⁷ Ah Q’s home village of Weizhuang was an environment typical of its time, the last days of empire; the conclusion of the story, in which the hapless protagonist is led off to execution, is also a typical circumstance, in that it represents the willingness of the ruling classes to sacrifice the peasantry. To Li, Ah Q was typical only of the backward laboring peasantry of a specific historical period, and to regard him as any kind of composite or representative beyond his class and age would be erroneous.

In a subsequent article dealing specifically with the typical, Li Xifan returned to He Qifang’s opinions on Ah Q and his attempts to forge a general theory of the typical that would embrace not only Ah Q but

²⁵ He Qifang, “Lun A Q” (On Ah Q), in He Qifang, *Wenxue yishu de chuntian* (Springtime for literature and art) (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1964), 1–14. A note on the pagination of this volume: the introduction has page numbers 1–39; it is followed by a table of contents numbered pages 1 and 2; and the collected essays (of which the one on Ah Q is the first) begin with a third page 1.

²⁶ Mao Zedong, “Guanyu *Hongloumeng* yanjiu de xin”, in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), 5:134–35; “Letter Concerning the Study of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*,” in *Selected Works* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), 5:150–51.

²⁷ Li Xifan, “Guanyu A Q zhengzhuan”, in Li Xifan, *Xianwai ji* (Collected overtones) (Shanghai: Xin wenyi chubanshe, 1957), 13–32.

also Don Quixote, Granny Liu, and other characters from the Chinese literary tradition. Li acknowledged He Qifang's contribution to recent debates that had followed the publication in China of an editorial from the Soviet journal *Kommunist* on the typical as a defining characteristic of socialist realism.²⁸ Li felt that the Chinese contributors to the debate prior to He Qifang had paid insufficient attention to their country's cultural heritage; however, he repeated his opposition to any suggestion that the character of Ah Q could transcend his age and class, and that he could be anything but the product of the feudal ideology of a particular age. Li also objected to what he regarded as He Qifang's abstraction of the "subjectivism" of Ah Q and Don Quixote to represent a common spiritual weakness of humanity, accusing He Qifang of oversimplification. After reiterating his arguments about the specificity of class identity in all typical characters, Li permitted himself only the generalization that Ah Q "encapsulates the history of blood and tears over the humiliation and defeat of the whole nation following the Opium Wars."²⁹ For Li Xifan, typical characters, however great their power, remain rooted in their *zeitgeist* and their place in society.

This round of the debate subsided during the years of the Great Leap Forward, but Li Xifan's criticisms clearly rankled with He Qifang, who might have expected more respect from his younger and less accomplished (though quite celebrated) interlocutor. He Qifang devoted much of the substantial introduction to a collection of his essays published eight years after their exchange to a restatement and defense of his views on the typical. He accepted the generally held view that typical characters combine the universal and the individual and emphasized the importance of the universal, claiming that the most influential typical characters are memorable for qualities that transcend social class; in the case of Ah Q, he maintained that there are Ah Q-esque characters in both the exploiting and the oppressed classes. He rejected Li Xifan's accusation of abstraction of typical

²⁸ The editorial, from December 1955, was translated in the Chinese literary journal *Wenyibao* in early 1956. It is summarized in D. W. Fokkema, *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence 1956-1960* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 77-81. The editorial's cautions against "scholastic formulas" and "dogmatism" occasioned a brief softening of the insistence on party standpoint in all definitions of what constituted typicality.

²⁹ Li Xifan, "Dianxing xin lun zhiyi—guanyu A Q dianxing wenti de shangque" (Questioning new theories of typicality—Discussion of the question of the typicality of Ah Q), in *Xianwai ji*, 33-47.



Figure 1. Ah Q, sketch by Feng Zikai 丰子恺, from Geremie R. Barmé, *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai (1898–1975)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 286. Barmé provides the original citation: Feng Zikai, Huihua Lu Xun xiaoshuo 绘画鲁迅小说 (Illustrations for Lu Xun's Fiction) (Shanghai: Wanye shudian, 1950).

nature, insisting that he had not ignored the factors of class and history, though he had given them a less decisive role. He repeated his earlier assertion that if typicality simply meant class nature, literature would suffer; his views may have been strengthened by his readings of the heroic fiction of the Great Leap and its aftermath that had been written since his last debate with Li Xifan.

Two further interventions from the end of the 1950s show the extent to which the side represented by Li Xifan in his exchange with He Qifang over the nature of the typical was to become dominant: a 1958 article in the belligerent style of the Antirightist Campaign by a critic called Tang Tao 唐弢, returning to the subject of the typicality of Ah Q in an attack on the literary theorist Feng Xuefeng, a principal target of the campaign; and, dating from two years after that, an essay by Yao Wenyuan that goes some way to explaining the focus on the exemplary rather than the representative as typical in the years that followed.

Tang Tao's "*Lun A Q de dianxing xingge*" 论阿 Q 的典型性格 (On Ah Q's typical nature), subtitled "Condemnation of Feng Xuefeng's Views on the Arts That Are Opposed to Realism and the Discourse of Class" (*Pipan Feng Xuefeng fan xianshizhuyi, fan jieji lun de wenyi guandian* 批判冯雪峰反现实主义, 反阶级论的文艺观点) denounced Feng's pretensions to be a Marxist literary theorist and attacked the position attributed to Feng (resembling the position taken earlier by He Qifang) that Ah Q is a type that can be found in all classes. Tang Tao paraphrased this to claim that Feng saw Ah Q as a concept that could be removed from the struggles of his day and applied to any class, and reasserted the by then normative view that Ah Q is representative only of his class and his time.³⁰

Writing in 1960, Yao Wenyuan followed precedent in starting his discussion of the typical with the character of Ah Q, but also included two peasant characters from more recent works of fiction; he used these three fictional characters, from works depicting three different historical periods, to demonstrate how changing realities (in this case, different stages in the Chinese Revolution) produced differences in the typical. The two heroic figures from the fiction of the 1950s were Zhu

³⁰ Tang Tao, "Lun A Q de dianxing xingge—pipan Feng Xuefeng fan xianshizhuyi, fan jieji lun de wenyi guandian". Essay dated 7 April, 1958, first published in *Wenji yanjiu*, reprinted in *Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi lunwen ji* (Selected essays on socialist realism) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1959), 315–34.

Laozhong 朱老忠, from Liang Bin 梁斌's civil war novel *Hongqi pu* 红旗谱 (Keep the red flag flying), and Liang Shengbao 梁生宝, from Liu Qing 柳青's collectivization novel *Chuangye shi* 创业史 (The builders).³¹ In the case of Ah Q, Yao offered the now familiar argument that the character was representative not of the worst of the national character or of defects common to all humanity, but of the particular conditions of a peasant class that was "not allowed to join the [1911] revolution" by the ruling class. In contrast, the other two characters—Zhu Laozhong, representing what Yao defined as the new democratic period of the 1940s, and Liang Shengbao, from the socialist era following Communist victory—did take part in revolutionary activities. Yao identified class hatred and Communist Party leadership as the defining elements that make the civil war peasant rebel Zhu Laozhong typical of his day; he saw Liang Shengbao as representing a peasantry walking the road of socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party. Both should be seen as distinct from Ah Q, a member of a subjugated class with no revolutionary vanguard to lead it; the typical peasant had become a heroic figure by virtue of the different ages and circumstances. Yao ventured to predict the next generation of typical peasant characters: heroes taking collectivization forward into the new age of the people's communes. Yao thus anticipated Xiao Changchun 萧长春, the central figure of Hao Ran's first epic novel, *Yanyangtian* 艳阳天 (Bright sunny skies), of which the first volume appeared in 1962, and the towering heroes of Cultural Revolution literature.

The debates of the late 1950s and '60s, combative as they might be, generally stayed within the confines of civility—for example, He Qifang and Li Xifan referred to each other punctiliously as "comrade" throughout their exchange. Following the upheavals of the mid-1960s, the launching of the Cultural Revolution, and the downfall of almost the entire cultural establishment, a sterner and more authoritarian line ensued, with even the mildest heterodoxy condemned as seditious. The definition of the typical, although claimed to be derived from the same authorities, notably the texts by Engels and Mao cited above, became limited to the heroic, and the prime examples of heroic

³¹ Yao Wenyuan, "Cong A Q dao Liang Shengbao—cong wenxue zuopin zhong de renwu kan Zhongguo nongmin de lishi daolu" (From Ah Q to Liang Shengbao—Looking at the historical road of the Chinese peasantry from works of literature). Essay dated December 1960, in *Zai qianjin de daolu shang* (On the road forward) (Shanghai: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1965), 301–16.

characters cited in discussions of the typical were a few selected figures from a very limited group of works.

“The Basic Task”: Instructions for Understanding and Portraying the Typical in the Cultural Revolution

Cultural Revolution writings on the typical, like other writings on the arts from the period, are inextricably linked to the development and promotion of a body of works in the performing arts, principally Beijing Opera, known as the Revolutionary Model Works (*yangbanxi* 样板戏). The adaptation or refinement of these works into their final form as models for all artistic creation was credited to Jiang Qing and conventionally dated as beginning with her first involvement with the original works at a forum on operas with contemporary themes held in Beijing in 1964. Her speech to the forum, “Tan jingju geming” 谈京剧革命 (On the revolution in Beijing Opera) was her first statement on the further politicization of the arts in the Cultural Revolution, and marked her return to elite politics after a long period of illness and ostracism.³²

The clearest articulation of Cultural Revolution aesthetics, including official views on the typical, came ten years later, in the mid-1970s, at a time of intense factional rivalry for succession as Mao and other leaders of his generation neared death. The achievements of the Cultural Revolution, the Model Works chief among them, were declared to be under attack by revisionists and counterrevolutionaries (though control of the media by the group that included Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan prevented the public expression of any such views); writing groups headed by Minister of Culture Yu Huiyong 于会泳, himself the composer of music for the models, launched a ferocious counter-attack on the unnamed enemies. The focus of the adaptation of the operatic models, from the 1964 productions to their canonization as Model Works three years later, had been on the single heroic figure in each, and defense of the operas was essentially defense of these central figures, most notably Yang Zirong 杨子荣, scout for a civil

³² Jiang Qing, “Tan jingju geming,” *Hongqi* 6 (June 1967): 25–27; translated as “On the Revolution in Peking Opera,” *Peking Review* 20 (May 12, 1967): 13–15. The speech was not included in initial documents emanating from the forum.

war Communist guerrilla detachment, and Li Yuhe 李玉和, railwayman and underground Communist Party agitator in the resistance to Japan, respectively the heroes of the operas *Zhiqu Weihushan* 智取威虎山 (Taking Tiger Mountain by strategy) and *Hongdengji* 红灯记 (The red lantern).³³ These are the “typical characters” of their day, referred to no longer simply as “types” (*dianxing* 典型) but as “heroic types” (*yingxiong dianxing* 英雄典型). The title essay in a 1974 collection titled *Jingju geming shinian* 京剧革命十年 (Ten years of revolution in Beijing Opera) announced that the creation of such heroic types drawn from the ranks of the revolutionary classes (workers, peasants, and soldiers) was an essential prerequisite for transforming the world in the image of the proletariat, showing the victories achieved by the Chinese people under the rule of the Communist Party, and realizing the dictatorship of the proletariat in the arts.³⁴ Much of this volume (and many similar collections) was taken up with pieces attributed to the companies performing Model Works about the creation of their central heroic types. In an influential article, this was declared to be the “basic task” of the arts under socialism. The examples given for such characters were drawn exclusively from the Model Works, with Yang Zirong and Li Yuhe mentioned much more than any of the others.³⁵

Typical characters, in their Cultural Revolution manifestation, were entirely exemplary, the embodiment of the qualities of strength, wisdom, loyalty, and courage attributed to the working classes as idealized (or fantasized) by Jiang Qing and her associates.³⁶ The typical circumstances in which they emerged were the product of the struggles or contradictions in the party’s official reading of the history of the

³³ Texts for the final versions of the *yangbanxi* can be found in *Geming yangbanxi juban huibian* (Collected libretti of Model Works) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1974).

³⁴ Chu Lan, “Jingju geming shinian” (Ten years of the revolution in Beijing Opera), in *Jingju geming shinian* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1974), 12–22.

³⁵ These two operas, their central heroes, and the stars who portrayed them appear to have been the closest to Jiang Qing’s heart; her biographer Roxanne Witke met both actors during the time she spent with her subject, and included these interviews in *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

³⁶ For an example of Jiang Qing’s generalization of proletarian qualities: she explained to Roxanne Witke why she demanded of the actress playing the hunter’s daughter Chang Bao in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* that she no longer slump down when telling of the death of her mother: “Working-class people don’t sit down and bury their heads when they cry...they cry standing.” *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing*, 423.



Figure 2. The actor Tong Xiangling 童祥苓 as Yang Zirong 杨子荣, from the performance edition of *Zhiqu Weihushan* 智取威虎山 (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 1971), 278.

Chinese Revolution in the Mao era, that is, the years since the early revolutionary activities of Mao Zedong.³⁷

A substantial elaboration of the meaning of the typical in Cultural Revolution literature can be found in a textbook titled *Makesizhuyi wenyi lilun jiben wenti* 马克思主义文艺理论基本问题 (Basic questions of Marxist artistic theory), published internally for use by students at universities in the northeast in 1973, just before the campaign to defend the Model Works.³⁸ The authors followed the line taken by Li Xifan and Yao Wenyan in writings cited above that typical characters are exclusively the product of their class and age, restricting themselves to the proletarian class in the Mao era. Yang Zirong, the most engaging of the opera heroes and the one subject to the most extensive revision process, was cited as the exemplar of the new form of the typical: “The artistic image of Yang Zirong fully expresses the proletarian class qualities of daring to make revolution and excelling at making revolution, profoundly embodies the spirit of an age in which the proletariat is fully involved, and clearly represents the direction in which history is developing. For these reasons, Yang Zirong is a heroic type with the characteristics of the proletariat, and the proletarian spirit of the age of thoroughgoing proletarian revolution.”³⁹ Individual as well as universal qualities (*gexing* as well as *gongxing*) were acknowledged as necessary, but the perceived universal qualities of the proletarian class in the Mao era received the greater attention; the craftiness with which Yang infiltrates the enemy stronghold and the valor he displays in his confrontation with the bandit chief were given as the qualities that make him individual, the Hegelian “*Dieser*” cited by Engels. Reference was made to the celebrated letters from Engels to Margaret Harkness and Minna Kautsky; an antidote to the passivity of the working class pointed out by Engels in his review of *A City Girl* was offered in the person of Fang Haizhen 方海珍, worker heroine of the opera *Haigang* 海港 (On the docks), one of only two initial Model Works set after 1949. The circumstance that produced her was the promulgation of

³⁷ See Jiang Tian 江天, “Nuli suzao wuchanjieji yingxiang renwu” (Strive to portray proletarian heroic types), in *Tan “santuchu” de chuanguo yuanze* (On the creative principle of the “Three Prominences”) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1974), 31–38.

³⁸ Dongbei diqu ba yuanxiao wenyi lilun bianxiezu, *Makesizhuyi wenyi lilun jiben wenti* (Basic questions of Marxist literary theory), dated October 1973. The volume was supplied to foreign students at Liaoning University in 1976.

³⁹ *Makesizhuyi wenyi lilun jiben wenti*, 129.

the documents of the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress, at which Mao reiterated the importance of class struggle. This historical moment, or typical circumstance, was said to permit Fang Haizhen simultaneously to fight the forces of nature, wrong-headedness in her colleagues, and a (barely) concealed class-enemy saboteur.

All the examples of typicality in the textbook mentioned above were taken from the operatic models. Heroic types in other literary forms created after opera reform were described in other critical works of the day as being the result of the application of the “valuable experience of the Model Works” (*yangbanxi baogui de jingshen* 样板戏宝贵的精神). The greatest fictional hero of the age, Gao Daquan, the central figure of Hao Ran’s monumental novel *Jingguang dadao* 金光大道 (The golden road), of which the first two volumes were published in 1972 and 1974, was said to have been the product of both the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism and the process of typification (*dianxinghua* 典型化) found in the Model Works.⁴⁰ Gao Daquan is everything a peasant cadre should have been, from the Cultural Revolution standpoint: absolutely loyal to Mao and instinctively opposed to initiatives from other leaders, charismatic, self-sacrificing, capable, and bold, an amalgam of the finest heroic qualities identified by Lan Yang in his study of the fiction of the Cultural Revolution.⁴¹ In the years following the death of Mao, the three parts of his name, *gao* 高 (lofty), *da* 大 (large), and *quan* 泉 (spring of water, homophonous with 全 complete), were cited derisively as a measure of the lamentable predictability of the typical characters of the era.

From the debates of the 1930s to the end of the Cultural Revolution forty years later, readings of the typical were subject to the tendency of Communist Party literary authorities to demand increasing subservience to the political priorities of the moment, to the point where discussions of the typical abandoned the increasingly esoteric arguments over what constituted the typicality of Ah Q and became exclusively concerned with exemplary characters drawn from the revolutionary classes in the Mao era; in the passage from Ah Q to Yang Zirong, the typical character had gone from everyman to superman. Post-Mao

⁴⁰ Fudan daxue zhongwenxi *Jingguang dadao* pinglunzu, *Jingguang dadao* pingxi (Critique of *The Golden Road*) (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1976), 25.

⁴¹ Lan Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998).

critics did not take long to reject the Cultural Revolution discourse and to draw on a much larger sample of (principally Western) theorists and literary characters; Liu Zaifu 刘再复, for example, like Hu Feng in his early debates with Zhou Yang, called for a greater role for author subjectivity and denounced the mechanical determination of typical characteristics based exclusively on normative notions of class.⁴² Discussions of the typical have withdrawn from political center stage and now find their rightful place in Marxist literary theory.

⁴² Qtd. in Li Xiuqin, "Dianxing renwu," 259.

USE THE PAST TO SERVE THE PRESENT; THE FOREIGN TO SERVE CHINA

Tina Mai Chen

Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, cofounders of the Chinese Communist Party, brought an iconoclastic nationalism characteristic of May Fourth China to their understanding of communist political organizing and the applicability of Marxism to China.¹ During the May Fourth period, slogans of nineteenth-century reformers such as “Chinese knowledge for essence, Western knowledge for practical use” seemed to have reached a radical endpoint.² The emphasis was not on supplementing a presumed preexisting Chinese essence but on taking up Western learning to create a new Chinese essence. As Chen Duxiu and other leading intellectuals turned to various Western political philosophies and practices for inspiration, the “West” appeared open for appropriation in the remaking of China as a modern nation-state.³ They envisioned the West as a counterpart to a Chinese past they considered to be outside history. In this intellectual and sociopolitical milieu, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded and a young Mao Zedong developed his own thoughts on revolution, nationalism, and socialism.⁴

In the late 1910s, Mao Zedong deemed very little in the Chinese or Western past to be relevant to China’s present and future. He denounced the “total emptiness and rottenness of the mental universe of the entire Chinese people” and asserted that the problematic attitude of “praising the past and denying the present” was

¹ See Lin Yu-sheng, *Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (New York: Atheneum, 1973).

² Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova and Oldrich Kral, eds., *The Appropriation of Culture Capital: China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).

³ This process is characteristic of anticolonial and anti-imperial nationalism. See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁴ For example, Stuart R. Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On: The Legacy of a Ruler,” *The China Quarterly* 137 (Mar. 1994): 125–43.

found “not just in our nation but in the West as well.”⁵ This negative assessment continued to inform Mao’s thinking on the relationship between past and present as he moved from his pre-Marxist to his Marxist phase. However, as Mao engaged more substantively with historical materialism and materialist dialectics, the jettisoning of past for present and wholesale acceptance or rejection of “China” or the “West” was replaced by calls for interaction between past and present, the foreign and China, rooted in dialectics and a Marxist standpoint. In 1956, in an address to music workers, Mao summed up this approach in the phrase “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*” (古为今用, 洋为中用), “use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China.”⁶ The complete phrase at this time primarily circulated in exchanges with cultural workers, historians, and philosophers, but during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution it entered mass circulation.

Scholars tend to present “use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China” as shorthand for CCP policies on “the suspect past and the corrupting foreign” or the ideological nature of writing history in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), particularly from 1949 to 1976.⁷ In this interpretation, the phrase “use the past to serve the present” connotes top-down control and a stifling of intellectual curiosity and analytic rigor. Yet this formulation elides the methodological debates surrounding historical materialism and materialist dialectics within China, and their connection to the phrase.⁸ This chapter, by contrast, considers how the theoretical opening up of Marxism-Leninism and its Stalinist form to include mass participation in

⁵ Ibid.; also Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1924, Volume 1: The Pre-Marxist Period, 1912–1920* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 5–6, 132, 232, 250, 329.

⁶ Mao Zedong, “Tong yinyue gongzuozhe de tanhua,” 24 August 1956, excerpted in Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu bangongting, Zhongyang dang’anguan bianyanbu, eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian 1915–1992*, 4 vols. (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 1996), 3:1168–1174. Cited in Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 1.

⁷ For example, Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*; Jerome Ch’en, “Letter from Jerome Ch’en,” *Modern China* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1979): 525.

⁸ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Party Historiography in the People’s Republic of China,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 17 (Jan. 1987): 82.

revolutionary dialectics emerged out of philosophical and historiographical debates. These legitimated more formulaic applications of historical materialism to cultural politics, so that both came to be encapsulated in the phrase “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong.*”

History, Historiography, and the Dialectics of Time and Space

Mao's conceptualization of the relationship between past and present developed alongside his understanding of Marxism-Leninism and his emerging relationship with Chen Boda, Marxist theorist and professor of ancient history. Chen understood dialectical materialism to be a dual process in which Marxism-Leninism guided understanding of Chinese reality at the same time that Chinese reality guided understanding of Marxism-Leninism.⁹ The resultant emphasis on “sinifying” Marxism-Leninism aligned the urban-based Chen Boda with the rural-based Mao Zedong. They contested the interpretation of the “returned students” who stressed the scientific nature of Marxism and the universalism of Marxism-Leninism over Chinese particularism in the pre-1949 debates. These early debates over the relationship in Marxism between past and present, foreign and China, general and particular highlight the intertwined nature of methodological and philosophical questions and contests over leadership and revolutionary direction in China.

Mao's 1937 “Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism” called for struggle against the “various outworn philosophies of China” and liquidation of the country's philosophical heritage as the precondition for revolutionary success.¹⁰ The following year his tone toward the past shifted as he focused less on the heritage to be overcome and more on the revolutionary roots to be uncovered. At the party's Sixth Plenum in October 1938, Mao insisted that the “standpoint and methodology” be distinguished from the “letter” of Marxism-Leninism. This distinction was important in strengthening Mao's ideological preeminence in

⁹ Raymond F. Wylie, “Mao Tse-tung, Ch'en Po-ta and the ‘Sinification of Marxism,’ 1936–1938,” *The China Quarterly* 79 (Sept. 1979): 447–80.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, “Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism,” in Nick Knight, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 17 (Jan. 1987): 82.

the CCP vis-à-vis Moscow and the Comintern and opened space for the sinification of Marxism. The result was a formulation of History that accepted a Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist periodization, emphasized a voluntaristic interpretation of Marxism, and envisioned the peasantry as a revolutionary force.¹¹ But these key principles of Maoism as articulated in the pre-1949 period were not uncontested with the founding of the PRC. The theoretical questions of the 1930s that came to be associated with the phrase “Use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China” continued in the post-1949 period when contests over party leadership and revolutionary direction converged with central questions regarding the application of Marxism to China, China’s historical legacy and stage of development, relations with Moscow, and the very meaning of “the past” and “foreign” in China’s revolution.¹²

Mao used the phrase “Use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China” in 1952 and 1956,¹³ but only at the end of the Antirightist Campaign in 1957 did it come into widespread use in the general media.¹⁴ A survey of *Renmin ribao* indicates that during the most radical moments of Maoist revolutionary praxis—namely the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution—revolutionary discourse emphasized spatially and temporally articulated use-value assessments of knowledge. During the Great Leap Forward period (1958–1961), the phrase “Use the past to serve the present” was at the center of debates that conjoined philosophical concerns regarding materialism and idealism to political campaigns that sought to create **revolution-**

¹¹ On voluntarism in Mao’s thinking, see Maurice Meisner, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism: Eight Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Nick Knight, *Marxist Philosophy in China: From Qu Qiubai to Mao Zedong, 1923–1945* (New York: Springer, 2005). On the role of the peasant, see James P. Harrison, *The Communists and Chinese Peasant Rebellions: A Study in the Rewriting of Chinese History* (New York: Atheneum, 1971); Kwang-Ching Liu, “World View and Peasant Rebellion: Reflections on Post-Mao Historiography,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 40, no. 2 (Feb. 1981): 295–326.

¹² For debates in the 1930s and 1950s on the relevance to China of the Stalinist five stages of history, see Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Edward Q. Wang, “Between Marxism and Nationalism: Chinese Historiography and the Soviet Influence, 1949–1963,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 9, no. 23: 95–111; Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “Back to the Past: Chinese Intellectuals in Search of Historical Legitimacy (1957–1965),” *Berliner China-Hefte/Chinese History and Society* 31 (2006): 3–23.

¹³ Generally, see *Lishi yanjiu* 5 (1958).

¹⁴ Place of publication is significant. *Renmin ribao* did not cover theoretical discussions. These are found in *Hongqi*, *Wenyibao*, and *Lishi yanjiu*.

ary subjects as the motive forces of history. Five years later, with the launching of the Cultural Revolution, when the phrase “Use the past to serve the present” primarily appeared paired with “Use the foreign to serve China,” the combination drew upon the earlier Great Leap Forward circulation of “*gu wei jin yong*” but also coexisted with campaigns against the “Four Olds,” remnants of the past, signifiers of the West, and Soviet revisionism. In order to understand how and why the foreign and past were linked to the radical politics and generally present-focused and China-centered analyses of socialist revolution during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, we need to analyze the phrase in relation to debates on cultural form, historical writing, and dialectical materialism; and to the political struggles associated with the articulation and enactment of Maoism.

Late 1957 and 1958 witnessed renewed attention to methodological questions and the relationship between the past and present, particularly in the fields of philosophy and history, as well as cultural and literary theory.¹⁵ Citing Mao’s immersion in the *Chu ci* (Songs of the South) beginning in December 1957, Stuart Schram suggests that the revolutionary romanticism evident in the Great Leap Forward and the call for romanticism in literature initiated in 1958 were instances of Mao himself “using the past to serve the present.”¹⁶ In the broader circulation of the phrase “*gu wei jin yong*,” a number of articles published in April 1958 outlined its connections with specific political campaigns. Some articles directly invoked the Great Leap Forward; others situated discussions of the phrase in terms of related campaigns to stamp out poisonous weeds, counter rightist thinking, create people with “red and expert” knowledge, and encourage the building of socialist society.

In the cultural realm, the issues centered upon representation of historic figures in plays, as well as the need to produce works that

¹⁵ Circulation of the phrases “*gu wei jin yong*” (use the past to serve the present), “*hou gu bo jin*” (厚古薄今, stress the past not the present), and “*hou jin bo gu*” (厚今薄古, stress the present not the past) correspond with other phrases prominent in historiography and politics, namely “*yi lun dai shi*” (theory has to take the lead over data), “*shi lun jiehe*” (data and theory have to be combined), and “*lun cong shi chu*” (interpretation has to emerge from data). See Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, “On *Shi* and *Lun*: Toward a Typology of Historiography in the PRC,” *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 (Dec. 1996): 74–95.

¹⁶ Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On,” 131. On this question, Schram cites Pang Xianzhi, “Guji xinjie gu wei jin yong” (A new understanding of ancient works: making the old serve the new), in *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* (Mao Zedong’s reading life) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986), 215–16.

highlighted class struggle in historical contexts. A *Renmin ribao* article entitled “Waking up Those Who Stress the Past, Not the Present” clearly delineated the relationship among cultural representation, historical writing, and revolutionary progress.¹⁷ In conjunction with various other 1958 articles, it articulated several interlocked issues that informed the relationship between past and present in Maoism. One, it reiterated acceptance of Marxist historical periodization as relevant to China; two, it presented Marxist history through the framework of Stalinist categories and upheld the prominent position of Stalin’s *Short Course of the History of the All-Russian Communist Party* for Mao Zedong;¹⁸ three, through references to Soviet socialist realist hero Pavel Korchagin, it suggested an alternative spatial organization of “China’s past” that was not confined to the geographic borders of the PRC; and four, it framed subsequent discussions regarding the political stakes of historiography and gave notice to historians who had settled into the past following the Antirightist Campaign. The historians’ immersion in the past was being interpreted politically: it would not suffice to remove oneself and one’s work from the politics of mass mobilization, revolutionary praxis, and its historical contextualization. Each point spoke to the issue of people’s participation in historical transformation, the politics of mass mobilization, and the “correct line” within a two-line historiography.¹⁹

Significantly, the ways the article invoked Stalin’s *Short Course* and Pavel Korchagin signaled that the relationship between past and present within China was also about China’s role in global revolution and the need to articulate a revolutionary Marxism-Leninism contra revisionist and feudal tendencies elsewhere. Foreign/China and past/present could be recategorized according to their revolutionary nature. Even though “*yang wei zhong yong*” was not typically paired with “*gu wei jin yong*” in the late 1950s, calls to use the past for the present

¹⁷ Lu Ge, “Hou gu o jin de ren xinglai” (Waking up those who stress the past, not the present), *Renmin ribao* (April 4, 1958), 7.

