

**Reimagining Revolutionary Labor in the People's Commune: Amateurism and Social Reproduction  
in the Maoist Countryside**

by

Angie Baecker

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Asian Languages and Cultures)  
in the University of Michigan  
2020

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Xiaobing Tang, Co-Chair, Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Associate Professor Emily Wilcox, Co-Chair  
Professor Geoff Eley  
Professor Rebecca Karl, New York University  
Associate Professor Youngju Ryu

Angie Baecker

abaecker@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0182-0257

© Angie Baecker 2020

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Chang-chang Feng 馮張章 (1921–2016). In her life, she chose for herself the penname Zhang Yuhuan 張宇寰. She remains my guiding star.

## **Acknowledgements**

Nobody writes a dissertation alone, and many people's labor has facilitated my own. My scholarship has been borne by a great many networks of support, both formal and informal, and indeed it would go against the principles of my work to believe that I have been able to come this far all on my own. Many of the people and systems that have enabled me to complete my dissertation remain invisible to me, and I will only ever be able to make a partial account of all of the support I have received, which is as follows:

Thanks go first to the members of my committee. To Xiaobing Tang, I am grateful above all for believing in me. Texts that we have read together in numerous courses and conversations remain cornerstones of my thinking. He has always greeted my most ambitious arguments with enthusiasm, and has pushed me to reach for higher levels of achievement. We began a conversation about modern China seven years ago that I've enjoyed immensely, and I look forward to the ones to come. To my dissertation co-chair, Emily Wilcox, I thank you for your effortless professionalism, compassionate criticism, and boundless intellectual energy. Emily has been unfailing in her engagement with my work, and I will be inspired by her model for years to come. Rebecca Karl has been an outsized presence in my life since the fall of 2011, when I walked into a classroom at Tsinghua University expecting a course on modern Chinese literature and instead got a master class on Marxist political economy and the Asiatic mode of production. She has always been my toughest reader, and the savagery of her insight is matched by the depth of her generosity and support. I have always been able to count on Youngju Ryu for incisive feedback, composed candor, and instinctive warmth. She makes everything look easy, and I have

been touched by the sincerity of her support. I thank Geoff Eley for taking me seriously from the start, for expanding my ability to see modern Chinese through a global lens, and for elevating my level of engagement with scholarship on comparative socialist projects. I am also grateful to all the other faculty and fellows at the University of Michigan who have served as teachers and mentors to me, showing me new ways of thinking and of being: Bill Baxter, Benjamin Brose, Miranda Brown, Pär Cassel, Laurence Coderre, Fang Zhang, Nancy Florida, Sandra Gunning, Christopher Hill, Nico Howson, Reginald Jackson, Tom Kelly, S.E. Kile, Ungsan Kim, Kening Li, Markus Nornes, Douglas Northrop, Anne Rebull, Laura Saslow, Jinyi-Li Stevenson, Will Thomson, Glenn Tiffert, David Rolston, Erick White, and Wang Zheng.

At the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies, my greatest appreciation goes to Carol Stepanchuk, Ena Schlorff, Jen Zhu, and Mary Gallagher. The Center for Chinese Studies not only provided me with generous financial support, but also an open and engaged community. Liangyu Fu at the Harlan Hatcher Asia Library is likely the greatest librarian I will ever know, and I thank her for everything she has done to facilitate my research. I would also like to acknowledge all the help and guidance I have received from staff in the department, including Kim Larrow, Rosalee Washington, Kathryn Beeman, and Ashlee Wolfe.

I have been honored to have Tarryn Chun, Fabio Lanza, and Martin J. Powers serve as discussants in chapter workshops. Their insight has transformed my work. I have also benefitted immensely from the comradery of a wide network of peers across academic institutions. We have banded together in different iterations to support and read one another's work. For their patience, generosity, and insight, I thank Maximilian Alvarez, Maja Babic, Farida Begum, Russell Burge, Chinbo Chong, Blake Miller, Paulina Hartano, Koji Hirata, Joshua Hubbard, Mei Li Inouye, Jaymin Kim, Adrienne Lagman, Peiting C. Li, Nicole Hentrich, Michael Pascual,

Adrienne Spunaugle, Yihui Sheng, Stephanie Tung, and Trenton Wilson. Louis Ciccirelli of the Sweetland Writing Center was a gentle and expert writing coach during the 2019 Dissertation Writing Institute. Katie Dimmery, Yucong Hao, and Linda Chen Zhang have rescued me and my work many times over. A good reader is hard to find, and I am lucky to have found so many.

My time in the department of Asian Languages and Cultures has been enriched by all of my graduate student colleagues. I am proud of the community that we have built together. When I first arrived, Becky Bloom, Martino Dibeltulo, Susan Hwang, Randeep Hothi, Anna Wolcott Johnson, Joseph T. Leach, Kevin Mulholland, Irhe Sohn, and Ignacio Villagran were the most gracious *shixiong* and *shijie* I could ask for. Eric Haynie and Melissa van Wyck began their PhDs the same year as me, and I was greatly reassured to be studying in the company of such accomplished and dedicated scholars. Kunisuke Hirano, HaNul Jun, Swarnim Khare, Minna Lee, Ruby MacDougall, Brittany Puller, Cameron White, and Charlotte Chun Lam Yiu each became indispensable the moment they arrived. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Anatoly Detwyler, Gal Gvili, Sophie Volpp, and Wang Hui for their help with my doctoral program applications. Across campus, Rich Bunnell, Jennifer Carman, Conley Chan, Ho Chak Law, Jisoo Lee, Michael Schmale, Mike Thompson-Brusstar, Andrea Valedon, Gerui Wang, and Courtney Wilder have been kind and generous friends. To Lynette Clemetson, Birgit Rieck, and the 2016-2017 class of Knight-Wallace Fellows, thank you from the bottom of my heart for welcoming me into your community while my partner was in residence. I thank Anna Clark in particular for running marathons, real and metaphoric, with me.

Pursuing a graduate degree in the humanities often entails frequent and extended travel to different corners of the world. In Hong Kong, I thank Alison Friedman, Natasha Khan, Brian Tsui, Ting Shi, Dan Chinoy, Josh Chin, Gillian Wong, Yidi Zhao, Neil Gough, Natalie Kam,

Nicholas Wong, and Pauline Yao for making me feel at home when I was learning my way around a new place. I especially thank Merlina J. Marikit, whose labor made it possible for me to focus on my writing. In Beijing, an old home that is always newly familiar, I thank Michael Cherney, Du Keke, Julian Fisher, Dong Huang-Cherney, Taku Kurashige, Aimee Lin Yu, Anna Lin-Yip, Liu Rui, Hannah Oussedik, Adrian Sandiford, Aminda Smith, Philip Tinari, Wang Zhongxia, and Yang Beichen. At Peking University, I thank Li Yang and Ren Siqi for indispensable help in facilitating archival research. At the Asia Art Archive, I thank Jane DeBevoise and Hilary Chassé for opening their resources to me. In Taipei, I thank Li-lih Feng.

Many networks of kinship, care, and support that either precede or stand outside my time in academia were and remain essential. I thank J.M. Chris Chang, Mackenzie Cooper, Samantha Culp, Mary Dotson, Darius Filsoof, Aaron Gans, Lei Gong, Gazelle Emami, Colin Jones, Alison Klayman, Rei Kobayashi, Michael Levin-Gesundheit, Daniel Liu, Sean Manning, Daniel Ming, Soo Oh, Sharmini Radakrishnan, Anne Ramzy, Samir Shah, Rachael Sherman, Oscar Shine, Kristen Stewart, Stephanie H. Tung, Tanya Vacharkulksemsuk, and Patrick Wen. One of the greatest joys of my adult life has been discovering how the childhood bonds with my cousins have matured into adulthood, and so I also thank Leland Chang, Ellen Chang, Helen Feng, Rex Feng, Alaina Jo, Kimberly Maxcy-Chang, and Curtis Loo for the play and the community that has defined me. I began working with Ariana Leon as a coach nearly three years ago. She has supported me through times of crisis and calm, and I am deeply grateful to everything she continues to teach me.

I want to thank my parents, Preston and Li Chi, and my sister, Aileen, and her husband Steve, for always allowing me to come home. Anthropocentric traditions have elided and belittled the importance of non-human actors in our lives, so I would like to acknowledge the big

role my little dog Mouse plays in my life. Last, Austin Ramzy and I have been following each other across the globe for more than a decade now. Just a few weeks ago, he flew across continents to be with me as I neared the final stages of this project. I am grateful for his love, and for all that we continue to learn together.



## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Figures .....	ix
Abstract .....	x
Chapter 1   Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2   The Laboring of Medicine: Barefoot Doctors and the Gendering of Revolution .....	35
Chapter 3   The Laboring of Art: Amateur Art Practice and the Everyday .....	84
Chapter 4   The Laboring of Education: <i>Juelie</i> and the Making of the Socialist Student.....	139
Chapter 5   The Laboring of the Home: Women Work and Reproduction in the Countryside ..	205
Chapter 6   Conclusion .....	250
Bibliography .....	259

## List of Figures

Figure 2-1 “Barefoot doctors are all over the mountain villages; cooperation creates a new atmosphere of medical treatment,” Wang Linkun collective work, Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 53 x 77 c.m., Stefan Landsberger collection of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.....	55
Figure 2-2 “Barefoot doctors do good prevention, cooperative medicine is strong and reliable,” artists and publisher unspecified, dimensions unspecified, private collection. ....	55
Figure 2-3 “A New Doctor in the Fishing Harbor,” Chen Yanning, Renmin meishu chubanshe, 38 x 26 cm., Stefan Landsberger collection at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.....	58
Figure 2-4 Principal Long enters Cao Zhonghe's office, still from "Breaking with Old Ideas." ..	61
Figure 2-5 Chunmiao walking barefoot in paddies, still from "Chunmiao." .....	62
Figure 2-6 Close up of Haiying’s feet during confrontation, still from “Yanming hu pan” .....	64
Figure 3-1 “The Political Commissar Pays a Visit to the Company,” sketch by Yu Simeng, a soldier, reproduced in Meishu (11) 1958: p. 8.....	126
Figure 4-1 Ge Cunzhuang as Sun Ziqing, still from "Juelie." .....	141
Figure 4-2 Close up of college student’s clothing, still from "Juelie." .....	162

## Abstract

This dissertation reveals transformations in the conceptual and cultural understanding of labor during the socialist period of the People's Republic of China. This era witnessed radical transformations in expert cultures (*bai*) that were marked through their redefinition in proximity to the proletariat (*hong*) and the forms of labor with which they were associated. I argue that the introduction of the people's commune (*renmin gongshe*) in 1958 precipitated the widespread reorganization of multiple sites of labor in the Chinese countryside, including those not traditionally recognized as productive in the Marxist account, such as medicine, amateur art, higher education, and the home. I explore new revolutionary epistemes of work through analysis of literature, film, fine art, and visual culture from the period.

In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I examine the processes by which professional cultures of work were converted into revolutionary cultures of labor, focusing on the transformation of medical and artistic labor through the figures of the barefoot doctor (*chijiao yisheng*) and the amateur artist. I argue that amateurism functioned as a means of converting highly professionalized, even rarified occupations such as the doctor or the artist, into practices of the everyday. The barefoot doctor redefined healing through their labor relationship with their communes, while the amateur artist transformed the specialized labor of the professionally trained artist into a productive leisure activity accessible to the worker, peasant, and soldier alike (*gongnongbing qunzhong*).

In the third and fourth chapters, I examine attempts to disrupt the divisions of labor that reproduced social inequality through chapters analyzing the filmic depiction of the Jiangxi Communist Labor University (Gongda), and literature depicting rural women’s “liberation” from domestic labor. In *Juelie*, a fictional film from 1975 set at Gongda, college students combined intellectual and productive labor in a transformation of the student from the elite, bespectacled urban intellectual of the May Fourth era into a diffuse, pluralistic subject position embedded within the socialist project and its productive social relations. Short stories by the authors Ru Zhijuan and Li Zhun published during the late 1950s and early 1960s examined the social consequences of re-organizing domestic labor on rural communes, resulting in works of fiction haunted by the endless physical and metaphorical reproduction of women around the countryside.

This dissertation describes how the work associated with each of these sites—medicine, fine art, education, and the home—was re-positioned through their relationship to agricultural or productive labor in a “laboring” of the cultures associated with each. Through the embrace of the rural female subject, I find that the structures of feeling sustaining these revolutionary attempts at reorganizing labor and society were ultimately produced through the gendering of revolution itself.