¹⁸ On Stalin’s *Short Course of the History of the All-Russian Communist Party in China*, see Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948–1953* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

¹⁹ David Holm, on the *Liu Zhidan* affair, argues “in the area of Party history there was to be a shift from a relatively healthy pluralism to an historically untenable monism, and, . . . a decisive shift in the direction of doctrinaire leftism.” David Holm, “The Strange Case of Liu Zhidan,” in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 104–23.

rested upon the complexities of Sino-Soviet relations and the meaning of the Soviet Union in China, which included almost a decade of intense Soviet influence in and aid to the PRC.²⁰ The Soviet novel and film featuring Pavel Korchagin acquired meaning for Chinese audiences in terms that brought to the masses the academic debates regarding revolutionary dialectics, historiography, and the relationship of past to present, universal to particular.²¹ Following Chen Boda and Mao's preference for the "standpoint and methodology" of Marxism-Leninism, Korchagin's revolutionary spirit was to inspire and enable Chinese revolutionary success (the particular), which in turn would redefine the global socialist movement (enriched Marxism-Leninism). This framing further invoked a temporal component because it located Korchagin's personal and collective struggle diachronically and synchronically within the history of the PRC. He was part of the contemporary effort to build socialism in China, while also recognized for the historical role that he and others had played in the establishment of Soviet socialism. The multiple temporal schemas that coexisted in the relatively simple didactic propaganda surrounding Korchagin point to another important aspect of "using the foreign to serve China": a historical chronology that moved from Soviet history—encapsulated in the October Revolution—to the establishment of the PRC and leadership of Mao Zedong such that Mao's China was the October Revolution in its most advanced form.²²

As the example of Korchagin and the broader circulation of Soviet film and literature in the PRC demonstrate, at the level of mass culture, the foreign was serving China as part of the enactment of Maoist revolutionary dialectics on the mass level. But in the mid-1950s and the Great Leap Forward period, the phrase "*yang wei zhong yong*" did not widely circulate in theoretical, policy, or popular discourse.

²⁰ Shen Zhihua, *Sulian zhuanjia zai Zhongguo, 1948–1960* (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbao chubanshe, 2003); Thomas Bernstein and Hua-yu Li, eds., *China Learns from the Soviet Union: 1949–Present*. (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2010).

²¹ Yu Min-ling, "A Soviet Hero, Paul Korchagin, Comes to China," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 29, no. 2–4 (2002): 329–55; Sun Yifeng, "Opening the Cultural Mind: Translation and the Modern Chinese Literary Canon," *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (Mar. 2008), 13–27; Tina Mai Chen, *Electric Shadows and Everyday Internationalism: Soviet Film and the Making of Socialism in the PRC, 1949–1976* (manuscript in progress).

²² Tina Mai Chen, "Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s," *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004): 82–114.

Rather, the primary focus was on the relationship between past and present within a conjoined national-internationalist frame. Campaigns and academic debates linked to “*gu wei jin yong*” at this time primarily criticized Chinese approaches to knowledge informed by revisionism, dogmatism, and idealism. As leaders associated with Mao Zedong advocated “*gu wei jin yong*” as a means to get rid of the “poisonous weeds” sprouting in China in the late 1950s, the phrase was increasingly linked to a stated desire to strengthen Marxist philosophy and its “fighting capacity” within China.²³

Philosophy and history constituted important terrains upon which the fighting capacity of Marxist theory in China was to be worked out. In these fields, the relationship between past and present, revolutionary potential of historical actors and the revolutionary consciousness of those who studied them, found expression in carefully articulated analyses. In 1958, rather than arguing that the study of the past should be jettisoned, theorist Lu Ge engaged in a sustained methodological discussion of how the study of the past must be approached through the prism of the present. He held that those with expert knowledge of the past should not insulate themselves from present concerns; instead their knowledge of past issues should serve the present. Experts on ancient China thus were called upon to embrace the sayings “*wen gu er zhi xin*” 温故而知新 (looking at the past in perspective to gain an understanding of the present) and “*gu wei jin yong*” (use the past for the present). In this way, they could write history according to scientific Marxism and thus contribute to the scientific culture of the Great Leap Forward.

The scientific Marxism Lu Ge associated with the Great Leap Forward was based in Marxism-Leninism as developed in China—or Maoism. It was rooted in rural peasant struggle and voluntarism and reflected Chen Boda and Mao’s insistence on Chinese reality as the mirror in which Marxism-Leninism was reflected.²⁴ This was the very position that the “returned students” had criticized as antithetical to the scientific general principles of Marxism-Leninism. The sanctioned

²³ Zhang Xuehui, “Zhaxue jiaoxue yao miandui xianshi houjin bogu” (Philosophical studies confront the practical aspects of “stress the present not the past”), *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 26, 1958), 7.

²⁴ On Chen Boda’s ideas as practice during the Great Leap Forward, see Ke An, “Yi ben jiechuan shengui mimi de shu—Pingjie ‘Pochu mixin’” (A book to unmask the secrets of gods and ghosts—discussing “doing away with superstitions”), *Renmin ribao* (Nov. 5, 1958), 7.

scientific Marxism within China now reflected a different understanding of the relationship between general and particular than that which had characterized Soviet education of Chinese in the 1930s. But again, the specific relationship and its methodological implications for cultural politics and history were not fixed. Several dimensions of how scientific Marxism was connected to the phrase “*gu wei jin yong*” can thus be considered, including political campaigns undertaken during the Great Leap Forward linked to Mao’s theory of permanent revolution and the ideal of “red and expert,” as well as the history debates of 1962–64.

Mao’s theory of permanent revolution 不斷革命 (*buduan geming*), which he clearly distinguished from Trotsky’s similarly named theory, simultaneously reinforced the need for China to move through all stages of history in order to arrive at socialism and blurred the boundaries between stages of the revolution.²⁵ This meant that more than one struggle could proceed at the same historical moment and that the materialist base and ideological superstructure need not be in a position of equilibrium.²⁶ Mao’s positive assessment of a universal law in which “things forever proceed from disequilibrium to equilibrium, and from equilibrium to disequilibrium in endless cycles. It will be forever like this, but each cycle reaches a higher level” heightened the role of human consciousness in historical progress. As Mao wrote in Article 22 of the “Sixty Articles on Work Methods”: “Ideology and politics are the supreme commander; they are the soul. Whenever we are even slightly lax in our ideological and political work, our economic and technical work will certainly take a false direction.”²⁷

This focus on ideological and political work as the application of Maoist theory explains why “*gu wei jin yong*” circulated in the cultural realm as well as in debates over historiography and Marxist-Leninist theory. What distinguished its use in the former, however, was the

²⁵ Stuart R. Schram, “Mao Tse-tung and the Theory of the Permanent Revolution, 1958–1969,” *China Quarterly* 46 (Apr–June 1971): 221–44.

²⁶ This distinction was summed up in the 1964 Maoist dictum, “One divides into two,” contra “the Rightists” who advocated “Two unites into one.” The competing interpretations of the dialectical method reflected different concepts of revolutionary subjectivity and assessment of the historical stage and desirability of revolutionary mass politics. Wang Ruoshui, “The Maid of Chinese Politics: Mao Zedong and His Philosophy of struggle,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 4, no. 10 (Autumn 1995): 66–80.

²⁷ Mao Zedong, “Sixty Articles on Work Methods,” in Schram, “Mao Tse-tung and the Theory of the Permanent Revolution, 1958–1969,” 226–29.

prescriptive nature of the phrase. Cultural policy and its calls to “scrape away the corroded layers” that prevented identification of the sprouts of socialism in ancient works²⁸ primarily was directed at enacting rather than theorizing “*gu wei jin yong*” (much in the way that the circulation of Pavel Korchagin enacted rather than debated “*yang wei zhong yong*”). The directives issued to cultural workers in the Great Leap Forward in which the phrases “*gu wei jin yong*” and “*yang wei zhong yong*” appeared put into practice a Maoist mode of combining Chinese reality with Marxist-Leninist theory even as that theory and its implications were being debated elsewhere.²⁹

In May 1958, the Deputy Director of the Propaganda Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, Zhou Yang, stated that the leap forward for cultural institutions would accompany economic development and therefore was located in the materialist base, whereas the leap forward for cultural thought was to be at the forefront of class and production struggle and instill the highest degree of socialist spirit.³⁰ Zhou privileged ideological consciousness as he called for the immersion of cultural workers in the lives and class struggles of the workers and peasants so that each could raise the level of the other and enable “red and expert” cultural units to emerge from the ranks of the people. He and others thereby connected production of proletarian literature that “used the past to serve the present” to the “to the countryside movement”³¹ so that “*gu wei jin yong*” promoted a particular mode of political participation that was, in the first instance, concerned with consciousness and the need to push the ideological superstructure to its progressive limits.

²⁸ See Zang Kejia, “Guachu tonglu” (Scrape away oxidized copper), *Renmin ribao* (May 8, 1958), 8.

²⁹ Shelun, “Duokuai hao shengdi fazhan shehuizhuyi wenhua yishu shiye (More quickly economize and develop the cultural and artistic institutions),” *Renmin ribao* (May 8, 1958), 1.

³⁰ Xinhuashe, “Wenhua yishu gongzuozhe bixu renzhen gaizao ziji zou zai wenhua geming de qianlie” (Cultural and artistic workers must resolutely resolve to be at the forefront of revolutionary culture), *Renmin ribao* (May 8, 1958), 1.

³¹ Sun Shikai, “Laodong duanlian de xianhua zai gongzuo anwei jiegou, Renmin daxue xiafang guilai ganbu gongzuo, sixiang huanre yi xin” (The flowers of the labor reeducation bear fruit: Returning sent-down cadres at the People’s University have a new outlook for work and thinking), *Renmin ribao* (Jan. 7, 1959), 6; Cheng Yusi, “Wengu er zhi xin” (Understand the present by reviewing the past), *Renmin ribao* (Mar. 17, 1959), 7.

In the unity of theory and practice applied to the cultural realm through the phrase “*gu wei jin yong*,” the dialectic interaction leaned toward the ideological superstructure.³² Following Zhou Enlai’s 1959 endorsement of policies associated with “*gu wei jin yong*,” it became a principle extolled for its applicability to all fields including agriculture, science, and politics.³³ Here, the theoretical relationship between past and present was not foregrounded; rather, the phrase functioned as shorthand for the application of Maoist revolutionary dialectics. By the second half of the Great Leap Forward, it appeared embedded in directives, editorials, and general propaganda that promoted peasant experiences as the basis for revolutionary consciousness and addressed the widening gaps between mental and manual labor, town and countryside, and worker and peasant.³⁴ The use of the phrase to promote integration with the masses also included substantial writings on the development of minority cultures according to “*gu wei jin yong*.” The focus was on peasant material practices and knowledge, distance from superstition and religion, and the recognition of specific experiences of

³² See “Zai zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi di san jie quanguo weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi shang de fayan, Zai ‘guweijinyong’ de yuanze xia ruhe zhengli zuguo nongxue yichan Xin Shuzhi weiyuan de fayan” (Talks at the First Plenary Session of the Third Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference: Talk by Committee Member Xin Shuzhi: How to clean up the national agricultural legacy under the principle of “making the past serve the present”), *Renmin ribao* (April 26, 1959), 12.

³³ In articles directed at science workers, “*guweijinyong*” was linked to the realization of “*sanjiche*” (three-in-one combination). “Zai zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi di san jie quanguo weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi shang de fayan: Xin de shisheng guanxi jianli qilai le Chen Fanzhong weiyuan tan zai gaodeng jiaoyu gaige zhong shoudao de qifa” (Talks at the First Plenary Session of the Third Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference: Talk by Committee Member Chen Zhongfan: Thoughts on higher education reformation—The new teacher-student relation is established), *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 28, 1959), 16.

³⁴ “Zai zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi di er jie quanguo weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi shang de fayan: You canhui you ganji Song Yunbin weiyuan de fayan” (Talks at the First Plenary Session of the Second Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference: Talk by Committee Member Song Yunbin: Feel ashamed, but grateful), *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 29, 1959), 16; “Zai di er jie quanguo renmin daibiao dahui di yi ci huiyi shang de fayan: Jianzhu sheji gongzuo zou dui le lu Liang Sicheng daibiao de fayan” (Talks at the First Plenary Session of the Second National People’s Congress: Talk by Committee Member Liang Sicheng: Architectural design is on the right track), *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 30, 1959), 14; “Zai zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi di san jie quanguo weiyuanhui di yi ci huiyi shang de fayan: Guanyu wenwu ‘guweijinyong’ wenti Shen Congwen weiyuan de fayan” (Talks at the First Plenary Session of the Third Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference: Talk by Committee Member Shen Congwen: Some questions on how to “make the past serve the present” in cultural relics), *Remin ribao* (May 7, 1959).

minority peoples as essential to the building of Chinese socialism. The conclusion was that “to stress the present, not the past” was a principle of scientific socialism.³⁵

In early 1959, debate over the relationship of general to particular, past to present, foreign to China suggested by the equation of “*gu wei jin yong*” with scientific socialism seemed closed, but the disastrous end of the Great Leap Forward and resultant upheavals and factional politics within the CCP meant otherwise. With the weakening of Mao’s position immediately following the failure of the Great Leap Forward and his insistence in 1962 on return to class struggle as a primary contradiction, historians once again turned to consider the dialectics of time and space within the Chinese Revolution.³⁶ In 1963 and 1964, Marxist historians within China took up the question of the interpretive and evaluative criteria for the application of Marxism to China.³⁷ In the leading historical journal, *Lishi yanjiu*, Lin Ganquan argued that “class viewpoint and historicism are completely coterminous and unified” and “class viewpoint is the basic core of historical materialism; it encompasses within it the necessity for historicism.” Ning Ke, following the position outlined by Jian Bozan during the late 1950s, countered that while Marxist historical analysis required the unity of historicism and class viewpoint, they were not identical approaches. He and advocates of the historicist position asserted that historicism corresponded to the dialectical view of historical change and class viewpoint to the materialist conception. One could not be folded into the other.

This debate became important for the politics of Maoist China and delineated a turning point in the circulation of the phrase “*gu wei jin yong*” because of its focus on the relationship between the material base, class relations, and the political and ideological superstructure of society. The historicist camp argued that no matter how exploitative the ruling classes of the past, they were necessary for historical

³⁵ Cheng Yusi, “Hou jin bo gu” (Stress the present, not the past), *Renmin ribao* (May 25, 1959), 8.

³⁶ Also important is the publication in 1962 of the multivolume “official” world history text edited by Zhou Yiliang and Harvard-trained Wu Yujin, based on the Soviet five stages of history. Luo Xu, “Reconstructing World History in the People’s Republic of China Since the 1980s,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 3 (Sept. 2007): 325–50.

³⁷ This summary of the debate is drawn from Arif Dirlik, “The Problem of Class Viewpoint versus Historicism in Chinese Historiography,” *Modern China* 3, no. 4 (Oct. 1977): 465–88. Fan Wenlan’s 1961 article “Do Not Shoot with Empty Bullets,” published in *Lishi yanjiu*, is credited with initiating the 1960s debate.

progress. In 1958, Jian Bozan sought to inject the historicist position into uses of “*gu wei jin yong*” by pointing to Marx’s writings on British imperialism and its progressive role in the development of India as an example of the past serving the present.³⁸ Furthermore, while Jian Bozan pointed to peasant production, class struggle, and patriotism as keys to study of the past, he argued that in earlier historical moments the peasantry had lacked a political consciousness that could bring about systematic change. These historic peasants were a class-in-itself (*zizai*), not a class-for-itself (*zawei*).³⁹ This position countered that of the “class viewpoint” camp, that mass consciousness was historically possible and was rooted in consistent and successful peasant resistance to ruling-class efforts to universalize their values. Since the late 1950s, the class viewpoint position had been associated with “using the past to serve the present” and calls for highlighting workers’ lives and their struggles as the primary area for historical inquiry.

These debates over Marxist dialectics and historical method reflected nuanced interpretations of Marxism and competing views on peasant consciousness, historical subjectivity, and political mobilization. The call for renewed class struggle at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee in 1962, alongside the conclusion of the debate in 1964 and the assertion that the masses were the motive force of history, however, meant that carefully articulated positions were simplified to fit political categories. Jian Bozan, Zhou Yang, Fan Wenlan, and the journal *Lishi yanjiu* were denounced for rejecting the existence of class conflict in history, evidential text criticism, and bourgeois tendencies. This pronouncement against historicism created the political conditions for the return of the phrase “*gu wei jin yong*” to mainstream publications. During the period from 1962 to 1965, precisely when the relationship between past and present preoccupied prominent historians, no more than eight articles per year published in *Renmin ribao* utilized the phrase, a significant drop from the Great Leap Forward period. But with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the number

³⁸ Jian Bozan, “Lishi kexue zhanxian shang liangtiao luxian de douzheng” (The struggle between the two roads in the field of historical science), *Renmin ribao* (July 15, 1958): 7. More generally, see Clifford Edmunds, “The Politics of Historiography: Jian Bozan’s Historicism,” in Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek, and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds., *China’s Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University East Asia Center, 1987): 65–106.

³⁹ *Beijingshi lishi xuezhì*, 1963, cited in Dirlik, “The Problem of Class Viewpoint,” 476.

rose dramatically; 55 articles in 1965 alone used it. Moreover, at this time the phrase increasingly was paired with “*yang wei zhong yong*.” As it gained wider circulation and import in revolutionary discourse and everyday life, its parameters narrowed so that “*gu wei jin yong*” and its counterpart, “*yang wei zhong yong*,” referred primarily to Cultural Revolution cultural policy and political directives.⁴⁰

Politically charged cultural representations of history figured prominently in the changing climate with renewed emphasis during the Cultural Revolution on “*gu wei jin yong*” that began with Jiang Qing’s vitriolic attack on *Li Huiniang* in 1964⁴¹ and the salvo directed at historian Wu Han’s play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*.⁴² This approach to culture—and the connections made to the phrase “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*”—was, on one hand, an application of the dialectics of time and space that characterized Maoist understandings of revolutionary dialectics, historical materialism, and the relationship between ideological superstructure and materialist base. On the other hand, the dialectical mode in which general and particular, past and present, foreign and China were continually to progress through moments of equilibrium and disequilibrium was often sacrificed to the political factions. By the fall of 1967, some of those earlier connected with the phrase, including Zhou Yang, came under investigation. Others like Chen Boda retained prominent positions during the early years of the Cultural Revolution but emerged on the wrong side of the Lin Biao—Gang of Four confrontation of 1970 and subsequently disappeared from public life.⁴³

⁴⁰ Historical discussions on the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi, took place as part of the Anti-Lin Anti-Confucius Campaign, echoed assessments of Mao Zedong, and appeared within the framework of using the past to serve the present.

⁴¹ Merle Goldman, *China’s Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 43–44, 106; Qi Xiangqun, “Chongping Meng Chao xinbian *Li Huiniang*” (Reevaluate Meng Chao’s new edition of *Li Huiniang*), *Renmin ribao* (Mar. 1, 1965), 5.

⁴² Tom Fisher, “‘The Play’s the Thing’: Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited” and Rudolf G. Wagner, “‘In guise of a Congratulation’: Political Symbolism and Zhou Xinfang’s Play *Hai Rui Submits His Memorial*,” both in Unger, ed., *Using the Past to Serve the Present*.

⁴³ Chen Boda was editor-in-chief of the theoretical party journal *Hongqi* from 1958 to 1970. He was instrumental in building up the Cult of Mao and wrote the June 1966 editorial “Sweeping Away all Monsters and Demons” that began the purges of the Cultural Revolution.

Not long after, Zhou Enlai became a target of the Anti-Lin Anti-Confucius Campaign.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, in December 1966, it was Chen Boda, Zhou Enlai, and Jiang Qing who took the lead with the “correct interpretation” of the past and foreign in revolutionary culture.⁴⁵ Chen highlighted those aspects of Maoism that had acquired meaning, in part, through references to “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*”: historical change could be initiated in the realm of art and literature; Maoism was an enriched development of Marxism-Leninism; the history of the CCP and PRC was characterized by a two-line historiography; and class struggle must be at the forefront of cultural and historical production. Chen then promoted the idea that under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing, Beijing opera, ballet, and symphonic music could be infused with new content that highlighted the heroic struggles of the masses. This reform accorded with the principles of “use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China, weed through the old to bring forth the new” (*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong, tui chen chu xin*). In this context, the phrases functioned to warn cultural workers of the need to emphasize class struggle and to summarize the correct conclusion to the earlier debates, rather than engage theoretical content. Zhou Enlai further reinforced the accepted parameters of use by stating that art and culture were to reflect society’s class struggles between the new and old, present and past (*xiandai* and *gudai*).

Jiang Qing also elaborated the framework through which past would serve present and foreign serve China, as she used the phrase to draw out continuities and global contexts useful for the political moment.⁴⁶ Not only did she attribute “*yang wei zhong yong*” to Mao, she argued for drawing out the positive aspects of China’s minority cultures as well

⁴⁴ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Jonathan Unger, ed., *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), Part I.

⁴⁵ Xinhuashe, “Quanguo geming wenyi dajun yan zhe Mao zhuxi zhiyin de fangxiang shengli qianjin, Shoudu juxing wenyi jie wuchan jieji wenhua da geming dahui” (The National Revolutionary Army of Culture and Art is making victorious progress under Chairman Mao’s guidance: Meeting of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution by the culture and art workers in the capital), *Renmin ribao* (Dec. 4, 1966), 1.

⁴⁶ Jiang Qing invoked Lu Xun, who had featured positively in debates over “*guwei-jinyong*” during the Great Leap Forward, as an exemplary practitioner of revolutionary culture. Chen Mingshu, “Lu Xun shi hou jin bo gu de weida bangyang” (Lu Xun is an outstanding example of “stress the present, not the past”), *Renmin ribao* (May 30, 1958), 7; Zang Kejia, “Guaqu tonglu,” 8.

as the outstanding art forms of all of the world's people. Her emphasis on the world's peoples, as opposed to foreign states, established connections between the people of China and those who participated in and supported socialist revolution globally. This reminds us that Jiang Qing's revolutionary Model Works⁴⁷ were expressions of "using the foreign to serve China," not a rejection of the foreign. Consider the appropriation of foreign artistic forms (*xingshi*) such as ballet to promote socialist revolution in China, the global references within Model Works such as *On the Docks*, and the simultaneous circulation of selected cultural products from North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and other places. The contemporary circulation of specific cultural products, including Soviet films like *Pavel Korchagin*, *Lenin in October*, and *Fall of Berlin*; Chinese revolutionary Model Works; and briefly in 1971–72, dynastic histories and *Dream of the Red Chamber*⁴⁸ functioned during the Cultural Revolution precisely as Zhou Enlai asserted culture should: they followed Mao's teachings to serve the peasant, worker, and soldier and "to stress the present not the past, use the past to serve the present, and the foreign to serve China."⁴⁹

The global references associated with "*gu wei jin yong*" during the Cultural Revolution were made explicit in a very lengthy article, first published in *Renmin zhi shengbao* on December 29, 1966 and reprinted in *Renmin ribao* on January 8, 1967.⁵⁰ The article juxtaposed revisionist states' embrace of "peaceful coexistence" with the revolutionary struggle of China. It detailed the positive connections between China and Albania in the global socialist struggle and referenced Mao's calls to "stress the present, not the past; use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China" and "weed through the old to bring forth the new." Next, the article asserted that Mao's attacks against counterrevolutionary and capitalist influences reflected the most advanced form of Marxism-Leninism, a claim substantiated by tracing Mao's

⁴⁷ The first group of Model Works (1967) included five modernized Beijing operas, two ballets, and one symphonic suite. 1972 saw a second group with a final total of 15.

⁴⁸ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 348–49.

⁴⁹ Xinhuashe, "Quanguo geming wenyi dajun yan zhe Mao Zhuxi zhiyin de fangxiang shengli qianjin Shoudu juxing wenyi jia wuchan jieji wenhua da geming da hui," 1.

⁵⁰ Xinhuashe, "Wei shenmo diguozhuyi he xiuzhengzhuyi lianhe zai yiqi fengkuang gongji zhongguo gongchandang he zhongguo wuchan jieji wenhua da geming?" (Why are imperialism and revisionism uniting in a frenzied attack on the Chinese Communist Party and the Great Proletarian Revolution?), *Renmin ribao* (Jan. 8, 1967), 1.

ideas to Lenin's writings, quoting Lenin on the need to struggle for the freedom of all people, and asserting that revisionists could not find support for their positions in Lenin's writings. Representing Maoism as the most advanced form of Marxism-Leninism reinforced the understanding of dialectical materialism associated with Mao and the class viewpoint, while positioning Maoism as a global political tool contra revisionism inside and outside China.

This use of "*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*" in the early Cultural Revolution period to privilege Chinese reality as a reference point for global struggles incorporated earlier theoretical debates while also justifying foreign policy and fueling internal factional struggle. But even though the prominence of the phrase grew out of earlier debates over the relationship within Marxism between general and particular, past and present, foreign and China, during the Cultural Revolution widespread circulation of the term reflected policy-oriented directives linked to particular leaders, as opposed to more confined historiographical debates. In this regard, the Cultural Revolution policy set forth by Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing to transform and develop theatrical art frequently coupled "Use the foreign to serve China" with "*bai hua qi fang tui chen chu xin*" 百花齐放, 推陈出新 (let a hundred flowers bloom, weed through the old to bring forth the new). This longer phrase recalled Mao's 1956 "use the past to serve the present" and the related campaigns, including the Antirightist Campaign during which the phrase gained mass circulation and Chinese responses to Khrushchev's secret speech at the twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The pairing also erased from PRC history and CCP/Maoist theory the methodological and theoretical questions that had informed earlier history debates. By using the inscription "*bai hua qi fang, tui chen chu xin*," written by Mao in 1942 for the founding of the Yan'an Institute of Beijing Opera, Jiang Qing created a presumably uncontested and unbroken continuity for Mao's "correct line" from Yan'an to the mid-1950s through the Cultural Revolution.

The use of "let a hundred flowers bloom, weed through the old to bring forth the new" as further elaboration of "*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*" became most prominent in 1973; the phrase appeared whenever the revolutionary Model Works were extolled for creating new revolutionary attitudes, attacking revisionism, and ensuring that world revolution would continue. This use coincided with the rise to power of the Gang of Four over Zhou Enlai and the recently rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping. By presenting the Model Works as the

fulfillment of policies set forth thirty years earlier, Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four (momentarily) resolved the debate concerning the relationship between material base and ideological superstructure in favor of Mao's writings on culture and consciousness. They also utilized the phrase to legitimate their leadership role over contending factions.⁵¹ This, however, proved a short-lived and contested elaboration of “*gu wei jing yong, yang wei zhong yong*.” By 1976, all these phrases once again required redefinition within the new political and theoretical context brought about by the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, the arrest of the Gang of Four, and the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The Post-Mao Years: From Dialectics to Pragmatism

In July 1977 an article entitled “Use the Past to Serve the Present or Use the Past to Serve the Gang” criticized the revisionist theories of Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four. Along with a number of other articles, it condemned the Gang of Four for hijacking revolutionary culture to serve the leftist counterrevolutionary and revisionist road. Even though this lengthy article carefully delineated their errors, on questions of theoretical and ideological errors the text amounts to a series of assertions meant to recuperate the thought of Mao Zedong and scientific Marxism for the CCP and PRC. In particular, the article sought to demonstrate that the Gang of Four had used the phrases “*gu wei jin yong*” and “*yang wei zhong yong*” for counterrevolutionary aims and had confused the interests of the exploiting classes with those of the people. Evidence to support this claim included a quotation from the Gang of Four, dated to the early Cultural Revolution, asserting that ancient and foreign culture were always reflections of the exploiting classes. This statement—which would align the Gang of Four with historicism and against a class viewpoint—was presented as an incorrect interpretation of materialism, historical materialism, and scientific Marxism. It proved the Gang of Four's viewpoint was not adequately Marxist, Leninist, or Maoist. Although the article indirectly invoked earlier historiographical debates concerning the possibility of a pro-

⁵¹ For example, Jiang Tian, “Shenru pi Lin pi Kong jixu gaohao wenyi geming” (Resolutely criticize Lin criticize Confucius, continue to strengthen revolutionary art), *Renmin ribao* (Feb. 8, 1974) 3. Also Wang Gungwu, “Juxtaposing Past and Present in China Today,” *The China Quarterly* 61 (Mar. 1975): 1–24.

gressive role for ruling classes at times of historical transition, in this instance the substance of the debates was not revisited. Instead, the correct line of Mao Zedong Thought based in the Yan'an period was reaffirmed and any claims to this line for the Gang of Four were debunked. There was, of course, a pragmatic politics to realignment of the phrase: the authority of Hua Guofeng rested upon the continued legitimacy of Mao Zedong as separated from the Gang of Four. This also meant that even though 1976–1978 saw a reappropriation of past and present, foreign and China, it was not until 1978 and the rise of Deng Xiaoping that a new historiography, equally rooted in questions of political power, emerged. At that moment, rather than analyze and debate the relationship between past and present, foreign and China, general and particular in order to develop a theory and practice of revolution informed by China's reality, historians turned to analyze feudal despotism.⁵²

One of the issues here—and perhaps why questions of historical materialism, revolutionary dialectics, and internationalist politics did not emerge as central foci of the renewed debates—was that the historical legacy and sets of foreign relations to be addressed by catch-all references to “the past” and “the foreign” had become increasingly complicated. The Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution as well as the Sino-Soviet split; normalization of relations with the United States; and support for Asian, African, and Latin American national liberation struggles added new layers of politics to China's “past” and the applicability of Marxist-Leninist theory.⁵³ Moreover, the dialectical method and theoretical innovations embraced by Mao from 1949 to 1976, which enabled peasants to become historical actors and positioned the cultural realm as central to historical transition, had fueled a radical politics loosed from material conditions. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, therefore, the phrase “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*” was associated with privileging of the ideological over the material, mass mobilizations, and formulaic applications of historical

⁵² Lawrence R. Sullivan, “The Controversy Over ‘Feudal Despotism’: Politics and Historiography in China, 1978–1982,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 23 (Jan. 1990): 1–31.