## Chapter 1 | Introduction

In the January/February 1969 issue of the *New Left Review*, the British historian Ronald Fraser penned a closing note to a series called “Work,” begun four years earlier in the journal. “The widespread interest in this series points to the lack of occasion under monopoly capitalism for serious individual expression of the meaning and purpose of work,” wrote Fraser, a gap that the series intended to fill by inviting people from all walks of life to speak, in their own words, about what they did for a living.<sup>1</sup> The series of interviews with British workers from all walks of life proved so popular it was memorialized in two edited volumes, *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts* and *Work, Volume 2*.<sup>2</sup> By giving voice to the working lives of British during the late 1960s in explicitly personal and deeply emotional terms, Fraser hoped that “[talking] about work other than instrumentally [would], however fragmentarily, question its basic capitalist nature.”<sup>3</sup>

The series also expanded concepts of what constituted work to general readerships through its inclusion of what, at the time, was considered a diversity of occupations and forms of labor. Workers interviewed in the volume include an auto body mechanic, solicitor, miner, scientist, police officer, surgeon, and bus driver, among others, who might broadly be categorized as engaged in blue-collar or white-collar labor. There are also contributions from an unemployed factory worker, a housewife, as well as women performing what was then

<sup>1</sup> Ronald Fraser, “Note on ‘Work’ Series,” *New Left Review*, Jan/Feb 1969, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, ed. Ronald Fraser (London: Pelican Original, 1968), and *Work, Volume 2: Twenty Personal Accounts*, ed. Ronald Fraser (London: Pelican Original, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Fraser, “Note on ‘Work’ Series,” p. 68.

considered traditionally male work. These contributions expanded narrow definitions of work beyond the realm of waged labor performed exclusively by one gender.

In his introduction to the second volume, Fraser noted that over the course of soliciting forty personal accounts, each worker, regardless of the work they engaged in, “felt the need for more control, control not only of the work process but of the purpose of work.” Noting “the basic capitalist contradiction between work that is inherently social and that yet remains controlled for private and sectional ends,”<sup>4</sup> Fraser believed the desire for greater agency in one’s work spoke to the central role work plays in defining who we are, not simply as economic creatures (“rational actors”), but as feeling, socially imbricated ones as well. Put simply, work has always been about much more than just work. “Work is not only the way each of us makes a living; it is one of the principal ways in which we ‘make’ the society we live in and which in turn ‘makes’ us work,” writes Fraser. Defining work as “the human activity of mastering and transforming the given,” Fraser concluded that work “is (or should be) one of the principal ways in which we make ourselves.”<sup>5</sup>

The same January 1969 issue of the *New Left Review* also included an essay on a social movement that was then unfolding in China: the Cultural Revolution. Written by the China scholar W.J.F. Jenner, Jenner strives valiantly in the essay to provide a sympathetic overview of recent revolutionary developments in the People’s Republic of China, explaining how the movement had left “government structure shaken and in places replaced in popular rebellions from below and from the left.”<sup>6</sup> Jenner believed the Cultural Revolution was best explained as a response to the sclerotic, bureaucracy-led changes to Chinese society that had taken place in the

<sup>4</sup> Fraser, “Note on ‘Work’ Series,” p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Fraser, ed., *Work, Volume 2: Twenty Personal Accounts* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Original, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> W.J.F. Jenner, “The New Chinese Revolution,” *New Left Review*, Jan/Feb 1969, p. 83.

seventeen years since the establishment of the P.R.C. A new government led by bureaucratic elites had implemented what Jenner described as disappointingly gradual reforms, squandering their opportunity to create a more just and equal world through sweeping structural change. As a result, tensions and inequality had built up, with preferential treatment given to newly bureaucratized and professionalized members of the old elite classes: “The new regime gave security and far better career prospects to the professionals and civil servants while providing a peaceful and expanding market for manufacturers and shopkeepers,” Jenner explained. These groups were once again “entrenched in the official structure,” which enabled them to imagine “that they had a near-monopoly of some of the knowledge needed to run the state, the economy, and the cultural and educational world.”<sup>7</sup>

For a revolutionary state, the situation was untenable, and the Cultural Revolution thus entailed nothing less than a sweeping critique of “all ideas about Chinese society and politics held before 1966.” A committed socialist himself, Jenner had recently returned to Europe from a two-year stint in Beijing as a translator for the Foreign Languages Press, and he wrote frequently on matters revolutionary and Chinese for *New Left Review*. Sympathetic to the cause, Jenner certainly interpreted the events and import of the Cultural Revolution through “rose-colored lenses.”<sup>8</sup> While some of his insights into the period remain incisive, other areas of the essay have not aged well. Jenner claims, for example, that the revolutionary ousting of “rightist” officials was judicious and limited, eliminating “only the most outrageous criminals” from the state machinery.<sup>9</sup> Mao Zedong is praised for his pacifist tendencies, in particular for “his techniques

<sup>7</sup> Jenner, “The New Chinese Revolution,” p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> See Sigrid Schmalzer, “On the Appropriate Use of Rose-colored Glasses: Reflections on Science in Socialist China,” *Isis* 98, No. 3 (2007): 571-83.

<sup>9</sup> Jenner, “The New Chinese Revolution,” p. 86.

for renovating the Party with rectification rather than executions,” and Jenner concludes that on the whole, “The Cultural Revolution has done China’s position in the world no serious harm.”<sup>10</sup>

Although they wrote on different topics, both Fraser and Jenner concluded their pieces with optimistic conviction in the alternatives offered by socialist praxis. For Fraser, the “hopes and partial demands expressed” in the series on work represent socialism’s potential for reclaiming the dignity of work. Fraser suggests that by “integrating [the desires] expressed” by workers in the series with “the vision of a socialist hegemony,” we might be able to “create a society in which the necessity of work [is shaped] in accord with human needs,”<sup>11</sup> righting the wrongs of the capitalist system and delivering agency into the hands of the people. To free labor from the rigid demands of capitalist rationality is to imagine a more humane way of working, and thus living.

Similarly, Jenner was excited by socialism’s potential to correct against exploitative social structures by restoring agency to those who suffer its consequences. Jenner was troubled by the re-emergence of old elites as professionals, technocrats, and bureaucrats within the institutions of the new state, and he took seriously the Chinese Communist Party’s charge that there were capitalist saboteurs hidden among them, as exemplified by the former president Liu Shaoqi. In contrast to today’s predominant understanding of the Cultural Revolution as factional conflict driven by sparring political elites, Jenner understood it as a people’s movement that restored revolutionary agency to the average Chinese. To Jenner, “the very chaos and open-endedness of the situation” was proof “that ordinary people have learnt to take more control over their own destinies.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jenner, “The New Chinese Revolution,” p. 86, 95.

<sup>11</sup> Fraser, “Note on the ‘Work’ Series,” p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> Jenner, “The New Chinese Revolution,” p. 95.



In many ways, my dissertation is driven by some of the same impulses that moved Fraser and Jenner to publish in the same 1969 issue of *New Left Review*: to make sense, on the one hand, of the way that we live and structure our lives through work; and on the other, to make sense of the P.R.C.'s "last revolution," to modify the title of Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals's famous study of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>13</sup> But where Fraser and Jenner were convinced in 1969 that the socialist project could offer powerful new agencies to those who sought to escape the tyrannies of capitalism, whether they were revolutionaries in China or laborers in Britain, five decades of changed thinking on work and revolution have complicated the picture. Since the 1970s, it does not appear that socialism has remade the face of labor across the globe so much as the rise and penetration of neoliberalism, with its extractive, globalized processes of manufacturing and trade.<sup>14</sup> In China, not only has evidence of violence committed during the Cultural Revolution come to light, the state's own repudiation of the Cultural Revolution in 1981 provided the ideological basis for its embrace of the market reforms that have since allowed the country to play a crucial role in the global articulation of capitalist production.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Lin Chun's *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) provides a provocative counter-argument to the idea that China's economic development today has occurred in spite of, and not because of, the experiments of its socialist period. Quinn Slobodian's *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Empire* is a penetrating study of the rise and entrenchment of neoliberalism (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Influential early studies on the Cultural Revolution include Richard Baum and Thomas W. Robinson, eds., *The Cultural Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Shaoguang Wang, *Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan* (Hong Kong: Oxford University press, 1995). For a prescient early account of the 1981 repudiation of the Cultural Revolution, see Lowell Dittmer, "Chapter Eight: Beyond Continuous Revolution" in *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 210-271.

Taken separately, today the fate of each of these projects—of socialist labor, on the one hand, and of the Cultural Revolution, on the other—seems ripe for reappraisal. It is my conceit that they are also intrinsically linked. By insisting on locating revolution through work and work through revolution, I ask how it was that they ever came to be decoupled in the first place. After all, what was it that socialism offered if not the possibility of an emancipation *through* labor? Where capitalist production created societies defined by a dystopia of alienation, atomization, and subordination, socialism has first and most commonly been understood reflexively, or as an inverse of capitalism. In his landmark 1985 study of factory labor, Michael Burawoy wrote that “If the capitalist labor process is defined by the separation of conception and execution, then the socialist labor process must be the obverse—the reunification of conception and execution.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, where capitalism is defined by its deskilling, socialism “heralds the restoration of the craft worker; if the capitalist labor process is defined by hierarchy, then the socialist labor process is defined by the abolition of hierarchy; control by capital gives way to control by workers.”

Yet Burawoy himself concluded that in fact, the lived experience of socialism had demonstrated that the same separation of conception and execution that defined capitalist societies was instead transformed into the “defining elements of class structure” under state-led socialism. This, in turn, led to the state’s oppressive presence as “appropriator of surplus and regulator of production.”<sup>17</sup> What, then, is, or was, socialism? How exactly did it reimagine the relationship between work and labor to value? How did the attempts to transform this

<sup>16</sup> Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Burawoy, *Politics of Production*, p. 195.

relationship produce new epistemes of thought, and how, in turn, were those produced and reproduced in the defining narratives of the period?

In this spirit, I begin my project from the premise that the transition to socialist and collective production methods in the P.R.C.—the process of producing the socialist economy—itsself produced value that went beyond the measurable and material value of commodities produced. By the socialist period, I mean the period stretching from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. In order to better understand what that value was, I examine cultural texts from the Maoist period in China that explicitly depicted different forms of labor as embodied through narrative. I argue that the introduction of the people’s commune (*renmin gongshe*) in 1958 facilitated the widespread reorganization of multiple sites of labor in China. These sites were centered principally but not exclusively around the countryside, and I focus on sites of labor not traditionally recognized as productive in the Marxist account, such as medicine, amateur artmaking, higher education, and the home.

Each chapter focuses on representations of a specific form of labor, exploring transformations in the conceptual and cultural understanding of labor during the socialist period in the P.R.C. As such, each chapter is written as a micro-genealogy of sorts of a specific field, and how the work associated with it changed during the socialist period, resulting in micro-histories of the “whole way of life” associated with that field and its work in the socialist period.<sup>18</sup> Chapter 2 takes up the question of amateur art practice (*yeyu meishu chuangzuo*) and its attempt to convert the rarified practice of professional, academy-trained artists into an everyday praxis, while Chapter 3 examines filmic, visual, and literary representations of the barefoot

<sup>18</sup> My understanding of culture is indebted to Raymond Williams’s definition of culture as “a whole way of life,” and not just the genres and forms of art that have historically been recognized as Culture. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

doctor (*chijiao yisheng*) to trace its rise as a discursive figure signifying an ambitious but ultimately failed attempt to reposition medical labor within society. Chapter 4 looks at the integration of intellectual and agricultural labor in the film *Juelie*, a fictional film depicting the founding of the real-life Jiangxi Community Labor University. Finally, Chapter 5 takes up representations of domestic labor on rural communes in literature by authors including Ru Zhijuan and Li Zhun, whose short stories explored the new social terrains engendered through the agricultural commune's programs to collectivize women's domestic labor.

Where other forms of scholarship make claims to representational accuracy, narrative and its cultural texts help us to approach the substance of the relationship between cultural production and political economy. Adopting a Gramscian vocabulary, I approach my primary sources not as representations of a specific socio-historical reality, but rather as an “ethico-political realm” where “a social order's legitimacy and cohesion could be secured and reproduced, modified or even overthrown.”<sup>19</sup> I am referring, of course, to the concept of ideology. Where an earlier generation of scholars may have read the fictions of the socialist period for insight into its lived experience, I prefer to read fiction as fantasy. A short story centered around the marriage between a couple living on a rural commune tells us less, for example, about the contemporary conditions for agricultural labor, and more about the emergent fantasies of fulfillment—of marriage, of *métier*—that were ascribed to them, and the conflict that the author imagined stood in their way.

These stories give us insight into the narratives that cultural producers found most relevant and compelling, the structures of feeling that sustained sentiment during the socialist period. By embracing fictional narratives from the socialist period as fantasies, a space in which

<sup>19</sup> Geoff Eley, “Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-speaking World, 1957-82,” *European History Quarterly* 14 (4) 1984: p. 443.

visions of the cultural frameworks structuring the production and reproduction of society are themselves produced, these narratives provide access to the autonomous processes through which the ideological hegemony of the socialist episteme was produced. I find Raymond William's concept of the "structure of feeling" particularly useful as a means of discussing the social acceptability of particular narrative conventions, and of how they emerge at a given time in history as well as the relationship between these dramatic conventions and a given text. However intangible, these structures of feeling are essential scaffolding bridging the gulf between the aspirations projected upon socialism, and the complexities of its historical record as actionable programs of utopic vision.

In this project, the year 1958 emerges as a definitive marker. While the broader epistemological shifts around cultures and concepts of labor extended well before 1958 and even 1949, the year 1958 is significant for several reasons: most closely associated with the launch of the Great Leap Forward, the year itself has come to function as a shorthand for the catastrophic failures of the utopic Maoist project, including the people's commune (*renmin gongshe*), the backyard furnace programs, large-scale irrigation and public works projects, and the famine that followed. Thus, scholarship on the Great Leap Forward has a strong tendency to understand the period as pre-determined by its failures. Yet as the historian Maurice Meisner emphasizes, when the Great Leap Forward was announced in January 1958, it was little more than a slogan that came with "no detailed blueprints. It was the project of a utopian social vision, not an economic plan on the order of a five-year plan."<sup>20</sup> Instead, the specific policy initiatives for which it is remembered were improvised, and produced as the revolutionary episteme the Leap embraced book hold.

<sup>20</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 192.

I endeavor to understand the Great Leap Forward first and foremost as a way of *thinking* that eventually produced the signature policies with which it is now conflated. If each historical action presupposes a cultural framework, then it becomes incumbent to examine the system of values in which these actions occur. Cast in this light, the year 1958 materializes as a moment of arrival for a new mass culture, later entrenched by the actionable programs of utopic vision that followed. Although this emphasis may seem like a minor issue of historiography, the conventional approach to the Great Leap Forward—through its failures first—can only ever result in a pre-determined analysis of the period that takes culture as sheer propaganda, and broad popular support as the brain-washing of a captive people.

My dissertation is roughly divided into two thematic sections: in the first, I examine the processes by which professional cultures of work transformed into revolutionary cultures of labor, focusing on the transformation of medical and artistic labor through the figure of the barefoot doctor and the amateur artist. In the second section, I examine attempts to disrupt the divisions of labor that structured processes of social reproduction, with chapters on the filmic depiction of the integration of student intellectual labor with productive labor at the Jiangxi Communist Labor University, and literature depicting rural women’s “liberation” from domestic labor on rural communes. I argue that although implementation of the rural commune was ultimately short-lived as a political campaign, it triggered a deep and lasting transformation of contemporary Chinese mass culture. Borrowing Michael Denning’s concept of the “laboring” of culture, I observe a similar transformation of Chinese culture through a pervasive use of “labor” and its synonyms in the rhetoric of the period (a “laboring” of language), the increased influence

of and participation of rural, lower-class Chinese in the culture and arts, and the new visibility of the labor of cultural production.<sup>21</sup>

Two sites were crucial to the laboring of contemporary Chinese culture. I use the term “site” in a dual sense, both in the material sense (spaces and bodies) as well as in the symbolic. These two sites were the countryside and the female gender. Narratives centering rural and female subjects participating in medical, artistic, intellectual, and agricultural labor disrupted the class structure of elite control that had previously defined these systems. Gail Hershatter synthesizes the “laboring” of culture with its “gendering,” arguing in her latest monograph that “women’s labor and Woman as a symbol were central to the Party-state vision of socialist modernization.”<sup>22</sup> Nearly to a rule, these narratives appear on the heels of the Great Leap Forward campaign, suggesting that the implementation of the rural commune had far-reaching impacts not simply on the organization of productive labor, but also on the dramatic narrative conventions of the period in written, filmic, and visual texts.

When the P.R.C. introduced the people’s commune (*renmin gongshe*) in the fall of 1958, the commune was the most developed and visible manifestation of programs seeking to reorganize land and rural labor that, by the late 1950s, had already been underway for decades. Beginning with land reform programs in the Jiangxi Soviet, the intended cumulative effect of these efforts was to transform private farming into a system of collectivized agricultural production, in effect a complete reorganization of the means of production that entailed not only radical reorganizations of labor, but widespread and pervasive social and cultural change—or, the emergence of new mass culture centered in the Chinese countryside. Rather than thinking

<sup>21</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Gail Hershatter, *Women and China’s Revolutions* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), p. 2.

about the people's commune as an isolated program limited in historical scope to 1958 to 1983, the years in which it was implemented as a policy, the collectivization of land and agricultural labor in China should be thought of as a planned yet experimental process of radical social and structural change whose penetration and implementation was uneven, and contained significant regional variation in its expression.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it bears emphasizing that the P.R.C.'s introduction of the people's commune took place against a greater post-war trend in the global South toward agrarian reform, with organizations in diverse national contexts seeking to protect rural inhabitants from the usury of the landlord.<sup>24</sup>

In China, the people's commune built upon pre-existing programs of land reform, mutual aid teams, and agricultural co-operatives to achieve what state planners hoped would be the full exploitation of agricultural labor power. Programs of land reform were the first step in this teleology of agricultural revolution in China: by appropriating land, which itself constituted the basis of the means of production in the countryside, the C.C.P. delivered land from private hands to the state. Attempts at land reform began in the Jiangxi Soviet, continued on a national scale in 1950, and were estimated to be largely completed by the spring of 1953.<sup>25</sup> The establishment of mutual aid teams followed closely on the heels of land reform, wherein several neighboring families were grouped together to share agricultural resources, including tools, draft animals, and field labor.<sup>26</sup> The mutual aid team introduced the work point instead of wages as compensation,

<sup>23</sup> For scholarship examining the experimental aspects of P.R.C. agricultural reform, see Yiping Huang, *Agricultural Reform in China: Getting Institutions Right* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Raphael Shen, *China's Economic Reform: An Experiment in Pragmatic Socialism* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000); and Guoli Liu and Lowell Dittmer, eds., *China's Deep Reform: Domestic Politics in Transition* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Zhun Xu, *From Commune to Capitalism: How China's Peasants Lost Collective Farming and Gained Urban Poverty* (Monthly Review: New York, 2018), pp. 19-20. Contemporaneous attempts at land reform around the globe include in Taiwan, Korea, Egypt, Peru, and Chile.

<sup>25</sup> For a fuller account of the land reform process, see Chapter 5.

<sup>26</sup> For more on mutual aid teams, see Chapter 5.



basing the recognition of value around agricultural productivity, and the agricultural co-operative further entrenched these hierarchical structures of compensation for productive labor by expanding the pooling of resources from a few households to hundreds, and establishing cooperative oversight of all agricultural resources, including land, labor, and equipment, such as tools and draught animals.

The people's commune represented the final stage of this utopic transformation of society through labor, wherein the implementation of the people's commune would transcend the mere organization of production to become "the organizers of the way of life."<sup>27</sup> As it happens, attempts at reorganizing the entirety of a society's way of living entails attention to women's labor, and thus the original plans for the people's commune included programs intended to collectivize domestic labor, providing the social services necessary to "free" women for labor in the fields. Wu Zhipu, party secretary of Henan county, where the nation's first commune was established, wrote that the people's commune would fulfill "seven basic requirements: eating, clothing, housing, childbirth, education, medical treatment, marriage and funeral expenses."<sup>28</sup> Those responsibilities that were traditionally considered the exclusive domain of women, such as childbirth, childcare, cooking, and clothing families, would be collectivized by the commune: commune-run maternity wards would facilitate the safe and hygienic delivery of children; commune-organized nurseries (*tuo'er suo*, or "place for leaving children"), kindergartens, primary and secondary school would substitute for home childcare; commune-organized sewing

<sup>27</sup> "Greet the Upsurge in Forming People's Communes," *Hongqi*, 7 (Sept. 1958): p. 13. Also included in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Wu Zhipu, "From Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives to People's Communes," *Hongqi* 7 (Sept. 16, 1958): pp. 5-11. Reprinted in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 37. In the same article, Wu waffled between committing to seven versus ten basic requirements. The "ten basic requirements" included the first seven as well as fuel for winter, haircuts, and theater.

circles (*fengren zu*) would produce clothing; and public canteens (*gonggong shitang*) would eliminate the need to cook.

In practice, many of these initiatives to transform the entirety of the way of life in rural China were short-lived and underfunded. Eating at the commune canteen and utilizing its childcare services was voluntary, and staff at canteens, nurseries, and sewing teams were “paid in accordance with the principal of ‘no losses and no profits.’”<sup>29</sup> Most public canteens did not last for more than two months, and many rural primary and secondary schools established from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s were dissolved following the re-organization of China’s education infrastructure in the years following the end of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>30</sup> Still, the historical experience of agricultural collectivization profoundly impacted the organization of productive, social, and cultural life. Mutual aid teams and communes organized villagers into new rural communities, forming social structures and networks that rivaled, and even threatened to replace, existing kinship networks. Collectivization competed with private family economies for primacy of place in the organization of rural life, weakening the base of patrilineal authority as the commune oversaw the direction of agricultural and small-scale industrial production, supplied labor for infrastructure projects, and delivered rural healthcare, education, and security.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Tentative regulations (draft) of the Weihsing (Sputnik) People’s Commune,” Aug. 7, 1985, *Renmin ribao*, republished in *People’s Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> See Li Chunfeng, “Historical Observations Regarding the Large-Scale Establishment of Rural Public Canteens in Hebei Province,” in *Agricultural Reform and Rural Transformation in China Since 1949*, eds. Thomas David DuBois and Li Huaiyin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 115-132. For more on the dissolution of rural primary and secondary schools at the end of the Cultural Revolution, see Suzanne Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th Century China: The Search for an Ideal development Model* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 484-511; and Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact on China’s Rural Development* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 157-176.

<sup>31</sup> For more on militias established within communes, see Joshua Eisenman, *Red China’s Green Revolution*, pp. 150-179; and Gordon Bennett, *Huadong: The Story of a Chinese People’s Commune* (Oxfordshire, U.K.: Taylor and Francis, 2019), pp. 63-70.

Indeed, reorganizing the countryside as a site of productive labor necessarily involved reorganizing the multiple other sites of labor constellated around it, as party control over the means of production entailed a vast change to the character of existing social relations. Yet existing scholarship on the people's commune has focused nearly to a rule on answering the question of how successful the commune was as a novel system for organizing productive agricultural labor. The mainstream scholarship on this question understands the commune as essentially an obstacle to economic growth that restrained the rural economy, prevented technical innovation, and resulted in a net decrease in agricultural output. Kenneth Lieberthal, for example, faults the commune with being "too large to link rewards closely with labor," which he argues "[fit] poorly with the natural bases of identity among peasants," or the patrilineal clan.<sup>32</sup> To John Fairbank and Merle Goldman, agricultural collectivization was a program of pure ideology, a violation of a supposed rural natural order that was completely divorced from reality and represented "the final penetration of the state into the farm household, [and] the politicization of peasant life in order to control it."<sup>33</sup> This scholarship draws direct links between the formation of the commune and the famine and poverty millions of Chinese experienced in from 1959 to 1961.<sup>34</sup> Recently, scholars espousing what Joshua Eisenman calls a "minority

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*, second edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press, 2006), p. 371.

<sup>34</sup> For scholarship on the Great Famine in particular, see Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2012); Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996); Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), as well as Cormac Ó Gráda, Felix Wemheuer, and Anthony Garnaut's reviews of Dikötter's monograph, Cormac Ó Gráda, "Great Leap Into Famine: A Review Essay," *Population and Development Review* 37 (1) 2011: pp. 191-202, Felix Wemheuer, "Sites of Horror: Mao's Great Famine," *The China Journal* 66 (2011): pp. 155-162, Anthony Garnaut, "Hard Facts and Half-Truths: The New Archival History of China's Great Famine," *China Information* 27 (2) 2013: pp. 223-246; Daniel Vukovich, "Accounting for the Great Leap Forward: Missing Millions, Excess Deaths, and a Crisis of Chinese Proportions" in *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the P.R.C.* (Oxfordshire, U.K.: Routledge, 2011); Ding Shu and Song Yongyi, eds., *Dayuejin Da jihuanguang: Lishi he bijiao shiye xia de shishi he sibian*, 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Tianyuan shushi chuban, 2009); Li Rui, *Dayuejin qinli ji*, 2 vols., (Haikou: Nanfang chubanshe, 1999); and

view” have argued that the agricultural commune was, in fact, a productive mechanism. “Simply put, the Chinese commune was not an economic failure remedied by decollectivization,” writes Eisenman. “During the 1970s, the commune was able to support a larger, longer-living population on a diminishing amount of arable land and to overcome high capital depreciation rates.” If previous scholars missed the institution’s economic contributions, Eisenman argues that “the explanation... hinges to a large extent on the lack of available data about the commune, and the success of the four-decades long official campaign to downplay its productivity to justify its abolition on economic rather than political grounds.”<sup>35</sup>

Answering the question of whether the commune was successful in its attempt to increase agricultural productivity is important, but ultimately one that is beyond the limits of this project. I am sympathetic to the argument that the dismantling of the commune was a politicized act that has been successfully framed as unpolitical, and even as I would like to see further engagement with the argument. Instead of pursuing the productivist bottom line, my dissertation aims to complement the existing scholarship on the rural commune by illustrating how the establishment of the rural commune engendered transformations in adjacent and overlapping sites of labor in the countryside, particularly those not traditionally recognized as productive in the Marxist account. I trace the impact to these sites of labor not through an empirical account of

Kimberly Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, eds., *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China’s Great Leap Forward and the Famine* (Vancouver: University Press of British Columbia, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Other scholars espousing a “minority view” of the communes as productive mechanisms include Barry Naughton, Sigrid Schmalzer, Benedict Stavis, and Lynn T. White. See Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2007); Sigrid Schmalzer, *Red Revolution Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Benedict Stavis, *People’s Communes and Rural Development in China* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Rural Development Committee of Cornell University, 1974); Benedict Stavis, *Making Green Revolution: The Politics of Agricultural Development in China* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Rural Development Committee of Cornell University, 1974); and Lynn T. White, *Unstately Power: Volume 1 Local Causes of China’s Economic Reforms* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

productivity, or technical and professional standards of success, but by examining narrative and conceptual shifts in the stories told about these types of labor.