⁵³ For the impact of the third world identification in Chinese works of world history, see Dorothea A. L. Martin, “China: Finding a Place for Itself in Modern World History,” *The History Teacher* 28, no. 2 (Feb. 1995): 149–59; Ma Xueping, “Observations on the Life of Marxist History in East and West,” *Chinese Studies in History* 38, nos. 3–4 (Spring–Summer 2005): 36–68.

materialism to cultural politics. The importance of the phrase in philosophical and historiographical debate over Marxism's global applicability was overshadowed because these issues were not of interest to the new leadership. Under Deng Xiaoping, the new order questioned the legitimacy of Maoism and revolutionary history as the enriched form of a universal History created through dialectics of time and space. "*Gu wei jing yong, yang wei zhong yong*" thus appeared as summarizing phrases for an overly politicized use of history and the past that, on this new reading, had endorsed particularism and divergence from scientific Marxism and universal History.

Whether in the 1970s or the 1950s, the phrase "*yang wei zhong yong, gu wei jin yong*" acquired meaning through the ongoing engagement of Chinese leaders and intellectuals with questions of universal History and China's ability to participate in and define it. Whereas during the Great Leap Forward period, "*gu wei jin yong*" appeared in the context of debates over historical and philosophical methodology that had bearing on political action, during the Cultural Revolution the careful and relatively open exchanges concerning historiography that had marked the first few years of the 1960s ceased. In this context, and with the pairing of "*gu wei jin yong*" with "*yang wei zhong yong*," political action overdetermined methodological debate. Nevertheless, the combined phrase and its constituent parts were part of a sustained consideration of the temporal and spatial politics of socialist revolutionary praxis, dialectical materialism, and the motive forces of history. As a constitutive component of the revolutionary discourse throughout the Maoist period, "Use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China" simultaneously provided a framework for dynamic and innovative engagement with the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism and legitimated political power and cultural forms that sought to limit creative applications of general theory to the particular and shifting realities of socialist revolution in China and globally.

Although it may seem overly optimistic to adapt Marx's comments on the heterogeneity of history to the history of the PRC from 1949 to 1976, in the spirit of dialectics of time and space, I will conclude by suggesting we consider the broader implications of the phrase "Use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China" and how it reflects the theorizing and enacting of a politics of the universal and particular within history. To do so reminds us of the contributions Mao Zedong made to Marxist theory and the political stakes of theory and history as global projects. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted in

relation to the modification of Marxist categories in India: “The politics of translation involved in this process work both ways. Translation makes possible the emergence of the universal language of the social sciences. It must also, by the same token, destabilize these universals.”⁵⁴ If we apply this thinking to studies of revolutionary discourse in the Maoist period of the PRC we can extricate revolutionary phrases like “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*” from overly simple assumptions that they functioned in the first instance as political justifications. We can then better understand how the phrases came to function within particular political and methodological struggles. Equally important, we can counter the tendency to condemn these phrases—and Maoist revolutionary discourse more generally—as reflections of a particularized and therefore nonuniversal history. This is necessary not only as a historical exercise but also to remain aware of what Rebecca Karl has referred to as the burdens of history/historical burdens that inform calls for China to join universal History in the Maoist and post-Maoist “presents.”⁵⁵ This chapter thus not only offers an analysis of the phrase “*gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong*” but also calls for careful historicization of state-sponsored discourse in relation to destabilized universals, whether produced in the revolutionary period or the current postrevolutionary moment in which “use the past to serve the present, the foreign to serve China” has been replaced with the new slogan “linking up with the international track.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capitalism,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 676.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Karl, “The Burdens of History: *Lin Zexu* (1959) and *The Opium War* (1997),” in Xudong Zhang, ed., *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 229–62.

⁵⁶ Hongying Wang, “‘Linking up with the International Track’: What’s in a Slogan?” *The China Quarterly* 189 (Mar. 2007): 1–23.

WOMEN CAN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

Xueping Zhong

Tales One, Two, Three (and a Half)

“*Funü nengding banbiantian*” 妇女能顶半边天 (Women can hold up half the sky) is a Mao-era household phrase that most people have assumed to be a direct quote from Mao Zedong. The interesting truth is that it is actually not clear where and when Mao said or wrote it and, for that matter, whether or not it was a direct quote.¹ Regardless, together with another statement known to be from Mao—“Time is different. Men and women are equals. What men can do women can also do”²—“women can hold up half the sky” has remained one of the most widespread, influential, and long-lasting revolutionary phrases from the Mao era.³ As a newly coined metaphor, “half the sky,” or *banbiantian* 半边天, with an emphasis on women entering the workforce for “socialist construction,” signified a fundamental change in women’s social, cultural, and public positions. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the fact that women were “told” they could work together with men has become a point of contention in the

¹ In the introduction to *Holding up Half the Sky*, Tao Jie states that “in 1958, during the Great Leap Forward, the government again called upon women to leave their households to participate in productive labor. And in the early 1960s, Mao Zedong, then the highest authority in the country, praised women for being an important force in production, holding up half the sky.” However, Tao does not specify the source of Mao’s statement. *Holding up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Tao Jie, Zheng Bijun, and Shirley L. Mow (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004), xxvi. Incidentally, it is worth noting that despite the title, the book actually gives little attention to the Mao era, a common phenomenon in many books on Chinese women (unless they are specifically about the Mao era).

² “Shidai butong le. nannü dou yiyang. nan tongzhi neng zoudao de, nü tongzhi ye neng zuodao.” CCP Committee of Hunan Province, “Fully Bring out Women’s Initiative in the Revolution and Construction,” *Hongqi* (Red flag) 10 (1971): 63; quoted from Hongjun Su, “A Feminist Study on Mao Zedong’s Theory of Women and the Policy of the Chinese Communist Party Toward Women Through a Study on the Party Organ *Hongqi* (1959–88),” *Chinese Historians* 3, no. 2 (1990): 21–35.

³ If one googles the phrase, more than 42,000 entries appear; most state that the phrase is a direct quote from Mao but none offers the source—where and when Mao made the statement.

history of the CCP-led women's liberation movement (妇女解放运动 *funü jiefang yundong*), but *banbiantian* has remained a commonly circulated word meaning, in part, the continuing (albeit debated) legacy of the movement and its state-sponsored and work-oriented specificities.

Broadly speaking, both inside and outside of China, there have been, since the founding of the PRC in 1949, three trends—or, to borrow Margery Wolf's words, "thrice-told" tales—in assessing the CCP-led women's liberation, each associated with the larger historical context.⁴ The first occurred during the early part of the Cold War, especially in the 1950s and '60s, when China's women's liberation movement was admired by many third world countries and seen as a major achievement of the CCP-led Chinese Revolution and socialism.⁵ At the same time, with the iron curtain separating China from the West, the first tale of the women's liberation movement was passed along by indirect accounts that were general and few and far between. During the second-wave women's movement in the 1960s and '70s in the United States, in which women were encouraged to enter the workforce and to struggle for their right to equal pay for equal work, Chinese women's liberation, though not a model for emulation, appears to have been looked upon positively from a distance. The notion of "half the sky," specifically, seemed to be one of the few phrases from Mao-era China that met with positive acceptance in the West, especially among left-leaning intellectuals.⁶

The second tale, heard shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) in the early 1980s, almost completely changed the perspective. The positively perceived Chinese women's liberation movement began to be questioned on two fronts, both inside and

⁴ I refer to Margery Wolf's *A Thrice-told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), mainly to indicate the ongoing negotiations among feminist critics, both inside and outside China, in their assessment and understanding of the CCP-led women's liberation.

⁵ Official publications during the Mao era are among some of the obvious sources where positive views are found. But contacts with elite women from some of the former "nonaligned" countries after the Mao era, as reported individually by writers and others, also seem to confirm that the Chinese women's liberation movement was once highly thought of in non-Western regions during the Cold War.

⁶ Not many books on Chinese women were published during this period. Existing ones include Marilyn Young, ed., *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1973); Delia Davin, *Woman-work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Julia Kristeva, *Des chinoises* (About Chinese women) (Paris: Éditions Des Femmes, 1974).

outside China. Inside China, criticism of women's status after *funü jiefang* or women's liberation was first made by female writers, such as Zhang Jie, Zhang Xinxin, and Yu Luojin, who published stories that expressed women's inner struggle over issues of love, marriage, position in the workplace, and their sense of what it meant to be a woman.⁷ In the West, feminist China scholars (in history, sociology, and anthropology) realized from their research the discrepancy between their imagination—indeed, their first tale—of China's women's liberation and the problems that the movement had failed to address. With works such as *Revolution Postponed* and *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women*, the critical sentiment came to dominate the second tale and, for the most part, has remained dominant in subsequent Western feminist critical assessments.⁸

There is, however, an interesting difference between the Chinese women writers' criticism and that of Western feminists within this second tale. The former, in the larger context of a Chinese intellectual revolt against the Cultural Revolution, turned inward to a culturalist position away from the social and the revolution. The dominant theme shifted from the social significance of women holding up half the sky to the cultural importance of women's searching for their femininity, a perceived key component of female identity that allegedly had gone missing in the spirit of "women holding up half the sky."⁹ Indeed, women writers' and critics' writings throughout the 1980s express an overwhelming sense of their dissatisfaction or discontent about what

⁷ The best known examples include Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai, shi bu neng wangji de, 1979) and "The Ark" (Fangzhou, 1982), and Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You" (Wo zai nali cuoguo le ni, 1981) and "On the Same Horizon" (Zai tongyi diping xian shang, 1981), to name just a few.

⁸ Systematic critical assessment of the CCP-led women's liberation movement began to appear in the early 1980s in the West (mostly in the United States), coupled with some sporadic writings by such Chinese women intellectuals as Li Xiaojiang that attempted to address women's issues in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. The former includes Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women: 1949–1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Brighton, Sussex: Wheaton Books, 1983); Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). The latter include the "Funü Yanjiu Congshu" (Women's studies series), ed. Li Xiaojiang (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1988).

⁹ For discussion on the difference between "*funü*" (women) and "*nüxing*" (female), see Tani Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: *Funü*, *Jiating*, *Guojia*," in Angela Zeto and Tani Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject, and Power in China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 253–90.

they perceived as a lack of proper understanding of what it meant to be a woman. Collectively, in other words, a shared voice from urban elite women demanded, as it were, their female identity back and insisted on turning inward to express their own desires. They wrote about women's desires for love, an ideal male companion, and sexual freedom, and about their inner struggles over their own identity (or lack thereof). Women scholars such as Li Xiaojiang, Dai Jinhua, and Meng Yue were also among the first to raise questions about related problems in the CCP-led women's liberation.¹⁰ Western feminist China scholars, many of whose perspectives were derived from the second-wave women's movement in the United States, tended to focus instead on the social and political dimensions of the shortcomings of the women's liberation. Women scholars identified and criticized such issues as the "double burden," the state's interest in seeing women as a source of labor, and the divide between rural and urban that also divided women in terms of (lack of) advancement in their social roles.

The rise to dominance of postmodern or poststructuralist feminism in the 1980s and '90s, especially in the West, influenced the emergence of what can be collectively identified as the third tale of the CCP-led women's liberation movement. This tale essentially followed the basic tone of the second tale, but further fragmented the issues by framing them within the poststructuralist discourse on gender and sexuality. Though this tale is by no means uniform and not without both validity and contradictions, it shows a rather serious willingness to detach *funü jiefang* or women's liberation from its own and larger—both national and international—historical contexts and situate it, negatively, within the postmodern critical discourse. Often, individual cultural texts produced in the Mao and post-Mao eras were selected for "symptomatic" analysis of the entire history and consequences of the liberation movement. Although symptomatic reading can be an important way to explore blind spots and to investigate necessary intellectually oriented speculations, the third tale produced within Western postmodern academic discourse is not without blind spots and

¹⁰ Li Xiaojiang began to publish on women's issues as early as 1983. Her first influential book, *Xiawa de tansuo* (Eve's probe), was published in 1985 (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House). The women's studies series Li edited published, among others, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Surfacing out of the historical horizon) (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1989) in which they studied some of the major May Fourth and post-May Fourth women writers whose works had been rendered invisible during the Mao era.

theoretical limitations of its own, especially when it comes to considering the complex relationship between the women's liberation movement and women's sense of their "self" (or, to use postmodern jargon, their subjectivity) constructed within.¹¹ Ironically, therefore, while feminist theoretical interventions significantly enriched a critical and gendered perspective toward the Mao-era women's liberation movement, they have also performed disappearing acts, further marginalizing and making light of, or making virtually invisible, the legacies of this liberation.¹²

Out of the second and third tales during the last three decades emerged a dominant perception regarding the CCP-led women's liberation movement, and it emphasizes the following points of contention: 1) that the liberation was a top-down movement that took women as objects of government protection; 2) that it was utilitarian in nature, in that when women were encouraged to enter the workforce (i.e., stepping outside their traditional domestic domains into public domains), they were looked upon mainly as labor resources; 3) that it was blind to "female specificities" and held women up to male standards—the CCP's gender-equality policies, in essence, are male-centric; and 4) as a result of these larger reasons, Chinese women did not learn to become "gender conscious"; instead, they became gender blind and were ignorant of their own femaleness, and also remained dependent on the state's protection. The central point of contention in all this appears to hinge on the specters of the state, the nation, and (the Chinese quest for) modernity, coupled with the assumption that national salvation is not also part of women's interests. And yet, as Lin Chun argues, some of the criticism(s) have a point, "for, like 'class,' 'gender' was also subordinated to the national project of revolutionary

¹¹ Historians such as Gail Hershatter and Emily Honig, anthropologist Lisa Rofel, and a few others have paid close attention to listening to the "individual voices" of women in post-Mao China and have offered rather nuanced discussions of how to understand them. See Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹² The impact of such "disappearance" can be constantly felt even in college classrooms both inside and outside China. In the United States, for example, most college students carry with them the impression that Chinese women are still oppressed, obedient, and conservative. An instructor trying to tell them there was such a major social change called the women's liberation movement and what that movement meant to generations of Chinese women can sometimes risk being accused of being apologetic for the Communists.

and socialist modernity. But, then, could women's liberation succeed alone without the independence and development of an oppressed people, for which women devoted themselves to the struggle?"¹³

What is more, despite sporadic scholarly attention, questions remain when it comes to our understanding of how generations of Chinese women learned to believe, regardless of the reality, that they were men's equals and how, along with various women-friendly policies and ideological campaigns, the Mao-era society, despite rural/urban differences and imbalance, also learned to accept the profound changes in gender relations and in women's social roles, and that women could indeed accomplish what the traditional social norms and political structure would deem unnatural or unwomanly.¹⁴ What is missing in most of these tales, despite their contribution to a necessary critical assessment of the Chinese women's liberation movement, in other words, is, once again, the linkage between the revolutionary-scale sociocultural changes in Chinese women's position and their sense of the self constructed within the context of various sociocultural practices symbolized by such phrases as "*nanü pingdeng*" 男女平等 (men and women are equals) and "*funü neng ding banbiantian*".

The complexity of this linkage does surface when Chinese women intellectuals respond to feminists outside of China, mostly in the West, with regard to the latter's assessment of the Chinese reception of Western feminism.¹⁵ A seeming contradiction—that Chinese women

¹³ Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 113.

¹⁴ In their efforts trying to understand the complexity of the women's liberation movement and its impact on Chinese women, scholars have conducted interviews and fieldwork in China. Their findings have demonstrated contradictory responses, and they have drawn different conclusions based on their own interpretations. See, for example, Honig and Hershatter, *Personal Voices and Other Modernities*.

¹⁵ One of the most vexing issues with regard to Chinese feminists' (regardless of whether or not they identify with the label) reaction to Western feminism has been their insistence on pointing out that in many ways Chinese women are more liberated than their Western counterparts and their reluctance to accept Western feminism wholesale as what they need to further gender-equality causes. Such expressions are commonly found in Chinese women intellectuals' responses. In English, see, for example, Wang Zheng, "Research on Women in Contemporary China," in Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, Susan Mann, and Lisa Rofel, eds., *Guide to Women's Studies in China* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1998), 1–43; Li Xiaojiang "With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China," in Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 261–77; Shu-mei Shih, "Toward an Ethics of Transnational Encounters,

themselves criticize the CCP-led women's liberation movement while also insisting that, in some ways, they were/are more liberated even than their Western counterparts—occurs every time the former encounter such questions as whether or not they are feminists and whether or not Chinese women are truly liberated.¹⁶ The fact that Western feminists keep running into resistance from Chinese women intellectuals who, consciously or unconsciously, hold the view that a wholesale acceptance of (Western) feminism is not what Chinese women need for their true emancipation, is in many ways part of the exchange between Chinese and Western feminists. The ambivalence in such responses signifies a continuously evolving effort by the Chinese women intellectuals to both critically assess the CCP-led women's liberation and acknowledge their own history, agency, and subjectivity within it. Such voiced ambivalence constitutes what can be identified as the 'third-and-a-half tale' in which Chinese women intellectuals (seemingly paradoxically) insist that Chinese women are no less liberated than their Western counterparts.¹⁷

Put differently, whether or not they have clearly thought them through with a "good" understanding of Western feminism, Chinese female intellectuals' responses express their unwillingness to forego their own identification with the legacy of women's liberation, and, for that matter, with such revolutionary phrases as "women can hold up half the sky" that once functioned, socioculturally and discursively, to help construct women as a different kind of modern social beings, and with the fact that such construction is simultaneously ideological and necessarily liberating. On a deeper level, therefore, this ambivalence has everything to do with the historical experiences of China's women's liberation movement and with the subject position constructed within it, in which women were told that they were men's equals and could and should "hold up half the sky." This was part of their

or 'When' Does a 'Chinese' Woman Become a 'Feminist'?', in Marguerite Waller and Sylvia Marcos, eds., *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3–28. In Chinese, see Li Xiaojiang, *Nüren: Kuawenhua duihua* (Women: Cross-cultural dialogues) (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2006).

¹⁶ Once again, ever since the beginning of exchanges between Chinese women intellectuals (writers, critics, and scholars) and Western feminists, this contradiction has been part of the dialogue. See notes 14 and 15.

¹⁷ Li Xiaojiang, Dai Jinhua, and Wang Anyi are some of the leading Chinese women intellectuals who come to mind who have made such claims.

own initiatives and beliefs. Additionally, what has motivated Chinese women intellectuals' criticisms of the CCP-led liberation movement may well be their recognition of continuing biases against women and, by extension, the unfinished nature of their liberation. Their complex, seemingly contradictory responses to the movement are thus two sides of the same coin; this needs to be better and fully recognized and understood with more focus on, among other things, the very notion of "women holding up half the sky" and its historicity.

Tale Four

By most accounts, in the Mao era the meaning of the phrase "women can hold up half the sky" lay in its emphasis on encouraging women to step out of their traditional roles into the political and public domains to participate in "socialist construction" and "socialist revolution." Critics have questioned what "political" and "public" meant within the context of the social and economic system of the time and whether or not such mobilization actually had women's interests in mind and was realized at the expense of women's gender difference. Our story must begin by both acknowledging this point of contention and avoiding the pitfall of the assumption that, when it comes to women, what is "political" and "public" is necessarily detrimental to them and somehow contradicts their female qualities.¹⁸

A "fourth-told tale" foregrounds the phrase *funü neng dǐng bānbiantian* in a way that is simultaneously conscious of both the shortcomings of the CCP-led women's liberation movement and its yet to be fully examined and acknowledged legacy embodied in that phrase. In this sense, this essay is by no means the first to recount tale four. It has already been started by memoirs and other kinds of writings by women

¹⁸ The individual-oriented approach to Chinese women's literature in recent academic trends has foregrounded the ambivalence of women in their participation in the Chinese Revolution and has highlighted the tensions between men and women in literary representations when the latter continued to run into male-centric and patriarchal biases against women. One effect of this approach, however, is the impression that women went through a different patriarch transition, from the familial father to a national father figure. The question remains whether or not Chinese women were really that passively manipulated, with no shared interests with the revolution and nation-state and no agency of their own. That cannot be explained away by feminist theories alone.

intellectuals who grew up in the Mao era.¹⁹ In conjunction with this group of emerging works and taking advantage of the overall theme of this volume, my discussion echoes their desire to fully acknowledge their collective experiences by revisiting some of the social, cultural, and discursive constructs of *funü neng dǐng banbiantian*, which, paradoxically, both profoundly changed women's social position and sense of self and rendered them less prepared to face social changes that were essentially regressive in terms of ensuring gender equality.²⁰

Specifically, the fourth tale argues that we must take into fuller consideration the connection between the work-oriented social and political changes in women's lives and the cultural and aesthetic expressions in the Mao era that encouraged women to see themselves as men's equals and to participate in public activities.²¹ By situating such expressions within the context of the "national project" that set the stage for women to move beyond the confines of their traditional roles (and, I might add, for a legacy that continues to inform the ongoing struggle for gender equality and justice), I orient the notion of half the sky back to the context of China's "socialist modernity" (Lin Chun's words). Taking the "three and half tales" and the implications of the aforementioned paradox as points of departure, I investigate how the combination of social changes and the state's version of gender-equality ideology, or "state feminism," helped generate and legitimize socio-cultural changes and aesthetic representations of women in the spirit of "half the sky," thereby helping generations of (especially young)

¹⁹ Examples include eleven memoir essays in Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di, eds., *Some of Us* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Ye Weili with Ma Xiaodong, *Growing up in the People's Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and an interview with Wang Zheng in the *Revolutionary Newspaper*, September 3, 2006 (<http://revcom.us/a/059/some-of-us-en.html>).

²⁰ For a more recent discussion of the CCP-led women's liberation movement, its historical significance, shortfalls, and complexities, and points of contention, see Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Amy D. Dooling, "A World Still to Win," *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 171–200; Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 113–28.

²¹ This is in reference to an ongoing project by Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, and Lisa Rofel on "women and work in post-1949 China." Wang Zheng, "Guowai xuezhe dui zhongguo funü he shehui xingbie yanjiu de xianzhuang" (State of studies on Chinese women and gender issues outside of China) (<http://www.wenhua.cn/article.asp?classid=10&articleid=2214>).

Chinese women to grow up believing that they were men's equals.²² Indeed, given the latest development in blatant gender discrimination in many social and private domains of post-Mao China, it is worth speculating why this revolutionary phrase continues to remain relevant and to be made anew as Chinese women struggle to reclaim the legitimacy of gender equality and to expand their social, cultural, and political horizons.

Existing studies of such major post-1949 CCP party media organs as *Hongqi* (Red flag, magazine), *Renmin ribao* (People's daily, newspaper), *Zhongguo funü* (Chinese women, magazine), and *Zhongguo funü bao* (Chinese women, newspaper) trace an unfolding of the official directives aimed at generating social, economic, and political changes in the PRC, among them the political and public pronouncements of the CCP's gender policies.²³ "*Funü jiefang*" or women's liberation quickly became a familiar catchphrase in the discourse of "socialist construction," and as women were encouraged to leave home and join the workforce, more women-friendly policies began to be announced and implemented, including equal pay for equal work, public child care and health care systems, and public canteens.²⁴ In articles published

²² This last assessment remains a controversial issue in that many writers, critics, and scholars (including Western feminist scholars of China) have argued and continue to maintain that such a construction is detrimental to women because they are made to identify with the "state" rather than with the "self." What I have suggested so far is the need to question such received scholarly assessments. The truth of the matter is that many Chinese women writers, critics, and scholars have remained far less clear-cut when it comes to assessing the legacy of the women's liberation movement. Their ambivalence toward Western feminism has to do with the fact that they do not accept that although Chinese women went through a state-led women's liberation movement, they are necessarily "less" liberated as individuals. The writings by Li Xiaojiang throughout the last two decades, for example, show a pronounced ambivalence toward both the legacies of the Chinese women's liberation movement and the Western feminist criticisms of the movement. See, for example, *Nüren: Kua wenhua duihua* (Women: Cross-cultural dialogues) (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing, 2006). Other prominent voices are Wang Anyi, a writer, and Dai Jinhua, a scholar. They all fluctuate between critiquing the legacy of the "gender-difference-blind" women's liberation and negating this profound social and gender revolution. Also see Wang Zheng, "Three Interviews: Wang Anyi, Zhu Lin, Dai Qing," in Tani Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 159–208.

²³ For specific discussion, see Hongjun Su, "A Feminist Study on Mao Zedong's Theory of Women and the Policy of the Chinese Communist Party Toward Women Through a Study of the Party Organ *Hongqi*," *Chinese Historians* 3, no. 2 (1990): 21–35.

²⁴ For specific listings of official announcements and directives, see All China Women's Federation, ed., *Zhongguo funü yundong bainian dashi ji: 1901–2000* (One hundred years

in these party organs, one finds increasing changes in emphasis on various aspects of women's issues that, for better or for worse, were always mixed with various political and economic campaigns, events, and movements.

Starting in the mid-1950s, along with the "*hezuoshe yundong*" 合作社运动 (cooperative movement in rural areas), mobilization of women into the workforce gained momentum in both rural and urban China; the trend continued into the Great Leap Forward and beyond. In the CCP gender discourse, incidentally, the idea that women should be encouraged to step out of the confines of the home and participate in production had been expressed much earlier than the founding of the PRC in 1949.

Modern male and female revolutionary intellectuals had seen the need to construct a public social domain as the site for women's emancipation. May Fourth women writers like Lu Ying, Shi Pingmei, Xiao Hong, and others wrote about the dilemma of "modern" females seeking "*zìyóu liàn'ài*" 自由恋爱 (freedom to find one's own love) and marriage with "modern" men only to find themselves trapped in traditional domestic roles and patriarchal relationships. Lu Xun's question, "What happens to Nora after she leaves home?" and his portrayal of Zijun in "Regret for the Past" were quite poignant at a time when women's liberation was not supported by a transformed social structure in which women could enter all walks of life and be looked upon as men's equals. Revolutionaries like Mao and others sought social and economic changes as the basis for women's liberation. In 1934, for example, Mao in "Our Economic Policies" wrote of the importance of women in the development of agricultural production.²⁵ In July 1949, shortly before the official ceremony of the founding of the PRC, Mao wrote an inscription for the inauguration of the women's magazine *Xin zhongguo funü* (Women of new China) stating: "United, participate in production and political activities, and improve women's economic

of major events in the Chinese women's liberation movement), ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo funv chubanshe, 2003); Zang Jian and Dong Naiqiang, eds., *Jin bainian zhongguo funü lunzhu zongmu tiyao* (A bibliographical guide to essays and works on Chinese women in the twentieth century) (Beijing: Beifang funv ertong chubanshe, 1996).

²⁵ Mao Zedong, "Women de jingji zhengce" (Our economic policies), *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 1:126–27.

and political positions.”²⁶ In 1950s and ’60s, Mao continued to write on the need for women to join the workforce and presented the issue as both necessary and positive for the PRC economic development and for changing women’s social positions.²⁷ Obviously, in the Mao era work and women were closely associated with the national modernization project.

Meanwhile, media and public pronouncements echoed Mao in setting the tone for the CCP’s gender-equality policies, which prepared for change in women’s social and economic positions and in the so-called “*lao fengjian sixiang*” 老封建思想 or old feudal views (on women). Despite the much-critiqued “double burden” of domestic duties and work outside the home, and the designation of women as “national resources,” there is no denying that “work” could also mean more for women themselves. For many, it was a new job and an opportunity to step outside the confines of their homes and gain a sense of independence. For others, “work” began to mean more than making a living or a means to survive in harsh conditions.²⁸ It also conveyed a sense that they were men’s equals in the society at large—an essential first step toward the construction of a different sense of the self. Being able to work, in other words, was the social basis on which the slogan “women can hold up half the sky” would appear possible and meaningful, especially to ordinary Chinese women after 1949. When

²⁶ *Xin zhongguo funii: Chuangkan hao* (The inaugural edition of *New Chinese Women*), July 20, 1949.

²⁷ Examples include his various comments on articles about women joining the workforce, in *Zhongguo nongcun de shehui zhuyi gaochao* (High tide of socialism in Chinese rural communities) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1956), 1, 2: 66, 357, 674–75.

²⁸ For existing studies on women and work in post-1949 China, see Marilyn Young, ed., *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1973); Delia Davin, *Woman-work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*; Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). In more recent publications on women and work in China, the focus is mainly on the post-Mao reform era. See “Women and Employment” in Tao Jie, Zheng Bijun, and Shirley L. Mow, eds., *Holding up Half the Sky* (even though the included articles focus primarily on the post-Mao era); Anne E. McLaren, ed., *Chinese Women, Living and Working* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Cheryln Skromme Granrose, ed., *Employment of Women in Chinese Cultures: Half the Sky* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2005); Ramara Jacka, *Women’s Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pun Ngai, *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in the Global Workplace* (Durham: Duke University Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

the “women-friendly” policies—such as maternity leave, child care, and health care—were put in place (mostly in urban centers), they not only made women’s participation in the workplace possible but also encouraged many women to want to do and be more.

Although the gender-equality policies were flawed and in essence still male-centric as well as subject to rural and urban differences, the work-originated changes in women’s lives and belief system fundamentally changed women’s social position and traditional views about them. Such a change within the historical context of twentieth-century China, to echo Lin Chun’s point mentioned earlier, was more essential than advocating changes on the basis of individual choice without the support of a changed and (as in the Chinese case it happened to be) a more women-friendly state-sponsored social structure. Chinese women’s entry into the public domain in this sense echoed the political demands in the second-wave women’s movement in the United States, even though the Chinese case has been critically judged by feminists for its “top-down” trajectory. This does not negate the fact that it was a “state feminist” endeavor that, regardless of its shortcomings, subsequently changed the traditional gendered social order. It is in relation to all of this that women, work, “half the sky,” and an empowered sense of self came to be unapologetically expressed in a range of cultural forms during the Mao era.

To be sure, cultural production in the Mao era of the PRC was very much in the hands of the state, and embedded within the grassroots-level mobilizations of women into the workforce, consciousness raising, and the state policies of equal pay for equal work were implications that women were the weaker sex and in need of protection as well as a top-down, politically correct “enlightenment.”²⁹ Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua correctly criticized women moving out of the patriarchal confines of the family only to find themselves trapped in the patriarchal confines of the state. But such a broad-stroke critique does not recognize women themselves as historical beings, the majority of whom were perfectly capable of recognizing where their own interests lay, and why work was liberating. What is more, within the context of the aforementioned tales and the context in which today’s Chinese women face benign neglect and even regression in gender policies

²⁹ For discussions on this point, see Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao*; Li Xiaojiang, *Nüren: Kua wenhua duihua*; Lin Chun, *Transformation of Chinese Socialism*.

and practices in the workplace and other social and public domains—increasingly crowded into female-specific ways of being—how do we reassess the subject positions of women who once truly believed that they were men’s equals?