Examining forms of labor that are less privileged in the classic Marxist account of labor entails several consequential shifts. First, we must plumb the boundaries of what is considered work and what is not, a distinction that lies at the heart of how we measure and produce (or produce by measuring) the vitality of a society.<sup>36</sup> Often, the most meaningful designation of work's legitimacy is simply whether or not one is paid to perform it. Yet as Andrea Komlosy and others have demonstrated, in modern times this privileging of gainful employment outside the home over other forms of labor has narrowed our understanding of work to the point where we now understand it as largely restricted to the performance of waged labor,<sup>37</sup> the "centerpiece of the late capitalist economic system," as Kathi Weeks describes it.<sup>38</sup> Fraser and others understood this phenomenon in the late 1960s and attempted to counter it by introducing greater diversity into the range of livelihoods that were recognized as meaningful forms of work.

But where Fraser attempted to expand the boundaries of what was considered work, I am trying to ask how we arrived at such a narrow understanding of it. In responding to this question, I make several contentions. The first is that the experience of socialism played a key and under-explored role in the consolidation of the concept of work around waged labor. Historical experience has amply illustrated the ways in which the pursuit of the bottom line defines capitalist societies; less appreciated, but not unknown, are the continuities between the processes

<sup>36</sup> The organizational behavioralist Stephen Fineman helpfully offers in his general primer on work that it can be "divided broadly into what is officially counted and what is not," a distinction that is widely shared by social scientists of work and labor. Stephen Fineman, *Work: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years*, trans. Loren Balhorn and Jacob K. Watson (New York: Verso, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 6.

of socialist and capitalist production.<sup>39</sup> If capitalism renders labor-power into a commodity, and if, throughout the twentieth-century, socialism has held the promise of an alternative approach to the valuation of labor, then the socialist experience must also be relevant to any examination of a shifting consensus around what work is and how it is valued.

My second contention is that what happened in socialist China did not happen in isolation, and that socialist Chinese expressions of the project and culture of work are necessarily imbricated in the global articulation of work as an epistemological regime. By examining the limits of the concept of work in socialist China, I ask which divisions of labor persisted even as the state sought a utopic erasure of the privilege between different forms of labor (for example, of the privilege associated with mental labor over manual labor, *naoli laodong he tili laodong*, between urban and rural labor, between industrial and agricultural labor). Further, because any division of labor is simultaneously classed, gendered, and racialized, probing the boundaries of the construction of work is also a way of asking how socialist actors attempted to transform the hierarchies of class, gender, and race that had previously structured work and life. Which hierarchies remained in spite of these attempts to transform them?

Finally, by examining unconventional categories of labor, I emphasize process over product, attempting to make sense of the system that produces workers, and not just the symbolic final product of their labor. For example, in a chapter on the new cultures of medical labor specific to the socialist period in China, this entails focusing on the ideas that underwrote the need for medical workers who were differently positioned within society (the barefoot doctors),

<sup>39</sup> Important scholarship in this vein include Michael Burawoy's *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism* (New York: Verso, 1985), *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and Martha Lampland's *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and *The Value of Labor: The Science of Commodification in Hungary, 1920-1956* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

as opposed to the health outcomes of their patients. In a chapter on attempts to collectivize the domestic labor of women in rural communes, this entails examining the new narratives that were told about the type of work women could do, as opposed to measuring the historical success of initiatives like the communal canteen. In a chapter on amateur art practice, this entails examining the processes by which workers, peasants, and soldiers (*gongnongbing*) were encouraged to participate in artmaking, as opposed to the formal qualities of their final output. And in a chapter on new university cultures that prioritized the participation of the lower classes, this entails attention to new narratives of rural university culture as opposed to the educational outcomes (test scores, graduation rates, employment rates post-graduation, career placement, etc.) of that period.

In my project, the professional emerges as a key problematic troubling the intervention into the structures of work and labor. Simultaneously the embodiment of the accumulation of work itself, as well as its isolation from productive social relations, the professional is ambiguously situated within society: is the professional handmaiden to capitalist interest, a “transitional” class like the petty bourgeois bridging the capitalist class with the proletarian labor it exploits? Or are professionals themselves a sort of mental proletariat, surviving off the sale of their labor power? After the establishment of the P.R.C., what was clear was that the “old experts” inherited from the former Republic of China were members of elite social classes, privileged through their distance from rural, agricultural, and manual forms of labor. The crisis around the countryside was thus doubly and triply amplified by rural poverty, which left its residents without access to the education and infrastructure necessary for cultivating professionalized forms of expertise. These professionals were often known pejoratively as “white

experts” (*baise zhuanjia*), in contrast to the virtue of being red (*hong*), where red was an index of both proletarian class and politics.

But what was problematic about the white expert was not necessarily their expertise, but rather their person. Guo Moruo, who was by then heavily involved in questions of intellectual and creative policy as a party official, wrote that expertise and redness had been isolated under the governance of the previous state. But now that all educational institutions were under C.C.P. control, anyone participating in the construction of the new society was automatically a red expert (*hongse zhuanjia*). According to Guo, the arrival of socialism had changed the nature of expert knowledge itself, rendering it a neutral, modular possession whose pursuit did not itself produce distance from the experience of the everyday.<sup>40</sup> That same year, Mao gave speeches in which he emphasized the need “to build strong ranks of proletarian intellectuals,” hoping to have a veritable corps of red experts and professionals in service within ten years, a vision shared by Liu Shaoqi, who similarly dreamt of a battalion of “professors, educators, scientists, journalists, artists, lawyers, and Marxist-Leninist theoreticians” who belonged both to the working class and the party.<sup>41</sup>

The party’s programs to create new “red and expert (*youhong youzhuan*)” cadres was part of a conscious attempt to recognize and resolve the major social conflicts understood to be driving injustice in the “old society:” the privileging of urban labor over rural labor, mental labor over manual labor, and between industrial labor over agricultural labor. By locating privileged

<sup>40</sup> Guo Moruo, “Taolun hong yu zhuan—da qingnian tongxue men de yi feng gongkaoxin [A discussion of redness and expertise: an open reply to young students],” from *Lun you hong you zhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958), pp. 108-11.

<sup>41</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* [Long live Mao Zedong Thought], vol. 1 (Wuhan: Neibu xuexi [Internally published materials], 1968), pp. 117. Liu Shaoqi, “Liu Shaoqi tongzhi zai Beijing gejie qingzhu Shiyue shehuizhuyi geming sishi zhounian dahui shang de jianghua” [Remarks by Liu Shaoqi at the all-inclusive fortieth anniversary celebration of the socialist October revolution in Beijing], reprinted as the introduction to *Lun youhong youzhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958), p. 3.



forms of labor within the social relations of underprivileged forms of labor, programs such as the barefoot doctor, amateur art study groups, labor universities, and collectivized domestic labor on communes challenged the reification of professional work as well as its exclusion of women.

In this dissertation, I often use the terms “work” and “labor” interchangeably in an attempt to trouble the distinction between the two. My use of the terms “work” (usually rendered as *gongzuo*) and “labor” (*laodong*) diverges in important ways from its usage in primary sources. I proceed under the assumption that intellectual labor, domestic labor, artistic labor, and medical labor are legitimate and existing forms of labor, yet my primary sources use the term “labor/*laodong*” to refer almost exclusively to *productive* labor in the classic political economic sense—of activity, such as factory or farm labor, that results in the production of goods for consumption. Thus, using the term “labor” to discuss the intellectual labor of the university student, the domestic labor of the rural housewife, the artistic labor of the amateur artist, or the medical labor of the barefoot doctor, is an anachronistic means of discussing the changes in the work *outside* of the productive labor that students, housewives, artists, and healers did. I share my approach to the interchangeability of the terms work and labor with Kathi Weeks, who rejects a distinction between the two in order to seek a critique of both, a theoretical beginning that makes it possible to imagine what she calls a “postwork future.”<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, during the Maoist period, attempts to improve society were accomplished through precisely the transformation of the relationship between the student, the housewife, the artist, and the healer *to* productive labor. Thus, the barefoot doctor is distinguished not through their training and credentials but through their participation in productive labor; the rural housewife’s lot is improved not through her domestic labor but by her participation in the

<sup>42</sup> Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, pp. 14-6.

agricultural labor of her commune; the fine arts are revitalized by the participation of amateurs from the laboring masses; and the university student is transformed through the integration of production and higher education. Narratives from the Maoist period reflect the belief that inviting the laboring masses to participate in the work of doctors, artists, and educators would create mass—as opposed to elite—cultures of healing, fine art, domesticity, and education. Inviting women to participate in productive labor would free them from the exploitation of their unwaged domestic labor.

Weeks's greater call to begin the work of articulating antiwork politics and a postwork imaginary draws attention to the productivist tendency that underscores both our late-stage capitalist present as well as its historical alternative. Productivism remains a profoundly unresolved legacy specific not just to capitalist logics, but to Marxist thought and the historical experience of socialism as well—no less so than in the P.R.C., where Engels's assertion that “labor created humanity” (*laodong chuangzao ren*) was taken as a point of departure and labor itself seen as the very ether from which humanity had been born.<sup>43</sup> As Jean Baudrillard points out, a “critical theory of the *mode* of production does not touch the *principle* of production,” resulting in an inability to break from the values of work for production and allowing for the sanctification of labor to be reproduced in Marxist political economy.<sup>44</sup> To Moishe Postone, this is the difference between Marxism as a “critique of capitalism *from the standpoint of labor*” as

<sup>43</sup> Sigrid Schmalzer, “Labor created humanity: Cultural Revolution Science on Its Own Terms,” in *The Chinese Revolution as History*, eds. Joseph Esherick, Paul Pickowicz, and Andrew Walder (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 185-210.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (Candor, NY: Telos Press, 1975), pp. 17-8.

opposed to a “critique of labor in capitalism.”<sup>45</sup> Fantasies of a limitless productivity haunt the capitalist and revolutionary imagination alike.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, the first step of Lenin’s teleology of communist development begins with the overthrow of capitalism, and is followed by a socialist phase in which “factory discipline” spreads from the proletariat to the entirety of society. The revolutionary dismantling of capital is meanwhile paused in order to implement the progressive development of the nation’s productive forces. In Lenin’s account, socialism therefore entails a provisional escalation of capitalist development, a contradiction that will be redeemed when communism is eventually achieved and the proletariat inherits the capitalist’s command over production. In the P.R.C., in spite of the Chinese Communist Party’s guerilla roots, the country’s first priorities were to lay the bureaucratic and institutional foundations for a strong, centralized state and to foster the growth of modern industry. The entwinement of the socialist project with productivist ethics, then, raises the question of whether or not socialism simply amounts to new ways of overseeing the same modes of production perfected in the pursuit of capitalist extraction.

Labor thus becomes a fraught praxis lying at the heart of the Chinese socialist project. Yet as a field, labor studies of modern China has largely chosen to focus on industrial labor relations after the death of Mao, particularly under the modern enterprise system that defines the economy of China from the 1990s on. As Mary Gallagher argues, during this period continuing economic deregulation, increased domestic competition, and China’s integration within the

<sup>45</sup> Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Branko Milanovic argues for a similar account of the historical experience of communism as “a social system that enabled backward and colonized societies to abolish feudalism, regain economic and political independence, and build indigenous capitalism,” ultimately leading to the formation of what Milanovic calls a system of “political capitalism” that defines the experiences of countries such as China, Vietnam, and Russia. See Branko Milanovic, Chapter 3, “Political Capitalism” in *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System that Rules the World* (Cambridge, M.A.: Belknap Press, 2019).

global economy has meant that “public ownership as a core characteristic of socialism is increasingly irrelevant for the determination of labor relations.”<sup>47</sup> Landmark studies in the field, such as Dorothy Solinger’s *Contesting Citizenship in China*, Anita Chan’s *China’s Workers Under Assault*, and Ching Kwan Lee’s investigation into Chinese factory oversight, emphasize the declining status of urban state-sector workers and the abysmal working conditions of migrant workers.<sup>48</sup> This approach is based around an assumption of worker’s rights that is itself contingent upon the legal articulation of either citizenship-based rights, or of universal human rights. Indeed, while labor scholars around the globe are divided on whether workers’ struggles should be linked to human rights, within Chinese studies scholars have explicitly linked scholarship of labor rights with human rights,<sup>49</sup> an approach that privileges individual autonomy and legal and commercial forms of intervention over collective mobilization.

Perhaps owing to the immediate legibility of the labor of exploited waged workers under capitalist work regimes, the labor studies of modern China have concentrated on the working conditions of industrial workers in the era of the P.R.C’s integration into the global market economy. This bias reflects the origins of labor history as a field, which grew out of European efforts in the twentieth-century to educate and organize urban workers. The field is thus typically delimited as a sub-discipline of social history specializing in the history of the urban working class and its political mobilization. This approach has the effect of rendering China’s rural and socialist pasts rather illegible *as* a labor history. Where the field does address the legacies of the

<sup>47</sup> Mary Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 203.

<sup>48</sup> Dorothy Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Anita Chan, *China’s Workers Under Assault: The Exploitation of Labor in a Globalizing Economy* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Ching Kwan Lee, “From Organized Dependence to Disorganized Despotism: Changing Labour Regimes in Chinese Factories,” *China Quarterly* 157 (1999): pp. 44-71.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Anita Chan, “Labor Standards and Human Rights: The Case of Chinese Workers Under Market Socialism,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 4 (1998): pp. 886-904.

socialist period, the decades from the 1950s to the 1970s are often treated as an aberrational if still essential historical set-piece in the narrative of multi-national capital's inevitable arrival in the P.R.C.<sup>50</sup> Labor historians dispute the extent to which the socialist history of the P.R.C. does or does not matter to the development of industry in contemporary China, but few scholars foreground socialist experiences in their narrative of the arrival of the present, essentially forming a consensus on the underlying assumption that what was socialist about the economic system of the P.R.C. has deteriorated to the extent that it is now nearly unrecognizable as such.<sup>51</sup>

I dwell on the labor studies of modern China in part because this project is explicitly in conversation with the concept of labor, its definition, disciplinary boundaries, and the consequences of the manner in which these understands are mobilized. I assert that for labor histories of the P.R.C. not to engage squarely with the complicated legacies of the socialist period is only a partial record of change. Any labor history of the P.R.C. that focuses on the urban to the exclusion of the rural has similarly misunderstood the nature of the revolutionary re-organizations of labor that laid at the heart of the Maoist project to disrupt and improve the prevailing organizing structures of society. At the same time, it seems clear that many critical insights from the study of work and labor within the humanities have not yet been brought to bear on the full record of the P.R.C's history. For example, scholarship that explicitly utilizes concepts of domestic labor in the Chinese context is nearly to a rule focused on the last four

<sup>50</sup> Studies of the socialist period that constitute exceptions to this rule include Mark Frazier's *The Making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace: State, Revolution, and Labor Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Andrew Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>51</sup> A notable exception to this approach is Joel Andreas's new study, which goes a long way toward offering a coherent narrative on the changing political status of Chinese factory workers from the founding of the P.R.C. to the present. Andreas uses the lens of the changing terms of industrial workers' "industrial citizenship" in a narrative of urban industry that places equal, if not greater weight on the historical experience of the Maoist period. See Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchized: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

decades.<sup>52</sup> The same is true to an even greater extent for scholarship examining affective labor,<sup>53</sup> immaterial labor, or cognitive capital in the Chinese context.<sup>54</sup> And while the influence of leftist, specifically Marxist feminist traditions of thought on social reproduction theory is widely and explicitly acknowledged, scholars who identify as working within the frameworks of social reproduction theory rarely bring their analytical framework to bear on the socialist and/or Chinese contexts, leaving the Chinese socialist historical record underexplored as a relevant praxis of social reproduction theory.

Consequently, the commune's impact on the Chinese imaginary has been difficult to measure.<sup>55</sup> To that effect, the discourses of amateurism and of social reproduction allow me to explore how understandings of labor changed. In my project, I apply insights from the study of amateurism in both fine art and medicine in order to examine the transformation of artistic and

<sup>52</sup> For a few examples, see: Yan Hairong, *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Tamara Jacka, *Women's Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Luo Mengsha, *Gender Division of Labor in China: Changes in Domestic Work and Market Work in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Libraries, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> For example, see Xia Zhang, "One Life for Sale: Youth Culture, Labor Politics, and New Idealism in China," *positions: east asia critique* (2015) 23 (3): pp. 515-543; Xiao Liu, "Information Fantasies: Culture and Media in the Post-Mao 'New Era,'" (Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2013); and Carlos Rojas and Ralph A. Litzinger, eds., *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> For example, see Jack Linchuan Qiu, "China's Digital Working Class and Circuits of Labor," *Communication and the Public* Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2018): pp. 5-18; Daniel Vukovich, "The China-Reference and Orientalism in the Global Economy" in *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the P.R.C.* (London: Routledge, 2011); Silvia Lindtner, "Hackerspaces and the Internet of Things in China: How Makers are Reinventing Industrial Production, Innovation, and the Self," *China Information* Vol. 28 (2014): pp. 145-67.

<sup>55</sup> Literature examining cultural depictions of the commune, particularly during the Great Leap Forward period, include Richard King's *Heroes of China's Great Leap Forward: Two Stories* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010); Krista Van Fleit, *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period, 1949-1966* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Cai Xiang, trans. and eds. Rebecca E. Karl and Xueping Zhong, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016); Ban Wang, ed., *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Brian DeMare, *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Maggie Greene, *Resisting Spirits: Drama Reform and Cultural Transformation in the People's Republic of China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Bonnie McDougall, ed., *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the P.R.C., 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, eds., *The Making and Remaking of China's 'Red Classics': Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).

medical labor during the P.R.C.'s socialist period. I draw insight from the fields of medical history and art history, where the discourses around amateurism are particularly developed. In fine art, the antinomy of modern amateurism is typically understood as “the professional [conducting] activities for work, [while] the amateur labors away from work in free or leisure time.”<sup>56</sup> Amateurism thus marks the dynamic juncture of the social and cultural boundaries separating leisure from labor, and the private from the public. Amateurism is often understood as a “social rather than artistic process,”<sup>57</sup> or even as the distinction between pre-modern and modern society.<sup>58</sup> But rather than accept a naturalized distinction between remunerated and unremunerated artistic pursuits, scholars such as Patricia Zimmerman draw our attention to the power structures in place that marginalize amateur art as an insignificant discourse and practice, favoring instead a history of the relationship between art practice and the art market (think, for example, of the seriousness with which commercial film is studied compared with home video.) Amateur art practice, therefore, is not simply an inert designation of inferior or unrecognized artistic talent, but rather a historical process of social control over representation.

By contrast, scholarship on health, medicine, and science and technology studies understands amateurism less as a matter of compensation and more as a problematic of expertise. Scholars critical of the construction of science as a “natural” phenomena identify expertise as a thorny possession that “privileges its possessors with powers that the people cannot successfully

<sup>56</sup> Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.7.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> See Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), pp. 16-9. Levenson argued that pre-modern society in China hinged around the “amateur ideal” of the scholar-official. When the nation-state arrived, the “bureaucratic Confucian ‘princely man’” gave way to Weber’s “puritan—and capitalist—‘vocation,’” elevating the competence of the professional over the pejorative sense of the amateur as unserious dilettante.

control, and cannot acquire or share in.”<sup>59</sup> Medical sociology has responded to the anti-democratic potential of expert domination over health systems through increased interest in the potential of the lay person, arguing that lay knowledge and participation in the medical system may be as important as expert knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Amateurism in medicine is thus accessed through the figure of the lay expert, whose participation reconciles expertise’s long-standing conflict with public epistemologies valuing democratic governance and participation.

In chapters on barefoot doctors and amateur art practice, I argue that amateurism functions as a means of converting the cultures of the highly professionalized, even rarified occupations—the doctor and the artist—into practices of the everyday. Barefoot doctors created a culture of medical practice socialized around their identities as regular working members of their communes, while the recognition of amateur artists challenged the professional, academy-trained artist's monopoly over fine arts practice. The historian Xu Xiaoqun understands this period as a history of “forced de-professionalization,”<sup>61</sup> while the sociologist Joel Andreas understands the Maoist initiatives to purge Communist officials with advanced technical credentials as an attack on the bureaucratic class.<sup>62</sup> By examining the Maoist rejection of professional cultures and embrace of amateur ones, I choose to understand the trend toward amateurism not as an exclusively top-down political process, but rather a broad and pervasive

<sup>59</sup> Turner, Stephen, “What is the Problem with Experts?,” *Social Studies of Science* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Feb. 2001): p. 123.

<sup>60</sup> For a few important works critiquing overreliance on expertise, see Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); D. Willems, “Susan’s Breathlessness: The Construction of Professionals and Laypersons,” in J. Lachmund and G. Stollberg, ed., *The Social Construction of Illness: Illness and Medical Knowledge in Past and Present* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), pp. 105-14; Srikant Sarangi, “On Demarcating the Space Between ‘Lay Expertise’ and ‘Expert Laity,’” *Text* 21, Vol. 1-2 (2001): pp. 3-11.

<sup>61</sup> Xu Xiaoqun, *Chinese Professionals and the Republican State: The Rise of Professional Associations in Shanghai, 1912-1937* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 278-9.

<sup>62</sup> Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).



cultural shift supported by shifting social consensus around the entrenched cultural expectations around knowledge and authority.

In the first chapter, I trace the rise of the barefoot doctor as a discursive figure of the socialist period. I argue that the barefoot doctor's emergence signified the undertaking of an ambitious, epoch-defining, but ultimately failed attempt to reposition medical labor within society. The barefoot doctor was a rural healthcare worker who provided low-cost medical and public health services to the members of their commune. By embedding barefoot doctors within their own rural communities, the barefoot doctor sought to remake medicine as a social relation through labor. Barefoot doctors remade the medical field as a culture of lay expertise, replacing the distant and elite professional doctor with grassroots, everyday healers. In filmic depictions, such as the 1975 films *Chunmiao* [Spring Shoots], *Hongyu* [Red Rain], and *Yanming hupan* [By the Side of Goose Crying Lake], the barefoot doctor's gender functioned as a site of revolutionary articulation, allowing women barefoot doctors to challenge the patriarchal structures of authority in the interests of serving their communities.

In the second chapter, I examine amateur art practice during the socialist period, the most famous of which were the peasant artists from Hu Xian, a rural county in Shaanxi Province. During the 1970s, Hu Xian peasant art (*Hu Xian nongmin hua*) exhibited widely both in China and abroad, feted from Paris to Washington D.C. as an "exhilarating"<sup>63</sup> artistic development in the culture of the P.R.C. Yet the celebrity of the Hu Xian peasant painters obscured an amateur art practice that was pervasive and widespread during the socialist period, not just among peasants but also industrial workers and the military. In this chapter, I argue that amateur art practice constituted an ambitious re-orientation of fine art practice, transforming it from the

<sup>63</sup> William Feaver, "China at the Double: Art," *The Observer*, November 21, 1976.

highly specialized labor of the professional and credentialed artist to a leisure activity accessible to worker, peasant, and soldier alike (*gongnongbing qunzhong*). Amateur art practice (*yeyu meishu chuanguo*) had its roots in pre-1949 political organizing and production practices, beginning with the encouragement of C.C.P.-organized workers to draw sketches and cartoons criticizing counterproductive work habits or to depict more ideal ones. As more amateurs became involved in creating art, the practice shifted from a critique of production methods into a broader socialist cultural praxis in which the artist's subjectivity was transformed through the act of making art, allowing the disenfranchised to assert and represent the "reality" of their lived experiences. This new artist's subjectivity was exemplified through the celebration of Li Fenglan, a farmer and mother of four from Hu Xian whose paintings were amongst the most high-profile works in Hu Xian peasant art exhibitions. The embrace of amateurism weakened the art academy as a legitimizing site of training. Concepts such as creative genius and high levels of technical accomplishment, previously linked closely with the recognition of an artist, were evacuated in order to accommodate the contributions of untrained art producers. The legacy of amateur art practice is an essential and under-appreciated element in the development of "contemporary Chinese art."