Even though, as mentioned at the beginning, it is not clear when and where “*funü neng ding banbiantian*” was coined (most sources suggest that the phrase did not occur until the 1960s), on the cultural front shortly after the founding of the PRC, images of strong and healthy working women—as men’s equals in industry, agriculture, the military, and other walks of life, and as revolutionaries—began to gain positive value in the Mao-era mainstream culture. On the one hand, in such cultural forms as literature, film, drama, opera, and music, women began to be typecast into categories ranging from revolutionaries to those with revolutionary potential but in need of consciousness-raising and those who were conservative or even antirevolutionary. Post-Mao feminist criticism has questioned such typecasting of women for its connection with orthodox Marxist class theory and with traditional views on the shortcomings of women (such as pettiness, narrow-mindedness, and lack of intellectual capacity). On the other hand, representations of women from the same cultural texts carried a sense of new identity and sense of mission that strongly influenced—indeed inspired—generations of women who took pride in believing that they could do what men could do. There is something aesthetically powerful and attractive about women being able to imagine their own transcendence beyond the confines of home, family, traditional gender roles, and traditional demands for “femininity.” In what follows I visit some of the often dismissed representations of female heroes, workers, peasants, soldiers, and other women found in literature, film, opera, and music.

Some historians have both identified Mao as a feminist based on his writings from as early as in the 1920s on women’s issues in China, and critiqued the limitations of his women’s liberation vision, subsumed within his vision of revolutionary or socialist modernity.³⁰ Whether or not one wants to identify him as feminist and insists on debating his

³⁰ It is not uncommon to hear dismissive remarks made against identifying Mao as a feminist, or even women friendly, when critics point to his mistreatment of his wives and other women. This note is meant to indicate my awareness of this kind of criticism. Feminists are surely not unified on whether or not a man is a feminist if he treats “his woman” well while holding all kinds of traditional views on gender roles and gender relations.

intentions, Mao's writings on women's issues are oriented around the view of "work"—in the sense of participating in the revolution and in "socialist construction"—as a primary way for women to achieve equality with men. The complexity of Mao's particular brand of feminism is expressed not only through many of his other writings, editorial comments, and inscriptions encouraging women to join the revolution, to enter the workforce, and to do what men can do, but also in two of his poems, "Die lian hua: da Li Shuyi" (To Li Shuyi, written in the *dielianhua* tune, 1957) and "Qijue: wei nü mingbing tizhao" (On the photo of women militias, written in the *qijue* style, 1961), respectively.

The former is a poem written in the *ci* 词 style in response to a letter from Li Shuyi, whose husband Liu Zhixun (b. 1898) died in 1932. Specifically, Mao wrote about his first wife, Yang Kaihui 杨开慧, who was executed by the Nationalist military in 1930. Using the traditional female image of the legendary figure Chang'e, Mao celebrates the deaths of both individuals by transforming the sadness into a revolutionary poem. In it, Chang'e, the mythical female figure whose earthly transgression (of giving in to her own desire) caused her punishment of everlasting loneliness on the moon, becomes a heavenly figure who celebrates the ascending souls of such revolutionaries as Yang Kaihui and Liu Zhixun, who, together with millions of others who sacrificed their lives for the revolution, are celebrated for their transcendent spirit. The juxtaposition of one man and one woman in the same and equal position as ascending revolutionary spirits, along with one male and one female figure receiving gifts from the spirits, is not accidental. At least in this poem, Mao manifests himself as both a romantic revolutionary and a husband who, in lamenting the losses and celebrating their spirits, does not erase the gender difference in Yang as a woman. The poetic juxtaposition of Chang'e and Yang Kaihui can give rise to multiple readings, but the identification between the two is potentially feminist in that it beautifies and celebrates a woman's aspiration, pursued regardless of its consequences.

The second poem celebrates the female militias whose "*sashuang yingzi*" 飒爽英姿 (valiant and brave bearing) was captured in a photograph.³¹ It is written in *jue* style with only four lines.³² Some phrases stand out: "*sashuang yingzi*" (valiant and brave bearing) and "*zhonghua*

³¹ Mao Zedong, "Wei nüminbing ti zhao" (A poem on a picture of female militia), 1961.

³² 飒爽英姿五尺枪，曙光初照演兵场，中华儿女多奇志，不爱红装爱武装。

ernü duo qizhi, bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang" (China's daughters have high-aspiring minds, they love their battle array, not silks and satins). What has troubled many critics, especially in the West, of course, is the word "*wu* 武," which means martial, military, and militant, and, by extension, came to characterize what some young female Red Guards did—resorting to violence—at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.³³ Here I am unable to expand the discussion of this troubled connection except to caution against a sweeping generalization and implicit essentialism (that women by nature are not supposed to be violent) and double standard (women in the United States should be able to join real combat and may be as violent as men). The English translation, additionally, may not fully capture the larger connotation of some of the key words and the poetics within these lines. The first line describes not so much "manlike" women but women who, "with a valiant and heroic bearing, look bright and brave"; the latter phrase plays with the word *zhuang* or outfit/clothing in *hongzhuang* and *wuzhuang*, emphasizing the difference in women's looks or appearance from being traditionally feminine to revolutionary (captured by the word *wu*). In these lines echoes a heroism that transcends the traditional gender divide. It is at the same time poetic, idealistic, revolutionary, and aesthetically seductive, and consequently troubling to many critics.

Related to Mao's poetic celebration of female heroism is a much larger cultural phenomenon—that of representations of women as heroes, revolutionaries or would-be revolutionaries, or proud workers in various public domains—in books, film, opera, and music. Mostly young women were represented in a range of walks of life such as sports, industry, agriculture, the military, and education, as athletes, workers, peasants, soldiers, teachers, and governmental officials (cadres). In the last three decades since the end of the Cultural Revolution,

³³ The issue of young female Red Guards' violence has been much studied and debated among China scholars in the West. Embedded in some of the discussions, interestingly enough, is the assumption that somehow by nature women are not violent. Overpsychologizing the issue by attributing it to "sexual frustration" is another attempt at explaining that does not quite fit the bill, as it were. A look at the larger world and at history shows the issue is not somehow unique to this generation of Chinese women. For discussions on female Red Guards' violence, see Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters*; Ye Weili with Ma Xiaodong, *Growing up in the People's Republic*; *Morning Sun* (a documentary film produced and directed by Carma Hinton, Geremie Barmè, and Richard Gordon, 2003).

especially since the 1980s “*gaobie geming* 告别革命,” or farewell to revolution, intellectual rebellion in which the revolutionary culture as a whole was negated and marginalized, such representations of women in Mao-era cultural texts have been either ridiculed or ignored by critics inside and outside China, for their supposed lack of artistic quality, for being too propagandistic, or for using female characters symbolically in the male-centric modernization discourse. In many post-Mao works of literature, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the caricatured “*maliezhuyi laotaitai* 马列主义老太太,” or Marxist-Leninist grannies, came to represent what was perceived as the negative results of women’s liberation—that women are not suited for power positions due to their narrow-minded pettiness and lack of intelligence—further pushing Mao-era representations of women into the dustbin of history.

In the limited existing studies of these representations of women, additionally, critics have focused on a few icons, one of which is *White-Haired Girl*, which evolved from an opera in the 1940s to a film in the 1960s and finally a ballet during the Cultural Revolution. Specifically, critics have critiqued the ways changes in the story purified the image of the saved girl and ultimately “religion-cized” her savior, the CCP, thereby continuing to subordinate women in the position of the daughter (but in this case transporting her from the patriarchal family to the patriarchal state).³⁴ These criticisms correctly point out the hierarchical relationship between women and the state and the implicit traditional value that holds the role of daughter to symbolize women’s sexual purity and desirability. The irony, however, is that if the purification process in the story of “*bai mao xian gu* 白毛仙姑” (white-haired ghost) is symptomatic of the official ideology in controlling, among other things, the meaning of female sexuality, the image of the white-haired girl may not necessarily have been what most urban women in the Mao era learned to identify with. One problem in the

³⁴ Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, “Jie Yu: xingbie yu jingshen xingbie—guanyu zhongguo funü jiefang” (Epilogue: gender and spiritual gender—about women’s liberation in China), in *Fuchu lishi dibiao*, 263–69; Harry H. Koushu, “The White-Haired Girl and Li Shuangshuang: Female Visibility and the Socialist Feminism,” in *Lightness of Being in China* (New York, Washington, D.C./Baltimore, Boston, Bern Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Canterbury: Peter Lang, 1999); Haiyan Lee, “The Benighted and the Enchanted: Religion in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature,” paper presented at “Reconfiguring Forms, Genres, and Social Space in Modern China,” conference held at the Fairbank Center, Harvard University, April 29–30, 2006.

aforementioned criticism, then, is the fact that the white-haired girl is just one of many different representations of women; the existing readings of its evolution suffer from, among other things, using one story and its textual changes to generalize about the entire relationship between the state and people/women.

Images of revolutionary heroines and women in various workplaces in other cultural texts may have had a much stronger and longer-lasting impact on (especially young) Chinese women, and to echo the third-and-a-half tale, this may well underlie the seemingly paradoxical position held by contemporary Chinese female intellectuals toward Western feminism.³⁵ On the one hand, as Wang Ban points out, representations of revolutionary figures such as Lin Daojing in *Song of Youth* are mixed with elements that can simultaneously cut such representations adrift into other psychic domains more attractive than the seemingly one-dimensional revolutionary discourse that constructed them.³⁶ On the other hand, the revolutionary spirit—a specific kind of modern “sublime”—embedded in the representations of Lin Daojing and other well-known female characters also exudes a sense of pride in encouraging women to identify with (revolutionary) “working women.”

As already mentioned, alongside the images of women as victims saved by the state, such as the white-haired girl and sisters on stage (in the film *Wutai jiemei*, *Sisters on stage*), in the spirit of women holding up half the sky, a wide range of positive female images were also created and widely seen. In films, especially, such images seem more widespread and their influence appears longer-lasting (albeit ambivalently) than images of women whose lives were changed and who grew up in the Mao era. Zhao Yiman, Liu Hulan, Jiang Jie, Lin Daojing, Wang Fang (in *Yingxiong ernü*, *Heroic sons and daughters*), Wu Qionghua (in *Hongse niangzijun*, *Women's battalion*), and groups of female characters in films about youth such as *Nulan wuhao* (*Woman*

³⁵ In many memoirs written by women who grew up in the Mao era, authors often mention certain kinds of female images that strongly influenced their sense of self. See, for example, Wang Zheng, “Call Me ‘Qingnian’ but Not ‘Funiu’: A Maoist Youth in Retrospect,” and Wang Lihua, “Gender Consciousness in my Teen Years,” in Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di, eds., *Some of Us*; Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters*; Ye Weili with Ma Xiaodong, *Growing up in the People's Republic*.

³⁶ For a specific study of the modern history of the notion of the sublime in China, see Wang Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), in particular, the chapter on films produced in the Mao era representing the revolution and on the complexity of such representations.

basketball player number five), *Women Cunli de nianqingren* (Youngsters in our village), *Bingshang jiemei* (Sisters on ice), and *Nü tiaoshui duiyuan* (Female divers), women are represented with a hopeful tone, either as revolutionaries or as would-be-revolutionaries. As I have repeatedly mentioned, in some of the existing criticism, these female images are questioned for being subject to, or trapped in, the CCP's revolutionary or socialist modernity discourse, which, according to the critics, is propagandistic and does not fully take women's interests into consideration. But the accumulation of such criticism itself has become rather one-dimensional, especially when the notion of trapping is used in antithesis to that of liberation, leaving Chinese women with little possibility of claiming the complexity of their subjectivity in relation to the liberation movement.

The fact that many Chinese women intellectuals are unwilling to forgo the significance of the liberation, as expressed in their own creative writings, in their ambivalent responses to Western feminism, and especially in some of the memoirs written by women who grew up in the Mao era, complicates such criticism when many of them maintain the importance of images of revolutionary women in relation to their own sense of who they were/are as women. In the dialogue between Ye Weili and Ma Xiaodong, for example, the latter mentions the importance of "women warriors" to the formation of her sense of self.³⁷ Wang Lihua, in another collection of memoirs, writes about the images of Liu Hulan and of the "iron girl" in her own negotiation with the job she was assigned to during the Cultural Revolution, and how her sense of female heroism prevented her from falling into the trap of "banality" or "pettiness."³⁸ Wang Zheng also reminisces about the extent to which female revolutionaries represented in films and literature both caused her to wonder about her own "revolutionary drive" and made her feel inspired.³⁹ Even though her piece insists that young Chinese women in the Mao era preferred to identify themselves with *qingnian* or youth over *funü* or woman, "youth" in her context was nevertheless identified as young female revolutionaries represented in films. For these memoir writers, such positive identifications are possible because these female images signify a different social and cultural

³⁷ Ye Weili with Ma Xiaodong, *Growing up in the People's Republic*.

³⁸ Wang Lihua, "Gender Consciousness in my Teen Years," 120–31.

³⁹ Wang Zheng, "Call Me 'Qingnian' but Not 'Funü,'" 27–52.

imagination, practices, and new opportunities never before so widely and publicly demonstrated for women as well as for the entire society. Within the context of imagining an independent and modern nation, women were encouraged to imagine themselves to be different from their mothers and grandmothers. When they actively participated in China's national struggle for independence and sovereignty, many did so for a mixture of social, political, and a range of personal reasons. The two aspects were often not compatible, and women constantly found themselves facing conflicting demands and difficulties not taken into consideration by their male revolutionary counterparts. But the theme of liberation, embedded in "holding up half the sky" and its cultural representations, remained a powerful discourse for, among other things, women's self-empowerment in a range of microcosms. Women could model themselves on images of females not confined within traditional social roles and could do what men could do. Even though in the postmodern context today these representations may appear naïve, the idealism they express may well have been a source of self-empowerment denied by the postmodern sensibility. Within the context of the last thirty years, during which Chinese women have discovered the limitations of relying on developing femininity, this sense of self-empowerment can be recalled as a cultural resource for many, especially when we realize that the connection between women and work continues to define women's identity, but the erosion of gender-equality policies has put many of them in a disadvantaged position when they enter the public by entering the workforce.⁴⁰

As I have argued elsewhere, when contemporary Chinese feminists talk about developing native Chinese feminism (*nüxing zhuyi bentuhua* 女性主义本土化), unless they fully take into account their own experiences within the CCP-led women's liberation movement and especially in relation to the "half the sky" discourse and practices, "native Chinese feminism" will remain illusive.⁴¹ What can be retrieved from the discourse of women holding up half the sky is a continuing commitment to gender justice and gender equality and a willingness to ask

⁴⁰ The blatant sexism and gender discrimination against women in today's job market in China constitute yet another round of socioeconomic reasons for further generating gender consciousness in women. Part of the cultural resources for such consciousness raising should be a full recognition of the historical importance and significance of the Chinese women's liberation movement.

⁴¹ Zhong Xueping, "Cuozi de jiaoli" (Anxiety over nativization of feminism), *Du shu* (Reading) 4 (2003): 47–53.

what women's liberation once meant and what can be made anew in a different social and historical context. Indeed, so long as feminists do not lose sight of the historical specificities of this discourse and both its limitations and its contribution to the liberation of Chinese women, there may be fifth and sixth tales in the future to further explore the significance of women imagining and practicing "holding up half the sky" and to argue why women's liberation, including gender equality, cannot be achieved in isolation from other social struggles and movements.⁴²

⁴² I would like to thank Lin Chun for this last point.

LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOSSOM, LET A HUNDRED SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT CONTEND

Richard Kraus

“Hundred Flowers” is a slogan that elicits complex memories in China’s cultural politics. It identifies a 1956–57 political campaign in which Mao Zedong urged intellectuals to criticize the shortcomings of the ruling Communist Party. More broadly, it refers to recurring moments of political tolerance in the People’s Republic. The Maoist slogan for the campaign was *baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齐放, 百家争鸣: “Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend.” The open-minded spirit of the Hundred Flowers Campaign is, however, forever bound up with its opposite: the repression of intellectuals in the Antirightist Campaign that followed. These linked trends of relaxation and restriction have dominated Chinese cultural life for half a century.

We can see the competing and ultimately contradictory meanings attached to the “Hundred Flowers.” Full of confidence from his successes at socializing the economy, Mao pressed hard for a new accommodation with China’s intellectuals. While many intellectuals took the campaign as a signal of the revolution’s conclusion, party leaders instead regarded it as a shift in political tactics. When the debates elicited during the Hundred Flowers showed Mao that he had overestimated the party’s popularity, he and other party leaders reacted harshly in a bitter Antirightist Campaign, consolidating control over Chinese culture and postponing for decades serious thought of an end to the revolution. When such ideas of tolerance and openness returned in a later period, the Hundred Flowers once more served as their vehicle.

The 1956–57 Hundred Flowers Campaign

1956 was the seventh year of the People’s Republic of China. The new government of the Communist Party had enjoyed some remarkable successes. The economy had been brought under state control in a series

of campaigns to reorganize industry, agriculture, and commerce. This “socialist transformation” accompanied new achievements in health care, education, and the status of women. The Communist Party still faced a hostile Guomindang government lurking in its Taiwan refuge, but had fought the United States to a standstill in the Korean War and was increasing its influence among an emerging “third world” of countries newly independent from colonialism.

Mao Zedong was optimistic, and led the party in judging that the big struggles of the revolution were a thing of the past, that China needed to focus on economic development, and that the official discourse of large-scale class struggle had become outmoded. In this spirit, Mao spoke frequently to groups of intellectuals, invoking the Hundred Flowers slogan to signal that the party should lighten its touch in cultural affairs.

Mao pushed these ideas more systematically in a speech on February 27, 1957 to an audience of nearly 2,000 leaders from the ruling Communist Party and its junior partners, the so-called “democratic” parties of bourgeois intellectuals who had supported the revolution. Mao proclaimed that it was time to put aside the class struggles that had rocked recent decades. China’s remaining social divisions were to be seen as “nonantagonistic contradictions” among the people, instead of “antagonistic contradictions” between the people (workers, peasants, and soldiers) and their class enemy.¹ Mao’s “Hundred Flowers” phrase evoked thoughts of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (in the eighth through third centuries B.C.E.). This was before the ascendancy of Confucian intellectual hegemony, and Mao knew that his audience would draw a parallel to recent Communist hegemony, which he seemed to be putting aside.

Mao had multiple and interrelated motives. One was to enliven China’s cultural scene, which was stodgy, cautious, and still stuck in a revolutionary model that had helped mobilize peasant armies to overthrow the Guomindang, but did not speak to the mood and needs of the urban population. Seven years after the revolution, cultural life was still most heavily influenced by veterans of the party’s Yan’an

¹ On the Hundred Flowers, see Hualing Nieh, ed., *Literature of the Hundred Flowers*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution. 1: Contradictions Among the People 1956–1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 167–203.

Rectification, the 1942 movement that helped turn the arts into a revolutionary weapon.

Mao wanted the party to begin to court nonparty intellectuals, who had been left in the background by a revolution waged in the name of workers and peasants. China was beginning to need their skills for economic development enough to overlook their “bourgeois” taint. Most of these intellectuals were not Communists, and many had associations with the defeated Guomindang. Few had taken part in the key moments of revolutionary history: Jingangshan, the Long March, or Yan’an, which were all rural, peasant-based, away from concentrations of urban workers or intellectuals. Indeed, to many intellectuals, the revolution seemed to be a conquest of China by untutored and intolerant peasants. Even those within the party found that although the revolution had used their skills in satire and mass mobilization, the new regime effectively dampened demand for social criticism, seeking propaganda celebrating its continuing victories.

Mao also hoped to release some social tensions. Alarmed by worker riots in East Germany in 1955, by Khrushchev’s secret speech criticizing Stalin in 1956, and by the violent revolt in Hungary in the fall of 1956, he and other Chinese leaders sought to develop a more humane kind of socialism.

At first, intellectuals were stunned by the new turn and cautious about how to use the opportunity, based upon knowledge of earlier examples of party discipline against intellectuals. Some whom the party judged to be hostile had been punished after the revolution, such as painter Li Kuchan, who was dismissed from the faculty of the Central Fine Arts Academy.² Better known was the campaign against Hu Feng, a literary critic and party member. But cognoscenti understood that Hu Feng was the losing partisan in an inner-party struggle, and most probably assumed that such high-level political battles had little to do with them.

One representative nonparty intellectual was Shanghai writer Fu Lei, translator of Balzac and other French writers and father of a famous musical prodigy who had won glory for China in Warsaw’s Chopin Piano Competition.³ The party cultivated Fu in part because

² Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960), 191.

³ Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle Over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 70–99.

of his high prestige among other intellectuals. Shanghai leaders gave him a new job as an official for the Writers' Association, and invited him to give speeches and take part in policy discussions. Issues included establishing special hospitals and food stores for intellectuals (so that they would not have to wait in line with others) and new homes for 3,000 of the 10,000 higher intellectuals in Shanghai (so that they might have quiet studies in which to work). Fu enthusiastically promoted the interests of Shanghai intellectuals, writing a report on arts publishing, which he argued could not be operated on the same financial basis as enterprises outside the cultural realm.⁴ Fu Lei's excitement at the new political climate was evident in a letter to his son, then in Warsaw: "We are truly entering the atomic age; the tempo is so fast that not everyone can keep up. There really are too many things to do, write, read, hear, and discuss."⁵

Most intellectuals were pleased by this new tolerance of a greater range of arts. Many welcomed a revival of traditional drama, as the party relaxed its suspicion of supposedly "unhealthy" and "feudal" dramas and encouraged new editions of old plays.⁶ There was an increase in foreign art exhibitions from beyond the usual Eastern block nations, including work by Rivera, Rouault, Hogarth, and Dufy.⁷

The exhilaration of the Hundred Flowers was not simply the once forbidden criticism of Communist Party leadership, although that became a part of it. Encouraged to participate, intellectuals spoke in many voices, with suggestions that were not necessarily in accord with one another. Many raised demands for better working conditions. The Shanghai Symphony, for instance, was given new rehearsal space to replace its old quarters above a fish market. Painters and sculptors pressed for studio space. Humanist intellectuals wanted salaries at the same level as scientists.

Some objected to officialdom's rigidity and lack of sophistication. When the Experimental Opera Theater of Shanghai staged *La Bohème*, the Ministry of Culture balked at paying for a full orchestra

⁴ Fu Lei, *Fu Lei Jiashu* (Family letters of Fu Lei) (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1984), 104, 85, 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 101–102.

⁶ Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 167; Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 293–94.

⁷ Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 27–29.

on the ignorant grounds that Chinese opera troupes only needed a few instrumentalists.⁸ One group of well-known writers was said to plan new literary journals that would be beyond party control.⁹ Shi Ximin, director of the Shanghai Propaganda Department, called for undoing the recent state collectivization of performing arts ensembles and returning them to private ownership in order to achieve greater efficiency.¹⁰

The Hundred Flowers brought to public discussion older tensions among arts genres, often tied to the rub between the revolution's populism and the intellectuals' cosmopolitanism. Defenders of traditional ink painting battled against Westernizing arts media, while other elite artists objected to the attention paid folkish genres such as New Year's paintings.¹¹ A brass band director complained that music leaders were snobbish toward his music.¹² Players of Western instruments argued that their music received less attention than Chinese opera.

More seriously, the Hundred Flowers fueled long-standing social resentments about the outcome of China's revolution. At Shanghai's Tongji University, students mocked their classmates from worker and peasant backgrounds and opposed a system to admit them without entrance examinations.¹³

Chu Anping, editor of the leading newspaper for intellectuals, *Guangming ribao* [Guangming daily], dispatched his correspondents around the country to organize meetings for additional criticisms. Such moves began to take the initiative for the Hundred Flowers out of the hands of the party leadership and no doubt alarmed Mao, as did efforts to reopen the cases of former targets of party dogmatism, such as Hu Feng or Wang Shiwei, a writer executed in Yan'an.

⁸ "Players, Singers, and Conductors Give Opinions to Music Workers' Federation" (Yanzoujia, gechangjia, zhuihuijia gei yinxie ti yijian), *Renmin yinyue* (People's music) (June 1957): 5.

⁹ They were Ai Qing, Chen Qixia, Feng Xuefeng, Xiao Qian, and Ding Ling. Douwe Fokkema, *Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence 1956-1960* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 140, 156.

¹⁰ New China News Agency, "Propaganda Work Conference of CCP Shanghai Committee Closed" (May 20, 1957), in *Survey of the China Mainland Press 1539* (May 28, 1957): 18.

¹¹ Laing, *The Winking Owl*, 27-29.

¹² Ouyang Feng, "Who Will Cultivate This Flower of Brass Bands?" (Tongguanyue zhe duohua you shui guanhuai)? *Renmin yinyue* (People's music) (May 1957): 6.

¹³ Lynn T. White III, *Policies of Chaos: The Organizational Causes of Violence in China's Cultural Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 144-45.

Although China's intellectuals were slow to accept the Hundred Flowers, by the spring of 1957, the party was receiving an unexpectedly rich harvest of critical comments. Mao Zedong had not imagined that he would unleash such hostility. His rosy view of the state of China had probably been exaggerated by flattery from his underlings, so that in his isolation he did not recognize the extent of unhappiness among intellectuals.

The 1957 Antirightist Campaign

The Hundred Flowers movement ended abruptly. Many senior party leaders, such as President Liu Shaoqi and Beijing Mayor Peng Zhen, had reservations about encouraging criticism of the party. The first open resistance to the Hundred Flowers came as early as January 1957, from officials of the People's Liberation Army's large cultural department. The army's propagandists were a likely group to speak out to protect the Communist revolution against its critics.¹⁴

It may have been campus activism emerging among nonparty university students that most alarmed Mao.¹⁵ He recognized that he had led the party out on a limb, and that other top leaders might regard him as politically vulnerable for an error in judgment. The reversal of direction was marked by the delayed publication of Mao's February speech, which finally appeared on June 19, 1957, as "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People." However, it was revised to add a retroactive set of criteria for judging criticisms made during the Hundred Flowers. Words that promoted unity and supported Communist leadership were blossoms, but words the party disliked became "poisonous weeds."

The Hundred Flowers is forever linked to its successor, the Anti-rightist Campaign of 1957, which tamed the now unruly intellectuals by targeting some individuals as "rightist elements," or enemies of

¹⁴ Chen Qitong et al., "Some of Our Views on Current Literary and Art Work," *Renmin ribao* (January 7, 1957), in *Survey of the China Mainland Press 1507* (April 9, 1957): 17–19.

¹⁵ Dennis J. Doolin, ed., *Communist China: The Politics of Student Opposition* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1964).

socialism. Deng Xiaoping, who had not shared Mao's enthusiasm for the Hundred Flowers, took leadership of the Antirightist Campaign.¹⁶

What happened to those named as rightists? The harsher treatments included labor reform (China's extrajudicial penal system) or internal exile to remote provinces such as Xinjiang, Ningxia, or Heilongjiang. In many cases this exile lasted for twenty years. Thousands of intellectuals lost their jobs. Many more received less draconian treatment, sometimes a cut in pay, often merely the public humiliation of being labeled.

Some were labeled rightists because of things they said during the Hundred Flowers, but others were selected merely on the basis of their associations or past history. Writers Ding Ling and Ai Qing were both labeled as rightists primarily as punishment for views they had expressed in the 1940s, which their enemies had not forgotten. The soprano Zhang Quan, who had studied in the United States at the Eastman School of Music, was to labor and reform herself in Heilongjiang for this purportedly bourgeois past.

Some targets of the campaign were prominent, selected to set an example. Journalist Liu Binyan and novelist Wang Meng were certainly named rightists because their published works had been celebrated during the Hundred Flowers. The self-criticisms of editor Chu Anping were widely publicized, to signal the excesses of the Hundred Flowers. In other cases, the campaign occasioned the settling of old scores. Party culture boss Zhou Yang purged those who had criticized him in the literary world, chiefly followers of the leftist pioneer Lu Xun.¹⁷ In the fine arts, veteran official Jiang Feng was targeted by old rivals opposed to his Westernizing ways.¹⁸

But most of the victims of the Antirightist Campaign were not well known outside their communities, if even there. The movement extended deep into society; 10 percent of China's 5 million intellectuals were labeled as "rightist elements."¹⁹ Pressure to meet the party's quota for campaign targets often shaped the selection. This process

¹⁶ Deng Xiaoping, *Guanyu zhengfeng yundong de baogao* (Report on the Rectification Movement) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1957).

¹⁷ Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 158–202.

¹⁸ Julia F. Andrews, "Traditional Painting in New China: Guohua and the Anti-Rightist Campaign," *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (August 1990): 555–85.

¹⁹ Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 61.

could be capricious, as Tian Zhuangzhuang vividly shows in his 1993 film, *The Blue Kite*: when a librarian leaves an Antirightist Campaign meeting to visit the toilet, he returns to find that his colleagues have taken advantage of his momentary absence to denounce him in order to meet their unit's quota of rightists.²⁰

Shanghai translator Fu Lei was not exiled, perhaps buffered by the celebrity of his musician son, Fu Cong. But he did lose his dignity through public criticism.²¹ Shanghai newspapers accused him of arrogance in his role as father of a musical prodigy. Fu's home-schooling scheme offended the populist revolutionaries, as did his sophisticated friends. He was the object of ten criticism meetings and had to write three versions of a self-criticism before one was accepted. By April 1958, as the movement was being concluded, Fu Lei was labeled a "rightist element." His wife reported that he lost seven pounds, his vision was affected, and his health was so upset by his humiliation that a physician prescribed four months of rest. Depressed, he remained in bed refusing to see outsiders, hinting darkly of suicide.