In the second section of my dissertation, I explore the changing subject position of students and women with particular attention to the role they play in the social reproduction of their communities. Education and domestic labor were themselves understood explicitly as system of social reproduction at the time. Attempts to integrate productive labor with intellectual labor, or to replace women's domestic labor with productive labor, were intended to disrupt elite monopolization of the university and male dominion over women. I conceptualize social reproduction not as the unity of two separate processes (commodity production and the

reproduction of labor power), but rather as the encapsulation of production and reproduction within the same systematic framework.<sup>64</sup> Where production is usually theorized as public and reproduction as private, these filmic and literary narratives from the socialist period are unique for the manner in which they present the university and the commune as institutions that make public the work of social reproduction. Furthermore, exploring the figure of the student and the woman through narratives of their labor allows me to illuminate not only the labor that produces commodities, but the labor that through which the student and the woman are themselves produced.

In the third chapter, I examine the integration of education and labor in the film *Juelie*. The film was released in 1975 to celebrate the success of the Jiangxi Community Labor University (Gongda), a university that was unique for its “part-work, part-study” (*bangong, banxue*) model for students, integrating the theoretical lessons of the classroom with the practical lessons of labor. Gongda was both a productive commune as well as a university. The film extolled the new national educational culture that it exemplified, a culture that was practical, cultivating useful skills such as animal husbandry and crop fertilization, as well as egalitarian, striving to offer rural students as much entry to college as their wealthier urban peers.

*Juelie* questioned the episteme of the university student: What should students learn, and whom does that knowledge serve—the professor or the cowherd, the school or society? Who is in control of the classroom, and what is the student’s agency? Where does their future lie? In this

<sup>64</sup> Here, I follow the contributions of Isabella Bakker, Tithi Bhattacharya, Johanna Brenner, Sylvia Federici, Johanna Brenner, Lise Vogel, and others on social reproduction theory. See Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression* (London: Pluto Books, 2017); Sylvia Federici, “Notes on Gender in Marx’s Capital,” *Continental Thought and Theory* 1 (4) 2017: pp. 19-37; Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (2013); Isabella Bakker, “Social Reproduction and the Constitution of a Gendered Political Economy,” *New Political Economy* Vol. 12 (4); Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, “Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 15, 1989; Susan Ferguson, “Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms: Toward an Integrative Ontology,” *Historical Materialism* 24 (2): pp. 38-60.

chapter, I examine the figure of the student during the socialist period in the P.R.C. My reading is grounded in the film *Juelie*, the most extensive narrative from that period to explore the relationship between the student and the university. I approach the student through a consideration of their labor, asking what was the work of the student, and what did it produce? I argue that the student's labor was a key site through which the student was reconsidered, transformed from the bespectacled urban intellectual of the May Fourth era into a diffuse, pluralistic subject position embedded within the socialist project and its productive social relations. The student stands as synecdoche for the entire apparatus of the educational system as a mechanism of social reproduction. By integrating the student's intellectual labor with productive labor, *Juelie* disrupts the university as a site of elite social reproduction and transforms it into an integrated and productive site of unalienated labor.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the representation of domestic labor in literature from the late 1950s to mid-1960s. During the Great Leap Forward, the advent of people's communes sought to bring new agricultural workers—women—out of the home and into the fields.<sup>65</sup> With unpaid family work theorized as unproductive, initiatives such as the “Five Changes” policy sought to collectivize women's domestic labor by introducing communal meal preparation, clothing production, midwife services, child care, and flour milling. By thus “freeing” women from household labor, women could be counted upon to serve as a core labor force for agricultural production.

Authors such as Ru Zhijuan and Li Zhun examined the social consequences of re-organizing domestic labor on rural communes in short stories and novellas published from the

<sup>65</sup> Women's participation in rural labor during the socialist period was not extraordinary; women have long participated in productive rural labor, especially in the Chinese countryside. The Great Leap Forward, however, may have been unusual in the extent to which women were mobilized as farmers.

late 1950s to mid-1960s. On the one hand, works such as Ru Zhijuan's "The Warmth of Spring" and Li Zhun's "Mother and Daughter" reframed cultural narratives of what constituted "women's work," denaturalizing the association between women and domestic labor by rendering the private household a public site for the production and reproduction of the laboring community. These works drew attention to the division between what Gail Hershatter calls the "visible and invisible" labor occurring in public and domestic spaces, respectively.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the agrarian commune in the literary imagination simultaneously upheld productive labor as the privileged form of women's labor, erasing the continuity between the waged labor of the commune with the unwaged labor of the home. While the authors gave language to the demands on women for socially reproductive labor, the home was conceptualized as an ancillary enterprise to socialist construction, and these fictional works are haunted by the endless physical and metaphorical reproduction of women around the countryside.

Ultimately, I find profound shifts in the ways that the labor of women, educators, artists, and doctors were understood during the socialist period. The cultural texts that I examine represent deliberate and complex attempts to shift the perception of the social relations that had previously separated the educated and the poor, the professional and the amateur, the urban and the rural, the revolutionary woman from the hegemony of men. In all sites of labor that I examine, gender was the essential site through which revolutionary narratives were articulated. Narratives of women's participation in new forms of medical, artistic, and intellectual work powerfully instantiated the labor transformations that were possible under the new conditions of the P.R.C. Women characters offered the ability to transform and sublimate the oppressive labor relations of the old society, a narrative trend that began in the late 1950s and reached its fullest

<sup>66</sup> Gail Hershatter, "Women and China's Socialist Construction, 1949-78," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol. 17, Issue 12, No. 2 (2019): pp. 1-27.

expression in cultural production during the final years of the Cultural Revolution. Within a few short years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the cultural imaginary that had given rise to these narratives quickly collapsed, rendering the works of literature, film, art, and journalism from the period “orphans” of the socialist period. But rather than narrating these ambitious attempts to transform the cultural imaginary through their failures, in this project I seek to illuminate why new revolutionary narratives of work seemed possible and necessary in the first place.

## Chapter 2 | The Laboring of Medicine: Barefoot Doctors and the Gendering of Revolution

*“Those with mud-covered legs are not to be underestimated.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction: Deng Walks Out

Sometime in early 1976, the senior Chinese statesman Deng Xiaoping attended the screening of a new film in Beijing. Deng’s path to his seat in the audience that night had been rocky, especially over the course of the previous ten years. He was still not in the clear. After decades of high-profile leadership in the Chinese Communist Party, he had been accused of pursuing the capitalist road in the late 1960s for siding against signature Maoist policies such as the Great Leap Forward, and was subsequently stripped of his titles and responsibilities. For four years, he worked at the Xinjian County Tractor Factory in rural Jiangxi, an ignoble demotion meant to humiliate in spite of praise elsewhere for the dignity of the proletariat laborer.<sup>2</sup> But as the years went by, the party’s internal consensus on the success of revolutionary Maoist programs shifted, and so did Deng’s fate. In 1973, he was called back to Beijing as part of a

<sup>1</sup> Chu Lan, “Yi Bu Gesong Wenhua Dageming de Hao Yingpian: Ping ‘Chunmiao’ [A Great Film in Praise of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Review of ‘Chunmiao’],” *Hongqi*, 1976. Chu Lan is a penname for opinions that were believed to represent the views of the State Council Cultural Creation Leadership Small Group (*Guowuyuan wenhua zu wenyi chuanguo lingdao xiaozu*). “Chu Lan” wrote high-profile commentary on film, and was active from 1973 to late 1976. See Qi Zhi, *Wenge dianying, 1966-1976: Yi ge zhidu yu guannian de lishi, di er ji* [A History of Institutions and Ideas: Cultural Revolution films, vol. 2] (Austin, TX: Meiguo huayi chubanshe [Remembering Publishing], 2020), pp. 66-71; and Wu Qiwen, “Wo zai ‘Chu Lan’ xie wenzhang [I wrote as ‘Chu Lan’],” *Yanhuang chunqiu* 7 (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ezra E. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), pp. 49-53.

broader effort to reinstate disgraced senior officials who were now seen as critical to the state's rebuilding efforts.

By the time Deng sat in the movie theater, the film industry was also in the midst of a slow recovery: after three years of no film production,<sup>3</sup> the country's most prominent studios slowly resumed making moves in the early 1970s, beginning with a few model operas. The film Deng was watching that evening, titled *Chunmiao* ("Spring Shoots"), was part of an initiative to release more films and a greater diversity of films, in particular narrative feature films (*gushipian*).<sup>4</sup> Like many ambitious film projects, *Chunmiao* had been in development for several years, beginning in 1970 when a script-writing team was sent to a village outside Shanghai to meet Wang Guizhen, the young woman who was the real-life inspiration for the movie project.<sup>5</sup>

Wang was a barefoot doctor (*chijiao yisheng*), a rural healthcare worker who provided low-cost medical and public health services to the members of her commune. Wang had risen to prominence when her village's medical team was featured in a report on barefoot doctors that was syndicated across national newspapers in 1968.<sup>6</sup> Although barefoot doctors rose out of pilot programs to train "semi-agricultural, semi-medical" (*bannong, banyi*) rural health workers that pre-dated the Cultural Revolution by almost a decade, they were closely associated with the Cultural Revolution, launched as a nationwide medical program in 1968 and described in press

<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix to Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 185-6.

<sup>4</sup> The number of feature films produced increased dramatically beginning in 1974. Film historian Zhai Jianning attributes this to a push led by Jiang Qing and Gang of Four to increase the number of films representing the struggle against capitalist roaders, while Li Wenhua recounts in an oral history of the film that Zhou Enlai had ordered the production of an increased number of feature films (*gushipian*). Zhai Jianning, *Hongse wangshi: 1966-1976 nian de Zhongguo dianying* (Taipei: Taihai chubanshe, 2001), p. 62; Lin Shu, ed., *Ru ying sui xing: Li Wenhua de dianying shijie* [Like the shape of shadows: the film world of Li Wenhua] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2012), p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Haiyun, "Dianying *Chunmiao* de yuanxing Wang Guizhen [Wang Guizhen, the original model for *Chunmiao*]," *Wenshi jinghua* 1995 (3): pp. 27-9.

<sup>6</sup> See "Cong 'chijiao yisheng' de chengzhang kan yixue jiaoyu geming de fangxiang," *Renmin ribao*, Sept. 14, 1968; see also "Zai Mao zhuxi de wuchan jieji geming weisheng luxian zhiyin xia Shanghai jiaoku 'chijiao yisheng' duiwu jinyibu chengzhang zhuangda," *Renmin ribao*, Sept. 25, 1969.



as a “socialist new thing” (*shehui zhuyi xinsheng shiwu*) that had grown organically from the Revolution’s successes. After meeting Wang, the script-writing team finished their first draft for a spoken drama titled *Chijiao yisheng* (“The Barefoot Doctor”). The manuscript would be revised at least eight times more and its title changed before it was adapted into the fictional narrative that Deng watched that night in early 1976. The final product was filmed on location in Jiangxi, directed by an award-winning team and featuring the newcomer Li Xiuming in her screen debut as the irrepressible Tian Chunmiao.<sup>7</sup>

In the film, the plucky eponymous heroine (whose name means “spring shoots”) decides to become a barefoot doctor after a baby with acute pneumonia dies because a physician refuses to treat it. Chunmiao studies medicine at the county health clinic, returning to her home commune to care for its underserved members. Chunmiao repeatedly butts heads with the film’s villains, the corrupt Dr. Qian (surnamed “money”) and the malicious health clinic director Du Wenjie (his surname is a homophone for “poison”), and she eventually wrests control of the commune health clinic from the two men. Chunmiao’s rebellion was especially notable since it constituted an act of Cultural Revolution, overthrowing the clinic’s ruling class in order to return it to proletarian control. *Chunmiao* was thus the first film since the Cultural Revolution had begun in 1966 to depict the movement on screen.<sup>8</sup>

But Deng likely did not watch this part of the film. He apparently disliked the film so much that he walked out of the theater in full view of its audience, which included other

<sup>7</sup> *Chunmiao* was co-directed by Xie Jin, Yan Bili, and Liang Tianduo. Xie Jin was the most prominent of the three co-directors, making his directorial debut with *Nü lan wu hao* (“Woman Basketball Player No. 5”) in 1957 and going on to direct the screen adaptation of *Hongse niangzi jun* (“The Red Detachment of Women”), for which he won the Hundred Flowers Award for Best Director.

<sup>8</sup> See “Shanghaiwei lingdao dui *Chunmiao* ba gao de yijian,” collected in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying ziliao, 1948-1979* [Collected research materials of Chinese film, 1949-1979], xia juan [Vol. 2] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006) pp. 288-90.

powerful and high-ranking party members.<sup>9</sup> With this gesture, Deng made his feelings about the film and its vision of empowered grassroots medical providers clear, and he allegedly called the movie a work of “ultra-leftist” (*jizuo*) trash as he left. The Cultural Revolution had left its scars on Deng and his family, experiences that made him skeptical of its most radical projects, and he had come to disagree inherently with policies that favored grassroots mobilization over the cultivation of specialized expertise. Ergo, Deng believed barefoot doctors to be ineffective practitioners with grossly overrated healing abilities derived from medical training that was rudimentary at best.

Deng’s outburst at the movie theater fanned a controversy that was already well underway. Once again, the validity of a radical Maoist social movement and political project—the Cultural Revolution—was in dispute. When Deng refused to issue self-criticisms that sufficiently affirmed the Cultural Revolution or disavowed the rightist tendencies that was accused of harboring, national press laid the groundwork for his dismissal.<sup>10</sup> “How could a film celebrating the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution make the party’s most recidivous capitalist, Deng Xiaoping, so uncomfortable that he couldn’t sit through the end?” asked two officials from the China Film Company (*Zhongguo dianying gongsi*) in a film review for the *People’s Daily*. “In fact, that’s exactly the point of the film’s critique, ...to serve as a mirror revealing the true shape of this chief representative of the capitalist class. That’s why he threw such a fit (*bao tiao*

<sup>9</sup> Deng’s departure from the movie theater was widely reported in national press. For a representative article, see Shanxisheng Xiyang xian Dazhai gongshe Nannao dadui pinxiazhongnong [Lower-middle peasants of the Southern Mound Brigade, Dazhai Commune, Xiyang County, Shanxi Province], “Anmen ye yao he Deng Xiaoping suansuanzhang” [We too need to settle accounts with Deng Xiaoping], *Renmin ribao*, May 19, 1976,

<sup>10</sup> See Ezra Vogel, Chapters 3 to 5 from *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011) for an account.

*ru lei*).<sup>11</sup> By April, Deng had been ousted once more, removed from power and replaced as successor to the premier by the colorless official Hua Guofeng.

Deng's antipathy to the film *Chunmiao* testified to the extent to which the barefoot doctor had emerged as a powerful discursive figure in the P.R.C.'s cultural imaginary during the mid-1970s. Provoking powerful praise and dissent, in 1975 the barefoot doctor was at peak saturation both within the medical system as well as the cultural consciousness: over 1.7 million were at work in communes across the countryside, with an estimated ninety percent of the country's rural residents served by a barefoot doctor in their community.<sup>12</sup> A spate of cultural products produced during from the 1960s to 1970s, from newspaper profiles to novels, short stories, paintings, poster, and songs, as well as merchandise such as notebooks and decorative vases, memorialized their achievements. In fact, representations of barefoot doctors were so popular during the mid-1970s that *Chunmiao* was one of three films released from late 1975 to early 1976 featuring a barefoot doctor as the central protagonist.<sup>13</sup>

Deng's connoption at the movie theater raises several questions: How had the barefoot doctor become at once so prevalent and controversial? What about the barefoot doctor's reconfiguring of medical treatment and social relations made the institution so contentious, even within the explicitly revolutionary context of their own time period? And, on a metatextual level, how should a barefoot doctor film, as a narrative and cultural text of its period, be understood in relation to the policies and social phenomena they reflect? Can a work of propaganda tell us anything about a culture beyond the interpretive demands of its associated agenda?

<sup>11</sup> Li Wenbin and Zeng Xiangtian, "Pi zai Du Wenjie de shen shang, teng zai Deng Xiaoping xin shang: ping caise gushipian *Chunmiao*," *Renmin ribao*, Apr. 27, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Chunjuan Nancy Wei, "Barefoot Doctors: The Legacy of Chairman Mao's Healthcare" in *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Revolution*, eds. Chunjuan Nancy Wei and Darryl E. Brock (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> The other two films are *Hongyu* ("Red Rain," or "The New Doctor") and *Yanming hupan* ("Geese Cries by the Lakeshore.") I discuss these films in greater detail in this chapter.

In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions by tracing the rise of the barefoot doctor as a discursive figure of the socialist period. I argue that the barefoot doctor's emergence signified the undertaking of an ambitious, epoch-defining, but ultimately failed attempt to reposition medical labor within society. By embedding barefoot doctors within their own rural communities, barefoot doctors sought to transform medicine as a social relation through labor. Barefoot doctors remade the medical field as a culture of lay expertise, replacing the aloof and elite professional doctor with grassroots, everyday healers. Filmic depictions of barefoot doctors represented complex narrative shifts from external to internal antagonists, external to internal medical cultures, and external to internal medical practices. This shift inward allowed for a critique of socialist bureaucracy and corruption that upended the narrative conventions of the nation's previous film output. In this chapter, I show that production documents from the barefoot doctor films *Hongyu*, *Chunmiao*, and *Yanming hu pan* reveal the importance attached to *Chunmiao's* depiction of Cultural Revolution on screen. Moreover, through comparative analysis of the films, I find that gender itself functioned as a site of revolutionary articulation, allowing women barefoot doctors to challenge authority in a critique of the medical establishment's separation from labor.

## **Expert Problems**

Barefoot doctors emerged from trends in thought in the late 1950s that interrogated the relationship between knowledge and class, particularly as it was embodied in the figure of the expert. Simply put, after a first five-year plan that drew heavily from Soviet precedent and the advice of Soviet experts, reliance on the expert had become problematic. As Western socialist theorists critical of the expert would later argue, a central issue with the notion of an expert

culture was that it was anti-egalitarian in and of itself.<sup>14</sup> Thus, barefoot doctors were a feature component of policies and programs that hoped to resolve the challenges of expertise by creating new socialist experts who remained embedded within their organic social relations.

Because the knowledge and experiences that accrue to specialized work are diverted from the realm of the everyday, the greater the degree of professionalization, the greater the distance to the public. This dynamic, which Jürgen Habermas calls a “dialectic of systemically induced reification and cultural impoverishment,” was illustrated in 1958 in a collection of essays on the nature of expertise.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup> A historian at Fujian Normal College<sup>17</sup> warned against the perils of pursuing expertise to the exclusion of all else, for example. After meeting an advisor who specialized in ancient world history (*shijie shanggu shi*) in his first year of college, the scholar, Lin Jinghua, writes that he “became intensely interested in acquiring expert knowledge, and spent all my time in the library, reading room, and my mentor’s home. I became obsessed, and even thought eating and sleeping were a waste of time.”<sup>18</sup> But without the moral tether of the proper politics, the researcher became further and further isolated, unable and uninterested in participating in contemporary society. Insulated from the masses and on track to become a full-fledged member of the anti-revolutionary elite, the researcher is redeemed when he joins party

<sup>14</sup> For Western criticism of expert cultures, see Harry Collins and Robert Evans, *Rethinking Expertise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Yaron Ezrahi, *The Descent of Icarus: Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Alan Irwin, *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise, and Sustainable Development* (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 1995); Sheila Jasanoff, *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *Lun you hong you zhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958). The “red and expert” campaign is discussed in further detail on the next page.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [Notes Toward an Investigation],” in *Mapping Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek, ed., (New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 100–140.

<sup>17</sup> Known from 1972 on as Fujian Normal University.

<sup>18</sup> Lin Jinghua, “Wo cengjing tiaoshang ‘xian zhuan hou hong’ de weixian xianjing [I once fell into the dangerous trap of being ‘expert first, then red’]”, in *Lun you hong you zhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958), pp. 175-8.

organizations following the establishment of the P.R.C. Through political activities sponsored by the party, he reintegrates with society. Realizing the selfishness of his actions, and ultimately the moral paucity of an apolitically cultivated expertise, Lin Jinghua concludes that “there is no soul without the political” as he reaches a final understanding of expert-driven culture as anti-democratic, and antithetical to the social forces that brought the C.C.P. to power.

Yet even as it was critiqued, expert knowledge was still understood as indispensable to the state-building enterprise and to the competitiveness of the socialist project. Expert power was essential to state power, no more so than to Liu Shaoqi, who was then chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress. Ever the “engineer”<sup>19</sup> in his approach to revolution, Liu Shaoqi believed that expert knowledge was the essential bridge to achieving simultaneous intellectual and material development. He spoke of his desire to see a “regiment of sci-tech (*kexue jishu*) cadres” who belonged to the working class, a battalion of politically-loyal “professors, educators, scientists, journalists, artists, lawyers, and Marxist-Leninist theoreticians”: essentially, a corps of proletarian professional workers.<sup>20</sup> Liu believed that after sufficient training, all proletarians could transform into proletarian intellectuals, thus closing the gap between mental and manual labor. This imaginary cadre would be both “red and expert” (*you hong you zhuan*).

<sup>19</sup> Lowell Dittmer describes two approaches to revolution within the Chinese Communist Party, an “engineering” approach that relies upon planned, sequential tactics with directions issued from an elite command center atop a vertical hierarchy, versus the “storming” approach of spontaneous action emanating from the bottom of an egalitarian hierarchy with an indiscriminate division of labor. Mao Zedong exemplified the minority “storming” approach, while Liu Shaoqi not only symbolized the majority “engineering” approach, but lent the approach its name through his metaphor of revolutionary processes as an engineered raising or lowering of water levels. See Lowell Dittmer, *China’s Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 1-11.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Shaoqi, “Liu Shaoqi tongzhi zai Beijing gejie qingzhu Shiyue shehuizhuyi geming sishi zhounian dahui shang de jianghua” [Remarks by Liu Shaoqi at the all-inclusive fortieth anniversary celebration of the socialist October revolution in Beijing], reprinted as the introduction to *Lun youhong youzhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958), p. 3. Translations all my own, except where noted otherwise.

The “red and expert” phrase was popularized by Liu Shaoqi and Mao Zedong in inner-party debates during late 1957, and spread into popular usage the following year as work units, particularly universities, were asked to hold discussions over the phrase and what its embrace would entail.<sup>21</sup> As a historical campaign, “The initial impulse behind the Red and expert drive was class warfare,” writes the sociologist Joel Andreas, who analyzes the “red and expert” campaign as the realpolitik cultivation of new political elites by allowing them to accrue the cultural capital typically reserved for old elites.<sup>22</sup> The historian Sigrid Schmalzer, however, highlights the red and expert’s theoretical challenge to the supposed neutrality or objectivity of scientific knowledge itself,<sup>23</sup> while Maurice Meisner describes the “red and expert” as an inherently contradictory ideal indebted to utopian Marxist notions of an all-round communist man who combines “brain work with brawn work,” “civilian and military work.”<sup>24</sup> Although the red expert emerged as an ideal specific to the historical conditions of the late 1950s, the phrase quickly came to be seen as a distinctive and symbolic feature of a broader Maoist episteme.

But during the late 1950s, the red expert was presented not as a contradiction, but as a solution. By resolving the historical opposition between intellectual elites and common laborers, the red expert integrated theory with practice, an innovation that the scholar-official Guo Moruo credited to the new epoch ushered in by the establishment of the P.R.C. Theoretically, the arrival of the socialist state meant that there were no longer any significant barriers to becoming a red expert. “Before Liberation, a person could be expert first and then red, or red first and then

<sup>21</sup> See Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 61-86 for a detailed discussion of red experts, particularly at Tsinghua University.

<sup>22</sup> See Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, pp. 61-70.

<sup>23</sup> See Sigrid Schmalzer, “Red and Expert” entry in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi* (Canberra and New York: Australian National University and Verso Books, 2019), pp. 215-220.

<sup>24</sup> See Maurice Meisner, “Utopian Goals and Ascetic Values in Maoist Ideology,” from *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 118-131.

expert,” wrote Guo, a poet and president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in a letter addressed to young students. Because the educational apparatuses of the previous state had not been red, expertise and redness had to be acquired in isolation from one another. Worse yet, “there were even some who were expert but not red, or red but not expert,” he wrote. But now, not only were all educational institutions under CCP control, those who had participated in constructing the new society were now automatically a red expert (*hongse zhuanjia*), Guo explained.<sup>25</sup> In Guo’s opinion, the arrival of socialism had changed the nature of expert knowledge itself, rendering expertise acquired under socialism unproblematic, a neutral, modular possession in which the process of acquiring specialized knowledge did not itself produce elitism or distance from the everyday.

In fact, the adoption of a socialist project by the state had instigated a legitimization crisis in all forms of professional activity, no less so than in medicine. The popularization of the “red and expert” ideal thus represented a serious attempt at democratizing the acquisition of education and technical expertise. By imagining the red expert as a common member of the masses, the red expert would simultaneously be accountable to the masses from which she had emerged. Thus, through lay participation in expert decision-making, experts would be accountable to the masses. The red expert was thus an embrace of lay expertise, imagining a new type of cadre who would be distinguished not only by her acquisition of expert knowledge, but also the authority of her experiential knowledge as a member of the lay. By embracing the lay expert, the party created a path toward greater lay (read: mass, proletarian, grassroots, *minjian*, *gongnongbing*) participation in determining the politics and policies that were previously controlled by the professional classes.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Moruo, “Taolun hong yu zhuan—da qingnian tongxueimen de yi feng gongkaixin [A discussion of redness and expertise: an open reply to young students],” from *Lun you hong you zhuan*, pp. 108-11.