One popular but mistaken theory is that the Hundred Flowers was a trap set by Mao to encourage his enemies to reveal their true natures. According to Mao's physician, the Chairman did claim "we want to coax the snakes out of their holes."²² But he made this comment near the end of the Hundred Flowers, as he was gathering strength to counterattack party critics. Embarrassed at his political miscalculation, he treated the intellectuals' Hundred Flowers criticism petulantly, as a betrayal, in order to make peace with his fellow leaders who had only reluctantly agreed to the campaign. If it had been a trap, Mao would not have needed to set it so elaborately, or over such a long period. Nor does the trap hypothesis help us understand why the party has subsequently continued to use the phrase, or why China's intellectuals respond favorably to it. The trap idea is most appealing to those who believe that Mao was fundamentally a monster, incapable of speaking the truth.

Such an explanation is entirely too Mao-centric. The two campaigns, the Hundred Flowers urging tolerance and the Antirightist

²⁰ See Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 160.

²¹ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, 70–99.

²² Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (New York: Random House, 1994), 201.

movement demanding discipline, are part of a long-standing tendency in Chinese Communism to shift between periods of relaxation (*fang*) and control (*shou*). In the cultural realm, the periods of relaxation recall the Communist tradition of United Front politics, in which the party tries to forge a broad coalition of social forces against a common enemy, such as the Japanese invaders; or after 1949, economic backwardness. Relaxation favors urban intellectuals, Westernizing tastes, non-Communist elites, commercial experimentation, and religious institutions. Aesthetically, it allows a broader range of cultural items (including more foreign goods) and greater artistic and technical experimentation.

In contrast, periods of control pull the party back to its roots as organizer of class struggle, with a focus on workers and peasants, hostility toward the bourgeoisie and other non-Communist elites, vigilance for the revolution against its enemies, suspicion of the outside world, and careful regulation of commerce and religion. Aesthetically, control means greater hostility toward cultural markets, a limited (but politically focused) array of cultural products, and a constricted set of styles for artists.

These two approaches of politics coexist, sometimes appearing to be grand visions for organizing and energizing China. Within the party, the Hundred Flowers did not represent the victory of liberalism and the end of the revolution so much as a tactical shift in the way China's leaders sought to organize society. The alternation was not a night-and-day contrast but a political adjustment. Put another way, party leaders have notoriously leaned toward relaxation and control according to their view of the needs of the political moment. In contrast, for many nonparty intellectuals, the Hundred Flowers seemed to promise a much more permanent change, a fulfillment of their desires to be treated with respect and given positions close to the holders of power in a China whose revolution had been completed.

A Complex Heritage

The Antirightist Campaign had a profound impact on China's cultural politics. It reshaped Chinese political space by silencing the party's most outspoken intellectuals. Equally importantly, others learned to practice a kind of cautious cynicism that may be the period's most damaging legacy. Fear and cynicism became commonplace for a generation.

The failure of the Hundred Flowers drive for openness reinforced nativist cultural impulses and weakened voices for a more cosmopolitan intellectual life. The Antirightist Campaign hit hardest at those with ties to the capitalist West. Artists and intellectuals with North American or Western European training were disproportionately labeled as rightists. Those with connections to Eastern Europe were less likely to be attacked, although even they came under fire as China quarreled with the Soviet Union in the 1960s.²³

The party rehabilitated many rightists during the political relaxation of the early 1960s, when it encouraged more use of the “Hundred Flowers” slogan. For instance, from 1962, *Popular Cinema* magazine began to bestow a Hundred Flowers film award, as a kind of Chinese Oscar. However, in the radical climate of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), the darker heritage of the Antirightist Campaign outweighed the spirit of the Hundred Flowers. Victims became linked with landlords and other class enemies of the revolutionary period in popular discourse. Landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists were castigated as the “five bad elements” throughout the Cultural Revolution. Many of the rightists who had regained their jobs lost them once more; those who had not been rehabilitated were typically treated even more harshly. Some intellectuals, including Shanghai translator Fu Lei, killed themselves rather than face another round of public criticism.

The Cultural Revolution raised anew debates about the Hundred Flowers, but in the retelling, the Maoists became the militants while Deng Xiaoping, Liu Shaoqi, and Peng Zhen were represented as susceptible to the temptations of the bourgeoisie. Yet the Hundred Flowers slogan persisted through the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution. Unsurprisingly, it was invoked to criticize that movement’s extremes. Critics who tired of the hegemony of Jiang Qing’s handful of “model theatrical works” referred to “eight flowers blooming.”²⁴ Even Mao invoked the Hundred Flowers to rebuke his own arts officials:

There are too few model plays; moreover, even the slightest mistakes are dealt with by criticism. There is no more blooming of a hundred flowers.

²³ Richard Curt Kraus, “Eastern Europe as an Alternate West for China’s Middle Class,” *Studies in Comparative Communism* XXII, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 323–36.

²⁴ Wenhua bu pipanzu, “A fierce struggle over the question of ‘many’ or ‘few’ arts works” (wenyi zuopin ‘duo’ yu ‘shao’ wentishang de yichang jilie douzheng), *Guangming ribao* (March 19, 1977).

The others cannot bring up their opinions; that's no good. There is a fear of writing articles, writing plays, novels, poems and songs.²⁵

A "Second Hundred Flowers"

After Mao's death in 1976, the Hundred Flowers slogan was revived as a focus for anti-Maoist political activism. Deng Xiaoping, who had led the Antirightist Campaign two decades earlier, reached out for the support of intellectuals in order to return to power. As early as 1975, Deng's allies gathered materials on the implementation of the Hundred Flowers policy to use in rehabilitating disgraced intellectuals. This scheme proved premature when Deng was himself purged in January 1976. But it became an important base for his consolidation of power in the later 1970s, when tens of thousands of former rightists were restored to their positions, in many cases after decades in the political wilderness.²⁶

Deng now found himself assuming Mao's 1956 role, appealing to intellectuals to strengthen the party through patriotic criticism. Against more cautious comrades, Deng held that the need for class struggle was past, that China needed to cultivate intellectual talents for economic development. He reinforced the message by publishing for the first time some of Mao Zedong's important Hundred-Flowers era speeches, such as his 1956 "Talk to Music Workers."

A high point of this second Hundred Flowers was the 1979 National Arts Congress, which heralded a new era of openness, tolerance, and innovation, just as Mao's remaining allies were being pushed to the political sidelines. A visual marker of the new social position of intellectuals was the issue of a new version of China's fifty-yuan banknote. It now included a portrait of a typical (male) intellectual, bespectacled face in profile alongside the conventional images of worker and peasant. At the same time, a popular movie traced the life of China's famous geologist Li Siguang, to reinforce the new official line that intellectuals had become a part of the working class and were no

²⁵ "Verbatim Record of Chairman Mao's Talks with Comrade Teng Xiao-p'ing in Early July, 1975," Document of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. *Chung-fa* 37, Part VII, *Issues & Studies* XV, no. 2 (February 1979): 101.

²⁶ Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 204-205.

longer to be viewed with suspicion as bourgeois. This new intellectual was stalwart, eager for change, and patriotic, and possessed wisdom acquired through great suffering.

Although the second Hundred Flowers was offered as a balm to those who had suffered during the Cultural Revolution, the cultural vision of Deng Xiaoping's entourage rarely moved beyond restoring a supposedly purified pre-Cultural Revolution system of state patronage and propaganda: a vision of a golden age, made more glistening by the absence of Mao. There was little official encouragement to challenge the fundamental system by which culture had been organized since the early 1950s.

Yet after the personal tragedies of the Cultural Revolution, it was understandable that many intellectuals would seize the Hundred Flowers slogan as an unfilled promise and use it aggressively to weaken their enemies.²⁷ Some bolder intellectuals interpreted the new Hundred Flowers to mean the end of party cultural controls, and perhaps the end of the revolution. Wang Ruowang wrote in *Red Flag* magazine that in the arts, the party should adopt the Daoist precept of "governing through inaction," adroitly but inaccurately claiming the late Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and late Foreign Minister Chen Yi as models.²⁸

There was no wholesale rehabilitation of those victimized in the Antirightist Campaign. Restoration was individual and piecemeal. For instance, in 1978 *Guangming ribao* praised the works that over two decades earlier had led to trouble for writers Wang Meng and Liu Binyan, and both men resumed their careers. Scientist Fang Lizhi, who had been purged for his Hundred Flowers activism, was restored to party membership in 1979, renewing a career of blunt criticism in which he was the boldest advocate for intellectuals' interests against the hesitations among the party leadership.

The restoration of large numbers of forceful intellectuals elicited some resistance, which initially seemed to be moments of politi-

²⁷ Sylvia Chan, "The Blooming of a 'Hundred Flowers' and the Literature of the 'Wounded Generation,'" in Bill Brugger, ed., *China Since the "Gang of Four"* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 174–201; Perry Link, *Roses and Thorns: The Second Blooming of the Hundred Flowers in Chinese Fiction 1979–1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 1–41.

²⁸ Wang Ruowang, "On 'Rule Through Inaction' for the Arts" *Hongqi* (Red flag) 9 (1979): 47–49; Kyna Rubin, "Keeper of the Flame: Wang Ruowang as Moral Critic of the State," in Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek, and Carol Hamrin, eds., *China's Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, 1987), 233–50.

cal whiplash, including campaigns against “bourgeois liberalization” intended to keep the pace of change under control. But the crack-down after the 1989 Beijing Massacre could not be dismissed so easily, and was profoundly depressing to most intellectuals. By that time, Liu Binyan and Fang Lizhi had taken refuge in the United States. Wang Meng, who had become Minister of Culture, resigned in protest of the massacre.

Flowers in the Cultural Market

Ultimately, the vision of a Hundred Flowers was resuscitated by the rapid economic growth that accelerated dramatically in the 1990s. Intellectuals remained resentful about the violence that had suppressed the 1989 demonstrations and sullen at party efforts to reimpose firm cultural controls. Yet as the state turned to economic growth to replace revolution as the basis for claiming legitimacy, it lost the ability to maintain tight cultural control. By the mid-1990s, it seemed to many intellectuals that this time the revolution really was over, supplanted by an economic transformation so vast that the party’s capacity to police them was profoundly eroded.

Rapid economic growth brought higher incomes and increased cultural consumption, new and more numerous media, more leisure, livelier cultural markets, increased foreign ties, and more intellectuals graduating from a growing education system, less willing to adhere to the party’s demands. Instead of rallying around the symbolism of the Hundred Flowers, some intellectuals dared to reprove the movement itself. Tian Zhuangzhuang’s controversial 1991 movie, *The Blue Kite*, contains a scene in which a doomed young intellectual is hit on the head by a falling banner, which his work unit hung to drum up enthusiasm for the 1956 Hundred Flowers Campaign. He cries, “Get this thing off me!” voicing the younger generation’s suspicion of a positive reading of this icon of intellectual politics. Tian’s film was never released in Chinese theaters, and he was sanctioned professionally for allowing a copy to be shown abroad. Yet the growing market in videos soon assured that it reached his desired audience.

This kind of criticism was probably essential for the language of a Hundred Flowers to become normalized. People use the phrase in casual conversation, sometimes with an ironic tone. The party continues to embed it formulaically within official pronouncements, to remind everyone that relaxation is the official policy, which also

simultaneously embraces the leftist ambition of “serving the people.” For example, this recent usage in an economic document shows that echoes of the Hundred Flowers resonate alongside phrases linked to class conflict:

The draft outline proposes to firmly control the direction of advanced culture in serving the people, serving socialism as well as letting a Hundred Flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend so as to prosper the socialist culture and meet people’s increasing demand for culture.²⁹

By 1998 China’s government was led by Premier Zhu Rongji, who had been purged as a rightist himself in 1957. This was a dramatic symbol to the nation’s intellectuals. There seem to be no individuals who have not been rehabilitated from the long-ago pairing of Hundred Flowers and Antirightist campaigns. However, the party has yet to condemn the Antirightist Campaign as a blunder or make an official gesture of apology to its collective victims. Books on the campaign appear, only to be banned and withdrawn, but often not before selling tens of thousands of copies. The party continues to block efforts to stage events explicitly organized around the theme of its victims’ experiences.

The Antirightist Campaign has now assumed a new significance as a human rights issue, one of many historical problems the party remains unwilling to address systematically, for fear of eliciting a flow of public criticism that it might, this time, prove unable to halt. It is one thing to acknowledge the problems of the Cultural Revolution; dealing with the Antirightist Campaign might well open a discussion the party does not welcome about the revolution itself.

The survivors of the Antirightist Campaign are growing old. The party will probably outlive a dwindling band of aging intellectuals who mistakenly and prematurely imagined the end of the revolution. Yet the party’s ability to control intellectual life is vastly diminished from the days of the new regime in the 1950s. For example, in 2006, China had twenty million bloggers, and the party has no effective strategy for shaping the growth of these newest flowers.

²⁹ “Abstract of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan outline (draft),” *People’s Daily* online (March 9, 2006), http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200603/09/eng20060309_249320.html.

THEY LOVE BATTLE ARRAY, NOT SILKS AND SATINS

Tina Mai Chen

为女民兵题照
飒爽英姿五尺枪，
曙光初照演兵场。
中华儿女多奇志，
不爱红装爱武装。

How bright and brave they look, shouldering five-foot rifles
On the parade ground lit up by the first gleams of day.
China's first daughters have high-aspiring minds,
They love their battle array, not silks and satins.

In February 1961, Mao Zedong penned the above inscription to a photograph of Chinese female militia. With the 1963 publication of this poem in *The Poetry of Chairman Mao*¹ and its wide dissemination across the People's Republic of China (PRC), the concluding sentence, “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*” 不爱红装爱武装, provided visual cues for the ideal form of China's new socialist woman. The reference to clothing functioned as a signifier of dress as well as normative behavior including personality, physical shape, and revolutionary consciousness. Rarely did the phrase “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*” appear without reference to the determination and “high-aspiring minds” of China's daughters, reinforcing the correspondence of mind and body, inner and outer. As part of the revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, these lines draw attention to the ways Maoist rhetoric incorporated notions of mutual development between outer comportment and inner cultivation informed by Confucian self-cultivation.² At the same time, the lines indicate a radical redefinition of the ideal form and

¹ *Mao Zhuxi shici* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1963). The poem first appeared in *Renmin ribao* on January 4, 1964, along with nine other poems by Mao Zedong published on the front page.

² Donald Munro identifies three sources for the Maoist concept of man: the Confucian concept of social nature that assumed association between “knowing” and “promptings to act,” the malleability of man rooted in Marxian and Soviet thought, and the guerrilla experience of the CCP. Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

temporality to be pursued by men and women; gender inequalities seemed to be erased in favor of a militarized sameness that will create new citizens who can deliver an egalitarian future.³ However, as I will explore in the following discussion of “*bu ai hongzhuang, ai wuzhuang*,” the erasure of gender difference was never complete, nor was it intended to be. The oppositional pairing of *hongzhuang* (feminine clothing) with *wuzhuang* (military clothing) provides a grammatical structure in which the female body haunts and lingers beneath the male or asexual body. The phrase thus simultaneously captures a moment of militarization in revolutionary discourse and practice and the complex tensions marking combined efforts at gender and class liberation within Maoist and socialist ideologies of gender.

Let us then explore several interwoven lines of inquiry: the disarticulation of *hong* (red) from *hongzhuang* (literally “red clothing”) that occurred with the shifting association of the color red (*hong*) from traditional femininity to socialist revolution; the rise of a militaristic aesthetic as the embodiment of class revolution; the critique of bourgeois self-interest promoted in the phrase; and the gendered nature of a Maoist utopian future.

In traditional literature the character *hong* 紅 referred to beautiful women and certain types of red clothing were used metaphorically to mean women.⁴ In contrast to the use of select red items for male costumes, which symbolized courage and loyalty, full red costumes for women were associated with female beauty and sexual allure. Most analyses of Maoist rhetoric, including the phrase “*bu ai hongzhuang, ai wuzhuang*,” assert that by the 1960s these traditional associations were overridden by an asexual or masculinized ideal. As Rosemary Roberts argues, however, red as a signifier of revolution did not completely displace the association of red with femininity. Red adorned women’s bodies as part of the celebration of socialism and a visual sign of a new female subjectivity. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) writings on history and subjectivity conceived of revolution as a gendered process

³ See Tina Mai Chen, “Re-forming the Chinese National Body: Emulation Campaigns, National Narrative, and Gendered Representation in the Early Maoist Period,” Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, (1999).

⁴ Rosemary Roberts, “Gendering the Revolutionary Body: Theatrical Costume in Cultural Revolution China,” *Asian Studies Review* 30 (June 2006): 147. On clothing and women, also see Joseph R. Allen, “Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior,” *positions* 4, no. 2 (1996): 343–79.

of human self-realization at the collective and individual levels.⁵ But because the social transformation was never complete, the narrative of becoming sat in tension with its “not quite” nature, as is evident in the subject status attributed to the female militia in Mao’s 1961 poem.

Mao’s poem locates the female militia at the dawn of a new era, “the first gleams of day”; they stand as a vanguard unit that rejects traditional femininity for a military aesthetic. The shedding of individualized desire for silks and satins allows for articulation of an (inter) nationally directed collective vigilance clothed in military uniform. Yet within this narrative of transformation, red female clothing does not entirely disappear; an aesthetic appropriation looses the color red from its traditional associations and co-opts it for gendered projects of socialist liberation. One of the key elements in this aesthetic appropriation is the redefinition of femininity or, perhaps more accurately, the insistence upon the bourgeois or feudal origins of femininity, which effectively removes the concept from the Maoist futurist vision.⁶ *Hongzhuang*, then, is best understood as a class-inflected “silks and satins” or “feminine clothing” with little concern for the actual color of the clothing. *Hongzhuang* becomes a derogative phrase associated with feudal or bourgeois femininity; red clothing is freed for revolution.

The use of the phrase *hongzhuang* in CCP-sanctioned texts prior to the penning of Mao’s poem provided the necessary political, historical, and cultural associations of red with revolution. Consider, for example, Qu Qiubai’s 1922 *Journey to the Land of Hunger* (*Exiang jicheng*) and 1924 *A Personal History of the Red Capital* (*Chidu xinshi*). In the former Qu writes, “the red blossoms covering the earth, stained with the blood of battle, shine forth with a red glow like that of the sunset or sunrise, shimmering brilliantly.”⁷ The color-coded promise of a revolutionary future and its association with the Soviet Union was echoed in 1950s references in the main CCP newspapers that brought together staples of revolutionary discourse, including tropes of seasonal rebirth as applied to the establishment of the USSR and the color red as symbol of the socialist present and future.⁸ In the discursive context

⁵ Chen, “Re-forming the Chinese National Body,” 22.

⁶ Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender Since 1949* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

⁷ Quoted and discussed in Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 44–53.

⁸ Li He, “Sulian renmin de shengda jiemu” (The victory program of the Soviet people), *Renmin ribao* (Mar. 15, 1954), 4. Also Li He, “Weida de Moqiike” (Great Moscow),

of the Chinese Revolution, red explicitly linked China to worldwide revolutionary struggle while the poetry of Mao Zedong combined the aesthetic conventions in both traditional and PRC literature to make red indigenous to socialist China.⁹



Figure 1. Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue, *This Land Is So Rich in Beauty*, mural in the Great Hall of the People, 1959. In this depiction of Mao's poem "Snow," the nation transcends geographical specificity through a composite landscape. The red sun rising in the East alludes to Mao and the party's leadership over the country while claiming red as the color of China.¹⁰

Renmin ribao (Nov. 4, 1954), 4; Li He and Cheng Guangrui, "Mosike jiemu zhi ye" (Moscow parade), *Renmin ribao* (Nov. 9, 1957), 5.

⁹ Also consider the phrase "*hongzhuang suguo*" (紅裝素裹), "clad in white, adorned in red," which traditionally refers to a sunlit sky and which Mao Zedong used in his poem "Snow" (北国风光, 千里冰封, 万里雪飘。望长城内外, 惟余莽莽; 大河上下, 顿失滔滔。山舞银蛇, 原驰蜡象, 欲与天公试比高。须晴日, 看红装素裹, 分外妖娆。江山如此多娇, 引无数英雄竞折腰。惜秦皇汉武, 略输文采; 唐宗宋祖, 稍逊风骚。一代天骄, 成吉思汗, 只识弯弓射大雕。俱往矣, 数风流人物, 还看今朝)。In the stanza "On a fine day, the land, / Clad in white, adorned in red, / Grows more enchanting," *hongzhuang* is perhaps best read as *hong* / *zhuang* where *zhuang* functions as the verb and *hong* as the adjective, thereby breaking the association with young women, allowing the nation to be substituted for the female body and the phrase to acquire a progressive temporal orientation rather than refer to backward states that the CCP wished to overcome.

¹⁰ For a fuller analysis of this painting and its relationship to displaying "the people" in the PRC, see Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 124–46.

One early example of revolutionary discourse's explicit appropriation of traditional red/womanhood for China's revolution in conjunction with the image of socialist women in China is Lin Lan's 1946 short story "The Red Padded Jacket" (Hong mian'ao). In this story, as Roberts notes, the red jacket carries a dual symbolism: red is the color of political liberation *and* of the restoration of female sexuality and desirability.¹¹ Characteristic of early CCP literature, the narrative hinges upon the return of humanity to peasants and women dehumanized by class oppression, an act accomplished in part by taking back land and material goods that landlords had purloined from their rightful owners, the peasants. Roberts concludes that "the red jacket and the arrival of Communism represent not the suppression of sexual and gender identity by class identity, but the simultaneous recognition of class identity and restoration of sexual and gender identity through class struggle." Various other well-known examples of this type of narrative circulated throughout the Maoist period, including the classics *The White-Haired Girl* (Bai mao nü) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (Hongse niangzi jun). These examples of restoration of gendered humanity in its collective sense coexisted with examples of idealized young women whose martyrdom and self-sacrifice—rather than the color of their clothing—rendered them "red." In each instance, we need to interrogate the relationship between female agency, celebration of women soldiers, and clothing¹² to understand on what terms "they love battle array not silks and satins" contributed to the display and politicization of female bodies.

Young female martyrs of the 1940s like Liu Hulan and Zhao Yiman were the subjects of feature films produced in 1950 as part of the revolutionary imagery used to consolidate the establishment of the PRC as a nation. In the 1950s these women represented one aspect of female participation in socialist revolution, alongside women celebrated for their participation in new occupations, commitment to scientific developments, or contribution to agricultural production. In the first years of the 1960s, however, the range of female models narrowed so that

¹¹ Roberts, "Gendering the Revolutionary Body," 148.

¹² Chen Xiaomei asks these questions in her analysis of *Green Barracks* and the problem of femininity within the context of military training. Chen Xiaomei, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 264. Also see Chen Xiaomei's introduction in Chen Xiaomei, ed., *Reading the Right Text: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003) for a comparative discussion of *The Red Detachment of Women* and *Green Barracks*.

militaristic bodies were seen as best capturing full socialist womanhood.¹³ Despite recognition of women's accomplishments, a feminist politics was secondary to a framework in which the sacrifice of individual women enabled the rise of the Chinese nation and socialism.¹⁴ Zhao Yiman's film character reinforces the ideal that women become historical actors by serving the CCP and its vision of national liberation when she answers the query of a young nurse about being afraid in battle by stating that if you love the party and the nation, there is no fear. In this film and others, the CCP empowered women for the ultimate goal of the nation, rendering women's liberation a metaphor for national liberation.¹⁵ As Dai Jinhua reminds us, such a political project leaves little room for women to act or exist as female subjects and effects an erasure of woman.¹⁶

Maoist revolutionary discourse did not maintain a fixed relationship among nation, woman, and socialist liberation, however. Mao's "Inscription on a Photograph of Female Militia" appeared in the 1960s precisely when the survival of socialism within China and globally, not the establishment of the nation, preoccupied Mao. The phrase emphasized women's relationship to class struggle, the link between "woman" as a subject category and "the people."¹⁷ This was done through a naturalization of the woman-nation link, as well as a rewriting of the 1940s militaristic struggle in the context of the 1960s conceptualization of the people. A 1961 discussion of the song "Liu Hulan" exemplified how the shifting relationship of women, nation,

¹³ For a discussion of how this narrowing of socialist womanhood is linked to the geopolitics of socialism and Sino-Soviet relations, see Tina Mai Chen, "Socialism, Aestheticized Bodies and International Circuits of Gender: Soviet Female Film Stars in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1969," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (online) 18, no. 2 (2007): 53–80.

¹⁴ On the conflation of gender and nation in modern China, see Meng Yue, "Female Images and National Myth," in Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 118–36; Prasenjit Duara, "The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China," *History and Theory* 37, no. 3 (Oct. 1998): 287–308.

¹⁵ Shuqin Cui, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003). In particular, consider *Zhongguo Nu'er* (Daughters of China) for its use of women as foundational subjects of the Chinese nation.

¹⁶ Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Cinema and Desire, Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (London, New York: Verso, 2002).

¹⁷ This was part of the distinction between party organizations and mass mobilization of "the people" that characterized the Cultural Revolution period broadly speaking.

and class shaped a military aesthetic that made women soldiers of the 1940s central to female subjectivity in the 1960s, and in which the female soldier was a metonymic representation of socialist revolutionary dreams coming to fruition, rather than of national liberation more narrowly defined.¹⁸ Through references to Mao's 1944–45 poem "Snow"¹⁹ and the lines "seeing them, with added elegance, in red and white" (*kan hongzhuang suguo, fen wai yaorao*), rhetorical linkages between the 1940s and 1960s, between "Snow" and "Inscription on a Photograph of Female Militia," were established. By asserting that Liu Hulan embodied the realization of the revolutionary vision Mao celebrated in "Snow," the text naturalized the relationship between woman soldier, land, and the color red in a manner complementary to earlier CCP discourse, evident in the oil painting *This Land Is So Rich in Beauty* at the Great Hall of the People (see Figure 1). At the same time, in 1961, the focus was on the enactment of "redness" through struggle, inspired by the writings and person of Mao.

By 1963 and the publication of *The Poetry of Mao Zedong*, women whose stories of struggle and liberation emerged out of the highly militarized moment of civil war and the anti-Japanese War of Resistance became role models for the youth of China, who since 1962 were being exhorted to "never forget class struggle." The use of the 1940s in the revolutionary discourse of the 1960s placed martyrs such as Liu Hulan and Zhao Yiman as well as film heroines like Xi'er (*The White-Haired Girl*) and Wu Qionghua (*The Red Detachment of Women*) at the center of political culture because they embodied a female subjectivity expressed through the combined aspects of active struggle and a militaristic aesthetic, set in opposition to feudal/bourgeois femininity and passivity.

The female militarized bodies of 1940s heroes, however, required constant rewriting in order to retain relevance to 1960s revolutionary discourse and its temporal and narrative frameworks. Revisions to the story of *The White-Haired Girl* and the importance given *The Red Detachment of Women* during the Maoist period are instructive for

¹⁸ Wen Jie, "Hongzhuang suguo—Mantan 'Liu Hulan' geci de yuyan he biaoian shoufa," *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 20, 1961), 7.

¹⁹ According to Jerome Ch'ên, the snow scene suggests that the poem was composed before the August 1945 meeting between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao at Chongqing. The 1964 edition of Mao's poems dates "Snow" to 1936 but Ch'ên argues that the poem's tenor and images do not support such a dating. Jerome Ch'ên, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 340–41.

understanding the context in which the phrase “they love battle array, not silks and satins” circulated. On one hand, these stories are marked by the double signification of red that Roberts identifies in “The Red Padded Jacket.” Even though the revolutionary discourse of the 1960s privileged a military aesthetic, expressions of female sexuality were evident as red jackets and wide leather belts accentuated the female body. But the color and styles celebrated in earlier moments as part of socialist liberation were largely absent from the sartorial imagery. People lived within a discourse that juxtaposed conventions of bourgeois sexuality to socialist practice, even though the shorts worn by dancers in *The Red Detachment of Women* might suggest otherwise.²⁰

The lived experience of 1960s sartorial discourse refracts the 1956 proclamation of women’s liberation alongside a Dress Reform Campaign that promised “pretty dresses” for women as a benefit of socialism.²¹ During the Cultural Revolution the central architect of the Dress Reform Campaign, Yu Feng, suffered persecution for class errors and for promoting the *bulaji*, a dress based on those worn by Soviet women that by the 1960s became associated with Soviet revisionism, not the Chinese socialist future. In the 1960s stylish clothes for women were made from men’s worn-out jackets, and gender-neutral clothing choices were promoted.²² While this shift in the post-Great Leap Forward (GLF) sartorial discourse can be read as a return to frugality as a result of the economic disaster of the GLF, I find it more instructive to analyze the changes in configurations of socialism being debated and asserted in revolutionary discourse. In the 1960s, amid Mao’s efforts to return to power, the emphasis moved from the promise of socialist becoming to socialist struggle, with the temporality of socialism refocused away from the (soon-to-be-realized) future to the immediacy of the present (and the dangers of a return to the past).

²⁰ Chen Xiaomei, *Acting the Right Part*.

²¹ On the styles being discussed as part of the beautification movement following the success of the First Five-Year Plan, see the photos with caption “Make us prettier and more stylish” (rang women de yifu geng piaoliang geng shiyang!), *Zhongguo qingnianbao* (Mar. 17, 1956), 3.

²² Tina Mai Chen, “Dressing for the Party: Clothing, Citizenship, and Gender Formation in Mao’s China,” *Fashion Theory* 5, no. 2 (June 2001): 143–72; also see Beijing qing gongye ju fuzhuang yanjiusuo (Institute of Clothes, the Bureau of Light Industry of Beijing), “Jieyue meiguan de qiuyi” (Economical and beautiful clothes for the fall), *Zhongguo funü* 17, no. 26 (1960), cited in Hong-Yok Ip, “Fashioning Appearances: Feminine Beauty in Chinese Communist Revolutionary Culture,” *Modern China* 29, no. 3 (July 2003): 352.

Mao's preoccupation with revisionist elements within Chinese and global socialist revolutions made it no longer appropriate that women celebrate a future socialist femininity or be portrayed primarily as the embodiment of nationhood. The roots of capitalism and feudalism, Mao emphasized, still existed in China, making it difficult to imagine a female subjectivity in which women were liberated from the constraints of feudalism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Instead, Mao's interpretation of the state of socialist revolution in the 1960s demanded that ideal socialist women be actively engaged in struggle against local and global antirevolutionary forces and their instantiation at the individual level. Thus as Mao targeted Soviet revisionism and U.S. imperialism, and launched campaigns within China to "Never forget class struggle" and "Learn from Lei Feng," red clothing and gendered signifiers drew upon the revolutionary heritage of military and class struggle rather than celebrating future victory. In this context the meaning of the red clothing worn by role models like Xi'er and Wu Qionghua needed clarification so that the liberated (and sexualized) body would not be placed within alternative narratives that might diverge from the correct path identified by Mao.

To this end, the ballet version of *The White-Haired Girl* performed during the Cultural Revolution and supported by Jiang Qing removed all ambiguous and nonrevolutionary traits previously associated with Xi'er and her father, Yang Bailao. Similarly, *The Red Detachment of Women* glorified the female warrior and participated in the consolidation of a revolutionary discourse that invoked what Dai Jinhua has referred to as the plight of Hua Mulan, in which women become heroes by adopting the role of man.²³ The contemporaneous circulation of the *yangbanxi* and the revolutionary phrases "They love battle array, not silks and satins," "Never forget class struggle," and "Learn from Lei Feng" made a militaristic aesthetic the privileged socialist identity for the revolutionary discourse of the 1960s and the Cultural Revolution.²⁴ Emulation campaigns further reinforced attempts to blur sexed identities through militarism. The younger sister of Wang

²³ Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Women: Contemporary Chinese Women and Women's Film," trans. Mayfair Yang, *positions: east asia cultures critique* 4, no. 1 (1995): 258.

²⁴ For example, Zhou Zemin and Cheng, "Xin shidai gewu yishu de fengshou—ji jiefangjun di san ceng wenyi huiyan" (The crop of songs and dances for the new era—The meeting of the No. 3 Cultural Unit of the People's Liberation Army), *Renmin ribao* (May 10, 1964), 2.

Jie (one of the primary male PLA models of the 1960s alongside Lei Feng) was the focus of a 1969 International Women's Day article. The article praised Wang Aijun for following the teachings of "China's first daughters [who] have high-aspiring minds and love battle array, not silks and satins."²⁵ The internalization of these lessons was reflected in both her name, Wang Aijun (王爱军, Wang "Love the Military"), and her words as she explained how her brother had died protecting his class brothers and that the teachings of Mao led her to realize that she too must join the army.

Here we can see how "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" participated in the process of defeminizing women, not by erasure but by linking femininity to feudalism or capitalism, thereby equating defeminization with a overturning of oppressive class structures. Moreover, the promotion of women's place in a militaristic aesthetic required rethinking a singularly masculine gendering of *wuzhuang* and the military. A tension continued to exist, however, between defeminization as a class project versus the imagining of a new female subjectivity, encapsulated in a 1964 account of the heroic efforts of female militia who defended the coastline. At its narrative climax, the article referred to the women as a "great wall of steel," erasing the female/human body by rendering it machinelike, and then shifting pronoun usage from 她們 to 他們 to complete the defeminization of the women as an outcome of military success.²⁶

What scholars often underplay, however, is that this defeminization occurred within a discursive context in which mass mobilization and class identity were also being rewritten. In the early 1960s women recognized as the "real red detachment of women" or representatives of "They love battle array, not silks and satins" embodied a form of agency rooted in a collective identity, mass action, and "the people." Consider an April 1964 article entitled "*Bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" that begins with the text of Mao's poem. No references to specific women appear in the first half; the opening sentence asserts "Military units have a glorious tradition in the history of China's revolution."²⁷

²⁵ Dong Xiangdong, "Yingxiong de meimei xue yingxiong" (The hero's younger sister studies the hero), *Renmin ribao* (Mar. 8, 1969), 4.

²⁶ Miao Junjie, "Haifang xianshang de yichang zhanzheng" (A battle in defending the coastline), *Renmin ribao* (June 10, 1964), 6.

²⁷ Guo Moruo (郭沫若), "Bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang" (They love their battle array, not silks and satins), *Renmin ribao* (Apr. 25, 1964), 7.

The article then provides a conventional narrative of liberation that consolidates Mao's position as leader of the CCP and socialist struggle. Only well into this lengthy piece do specific references to female soldiers appear, at which point the author states that although Mao wrote his poem in 1961, it encapsulated more than thirty years of history. Placing the Chinese female militia within the larger history of Chinese socialist struggle ensures that women are mobilized alongside men as part of "the people" who will continue revolutionary struggle in the 1960s. The explicit inclusion of women in "the people" maintains the gendered inclusivity of this category, even as it renders subject status for men and women contingent on their ability to lay claim to the military trajectory of national liberation and socialist revolution. In this context, alleged refusal to take up the thought of Mao Zedong and promote realization of "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" left one open to criticism. This was particularly true for feminized intellectuals in the 1960s. The May 1966 *Renmin ribao* editorial that initiated the campaign against the reactionary stance of Deng Tuo, former editor of the *People's Daily* and in 1965 the secretary for culture and education in the Beijing Party Committee, was partly supported by assertions that he worked against "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*."²⁸

Moreover, "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" acquired meaning not only in relation to "the people" of Chinese history but also in relation to "the people" of global socialist struggle. Materials using the phrase "They love battle array, not silks and satins" regularly internationalized the links between female militia and successful socialist revolution. In April 1964, writings emphasized Maoist lessons of military organization and links to Cuban and African female militia, thus extending the geographical reach of the phrase. Guo Moruo wrote: "The world's daughters have high-aspiring minds, they love their battle array, not silks and satins" (全球儿女多奇志, 不爱红装爱武装),²⁹ thereby placing female militia in central positions in international and national struggles against capitalism and imperialism. The daughters (and sons) of China were struggling not only to build socialism in China but also to ensure its success elsewhere. Further linking of global female militia to the success of China's revolution occurred in films like *Heroic Sons*

²⁸ Deng Tuo—Fandang, fanshehuizhuyi de dayinmoujia (Deng Tuo—Chief anti-party, antisocialist conspirator), *Renmin ribao* (May 18, 1966), 3.

²⁹ Guo Moruo, "Bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang," 7.

and *Daughters* (Yingxiong ernü, 1964) and the *China Youth Daily's* International Women's Day reporting. In that newspaper's 1965 International Women's Day photographs featuring Vietnamese, Indonesian, Congolese, and Venezuelan female soldiers with the caption "Asian-African-Latin American Women in Battle" reinforced the ideal female form associated with "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*."³⁰

Through these international references, "They love battle array, not silks and satins" redefined female subjectivity in terms of the woman soldier while tying the available subject positions to global geographies of socialist revolution and gendered liberation. Reportage on women from third world nations who could be characterized as loving battle array, not silks and satins, reflected a broader shift in revolutionary discourse in the 1960s toward third world identity and a leadership role for Mao in global struggles. The use of the phrase "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" to refer to female militia outside of China was part of the Maoist project of insisting on China's global revolutionary focus, contra the revisionism and betrayal of global revolution associated with the Soviet Union. At the same time, in all references to women who embodied "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*," their position depended upon study and practice of Mao's words. A November 1967 article that paraphrased Mao's poem in its title, "Vietnamese Women Have High-Aspiring Minds," recounted the actions of North Vietnamese women, including those over fifty years of age, in battling against the "paper tiger" United States.³¹ Tellingly, nowhere in the article was there a discussion of gender liberation; rather, in referring to *The Red Detachment of Women* and quoting Mao's "Inscription on a Photograph of Female Militia," women's liberation was presumed to be accomplished when spaces of struggle were identified and made accessible for women to express and enact anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist revolutionary spirit.

The internationalization of the phrase placed China and Chinese women at the forefront of a global movement while always making women's subject status contingent on an embrace of Mao and a masculinized CCP. Within this context of the interlocked national and international dimensions of socialist struggle under Mao, a delegation

³⁰ *Zhongguo qingnianbao* (Mar. 8, 1965), 3.

³¹ *Zhongguo xinwen gongzuo zhe fang Yue daibiaotuan*, "Yuenan funnū duo qizhi" (The high aspirations of Vietnam's women), *Renmin ribao* (Nov. 10, 1967), 6.

of Red Guards visiting Albania in 1967 selected Mao's "Inscription on a Photograph of Female Militia" as one of the pieces to present.³² These examples show that "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" promoted international solidarity and brought together particular struggles. Moreover, the accomplishments of women in other nations functioned to remind women within the PRC of the power of the revolutionary spirit and the need to focus energy on the targets of U.S. imperialism and Soviet-style revisionism (rather than women's liberation per se). This linking of militarized women to the defense of the nation and socialism is evident in Tao Huawu's 1964 New Year wood-block prints (see Figure 3). They include two lines from Mao's poem as the framing context of the images, while within the frame the flags read "Down with American Imperialism" and "We will surely liberate Taiwan Island."

The combined international and national focus of class struggle that informed "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" was never disarticulated from individual transformation. Many of the stories about women who exemplified the phase took the form of inspirational biographies that emphasized a narrative of becoming. The desired (and desirable) female body in the revolutionary discourse of the 1960s displayed a beauty derived from political consciousness rather than self-adornment. This could take the form of a transformation of peasant girl to female militia. For example, the young martyr Liu Hulan typically wore simple monochromatic peasant clothing of cross-over padded jacket and pants rather than military attire. Yet the defiant stance assumed in the statue erected in 1957 at the Liu Hulan Memorial Hall in Wenshui-xian, Shanxi Province (and often incorporated into the background of posters and other images) foreshadows the stature frequently associated with female militia in the 1960s (see Figure 2).

Alternatively, the transformation could be focused on overcoming bourgeois tendencies, as in the 1968 story of Zhang Meixuan that took Mao's "Inscription on a Photograph of Female Militia" as the epigraph.³³ Zhang's transformation is described as follows:

³² Xinhua, "A'erbaniya renmin relie huanying Mao zhuxi de zhongshi zhanshi" (Albanian people welcome Chairman Mao's faithful soldiers), *Renmin ribao* (June 27, 1967), 6.

³³ Hsinhua, "All-Women's Militia Unit on Off-Shore Islet Opposite Quemoy," *Hsinhua SNI* (Mar. 18, 1968), 18-19.



Figure 2. ~~Korean female soldier~~, commemorated in the Chinese Press with stance similar to Liu Hulan, particularly with the clenched fist. *Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 6 March 1965, p. 4.

At 18, Chang Mei-hsuan is the youngest party member in the unit. A frail girl before joining the unit, she never neglected to put on her straw hat when she hung her clothes on the line for fear of getting sunburned. Under the influence of her comrades-in-arms, her world outlook changed...particularly after she studied Chairman Mao's three constantly read articles.... During military training she became bronzed in summer and her skin chapped in winter.... She soon became an activist in the living study and application of Mao Tse-tung's Thought and an outstanding gunner and rifleman.

Narratives like this of transformation from personal beauty to political consciousness and military competency rendered the female militia

relevant to all women and men in China, particularly urban-based youth mobilized in the sent-down youth campaigns. The movement from individual preoccupation to collective action paralleled the shift from *hongzhuang* to *wuzhuang*. *Hongzhuang* became more than a lifestyle or clothing choice; it was also a metaphor for personal and class consciousness, or lack thereof. Good class character for female militia and sent-down youth meant shedding individualized—and feminized—practices associated with *hongzhuang* and embracing collective values connected to the dual symbols of the CCP-PLA masculinity, the sun and gun, symbols that could be summed up as *hong* (red) plus *wuzhuang*.

The narratives of transformation were not necessarily an “end of history” moment at which *wuzhuang* replaced *hongzhuang*. Rather, recognition of the narrative of (social) transformation underpinning Mao’s poem returns us to the idea that the female body haunts the military aesthetic because subjectivity is articulated through struggle, a process of collective becoming, and continuous revolution. *Hongzhuang* lingers beneath *wuzhuang* because the phrase expressed both the endpoint of revolutionary history and the process of gender and class liberation. A brief 1974 article that juxtaposed the past to the present, a belief in fate to voluntarist revolutionary action invoked “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*” to refer to the generalized condition of socialist China. In contrast to the past where women had bound feet and could not leave the home, the article stated “our women” are “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*.” The grammatical structure in this case made “*bu ai hongzhuang, ai wuzhuang*” a characteristic of the socialist present by rendering it a noun clause whose counterpart is Chinese women.³⁴ Statements to this effect universalized “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*” and extended its relevance from specific model units of female militia to the Chinese people, and metonymically equated the liberation of China/Chinese women with the realization of “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*.” This framing of women’s liberation was clearly laid out the year following Mao Zedong’s death by Kang Keqing in an article entitled “Mao Zedong Led Us on the Path of Women’s Liberation.”³⁵ Kang quotes

³⁴ Xu Meifang, “Bu xin tianming, gan geming” (Don’t believe in fate,/make revolution), *Renmin ribao* (Nov. 17, 1974), 2.

³⁵ Kang Keqing, “Mao Zhuxi shuailing women zou funu chedi jiefang de daolu” (Chairman Mao led us on the path of women’s liberation), *Renmin ribao* (Sept. 22, 1977), 2.

Mao's poem once in the article to mark the culmination of successful socialist construction and the full liberation of women. The next paragraph then reinforces the nature of this liberation by stating very simply: "Only with class victory can women have true liberation."

The closed nature of this statement was more characteristic of post-Mao concerns with Mao's legacy and a future direction for China in which class struggle and permanent revolution could be downplayed than of the Cultural Revolution context in which "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" acquired meaning. "*Bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" held in tension the achievement of national liberation and the Maoist insistence on continuous struggle for revolutionary progress. Because female militia sat at the nexus of these historical moments, *wuzhuang* as a metaphor for these women occupied a revolutionary present. *Hongzhuang*, signifying individualistic self-interest associated with feudalism and/or capitalism, was the past to be overcome in struggle. But as Lin Lan's story "The Red Padded Jacket" and other materials suggest, *hongzhuang* could also be recuperated for an alternative socialist femininity that was located in the revolutionary future. The complex temporal politics of female bodies and socialist subjectivities were very much part of the framework that gave meaning to "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*." By way of conclusion, then, let us turn to two visual representations of "*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*" that capture these tensions.

Tao Haowu's 1964 New Year's wood-block prints provide strong evidence of the appropriation of indigenous Chinese femininity for a future socialist utopia. The women are depicted as organically conjoining the Chinese people and nation (symbolically represented by the rocks and waves) with the Maoist future (the rising red sun). They stand on guard against American imperialism and work for the full unity of the nation, including the return of Taiwan to China. Yet they are adorned in precisely the colors presumably eclipsed by women who embody the lines penned by Mao in 1961, which frame the prints. The use of reds, pinks, and purples perhaps points to the successful disarticulation of *hong* from *hongzhuang* as discussed in the first section of this chapter. But it seems forced to suggest that all earlier markers of femininity, including color, have been overwritten by revolution in these illustrations. Rather, it is precisely the visual boldness of women as warriors for China/socialism that gives the prints their power as they claim a new position for China and women. The body dressed in *hongzhuang* plus gun shows how class consciousness and "high aspira-



Figure 3. Tao Huawu New Year's wood-block prints, 1964. Reprinted from Iris Wachs and Chang Tsong-zung, *Half a Century of Chinese Woodblock Prints: From the Communist Revolution to the Open-Door Policy and Beyond, 1945–1998* (The Museum of Art Ein Harod), p. 132.

tions” drive women’s subject position and its outer appearance. These prints show the potential in revolutionary discourse for femininity and *hongzhuang* to be combined with *wuzhuang* if they are redefined in terms of collective action through globally directed socialist struggle. The writing of *wuzhuang* as revolutionary present and *hongzhuang* as potential socialist future was delimited, however, by the Maoist preoccupation, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, with “the past,” including feudal remnants, revisionism, and the “Four Olds.”

In this context, Jiang Qing’s involvement with fashion design is telling. For many, Jiang Qing epitomized the shedding of bourgeois feminine fashion for sexless proletarian attire as her own public image went from that of Shanghai actress to leader of the Gang of Four. But even Jiang Qing did not consistently embody the complete replacement of *hongzhuang* with *wuzhuang*. In the 1970s she occasionally donned the *bulaji*, the belted shirtdress derived from Soviet women’s clothing that

had been promoted in the dress reform campaigns of the mid-1950s.³⁶ More strikingly, in 1974 Jiang Qing designed and promoted the ill-fated “Jiang Qing dress,” a dress with V neckline bordered with a wide white band, sleeves to the elbow, and a pleated skirt. This was an attempt at developing a female “national dress” that drew inspiration from Tang-era styles and perhaps the *bulaji*. But unlike the red and pink folk fashions promoted as the socialist future by Tao Haowu, Lin Lan, and even Jiang Qing in the clothing of Wu Qionghua in *The Red Detachment of Women*, the “Jiang Qing dress” failed to fit into an acceptable revolutionary narrative or temporality. In her analysis of why this vestment did not elicit popular response, Antonia Finnane writes:

In the years of the Cultural Revolution, young Chinese women liked wearing army uniforms, which derived their meaning from politics, history, and the very song and dance routines that Jiang Qing had approved as part of the developing revolutionary culture. The Jiang Qing dress was culturally meaningless to them. In such a dress, no one could have known what part she was meant to play in what story.³⁷

The parameters of accepted revolutionary discourse did not allow people to make sense of the Jiang Qing dress as a progressive fashion. Rather, it became a symbol of Jiang Qing’s own revisionist stance and individualistic quest for power. The dress therefore was relegated to the Chinese past, as evident in cartoon depictions that rendered Jiang Qing as embodiment of revisionism, understood as a combination of feudalism and capitalism.

These two examples of visual representations return us to the multiple points of reference informing “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*.” On one level, this phrase encapsulated a literal shedding of feminine clothing for military clothing by China’s female youth. Yet, as I have argued, the sartorial tropes of 1960s and 1970s China can only be understood by considering how and on what terms class struggle, gender liberation, female subjectivity, and revolutionary temporality interconnected. This was a dynamic and fluid set of relations that engaged with the local and global politics of socialism. In this context, “*bu ai hongzhuang ai wuzhuang*” functioned in the revolutionary discourse not as a fixed

³⁶ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977). Also Verity Wilson, “Dressing for Leadership in China: Wives and Husbands in an Age of Revolutions (1911–1976),” *Gender and History* 14, no. 3 (Nov. 2002).

³⁷ Antonia Finnane, “Looking for the Jiang Qing Dress: Some Preliminary Findings,” *Fashion Theory* 9, no. 1 (2005): 19.

formula but to remind Chinese and global participants in socialist revolution that success required recognition that these four elements—class struggle, gender liberation, female subjectivity, and revolutionary temporality—were intimately part of an ongoing struggle.

THE THREE PROMINENCES¹

Yizhong Gu

The political-aesthetic principle of the “three prominences” (*san tuchu* 三突出) was the formula foremost in governing proletarian literature and art during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) (hereafter CR). In May 1968, Yu Huiyong 于会泳 initially proposed and defined the principle in this way:

Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the most important character, namely, the central character.²

As the main composer of the Revolutionary Model Plays, Yu Huiyong had gone through a number of ups and downs in the official hierarchy before finally receiving favor from Jiang Qing 江青, wife of Mao Zedong. Yu collected plenty of Jiang Qing’s concrete but scattered directions on the Model Plays and tried to summarize them in an abstract and formulaic pronouncement. The principle of three prominences was supposed to be applicable to all the Model Plays and thus give guidance for the creation of future proletarian artworks. Summarizing the gist of Jiang’s instruction, Yu observed, “Comrade Jiang Qing lays strong emphasis on the characterization of heroic figures,” and therefore, “according to Comrade Jiang Qing’s directions, we generalize the ‘three prominences’ as an important principle upon which to build and characterize figures.”³

¹ This essay owes much to invaluable encouragement and instruction from Professors Ban Wang of Stanford University, Tani Barlow of Rice University, and Yomi Braester of the University of Washington.

² Yu Huiyong, “*Rang wenyi wutai yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan maozedong sixiang de zhendi*” (Let the stage of art be the everlasting front to propagate the thought of Mao Zedong), *Wenhui Bao* (Wenhui daily) (May 23, 1968). Translation (with my revision) refers to Lan Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 29. All translations in this essay are mine unless otherwise indicated.

³ Ibid. For the detailed autobiography and historical evaluation of Yu Huiyong, see Dai Jiafang, *Wenge wenhua buzhang Yu Huiyong chenfulu* (The rise and fall of Yu Huiyong,

In November 1969, Yao Wenyuan, then a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, revised and officially standardized the definition of the principle:

Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the heroic characters; among the heroic characters, give prominence to the main heroic character.⁴

In the same article, Yao noted, “Using the negative characters, the other positive characters and stage settings to serve as foils, in order to give prominence to the main heroic character—this is the principle that all the proletarian literature and art must follow.”⁵ Yao’s statement elevated the “three prominences” from an “important principle” (in Yu’s definition) to a fundamentally indispensable principle, thus indicating its absolute dicta over all proletarian literature and art until the fall of the “Gang of Four” in October 1976.

I consider the “three prominences” as a political-aesthetic principle because of its dual attributes. As an aesthetic principle, it organized the narrative structure of the CR narrative arts (literature, drama, and cinema) and shaped the composition of the plastic arts (painting and sculpture). As a political standard, it provided an approach through which mass audiences formed a mutual proletarian consciousness of a society characterized by endless class struggle. During the Cultural Revolution, the “three prominences” was cherished as an infallible

Minister of Culture in the Cultural Revolution) (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1994) and Richard Curt Kraus, “The Rise and Fall of Yu Hui-Yong,” in A. Joseph, Christine P. W. Wong, and David Zweig, eds., *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁴ Shanghai Jingju tuan “Zhiqiu weihushan” Juzu (The Performing Group of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe), “Nuli suzao wuchan-jiuji yingxiong renwu de guanghui xingxiang” (Strive to create dazzlingly brilliant proletarian heroic images), in *Jingju geming shunian* (Ten years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1974), 69. Although the writing credit was to a group rather than an individual, this article was mainly composed by Yao Wenyuan. Translation refers to Lan Yang’s version with modification. Yang’s translation is “give prominence to the main heroic characters” (29). I will argue, however, that CR official discourse could not allow “prominence” to be equally given to two or more characters. Xin Wentong noted: “There is only one central character in a play or a film. Two or more central characters are not allowed, multicenters are equal to noncenter” (Xin Wentong, “Rang gongnongbing yingxiong renwu laogu zhanling yinmu” (Make heroic characters of workers, peasants and soldiers take possession of the cinema screen firmly), in *Renmin Danying* (People’s film) 1976:3. Although it is theoretically feasible to give prominence to “only one central character,” I will analyze the difficulty and complexity of such centralization in practice.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

touchstone to distinguish proletarian art from nonproletarian art.⁶ But in the post-Mao era it was denounced by critics as ridiculous—for example, as “a putrid hodgepodge of dogmatism, revisionism, feudalism, and fascism.”⁷ These contrary political evaluations obscure critical reflection on this specific principle in a specific historical context. To delineate the “three prominences” from the overwhelmingly deafening revolutionary discourse of the time, one must first trace its origin and historical development from various convoluted conflicts in the history of leftist literary thought. It is more important to study how and why the principle gradually evolved than to give it an easy, hasty evaluation.

Genealogical Study: The Irresolvable Description-Prescription Contradiction?

The “three prominences” was not a whimsical invention by Yu Huiyong, Yao Wenyuan or Jiang Qing, but an extremely rigid symbolic system that evolved from the unresolved contradiction in leftist literary thought.⁸ To trace the complex vicissitudes of Chinese leftist literary thought for nearly five decades requires book-length effort. My genealogical study, however, suggests a red thread and argues for continuity rather than rupture between the May Fourth enlightenment discourse and Maoist revolutionary discourse. First, two seemingly apparent contradictions inherent in the “three prominences” need to be addressed.

The first contradiction lies in the at once realist and idealized representation of the main heroic character. The “three prominences” requires that this figure be unreservedly elevated into an overblown image of perfection comprising all heroic merits. Such an elevation,

⁶ See Wen Qiao, “Suzao gongnongbing yingxiong renwu shi shehuizhuyi wenyi de genben renwu” (To build the heroic characters of workers, peasants, and soldiers is the fundamental task of socialist literature and art), *Shanxi ribao* (Shanxi daily) (July 12, 1974).

⁷ Zhu Zhai, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue sichao shi* (A history of contemporary Chinese literary thought) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1987), 504. This book is a well-received scholarly work, whose unreserved criticism of the “three prominences” represents the major Chinese academic views on this issue in the post-Mao era.

⁸ The term “description-prescription oxymoron” is borrowed from Régine Robin’s book on the impossibility of socialist realism. See Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 297.

however, is not accomplished by fantasies, but by so-called “typicality” (*dianxing* 典型). The artist creating the main heroic character draws traits from many proletarian heroes in real life, selects and purifies these traits, and then represents them on a “real” but much heightened plane. A crucial difficulty arises accordingly: How can the real description and the ideal prescription of the main heroic figure occur simultaneously?

The second contradiction arises between the politically controllable symbolic meanings and the uncontrollable textual dynamism. The “three prominences” aims to ensure a single voice over various symbols in CR literature and art. In other words, the interpretation of symbols, or of relationships among symbols, must be predictable and fixed, leaving little room for narrative tension and alternative interpretations. However, it remains questionable whether symbolic meanings can be totally controlled by the political imperative. The “revenge of *écriture*” inevitably occurs—no matter how the rigid formulaic system blocks textual indeterminacy and symbolic ambiguity, “there are always cracks, ruptures, elements that are irrelevant or that resist entering into the general configuration.”⁹

Starting in the 1920s, these two contradictions ingrained in leftist literary thought stimulated various debates and conflicts, rendering the “three prominences” a routine theoretical subject, which evolved and intensified in a long historical process. The genealogical study in this section addresses the first contradiction; the narrative accounts in the next section will foreground the second contradiction.

Realism was acclaimed as a progressive and critical literary approach in the May Fourth period. As Chen Duxiu claimed, “Down with stale, pompous classical literature; up with fresh, sincere realist literature!”¹⁰ May Fourth thinkers regarded realism as the most effective literary approach to unveil and analyze various social problems. However, as Marston Anderson correctly argues, realism was endorsed in China not primarily because of its objective representation of empirical reality, as

⁹ Ibid., 253. This argument’s predecessor is Roland Barthes’s famous reading of *Sarrasine*, in which he proposes that “limited plurality” can allow multiple and contradictory readings of the coherent and self-enclosed realist works. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

¹⁰ Chen Duxiu, “Wenxue geming lun” (On literary revolution), in Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 141.

is usually said of Western critical realism.¹¹ Rather, the introduction of realism coincided with China's urgent need for "a new model of creative generativity and literary reception." It allowed May Fourth intellectuals to not only observe society but also affectively express their moral standpoints to the audience at the deepest level.¹² In this way, realism—with its penchant for representing the world scientifically—was informed with Chinese intellectuals' sentimental expression and moral obligation.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a definition of realism as "any view or system contrasted with idealism."¹³ If idealism is "a system of thought that subordinates sensory perceptions of the world to intellectual or spiritual knowledge,"¹⁴ modern Chinese idealism—characterized by intellectuals' moral obsession with the nationalist ideal embedded in the traditional Chinese literary style—paradoxically constituted an indispensable part of modern Chinese realism.¹⁵ From the initial introduction of realism, to its later development from "social realism" to "socialist realism," to the "three prominences," what occurred was not stark rupture and distortion but the continued escalation of idealism within it.¹⁶ Idealism was inherent in the translated and reinterpreted concept of realism, whose contradictory twin constituents were never

¹¹ Realism in Western literary tradition is a loaded and contested term. Its slippery nature denies sweeping definition. However, particular Chinese discursive practices built the "tropes of equivalence" in translation, appropriating and reinterpreting the concept of realism in a new context. For discussion of realism in the Western literary tradition, see Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003). For an investigation of "tropes of equivalence," see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), Chapter 1.

¹² See Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 2.

¹³ See Morris, *Realism*, 2.

¹⁴ Morris, *Realism*, 3.

¹⁵ See C. T. Hsia, "Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature," in C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 533–54.

¹⁶ Chen Shunxing led a comprehensive investigation on the reception and transformation of socialist realism in China. But her analysis jumps directly from 1962 to 1976 with only one sentence to generalize the literary thought in this fourteen-year-period: "We can say that the reception of socialist realism in China from then [1962] on was in such a distorted way that this reception was absolutely blocked until the 'thaw' in the post-CR period" (Chen Shunxing, *Shehui zhuyi xianshi zhuyi lilun zai zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanhua* [The reception and transformation of socialist realism in China [Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000], 370]). This paper argues that the "three prominences" was not a distortion but an intensified form of socialist realism.

separated: the descriptive, objective observation has ever been shadowed by the prescriptive, subjective signification.

The 1927 Revolutionary Literature debate first demonstrated the tension of this description-prescription contradiction. As the leading theorist from the Communist Party-sponsored Sun Society, Qian Xingcun accused Lu Xun of exposing the dark side of life at the expense of political ideas.¹⁷ Qian believed the new “proletarian realism” should guide literature “(to) do more than simply describe life—it should create new life, that is, actively propel society into the future.”¹⁸ Lu Xun refuted and criticized this future-oriented prescription for its refusal to face harsh realities, although he obeyed the “revolutionary vanguard’s order” by offering certain bright idealistic hopes in the end of some his fiction back in 1919.¹⁹

The introduction of socialist realism to China by Zhou Yang in 1933 further manifested the description-prescription contradiction in a single literary doctrine.²⁰ Socialist realism, by its original Russian definition, requires two tasks.²¹ The descriptive task is “a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality,” and the prescriptive task is “ideological molding and education of the working people in the spirit

¹⁷ See Qian Xingcun, “Siqu le de A Q shidai” (The bygone age of Ah Q), in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 276–88.

¹⁸ Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 49.

¹⁹ See Lu Xun, “Zi xu” (Preface to Call to Arms), in *Nahan* (Call to Arms) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1997). English translation in Anderson, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 238–42. Lu Xun applied such *qubi* (translated as “innuendos” [Denton] or as “distortions” [Anderson]) most famously in his fiction “Yao” (“Medicine,” from *Call to Arms*) by leaving a wreath on the son’s grave to cancel certain pessimistic effect of the fiction. For discussion of *qubi*, see Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, Chapter 2.

²⁰ See Zhou Yang, “Guanyu shehui zhuyi de xianshi zhuyi yu geming de langman zhuyi” (On socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism), in *Zhou Yang wenji* (Selected works of Zhou Yang) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1984), I:101. Although the standard definition of socialist realism was not proposed until the First Congress of the Soviet Writers in 1934, Zhou Yang had sensitively grasped the essence of socialist realism one year earlier.

²¹ The standard definition of socialist realism is:

Socialist realism, being the basic method following Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time this truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological molding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.

(Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917–1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism* [New York: Octagon Books, 1977], 197).

of socialism.” As for how to reconcile these two contradictory tasks in one doctrine, Zhou Yang replied with a rhetorical question: “Socialist realism requires writers to depict reality; isn’t it true that revolutionary romanticism is included in such a living reality?”²² Zhou’s defense regarded “positive romanticism” as an inherent part of realism, an argument essentially inherited from the ideals driven realism that had been forming since the May Fourth period. In contrast with Zhou’s foregrounding of “heroism” in the “darkness surrounding us,”²³ Hu Feng’s argument on realism emphasized the social particular—“the injured and insulted”—rather than a bright universal truth.²⁴ As a student of Lu Xun, Hu was associated with the other trend of 1930s leftism, whose humanistic concern to expose social ills differentiated it from the ideologically charged “socialist realism.” Leo Ou-fan Lee coined the term “social realism” to refer to this trend in 1930s–1940s leftist cinema. He points out the “striking difference” between 1930s leftist cinema and 1970s CR cinema based on the “three prominences.”²⁵ However, Lee also notes that the former were often marked by “sentimental and naively idealistic terms.”²⁶ More recently, Laikwan Pang uses the term “engaging realism” to suggest the propensity of 1930s leftist cinema to incorporate the ideological socialist realism and traditional Chinese “heavy sentimentalism.”²⁷ Whether the style was “social realism” or “socialist realism,” the idealist element persisted in leftist realism.

Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Talks” in 1942 legitimized the idealistic and prescriptive elements in leftist realism. For Mao, “life” reflected in artworks “can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”²⁸ The “Yan’an Talks” anticipated

²² Zhou Yang, “On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism,” 113.

²³ See Zhou Yang, “Thoughts on Realism,” in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 344.

²⁴ See Hu Feng, “Realism: A Correction,” in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 345–55.

²⁵ See Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Tradition of Modern Chinese Cinema: Some Preliminary Explorations and Hypotheses,” in Chris Berry, ed., *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (London: BFI, 1991), 6–20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement 1932–1937* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), Chapter 8.

²⁸ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art,” in Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 470.

the “three prominences” in two ways. First, when literature and art are “cogs and wheels in the whole machine,” they can only passively yet faithfully produce standard artworks under the necessary guidance of a definite form, such as the principle of “three prominences.”²⁹ Second, Mao demanded that the equal treatment of social brightness and darkness should give way to “bring[ing] out the brightness of the whole picture.”³⁰ This can almost be paraphrased as “Among all the characters, give prominence to the positive figures.”

After Mao’s “Yan’an Talks,” the characterization of positive figures became the central task for Communist literature and art. In 1948, Hu Ling distinguished the positive characters from heroic characters, noting, “Not all the positive characters need to be depicted as perfectly as the heroic characters,” but the new heroic characters “should be perfect.”³¹ In 1951, Chen Huangmei called for efforts to create new heroic models and eulogize their sublime characteristics rather than depicting their backwardness.³² In 1953, the Second Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers endorsed socialist realism—with its idealistic element rapidly increasing—as the highest principle for literature and art. The conference report by Zhou Yang again revealed the description-prescription contradiction of leftist realism. Zhou noted that “real life” should be the foundation for creating heroic characters. But he also claimed that “to prominently represent the brilliant characteristics of the heroic figure, it is allowable and even indispensable to intentionally ignore some unimportant defects of the heroic figure, thus making him the idealized character admired by the masses.”³³ In the top-down Communist literary system, this presented enormous puzzles for writers: What were the “unimportant defects”? How could the erasure of these defects according to a prescriptive ideal still be based on “real life”?

²⁹ Ibid., 474.

³⁰ Ibid., 479.

³¹ See Hu Ling, “Cong ‘ruhe chuangzao zhengmian renwu’ tanqi” (A discussion on the topic “how to build positive characters”), in *Dongbei wenyi* (Northeastern literature and art) 4, no. 6 (1948).

³² See Chen Huangmei, “Wei chuangzao xinde yingxiong dianxing er nuli” (Strive to create new heroic models), in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao (1949–1979)* (Research documents of Chinese film 1949–1979) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 1:86–91.

³³ Zhou Yang, “Wei chuangzao gengduode youxiude wenxue yishu zuopin er fendou” (Strive to create more brilliant literature and artworks), in *Selected Works of Zhou Yang*, 2:243.

These uncertainties derived from the description-prescription contradiction required the Communist artists always to “dance on the knife blade.”³⁴ After the Antirightist Campaign in 1957, whether an artist leaned toward the descriptive end (expose social problems) or the prescriptive end (eulogize socialist brightness) of socialist realism became the yardstick to judge their Communist beliefs and revolutionary loyalty.³⁵ Artists had no choice but to neglect as many defects of heroes as possible. Only by doing so could they remain in the socialist leftist camp. The 1958 Great Leap Forward called for more artistic representation of omnipotent and flawless heroic characters to echo its overdrive for material production. To promote the unconquerable Communist ideal, Mao Zedong coined the principle of “combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism” to replace socialist realism.³⁶

This replacement allowed the idealistic element within realism to escalate continuously until it culminated in the “three prominences.” Aesthetic debates were explicitly transcribed into political struggles after Mao’s directive “never forget class struggle” in 1962.³⁷ His two harsh comments on the realm of literature and art, in 1963 and 1964, further put artists on trial.³⁸ Following this trend, in February 1966 a forum hosted by Jiang Qing generated a combative “Summary,” which claimed that ever since the establishment of the PRC, a “black line” had usurped the literature and art realm. To support the characterization of the flawless heroic models, the “Summary” also attacked the theory of “truthful writing” as the foremost poisonous theory in

³⁴ Qi Xiaoping, *Xianghua ducao: Hongse niandai de dianying mingyun* (Fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds: The destiny of films in the red years) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2006), 2.

³⁵ For a comprehensive and authoritative analysis of the aesthetic/political struggle between the leftist camp and the rightist camp, see Zhou Yang, “Wenyi zhanxian shang de dabianlun” (A huge debate on the battlefield of the literature and art realm), in Wu Di, ed., *Research Documents of Chinese Film 1949–1979*, 2:167–83.

³⁶ Mao actually recognized the idealistic aspect within socialist realism as early as the 1940s, when he wrote the slogan “realism of the Anti-Japanese War, romanticism of the revolution.” (*kangri de xianshi zhuyi, geming de langman zhuyi*). See Chen Shunxing, *Shehui zhuyi xianshi zhuyi lilun zai Zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanhua*, 321. Such a nominal modification also reflected Mao’s increasing concern that the Chinese revolutionary experience should be distinguished from Soviet influence.

³⁷ In September 1962, Mao Zedong made this comment in the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth CPC Central Committee.

³⁸ Mao Zedong, “Guanyu wenxue yishu de liangge pishi” (Two comments on the realm of literature and art), *Renmin ribao* (Renmin daily) (May 28, 1967). Mao originally made the comments in December 1963 and June 1964.

the Eight Negative Expressions.³⁹ The “Summary” fully reflected Jiang Qing’s literary thought, and provided a canonical text from which Yu Huiyong could generalize Jiang’s thought into a formulaic principle of “three prominences.”

Genealogical study shows the red thread running through the “three prominences.” The concept was not a whimsical invention, but an intensified formula developed from the dual formation of Chinese leftist realism: the faithful description of empirical reality and prescriptive idealization of revolutionary heroes. With idealism taking on ever-greater proportions within leftist realism, the flawless main heroic characters seem to be free from the limitations of reality—as Leo Ou-fan Lee comments about CR films, which are “grossly unreal when seen side by side with the social-realistic films made in the ’40s.”⁴⁰

However, rather than rush to the conclusion that this unresolved inner contradiction renders the “three prominences” irremediably contradictory, we need to reconsider the slippery nature of “reality” itself. The political attack on “truthful writing,” as is shown in the “Summary,” was not an attack on *truth* itself but on the version of truth in the rightist artists’ minds, which tended to expose the dark side of the socialist system. Such dark truth needs to be distinguished from the idealized leftist truth, which is criticized as unreal nowadays but might be regarded as pure reality during the CR period.

Empirical reality differs from, but is also bound up with the morally prescribed “reality.” As Terry Eagleton suggests, we need to distinguish “‘false’ as meaning ‘untrue to what is the case,’ and ‘false’ as meaning ‘unreal.’”⁴¹ If the first “false” implies ethical evaluation, the second “false” is based on empirical observation. The complication is that ideological discourse mediates through “a complex network of empirical and normative elements, within which the nature and organization of the former is ultimately determined by the requirements of the latter.”⁴² In other words, by a certain ideological practice, an

³⁹ The full name of the “Summary” is “Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiangqing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao” (Summary of the Forum on Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing), in Wu Di, ed., *Research Documents of Chinese Film 1949–1979*, 3:3–11.

⁴⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Tradition of Modern Chinese Cinema,” 15.

⁴¹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

idealistic prescription can influence and even determine the empirical description, thus blurring the boundary between the two. Is it possible that what appears a description-prescription contradiction from today's retrospective viewpoint was not a contradiction for the intellectuals and many others at that time, because they simply regarded the prescriptive ideal as the descriptive real?

Social truth/reality is ultimately an ideological construction in a symbolic system. In an analysis of Balzac's novel *La Vieille Fille*, Frederic Jameson investigates "the relationship between desire, ideology, and the possibility for certain types of narrative apparatus to lay claim to a social and historical 'realism.'"⁴³ For Jameson, social reality comes to us in narrative forms, and its representation (realism) inevitably goes through symbolic mediation. It is a master narrative (ideology) that contains, if not solves, historical contradictions and provides coherence and comprehensibility for a collective unity, from which individual desires and fantasies can find symbolic affirmation.⁴⁴ In a vivid illustration of such an affirmation, Jonathan Crary examines how regulated knowledge fuses and unifies spectators' vision. He points out that from the late 1500s to the late 1700s, Europeans used camera obscura to confirm their epistemological ordering of the world. By "excluding anything disorderly or unruly," spectators could find symbolic correspondence "between exterior world and interior representation."⁴⁵ Crary's argument confirms the fusion of the descriptive and the prescriptive. In front of an ideological apparatus such as a camera obscura or cinema screen, what the spectator desires to see determines to a large extent what he empirically sees.

Crary's argument on "the mind's eye" suffers from his assumption of universal spectatorship.⁴⁶ Given the very complexity of the Cultural

⁴³ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 179.

⁴⁴ See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, especially chapters 1, 3, 5, and 6. For two brilliant readings of *The Political Unconscious*, see William C. Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), and George Hartley, *The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and Postmodern Sublime* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Chapter 5.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 42–43.

⁴⁶ See Heidi J. Nast and Audrey Kobayashi, "Re-Corporealizing Vision," in Nancy Duncan, ed., *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 81.

Revolution,⁴⁷ it is presumptuous to assume any CR audience's/reader's position to judge whether or not they identified with the flawless heroic characters and regarded the prescriptive ideal as the descriptive real.⁴⁸ It is, however, necessary to investigate how the revolutionary ideology "contains"⁴⁹ the description-prescription contradiction by merging the "idealized future world" with the "real present world" during the CR years. If for Jameson the symbolic act can invent "imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions,"⁵⁰ the reverse also holds true: social imagining of a future totality can potentially contain, if not solve, the description-prescription contradiction in a literary principle.

The Cultural Revolution began in the spheres of literature and art. For Mao Zedong, the establishment of an autonomous kingdom of proletarian art was possible and necessary. Mao's privileging of culture dated to as early as 1937, with his essay "Maodun lun" (On contradiction), in which he noted, "when the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economy, political and cultural changes become principal and imperative."⁵¹ Mao boldly carried out this belief by liberating the cultural from the economic during the CR period. Such a practice, however, could easily slide toward another extreme, as Liu Kang points out: "Mao's privileging of culture, as a way in its inception to counter the economic determinism of classical

⁴⁷ These complexities include, for example, the heterogeneous spectatorship/readership, the regional diversity in China, and the ever-changing social contexts of each period during the Cultural Revolution. For recent scholarship focusing on such diversities of the Cultural Revolution, see Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Perry Link distinguishes four types of readers in the socialist literary system: The Mass Audience, The Popular Readership, Socially Engaged Readers, and Elite Readers. See Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 211–83.

⁴⁹ See Frederic Jameson's term "strategy of containment," which indicates an alternative mode of ideology other than "false consciousness." Ideology provides coherence and comprehensibility by containing (not necessarily solving) the real social contradictions. See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 52–53; also Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx*, 76–93.

⁵⁰ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 79.

⁵¹ Mao Zedong, "On Contradiction," in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong), vol. 1. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1975).

Marxism, was eventually turned into a ‘culturalist’ determinism and essentialism.”⁵²

When culture was liberated from materialism and became an driving force in social development, a spiritual movement inevitably arose. Rather than reflect on the present world critically, this movement introduced an invisible future world and inflamed the imagination untrammelled by material boundaries. As a popular saying during the Great Leap Forward goes, “There is only that which has not been thought of, not that which is impossible to achieve” (*Meiyou gan budao de, zhiyou xiang budao de* 没有干不到的, 只有想不到的).⁵³ The key cultural strategy of the party was to stimulate the collective imagination of the “future ideal world” in order to transform the shape of the “real world” in the minds of the masses. Consciousness of the boundary between the present and the future was strategically obscured.

This leftist cultural strategy is reminiscent of Lukács’ discussion on epic narrative,⁵⁴ in which the heroic figures in Homeric times indicate a golden era when the totality and the original harmony of life remained. Such an original unity cannot be regained in a modern age characterized by rupture and uncertainty. Therefore, Western critical realism constructs psychologically divided heroes facing an increasingly segmented capitalist modernity. For Mao, however, class struggle could eliminate such a rupture and revive the original harmony.⁵⁵ By provoking unbounded imagination of a future world where the capitalism and labor divide is overcome, Mao’s cultural strategy called for the unity of the past and connected it with a future totality, which was implanted into the present and redefined as the consciousness of reality. The future is the present; the prescriptive ideal is the descriptive

⁵² Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), xi.

⁵³ See “The Great Leap Forward,” from Chinese Online Encyclopedia Baidu, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/8601.htm> (accessed June 26, 2009).

⁵⁴ See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), 56. Also see Ban Wang’s analysis of Lukács’ notion of epic in relation to the memory of realism in modern China. (Ban Wang, “Epic Narrative, Authenticity, and the Memory of Realism: Reflections on Jia Zhangke’s *Platform*,” in Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, eds., *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007], 193–216). Régine Robin also analyzes Lukács’ epic heroes to demonstrate their incompatibility with socialist realism, in *Socialist Realism*, 240–43.

⁵⁵ For Mao’s utopian impulse to escape historical blemishes and restore the original unity on a “clear sheet of paper,” see Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), Chapter 18.

real. In an “aesthetically driven, ritualistic and theatrical” CR society,⁵⁶ the main heroic figures governed by the “three prominences” not only symbolized the revolutionary achievements but also, more importantly, represented the future.

Slavoj Žižek’s arguments shed further light on such representation of the future totality. Ideological fantasy constructs social reality by designating a future that is ultimately a void. To make the void representable, the future totality needs to efface “the traces of its own impossibility” by calling for a sublime object to occupy the empty Holy place.⁵⁷ Žižek defines this object as “immaterial corporality”⁵⁸—“immaterial” because its meaning depends on a symbolic order (the symbol is not sublime itself, but the “Holy place” renders it sublime); “corporality” because it is the embodiment to fill the void. The sublime object needs to be “indestructible and immutable,” and it “persists beyond the corruption of the body physical.”⁵⁹ In this regard, nothing is more suitable as the sublime object to represent the future totality than the flawless main heroic figures. Their perfection will be “immutable,” and their sacrifice ensures the continuation of the next sublime body to fill the void, rendering the revolutionary spirit “indestructible.”⁶⁰ The “three prominences” provided a symbolic order to foreground the sublime object, and the social imaginary of the future totality during the CR years justified the “three prominences” and potentially contained its inherent description-prescription contradiction.

Narrative Accounts: The Awkward Position of the Main Heroic Character?

The “three prominences” was the major principle behind all proletarian art works during the CR. For example, all the artistic elements in the Model Plays—from a single flash of light and props on the stage, to a single actor’s line or action, to the plot and narrative structure of the play—strictly followed the “three prominences.”

⁵⁶ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetic and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 219.

⁵⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 50, 221.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ I will discuss in detail the continuation of revolutionary spirit in the “spontaneity-consciousness mode” in the next section.

Yao Wenyan's article, in which the standard version of the "three prominences" was proposed, gives official examples of the application of the principle in the model play *Zhiqu weihu shan* 智取威虎山 (Taking Tiger Mountain by strategy).⁶¹

First, the negative characters serve as foils to the main heroic character. Yao cited an example from Scene VI. In the original version of this play, the negative character Zuo Shandiao 座山雕 (the Vulture) sits in a higher place and looks down at the main heroic character, Yang Zirong 杨子荣. Such a stage setting only allows Yang to circle the Vulture. In the revised version, the Vulture's seat moves from the center to the side so that Yang can stand center stage and the Vulture can circle him. The main heroic character Yang is given full prominence in contrast to the peripheral Vulture.

Second, the other positive characters serve as foils to the main heroic character. Yao draws the example from a frozen stance (*liangxiang* 亮相) at the end of Scene I. There are two groups of people on stage. Yang Zirong stands tall at center stage, with his fellow soldiers clustered around him in lower poses. Behind Yang's group stands Shao Jianbo, the commander-in-chief, with soldiers around him in lower poses. In this way, soldiers act as foils to Shao, Shao's group serves as a foil to Yang's group, while and in Yang's group the fellow soldiers act as foils to Yang.⁶² Such well-contrived multilayered foils naturally draw the audience's attention to Yang, who gains final prominence among all of the positive characters.

Third, the stage settings serve as foils to the main heroic character. In the original version of Scene VIII, Yang crouches in a damp, narrow cave, which has a dimming effect. The revised version has Yang tower over all at the top of the mountain, singing in the rays of splendid sunshine. Such a rearrangement presents the audience with a sublime revolutionary image and gives prominence to the main heroic character.

These three aspects of the principle are equally viable in explaining countless examples from CR Model Plays, novels, and other art forms. The hierarchy among three kinds of symbols (the main heroic

⁶¹ See The Performing Group of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, "Strive to Create Dazzlingly Brilliant Proletarian Heroic Images."

⁶² See The Performing Group of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe: "Yuanyu shenghuo, gaoyu shenghuo" (Drawn from life, higher than life) in *Ten Years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera*, 77.

character, the other heroic or positive characters, and the negative characters) is theoretically simple to apply, and easily recognized by mass audiences/readers. Therefore, Paul Clark regards the “three prominences” as “a useful, relatively objective yardstick by which to measure correctness.”⁶³ In practice, however, the symbolic relationship is not as clear-cut. I will examine the seemingly awkward position of the main heroic figures to deal with the second contradiction of the “three prominences”—between the politically fixed symbols and the potential “textual revenge.”

First, the awkward position of the main heroic character is reflected in his or her relationship with the negative characters. Artists could give full prominence to the main heroic character by establishing his or her absolute superiority (morally or intellectually) over all the negative characters. In other words, by denigrating the negative characters as stupid or vulnerable, the main heroic character could be easily foregrounded. However, as a critic noted, the negative characters as “the opposite dimension of paradox” should also be emphasized to a certain degree to foil and elevate the main heroic character; otherwise the main heroic character cannot fully develop heroic characteristics and thereby be paradoxically downplayed.⁶⁴ For instance, according to the “three prominences,” the general cinematographic strategy to represent enemies should be “far, small, dark” (*yuan, xiao, hei* 远\小黑). When struggle occurs, however, if the enemies appear to be too small and dark, the mismatch in conflict would be all too evident, and the hero’s prominence would come cheaply if the powerful hero only beats weak enemies. In this way, dwarfing negative characters simultaneously gives and does not give prominence to the main heroic character.

Second, the main heroic character’s awkward position is also manifested in the relationship with other heroic/positive characters. To ensure the prominence of the main heroic character, artists usually applied two strategies: “*Shuizhang chuangao*” 水涨船高 (the rising river raises the boat) and “*Shuiluo shichu*” 水落石出 (when the river ebbs the

⁶³ Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47.

⁶⁴ See Ye Xiaosheng, “Yingxiong guanghui zhao yinmu” (Heroism shines on the screen), in *Ten Years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera*, 180–84.

stone appears).⁶⁵ The positive characters are compared to a river, and the prominence of the main heroic character can be accentuated by either elevating or dwarfing them. The difference is that the ebbing river can make the stone stand out but cannot elevate it. Therefore, “the rising river raises the boat” became the preferred approach.

However, while a rising river can elevate a boat, it can also capsize the boat. In some filmic versions of the Model Plays, it is hard to determine who the main heroic character is.⁶⁶ The play *Shajiabang* 沙家浜 exemplifies such a difficulty. Although Guo Jianguang (the army leader) is the flawless main heroic character, Sister Aqing, an underground Communist coming from the local area, seems to undermine Guo’s supremacy. Her legendary life and acute mind to outwit the male enemies are more fun to watch. In a recent study of the “three prominences,” Gu Yuanqing points out, “In practice, the artistic brilliance of Sister Aqing overshadows Guo Jianguang, who is only able to make empty gestures. This woman coming from the people is always, in the audience’s minds, the main heroic character.”⁶⁷ Here, the contradiction between the elevated political symbols and the uncontrollable textual dynamism seems to put the hierarchical system of the “three prominences” in question.

Similar to the unanimous denouncement of the “Three Prominences” on the post-Mao claim of truth, Gu’s argument is undercut by his retrospective evaluation of the CR audience. Given the

⁶⁵ See Fang Yun, “Shi ‘shuiluo shichu’ haishi ‘shuizhang chuangao’” (Whether “shuiluo shichu” or “shuizhang chuangao”), in *Ten Years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera*, 172–75.

⁶⁶ For a detailed description of how such a difficulty generated various political debates and struggles in the Model Play films *The Red Lantern* (1971) and *The White-Haired Girl* (1972), see Qu Jiannong, *Hongse wang shi 1966–1976 nian de Zhongguo dian ying* (The red past: Chinese cinema 1966–1976) (Beijing: Taihai chubanshe, 2001), 111–12, 139–40, 151–56.

⁶⁷ Gu Yuanqing, “San tuchu” (The three prominences), in Hong Zichen and Meng Fanhua, eds., *Dangdai wenxue guanjian zi* (Key vocabulary in contemporary literature) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 148. See a similar comment from Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue guanjianci shijiang* (Ten lectures on key vocabulary in contemporary Chinese literature), (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 154. Chen’s insights on the “latent folk structure,” which resisted the dominant revolutionary discourse during the CR period, shed light on the CR audience’s response. For Chen, the Model Plays drew CR audiences’ interest because certain parts of the plays inherited from folk art and popular culture (*Ten Lectures*, 130–65). This is certainly important, but it does not capture the “hypnotic and seductive power” of art in the ritualistic CR society. (See Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 213.)

heterogeneity of the CR spectatorship, it is equally presumptuous to assume the audience “in their minds” identified more with Guo Jian-guang or with Sister Aqing. It is doubtful whether textual revenge necessarily occurs in every scenario. Yomi Braester suggests that the power of writing “stems from the chasm between text and what it represents, and draws on ambiguity and paradox.”⁶⁸ Concerning the film versions of the Model Plays, however, he notices that the polyphonic text was “effectively silenced” by totalitarian political semiotics during the CR years: only the party had absolute authority to interpret all the signs—for instance, the “sublime sign” of the coded message in *The Red Lantern*.⁶⁹

The sublime characteristic of symbols is exactly the point from which the social imaginary of the future represses textual dynamism. The flawless main heroic figure as the “sublime object” represents and fills the void of future horizons, while the other positive/heroic characters—fallible or unsteady in revolutionary belief—represent the imperfect present. In hindsight today, textual revenge occurs because the main heroic character is prescriptively conceptualized, in contrast to the more “realistic” depiction of other positive characters. But if the crucial ideological strategy of the party during the CR years was to reshuffle the collective consciousness of the present and the future and thrust the future imaginary into the present reality, the positive characters could not threaten the supremacy of the main heroic character because the descriptive real was rendered hard to distinguish from the prescriptive ideal.

Textual dynamism is further repressed by one of the basic narrative modes in the CR arts, the “spontaneity-consciousness mode.”⁷⁰ Spontaneity stands for the present time, when groups or individuals “are not sufficiently enlightened politically and might act in an undisciplined or uncoordinated way.” Consciousness signals aspirations for a better future, when people “act from complete political awareness.”⁷¹ The representative characters of this narrative mode are Wu Qinghua

⁶⁸ Yomi Braester, *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), ix.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 107–27.

⁷⁰ Katrina Clark, “Socialist Realism with Shores,” in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 27–50. Clark investigates this mode in Soviet novels. It is also applied in many CR artworks.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

and Hong Changqing in the revolutionary ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzi jun* 红色娘子军). The positive character Wu Qinghua is “spontaneous” at first—she is not able to restrain her personal resentment when she shoots and injures her enemy, Nan Batian, thus frustrating the original plan.⁷² After the main heroic character, Hong Changqing, educates her with the model of “consciousness,”⁷³ Wu makes every effort to transform herself into that “consciousness.” Hong sacrifices his life in Scene VI to leave the “Holy place” of the future totality empty again, and Wu, inheriting “consciousness” from him, functions as the symbolic embodiment to fill the void. In correspondence with the social imaginary by which the present reality is led, modified, and finally merged with the future totality, the “spontaneous” positive character is first frustrated, then educated, and finally transformed into the “conscious” main heroic character. When the future vision is to be the ultimate orientation for all the positive characters and calls for their commitment in a successive sequence, textual dynamism is potentially contained because every symbol will become essentially the same “sublime object” to embody the future horizon.

Postscript

In twenty-first-century China, where the feverish pursuit of material interests has replaced the social imaginary of the future, what is the destiny of the CR artworks, as well as the underlying principle of the “three prominences”? Instead of throwing the Model Plays into the dustbin, a new tendency had arisen rapidly under the logic of “going to market.”

In the name of reviving the “Red Classics” (*Hongse jingdian* 红色经典), the TV series market has witnessed a number of adaptations from the Model Plays, such as *The Red Detachment of Women* (2004), *Sha jiabang* (2006), and *The Red Lantern* (2007). To restore the “distorted” heroic characters and to humanize their highly formulaic profiles, directors/scriptwriters tried all means to rewrite these Model Plays—not only to get rid of the “three prominences” but also to cater to

⁷² See *The Red Detachment of Women*, Scene III, in *Gemin Yangbanxi juben huibian* (Compilation of the Revolutionary Model Play scripts) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1974), vol. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Scene IV.

the market economy. For instance, the TV series *The Red Detachment of Women* invited famous stars and added many love stories to attract not only the older audience who had lived through the CR period but also the younger audience fascinated by Japanese/Korean idol dramas.⁷⁴ Yet neither group welcomed this TV series⁷⁵ and the original scriptwriter Liang Xin refused to watch it.⁷⁶ The State Administration for Radio, Film, and TV issued a notification demanding “more serious adaptations” of the “Red Classics” into TV series. The negative models in this notification included *The Red Detachment of Women* as yet unreleased.⁷⁷

The critiques from the audience, critics, and the state bureau were similar. Following the popular opinion, the state charged that these adaptations “invest too much romance on the main characters and emphasize their love stories . . . deliberately endow the heroic figures with multiple characteristics (*duochong xingge*, 多重性格), and seek for the so-called ‘humanism’ (*renxinhua* 人性化) from the negative characters.”⁷⁸ Ironically, in light of the postsocialist discourse that condemned the “three prominences” as dogmatic or ridiculous and regarded CR main heroic characters as empty or unreal, these rewritings in the TV series aimed to render the characters more “real” human beings. What had been most severely denounced in the “three prominences” seemed to be endorsed again. This raises the question if there is any theoretical validity of the

⁷⁴ See Li Yan, “Hongse niangzi jun gemingju jingchen ouxiangju” (*The Red Detachment of Women* became an drama of fashionable idols?), in *Jinri xinxi bao* (Today’s news) (March 14, 2004).

⁷⁵ See Li Yan, “Xinban hongse niangzi jun gen hongse bu tiebian” (The new version of *The Red Detachment of Women* has nothing to do with the “red”), in *Beijing qingnian bao* (Beijing youth) (July 3, 2006).

⁷⁶ Liang was the scriptwriter of the 1961 film version of *The Red Detachment of Women*. He castigated this TV series because five or six people had worked on rewriting the script without his consent. See Ding Guanqing, “Dangnian yuan dianying bianju liangxin jukan dianshiju hongse niangzi jun” (The original scriptwriter Liang Xin refused to watch the TV series *The Red Detachment of Women*), *Nanfang ribao* (Nanfang daily) (June 15, 2005).

⁷⁷ See “Guanyu renzhen duidai hongse jingdian gaibian dianshiju youguan wenti de tongzhi” (Notification on the serious treatment of the TV adaptations from the Red Classics), <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/22114/33943/33945/2523858.html> (accessed June 29, 2009).

⁷⁸ Li Yan, “The New Version of *The Red Detachment of Women* Has Nothing to Do with the ‘Red.’” “Notification on the Serious Treatment of the TV Adaptations from the ‘Red Classics,’” <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/22114/33943/33945/2523858.html>.

“three prominences” that transcends different social contexts? Why is the condemnation of the heroic characters as “unreal” simultaneously accompanied by resistance to rewriting them to be more “real”? How can we situate CR artworks (or their adaptations) in today’s China, where “the dominant trend of marketization” is still haunted by “the remnants of the state heteronomy”?⁷⁹ These questions are worth further reflection.

⁷⁹ Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 12.

REVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVE IN THE SEVENTEEN YEARS PERIOD

Guo Bingru

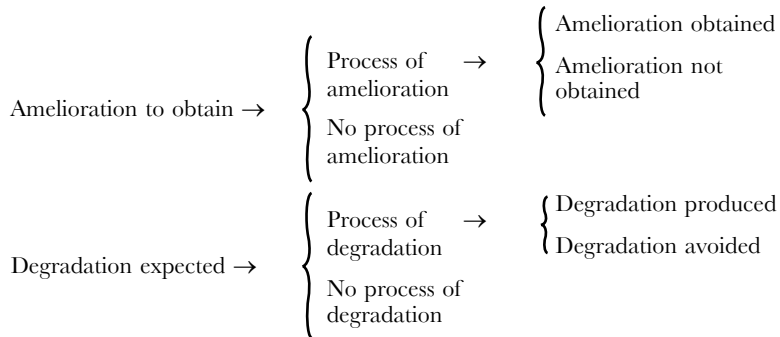
Translated by Michael Gibbs Hill

Chinese literature from 1949 and after is commonly known as “contemporary Chinese literature”; within this, the literature from the period between 1949 and 1965 is called “literature of the seventeen years period” (十七年文学 *Shiqi nian wenxue*). This chapter discusses fiction from the seventeen years period to investigate the basic characteristics of and ideological factors behind “revolutionary narrative.”

Fictional narrative from the seventeen years period addresses the process of establishing a modern nation-state and involves the two major themes of revolutionary history and “socialist transformation.” It addresses the problem of why and how “we” should engage in revolution and demonstrates the results of “our” final victory. The fictional texts from this period present the basic features of the revolution in narrative. Within the overall context, this narrative follows the principles of artistic creation established in 1942 by Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art.” For this reason, these texts all show varying degrees of formulaic tendencies both in their intellectual content and in their management of plot. Be that as it may, authors’ individual mental labor and their varying ways of imagining the modern nation-state both enriched well-established narratives and created their own vision, thus forming a different type of revolutionary narrative that marks the seventeen years period. With different ways of handling plot and character, mainstream fictional narrative in the seventeen years period may be divided into two types of narrative: classic revolutionary narrative and legendary revolutionary narrative. Classic revolutionary narrative completely followed well-established narratives in terms of plot and characters; revolutionary legendary narrative, however, blended in imaginative elements found in popular literature. The differences between these narrative forms reveal the richness of literature from the seventeen years period and demonstrate aspects of its modernity.

In classic revolutionary narrative, the author's management of plot and characters follows completely the principles of artistic creation established by cultural policy. The plot design follows similar logic and has become the established mode of narration. Using Claude Bremond's model of plot types, we can clearly delineate the patterns of plot formation. Bremond divided the plot development process in narrative works into two categories, "amelioration" and "degradation." Within any category, a plot's development and its conclusion both have the possibility for amelioration and degradation. Based on this model, Bremond laid out three ways of linking amelioration and degradation in narrative works.¹

¹ In his article, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," Bremond argues, "All narrative consists of a discourse which integrates a sequence of events of human interest into the unity of a single plot. Without succession there is no narrative, but rather description (if the objects of the discourse are associated through spatial contiguity), deduction (if these objects imply one another), lyrical effusion (if they evoke one another through metaphor or metonymy). Neither does narrative exist without integration into the unity of a plot, but only chronology, an enunciation of a succession of uncoordinated facts. Finally, where there is no implied human interest (narrated events neither being produced by agents nor experienced by anthropomorphic beings), there can be no narrative, for it is only in relation to a plan conceived by man that events gain meaning and can be organized into a structured temporal sequence." He divides events into two categories based on whether they complete or hinder this sequence.



Specifically, the three processes of combining degradation and amelioration are: the "end-to-end series," in which, according to a series of linked cycles, a story substitutes and exchanges stages of amelioration and degradation; "the enclave," in which the failure of a process of degradation or amelioration is caused by the interference of a reverse process that prevents its development and conclusion; and "coupling," in which, in the same sequence of events, "the degradation of the fate of the one coincides with the amelioration of the fate of the other." See Claude Bremond, "The Logic of Narrative Possibilities," trans. Elaine D. Cancalon, *New Literary History* 11, no. 3 (1980): 387-411.

For these reasons, authors' narrative behavior in works from this period is standardized. A story's development process was defined by a single, established formula: amelioration to obtain → process of amelioration → amelioration obtained. In works based on the theme of revolutionary history, such as *Kucaihua* 苦菜花 (Bitter flowers of a wild vegetable), *Hongri* 紅日 (Red sun), *Baowei Yan'an* 保卫延安 (Defending Yan'an), *Hong yan* 紅岩 (Red crag), and *Hongqi pu* 红旗谱 (Genealogy of the red flag), the narrative's point of departure is a grave situation for "us" that arises from a conflict between us and the enemy and must be ameliorated. All events move in the direction of amelioration, and the entire process is located in a bitter, supreme struggle conducted by our side under the party's correct leadership. The outcome of the narrative is our final triumph. In works based on the theme of "socialist transformation" such as *Sanliwan* 三里湾 (Three mile valley) *Shanxiang jubian* 山乡巨变 (Great changes in a mountain village), *Chuangye shi* 创业史 (A history of pioneers), and *Shanghai de zaochen* 上海的早晨 (Morning in Shanghai), the narrative's point of departure is the need for the countryside (or factories) to launch a movement for collectivization. Events also develop in the direction of amelioration, and the process is also driven by the correct guidance of the party and the work of progressive elements. Finally, the terminus of the narrative is always the victorious completion of this work. Even a narrative based on an individual's development, such as *Qingchun zhi ge* 青春之歌 (*Song of Youth*), begins with the hero, Lin Daojing, at a low point in her life in terms of revolution and love, both of which demand amelioration. The process is set in motion by the help offered to her by party members Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Hua, and the narrative ends with Lin Daojing obtaining amelioration both in love and in revolution.

As a form of mental labor, literary creation requires that as authors work consciously within narrative constraints demanded by ideology, they thoroughly express their own artistic vision; thereby their efforts not only complete and strengthen established narrative models but also ensure the full and effective realization of the work as propaganda. At the level of plot, the three models of combination elucidated by Bremond all appear in fictional texts from the seventeen years period. For example, *Bitter Flowers of a Wild Vegetable*, *Three Mile Valley*, *Great Change in a Mountain Village*, *Red Sun*, *Song of Youth*, *Ride the Winds Break the Waves* (乘风破浪 *Chengfeng polang*), and *A History of Pioneers* all conform to the "end-to-end series" model. In other words, as events reach the terminus of the narrative at revolutionary victory, the work of

ideological instruction borne by literary writing also reaches a conclusion. *Red Crag* and *Morning in Shanghai* conform to the “coupling” plot, using similar writing styles to describe both sides in the struggle, laying out one side’s victory in contrast with the other’s defeat, and thereby effectively completing the ideological propaganda function. *Defending Yan’an* follows the “enclave” form: as an ongoing process of degradation is continuously ameliorated and finally brought to a halt, the propaganda work of the text slowly gains momentum, reaching its highest point at the narrative’s conclusion. Clearly, a number of plot combinations not only demonstrate the wealth and complexity of literature as mental labor but also strengthen their functions as ideological propaganda.

Aside from providing a fixed narrative model, classic revolutionary narrative distinguishes character types according to specific policies.² Mao Zedong once pointed out that the main problem in revolution lies in telling friends from enemies. Accordingly, narrative from the seventeen years period has two clearly distinguished types of **charac-**

² In his “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society,” Mao Zedong provided a detailed analysis of class formation in Chinese society, arriving at the following conclusion: “[A]ll those in league with imperialism—the warlords, the bureaucrats, the compradors, the big landlords, and the reactionary section of the intelligentsia dependent on them—are our enemies. The industrial proletariat is the leading force in our revolution. All sections of the semi-proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie are our closest friends. As to the vacillating middle class, its right wing may become our enemy and its left wing may become our friend, but we must be constantly on our guard towards the latter and not allow it to create confusion in our front.” See Mao Zedong, “Zhongguo shehui ge jieji de fenxi,” *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Selected works of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 1:9. Translation from *Mao Tse-tung: Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1954), 1:20. In his “Yan’an Talks,” Mao also said: “With regard to the enemy, that is, that is, Japanese imperialism and all other enemies of the people, the task of revolutionary writers and artists is to expose their duplicity and cruelty and at the same time to point out the inevitability of their defeat, so as to encourage the anti-Japanese Army and people to fight staunchly with one heart and one mind for their overthrow. With regard to our different allies in the united front, our attitude should be one of both alliance and criticism, and there should be different kinds of alliance and different kinds of criticism. . . . As for the masses of the people, their toil and their struggle, their army and their Party, we certainly should praise them.” Of course, the people may have their shortcomings, but “they have remolded themselves in struggle or are doing so, and our literature and art should depict this process. . . . Our writings should help them to unite, to make progress, to press ahead with one heart and one mind, to discard what is backward and develop what is revolutionary, and certainly not do the opposite.” See Mao Zedong, “Zai Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua,” *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 3:848. Translation from Kirk Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 460.

ters. Generally speaking, in “revolutionary history” narratives, these characters are divided into “us” and “the enemy,” while in “socialist transformation” narratives, “new-style” characters that represent the new morality of socialism must reform the “old-style” characters. Much like plot structures, characters also perform the work of ideological propaganda, which is largely achieved by portraying their differing personalities and fates. “We” are all courageous, decisive, steadfast, loyal, good, and forthright, while “the enemies” are deceitful, insidious, greedy, fearful of death, and interested only in personal gain; the narrative performs the work of ideological propaganda by presenting “our” final victory over “the enemy.” Although “new-style” characters and “old-style” characters are both part of “the people” and part of “us,” struggles still take place between them. The core quality of “new-style” characters is their selflessness, and putting the greater good above oneself is the guiding principle of socialist transformation. Even if they are hard-working and frugal, “old-style” characters remain selfish, interested only in their own and their families’ well-being. In the end, the narrative achieves its goal by bringing these characters to accept transformation through the moral standards of socialism.

The creation of characters also brings in the author’s subjectivity, a process that strengthens the work’s ability to provide ideological guidance. First, the author brings the characters’ class origins and moral qualities into correspondence with one another. When analyzing a particular social class, Mao Zedong evaluated how backward or advanced, reactionary or progressive it might be by focusing on its nature in revolutionary struggle, as well as how it was positioned vis-à-vis the relations of production. He made no link between an individual’s class background and economic status and their sense of ethics and morality. In stories of revolutionary struggle, however, “we” are not only excellent members of the Communist Party, the broadest masses of the people, and the staunchest revolutionaries, but also the people with the most complete and perfect sense of morality. On the other side of the coin, the “enemies” are deceitful greedy, reactionaries with seriously compromised personal morals. Because characters’ moral standards are divided along class lines, women—also because of their relations through marriage—show differing degrees of moral integrity: the wives of revolutionaries are “one-in-a-million” exemplars of moral righteousness, while most wives of antirevolutionaries are often suspect in their actions. In socialist transformation stories, although character types are no longer given the simple divisions of

class membership, this method of class analysis still influences the creation of fictional characters. For example, “new-style” characters in these stories, such as Liang Shengbao, Li Shaoxiang, and Liu Yusheng, are, without exception, born into poverty, because impoverished people possess the potential for a perfect sense of morality. Moreover, although poor peasants may be portrayed as “old-style” characters in transformation stories, rich peasants and “middle peasants” are never portrayed as “new-style” characters. Beyond this, there is often correspondence between a character’s class affiliation and his or her appearance. Although this type of text offers little description of physical appearance, it nonetheless reflects an aesthetic in which “we” are beautiful and the “enemy” is ugly. This correspondence is most apparent in *Song of Youth*. The politically backward Yu Yongze is always staring around with beady eyes, and the traitor Dai Yu is short and fat, with “eyes that stuck out like a carp’s.” But party member Lu Jiachuan is “tall and well-built, with large, handsome, intelligent eyes, a dark shock of hair, and an amiable, upright look to his face.” Likewise, Jiang Hua is “tall and sturdy.”

Legendary revolutionary narratives deal with topics similar to those found in classic revolutionary narrative, and follow similar established models and logic in their design of plot and characters. For example, the plot moves forward according to a single, fixed model of amelioration to obtain → process of amelioration → amelioration obtained. The final fate of the characters, who are simply and directly divided between “us” and “the enemy,” lies in “our” victory and the defeat of “the enemy.” The imaginative modes found in these legendary folk narratives, however, give the texts a strong flavor of the picaresque and the adventurous, which partly conceals the texts’ ideological content.

Here I will focus on *Linhai xueyuan* 林海雪原 (Tracks in the snowy forest) by Qu Bo 曲波 (1923–2002), a classic work of fiction from the seventeen years period. I analyze the emergence of the ideological mixed with the legendary and picaresque in fiction and, through an examination of attitudes in contemporaneous critical evaluations of the text, reveal some of the complex aspects of the modernity of fictional narrative from this period.

Qu Bo’s *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* narrates the story of a small detachment of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) that, badly outnumbered, sets off to the Changbaishan region of northeastern China to eliminate groups of bandits and contingents of the Kuomintang

(KMT) military. At the beginning, the plot lays out a background of class oppression and class hatred. In the first chapter, titled “A Bloody Debt,”³ the author spares no ink to describe how a group of bandits ransacked Pine Tree Station and the destruction they left in their wake. The bandits’ barbaric acts spark an unyielding flame of class hatred in the heart of every battalion member, and this in turn sets off the main theme of class struggle. The battalion fights on its own, and the narrative’s point of departure is the battle of the weak versus the strong. In the following chapters, events follow an end-to-end series of degradation/amelioration in their movement toward a process of amelioration. After battles at Breast Mountain, Dinghe Temple, Jiapi Valley, Tiger Mountain, and Li Li Temple, the battalion successfully drives out their enemies, events achieve amelioration, and the story achieves completion. Degradation occurs because of the harsh natural environment, when clues needed to attack the bandits run cold, and when antirevolutionary forces foil the battalion’s plans; at a basic level, amelioration occurs because of decisive guidance from the party and successful command by Party Representative Shao Jianbo. As for character development, party members Shao Jianbo and Yang Zirong are steady, firm, bold, loyal, and wise, while their allies, members of the masses such as Jiang Qingshan and Li Yongqi, hate injustice and are simple and courageous. Bandits such as the Tinker (Xiaolujiang 小炉匠), Monkey Diao (Diao Zhanyi 刁占一), and Zuo Shandiao are deceitful, sinister, and treacherous. Each character shows a particular type of personal characteristic, and throughout the story, the management of plot and character follows the demands of literature to serve political purposes.

However, although *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* ensures that its main theme, narrative perspective, story structure, and arrangement of characters are identical with classic revolutionary narrative, it also borrows from premodern tales of fantastic, picaresque heroes, especially the modes of representation found in *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (The water margin), to introduce a number of imaginative elements into the novel.

When a story sets its narrative framework in diametrically opposed terms of good versus evil, strong versus weak, victory by the weak side

³ Translator’s note: where possible, all chapter headings, place names, and character names in the novel draw from Sidney Shapiro’s English translation, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962).

creates the conditions for the legendary and picaresque elements in the plot. In terms of plot arrangement, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* takes the strong versus the weak as the main premise for the story, set against the background of class oppression and hatred. The cunning, seemingly invisible bandits, the white sneaker appearing out of nowhere, and the harsh natural landscape of the Changbaishan region all work together to create the novel's fantastical, picaresque environment. The battalion's success in rooting out the bandits highlights the importance of the party's correct leadership, but a series of lucky coincidences—the kind that follow the old saying, “It's not a story without a coincidence” (*wuqiao bucheng shu* 无巧不成书)—give the text much more detail and make it more vivid. For example, when Yang Zirong and Sun Da'de spend hours looking for that white sneaker, they finally come across it in a village not found on any map—the same village where they find one of the villains, the Tinker. In another example, just as Liu Xuncang (also called “Tank”) is ready to give up on his plan to lie in wait for the bandits inside a hollow tree trunk, Monkey Diao appears, whistling a tune. In yet another example, when the battalion has no idea where Horse Cudgel Xu's hideout can be found and is completely unfamiliar with the terrain of Naitoushan, they happen to encounter a wise old mushroom picker, and all of their problems are solved at once.

In sum, whenever the bandits' trail runs cold in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, the battalion can always find it again through just this kind of lucky event. Moreover, the text describes in detail the difficulties in the search for clues before the occurrence of the coincidence. These coincidences not only drive the amelioration of events but also allow the characters to avert disaster and snatch victory from defeat. This is especially true, for example, in the classic “defeating the Tinker in a verbal battle” plot sequence. Yang Zirong dresses up as the bandit Hu Biao and climbs Tiger Mountain. He easily gains the trust of Zuo Shandiao, but just as he prepares to eliminate the bandits according to plan, he runs into the Tinker, who recognizes him. The confrontation between the two men at Tiger Hall is very exciting, and this coincidence serves to highlight Yang Zirong's courage and quick wit. Moreover, in order to underscore the picaresque, legendary nature of the narrative, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* goes to great lengths to describe the battalion's struggles with the dangerous natural environment in such places as Hawk's Beak Peak, the treacherous cliffside Eighteen Stages, Three-Path Pass, and the Big Ice Range. Treacherous mountains, strange rocks, wide forests, endless snowscapes, and unpredictable bliz-

zards bring many unforeseen difficulties as the battalion carries out its mission, but it is precisely the description of these difficulties that give the story an element of the picaresque and legendary.

When a plot has legendary elements, corresponding characters also take on fantastic, heroic qualities. The unique battlefields found in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* also brings out fantastic abilities in the heroes: the long-legged Sun Dade runs through the snow for several days and nights without rest; expert climber Luan Chaojia can jump from a rock overhang to a distant tree limb; Jiang Qingshan can jump down dozens of feet from a high platform without injury; and the entire battalion, even the diminutive medic Bairu, quickly become expert climbers and skiers. Moreover, in every brush with danger, these heroes always escape without a scratch. For example, when the old hunter dies when taking back the Great Peak, Jiang Qingshan seems to have supernatural abilities in the face of all of the dangers he encounters. Crossing paths with a tiger, encountering bandits, doing battle with Zuo Shandiao, and in his face-off with the Tinker, Yang Zirong always defeats his enemy and neutralizes every threat.

In a testament to *Tracks in the Snowy Forest's* lively storytelling within the framework of revolutionary narrative, many of its chapters and episodes were told and retold among its large reading audience. At the same time, the characters and plot twists all served the mission of portraying class struggle. The author of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* himself spoke of seeking “a fresh and clear perspective, drawing sharp lines between good and bad,” to show his “love for the great project undertaken with the Party’s leadership to liberate the people, [and his] love for the glorious duties the party has given to us.”⁴ Critics, however, did not give very high marks to this kind of text. According to Hong Zicheng,

Although critics noticed the characteristics of “legendary fiction” in the novel, they were reluctant to establish a critical yardstick that respected the “established narrative practice” of this type of fiction. So, while affirming the “strong storyline, as well as the attractive power, common language, and mass line” of this type of fiction that led to “great popularization and even wider readership,” and even though it “may replace old fiction that was once very popular but featured bad thought and content,” critics never failed to remember to criticize its “weak points”: “The degree of ideological depth is still insufficient, and characterization

⁴ Qu Bo, “Guanyu *Linhai xueyuan*” (On *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*), see the “Houji” (Afterword) to *Linhai xueyuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1957), n.p.

is somewhat thin and immature.” “From the demands of the higher perspective of realism. . . . Although this work correctly reflects the general trend of our past indomitable, all-conquering military struggle, there is not enough description of the arduous difficulties of the times,” and so on. More than one critic expressed concerns that “such a strong . . . picaresque flavor” would “somewhat obscure its fundamental ideological content.” The raising of these issues was indicative of the novel’s shortcomings, but also reflected contradictions over logical problems with this type of fiction for both critics and writers.⁵

If we put this novel in the context in which it was written and undertake a detailed examination, then perhaps we can understand to a certain degree the attitude of critics in the seventeen years period. In telling stories of revolution, legendary revolutionary narrative was prone to borrowing from narrative characteristics of traditional “picaresque tales of heroes,” but the narrative models found in these tales were not suited to ideological propaganda. The amazing, captivating plots of “picaresque tales of heroes” often obscured the “way” found in the stories. Therefore, when literature must serve as a tool for revolutionary struggle and propaganda, it was unavoidable that critics would say this type of plot’s “degree of ideological depth [was] still insufficient.” Moreover, the experiences of lone heroes fighting with one-of-a-kind skills often distracted readers from characters’ enthusiastic ideological language and internal soliloquies that declared their loyalty to the revolution and the Party. For these reasons, these heroic characters were seen by critics as unable to “represent the spirit of the times, and to show the enlightenment and growth of the people.”⁶ Why were critics unwilling to establish a critical rubric that would respect the established modes of narration for this type of novel? Why were they dubious about the rational nature of these novels? Based on a close analysis of historical materials, Hong Zicheng argues, “In the 1950s and 1960s, the yardstick for fiction was primarily based on the ‘classics’ of realist fiction; at the time, it was not felt necessary to distinguish between different forms of fiction.”⁷ If we look at these

⁵ Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi*, 130. Translation from Michael Day, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 149–50.

⁶ Hou Jinjing, “Xiaoshuo de minzu xingshi, pingshu, he *Liehuo jingang*” (National form in fiction, *pingshu*, and *Liehuo jingang*) in *Hou Jinjing wenyi pinglun xuanji* (Critical essays on art and literature by Hou Jinjing) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 1979), 143.

⁷ Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi*, 130; trans. Day, *History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, 146.

critics' attitudes from another perspective to include the way Chinese literature actively participated in China's process of modernization, then their point of view reveals the difficult nature of the modernity of Chinese literature.

Obviously, the differences between legendary revolutionary narrative and classic narrative arise from their degrees of imitation and utilization of older literary forms. The critic Hou Jinjing has observed "a fact that cannot be ignored or blotted out" in literature written since 1949: some writings that describe new-style heroic characters "have much greater common appeal and a broader base of readers. They can reach a level of readers that many works of literary can never approach" because "they have certain characteristics of the people (*minzu* 民族), because they have a strong, appealing story elements, colloquial language, and appealed to the tastes of the masses, and have very little of the foreign flavor of intellectual's writings or translations, and can vividly and accurately portray the people's struggle as it is lived."⁸ Clearly, the "old forms and styles" referred to here are not all older artistic forms in general, but rather the styles and forms of folk art and literature.

In fact, writers involved in revolutionary activities have always been deeply concerned with the practical problem of how to create enjoyable, memorable works that can be read by literate workers and can also achieve the goal of teaching the masses and spreading revolutionary propaganda. As far back as the period when the League of Leftist Writers was founded, intellectuals had already begun to discuss the massification of literature and the arts. At that time too, the use of old-style forms was an important point of contention. When Lu Xun introduced his idea of "grab-ism" (*nalaizhuyi* 拿来主义), he argued that "we need to grab" from classical Chinese culture, Chinese folk culture, and foreign cultures. "We need to use them, or store them, or destroy them.... If no one grabs, then people cannot make themselves into new-style people (*xin ren* 新人); if no one grabs, then literature and art cannot make themselves into new-style literature and art."⁹ As a theoretical framework, Lu Xun's "grab-ism" exerted a lasting influence

⁸ "Yibu yinren rushing de changpian xiaoshuo" (A fascinating work of long fiction), *Hou Jinjing wenyi pinglun xuanji*, 106.

⁹ Lu Xun, "Nalazhuyi" (Grab-ism), in Zhu Zheng, ed., *Xinban Lu Xun zawan* (New edition of Lu Xun's *zawan* essays) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2002), 33.

over the development of new literature in China, and can still be seen in discussions of “national form” and the “New Democratic Culture” proposed by Mao Zedong.

Debates about “national form” responded to demands that literature serve the purpose of anti-Japan propaganda, and the nature of the anti-Japanese war also made the national character (*minzuxing* 民族性) of literature an important issue in the development of literary and cultural theory. In his 1938 report on “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War,” Mao Zedong demanded that writers and artists combine “internationalism” with “national form” to create “fresh and lively things of Chinese style and Chinese flavor which the common folk of China love to see and hear.”¹⁰ In his 1940 essay on “New Democracy,” Mao also argued, “national in form, new-democratic in content—such is our new culture today.”¹¹ Following these and other statements, discussions began on “national form” and the relation between “old-style forms” and “national form” in the massification of literature and the arts.

Histories of the 1940s all refer to the debates between Xiang Linbing, Ge Yihong, and others about the “wellspring” of national form. On the one hand, Xiang Linbing insisted that folk forms were the national form and denied that the New Literature of the May Fourth period had made any successful borrowings from Western literature. On the other hand, Ge Yihong argued that old-style forms were one and the same with feudal literature, and denied that folk forms had any aspects that were valid or could be taken over in a critical way. This debate bore a very close resemblance to early discussions on how to treat old-style forms in the popularization of literature and the arts; it eventually moved beyond the limits of a “wellspring” of national form. Essays often cited by scholars include Guo Moruo’s “Minzu xingshi shangdui” 民族形式商兑 (Evaluation of “national form”), Mao Dun’s “Jiu xingshi, minjian xingshi yu minzu xingshi” 旧形式, 民间形式与民族形式 (Old-style forms, folk forms, and national form), and Hu Feng’s “Lun minzu xingshi wenti de tichu he zhongdian” 论民族形式问题的提出和重点 (On the origins and main issues of the problem

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, “Zhongguo Gongchandang zai minzu zhanzheng zhong de diwei,” *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 2:534. Translation from “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War,” *Mao Tse-tung: Selected Works*, 2:260.

¹¹ Mao Zedong, “Xin minzhu zhuyi lun,” *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 2:707. Translation borrowed from “On New Democracy,” *Mao Tse-tung: Selected Works*, 3:154.

of national form).¹² Although there may be differences between them, their core arguments all involve the question of how national form draws from both traditional folk forms and foreign models. In other words, to a certain degree they are all concerned with Lu Xun's "grab-ism." No matter how theorists might define the contents and limits of national form or delineate its relationships with old-style forms, all discussions of national form were limited to this central question. On the more specific level of artistic creation and practice, a national form working to carry forward New Democracy still borrowed from old-style forms, especially in folk songs, popular drama, and linked-chapter novels (*zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小说) crafted for propaganda for the War of Resistance. Moreover, once Beijing was liberated, the first issue of *Wenyibao* (Literary bulletin) featured the minutes of a roundtable meeting with "writers of old-style, linked-chapter novels." "National form," then, was a theoretically undefined concept that encompassed too much material. "Old-style forms," however, was a concept with which readers, writers, and critics were all familiar. As a result, the so-called "national form" charged with promoting the new culture's New Democracy was, to a large degree, simply another way of referring to old-style forms.

If content related to New Democracy and modernity could be expressed entirely in modern forms, then why such emphasis on national form? The answer is that when Mao Zedong put forward his idea of national form in 1938, it was directed at the sinification of Marxism-Leninism. Mao hoped to rewrite modern, Western theories of revolution by using a Chinese national model or form; only this work, he believed, would allow Western theories to become guiding theories for Chinese revolutionary practice. In the field of literature and the arts, the emphasis on national form was much more instrumentalist because, relatively speaking, old-style literary practices could appeal to more readers. The critic Chen Qixia, for example, argued that "no matter which literary and artistic form it is, if many people welcome it and pay attention to it, then we cannot exclude it from

¹² For related historical materials, see Qian Liqun, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue sanshi nian* (Thirty years of modern Chinese literature) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), and Huang Xiujie, ed., *Ershi shiji Zhongguo wenxue shi* (A history of twentieth-century Chinese literature) (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1998), etc.

consideration.”¹³ Zhao Shuli, considered a representative of the practice of using old-style forms to create new materials, wholeheartedly responded to Mao Zedong’s call: “Whichever forms are welcomed and can be accepted by the masses, we will adopt those forms. Once we made improvements in the political arena, we can examine things from the past in detail, maintaining what is of value in them while creating new forms so that every theme can reflect reality, educate the masses, and no longer prattle on with no goal in mind.”¹⁴ It was this type of theoretical backdrop and critical guidance to which legendary, picaresque revolutionary narrative responded.

In China’s process of modernization, “national form” and “New Democracy” are contradictory concepts. Especially as old-style forms in the field of modern artistic creation, “national form” represents relatively traditional cultural structures and cultural mentalities. Although it does not completely correspond to what Ge Yihong called “feudalism,” at the very least it is not modern. “New Democracy” includes a series of modern ideas such as freedom, democracy, science, and progressivism, and is based on antitraditionalism devoted to the pursuit of the modern. In his stance of revolutionary utilitarianism, Mao Zedong brought these sets of opposing ideas into his vast narrative: whether traditional or modern, Western or Chinese, if it helped China’s revolutionary practice and helped to establish a modern nation-state, then it could be put to use. As part of the “cogs and screws” of revolution, literature actively participated in the process of construction, and legendary, picaresque revolutionary narrative faithfully represented both the promise and deep contradictions within Mao’s larger narrative. Beloved by readers, attacked by critics, and gutted by editors, these texts show the richness of artistic creation that lies behind the formulaic surface and provide a glimpse of the complex aspects of modernity in literature of the seventeen years period.

¹³ Chen Qixia, “Zhengqu xiaoshimin ceng de duzhe” (Winning over common urbanite readers), *Wenyi bao* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1949).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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