The public commentary on red experts was matched by a slew of policy initiatives meant to cultivate a new class of technically skilled and politically reliable professionals. During a period of party rectification during 1957, technical staff in work units across the country complained that the party leadership they answered to had no right to lead their units because they lacked the technical expertise to make for competent administrators.<sup>26</sup> Their demand that “non-specialists cannot lead specialists” (*wai hang buneng lingdao neihang*) threatened the legitimacy of party authority, the subsequent Anti-Rightist Campaign is generally understood as a backlash to the challenge of the intellectual class’s dissent.<sup>27</sup> The red and expert formulation emerged in the early months of the Anti-Rightist as the ideal rebuttal, and the campaign highlighted the need to replace the old, “white” experts with new, red ones. Soon, the slogan was instantiated through programs to educate and train party faithful. Worker-peasant cadres could attend crash education courses, while factories provided literacy and technical-training programs. New schools were established in villages and poor urban areas to educate the proletariat, while organizations implemented class line policies that discriminated against the children of old elites in favor of the children of workers, peasants, and revolutionary cadres.<sup>28</sup> In medicine, pilot programs began to train rural health workers for work in the countryside. These rural health workers are the direct predecessor to barefoot doctor.

<sup>26</sup> See Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 47-9 for further discussion of the roots of the Anti-Rightist campaign.

<sup>27</sup> Classic scholarship on the Anti-Rightist campaign includes Roderick MacFarquhar’s *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Ding Shu’s *Yangmou: “Fanyou” qianhou* [Open conspiracy: The Complete Story of the Chinese Communist Party’s Anti-Rightist Campaign], (Hong Kong: Jiushi niandai zashi she, 1991); and Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-65* (New York: Routledge, 1993). See also *Zhongguo fanyou yundong shukujū 1957-* [Database of China’s Anti-Rightist Movement] (Hong Kong: Universities Service Center for Chinese Studies, 2010), edited by Song Yongyi for an essential collection of primary source documents. For recent scholarship, see Sebastian Veg, “Testimony, History, and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to a Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China,” *The China Quarterly* No. 218, pp. 515-539.

<sup>28</sup> See *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 61-2.

The systems that gave rise to the rural health worker subsequently shaped and defined the scope and substance of the barefoot doctor's responsibilities. At its most basic, this entailed an ambitious re-organization of the existing medical system, transforming it from privatized service to public good. The state began this process in the 1950s by mobilizing individual medical practitioners into voluntary union clinics, where doctors' collectives (*yisheng jiti suoyouzh*)<sup>29</sup> and county hospitals together constituted a two-tier state medical system making up the basic structure of the P.R.C.'s medical system during the socialist period.<sup>30</sup> But union clinics, despite falling under the explicit auspices of party and government organs, were self-organized and self-funded. Clinics kept their own books and did not receive substantial financial support from the state. Unsurprisingly, the medical needs of the country's rural residents, who constituted over sixty percent<sup>31</sup> of the population at the time, were left unmet. Policies implemented in 1952 that granted free medical service (*gongfei yiliao*) to all civil servants, party members, and disabled revolutionary veterans did not include peasants, while workers in state-owned enterprises enjoyed medical coverage through the Labor Health Insurance system (*laobao yiliao*).

The lack of medical care available in the countryside did not go unnoticed, however. In the late 1950s, a group of physicians from Shanghai initiated a pilot program to train rural health workers (*nongcun weishengyuan*) in the countryside. Traveling to the city's countryside, doctors began training local personnel who would be engaged in both medical and agricultural work. Working through the rural communes to train these rural health workers, the doctors held short-term classes and provided opportunities for supervised practice. By June of 1960, over 3,900

<sup>29</sup> For more details on the founding of union clinics, see Xiaoping Fang, *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine in China* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), especially "Regulations for Organizing Union Clinics" published by the Ministry of Health in 1956, quote on p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> The two-tier medical system's structure resembled policy recommendations promoted by the Nationalist government during the Rural Construction Movement of the 1930s

<sup>31</sup> The World Bank, 2018, World Bank Open Data (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>.

individuals in the greater Shanghai municipality had received rural health worker training, representing ten counties in the area.

These programs to train rural health workers were the direct predecessor of the barefoot doctor program, and in the summer of 1960, the program seemed off to a good start: with proof of concept delivered, supporters hoped to expand the model to other provinces.<sup>32</sup> But nationally, opportunities for leftist social experiments dwindled as complications with the implementation of the Great Leap Forward and new revelations of the “three years of famine” came to light. By the early 1960s, conservative voices dominated policy, and a critical report of the rural health worker program was released in 1961. Finding the medical training of the health workers lacking, the report recommended that the program be abandoned and rural health workers reassigned exclusively back to agricultural labor. From 1961 to 1965, the rural health worker program shrank significantly, with the number of rural health workers in the Shanghai region dropping to just over three hundred.<sup>33</sup> Rural health workers were described as “semi-agricultural, semi-medical (*bannong banyi*),” a pejorative label meant to imply they were insufficient for either task.

Yet by the mid-1960s, the phrase *bannong banyi* would be proudly embraced in official discourse, mobilized in support of the redistribution of state resources to address the urban/rural divide. When the Socialist Education Campaign was launched in the mid-1960s, it explicitly targeted urban/rural disparities in the distribution of resources, including healthcare. Policies and attitudes swung again back toward sympathy for rural social interests, and the report criticizing rural health workers was now considered revisionist and counter-revolutionary.<sup>34</sup> The term

<sup>32</sup> Victor Sidel, “The Barefoot Doctors of the People’s Republic of China,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 286 (June 15, 1972): p. 1,294.

<sup>33</sup> Sidel, “The Barefoot Doctors of the People’s Republic of China,” p. 1,295.

<sup>34</sup> Sidel, “The Barefoot Doctors of the People’s Republic of China,” p. 1,295.

“semi-agricultural, semi-medical (*bannong banyi*),” was now embraced in official discourse, and a January 1965 plan from the Ministry of Health included programs to train more rural health workers, and required that each production brigade have at least two “semi-agricultural, semi-medical” workers, one of whom would be a woman responsible for delivering babies.<sup>35</sup> By the time Mao issued the “June 26 Directive,” a scathing critique of the Ministry of Health that fundamentally re-shaped the direction of the country’s healthcare system toward the countryside, there was already considerable interest in providing better healthcare to the country’s rural residents.<sup>36</sup>

The barefoot doctor is typically recognized in historical scholarship as a separate entity from the rural health worker. For example, the historians Li Haihong and Xiaoping Fang, both of whom have published monographs on the barefoot doctor, define the barefoot doctor as existing from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, a period that neatly overlaps with the officially recognized dates of the Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976). But I believe that the barefoot doctor and rural health worker are better understood as belonging to the same trajectory of thought, policy, and culture that developed in distinct phases across the entirety of the socialist period. In a chapter on barefoot doctors, Xiaoping Fang describes the policies and practices that distinguish rural health workers from barefoot doctors, and the difference largely boils down to the scale on which barefoot doctors operated, as well as the barefoot doctor’s engagement in direct medical care in their own commune clinics, as opposed to the public health work that rural health workers performed in brigade clinics.

<sup>35</sup> Xiaoping Fang, *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine in China*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Mao Zedong, “Directive on Public Health” (June 26, 1965), from *Long Live Mao Tse-tung Thought in Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 9, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967). Also available at: [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9\\_41.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_41.htm).

Furthermore, the vintage of the name “barefoot doctor,” which was popularized in national press in 1968, has allowed many to attribute the barefoot doctors specifically to the Cultural Revolution. The barefoot doctor is thus closely entwined with the Cultural Revolution, and the negation of the barefoot doctor seems to follow as naturally as the negation of the Cultural Revolution itself. I prefer to understand them as a product of socialist culture and the socialist healthcare system writ large. Recognizing that the cultural lineage of the barefoot doctor includes that of the rural health worker, with its roots in the red and expert debates, allows us to recognize that the intellectual project of the barefoot doctor is, in fact, much more closely entwined with the entirety of the intellectual project of the P.R.C., and not just the “ten years of disaster (*shinian dongluan*).” This easy—but I believe ultimately mistaken—attribution of the barefoot doctor contains significant repercussions for the post-Reform appraisal of the socialist period, and has guided the Reform period’s negation of socialist ideology and culture. Repudiating the barefoot doctor should not be as easy as denying the legitimacy of the Cultural Revolution, as the denial of barefoot doctors actually implies the denial of a much more extensive intellectual project and cultural history.

### **The Barefoot Doctor as Discursive Figure**

Within China, barefoot doctors first came to prominence in September of 1968, when a front-page report on their contributions to the revolution in medical education was carried across multiple flagship newspapers with national distribution, including the *Renmin ribao*, *Hongqi*, *Guangming ribao*, and *Jiefangjun bao*. Titled “Cong ‘chijiao yisheng’ de chengzhang kan yixue jiaoyu geming de fangxiang [Examining the direction of the revolution in medical education from the development of ‘barefoot doctors’],” the article traces the history of the barefoot doctor back to Mao Zedong’s June 26, 1965 “Directive on Public Health,” in which Mao, recognizing

the unequal distribution of healthcare resources in the cities and countryside, advised the nation to “put the emphasis on the countryside” in medical work.

In the report, barefoot doctors are described as “participating in labor about half of the time,” with their income largely derived from subsidies contributed by the peasants of their respective communes, and compensated at a rate commensurate with other laborers in the commune.<sup>37</sup> The report emphasizes the barefoot doctor’s identity as a full-fledged member of the local community, their active interest in the well-being of their neighbors, and their fair and affordable rates. “When the child of a poor peasant fell ill, it used to be that some itinerant scoundrel would come to consult (‘*kan’ bing*), cheating you out of ten *kuai* or more just for a few tablets of Analgin, and your child’s fever wouldn’t break. ‘Barefoot doctors’ take the initiative to come to your home, treat you with careful attention, and your illness will be healed at the cost of only around three *kuai*.”

After the September 1968 front-page report on barefoot doctors was published, a steady stream of profiles of exemplary barefoot doctors from different provinces followed.<sup>38</sup> Soon, the barefoot doctor was soon ready for foreign consumption, too: by the early 1970s, outward-facing publications such as *China Reconstructs* and *Peking Review*, which were written in non-Chinese languages and widely distributed abroad, contained primers on China’s new initiatives in rural health. In a 1971 *China Reconstructs* article, barefoot doctors were defined as “commune members who have taken courses in medical treatment,” and “a peasant who has had basic medical training

<sup>37</sup> Shanghai shi diaocha baogao. “Cong ‘chijiao yisheng’ de chengzhang kan yixue Jiaoyu Geming de Fangxiang [Examining the Direction of the Revolution in Medical Education from the Development Of ‘barefoot Doctors’].” *Renmin Ribao*, September 14, 1968.

<sup>38</sup> The compendium *Chijiao yisheng xianjin shi ji hui bian* collects seventeen such profiles, variously published in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Editors of the *Renmin weisheng chubanshe*, *Chijiao yisheng xianjin shi ji hui bian* (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1974).

and gives treatment without leaving productive work.”<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, publications dedicated to the on-going education of barefoot doctors were published in every province. A theatrical play, “The Barefoot Doctor,” was written in 1971, while a full-length novel, *Hongyu*, featuring a young boy as a barefoot doctor protagonist was published in 1973, with another barefoot doctor novel, *Yanming hu pan*, following in 1974. And by 1976, the full-length feature films based on these novels and play were screened across the nation. By the 1970s, the barefoot doctor had become a defining feature of both the P.R.C.’s socialist healthcare system, as well as a prominent discursive figure in the cultural imaginary of the nation.

In both English and Chinese, as a concept and as an occupation, the barefoot doctor is distinguished by its curious name, which *China Reconstructs* explains derives from peasants who work bare foot in the muddy rice paddies.<sup>40</sup> Yet in spite of serving as the defining indicator of the rural health workers embedded in local communities, bare feet in and of themselves function as a highly unstable indicator of the barefoot doctor. Films, art, and photographs featuring barefoot doctors do not always depict them with bare feet; in fact, barefoot doctors are more reliably indicated by the wooden medical box slung over their shoulders than they are by a lack of footwear.

The instability of the bare foot as an indicator of a specific type of socialist Chinese medical worker is a complex phenomenon, and deconstructing the iconography of the barefoot doctor involves unpacking several intersecting modes of thought and cultural production. Shoes, for example, have long been imbued with notions of gender,

<sup>39</sup> “Health and Medical Care for the People,” *China Reconstructs*, Vol. XX No. 6, June 1971, p. 20; and “Everybody works for Good Health,” *China Reconstructs*, Vol. XX No. 10, November 1971, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> “Everybody works for good health,” *China Reconstructs*, p. 20.

class, and sexuality, and scholars such as Pang Laikwan prefer to read images of the barefoot doctor through the lens of gender, seeing a veiled eroticism in the depiction of naked feet.<sup>41</sup> To others, such as social scientist Ruth Sidel, the barefoot doctor is so intellectually and culturally challenging to understand in the highly professionalized Western context that the name makes no sense, and might be untranslatable. On this basis, Sidel concludes that the appellation is oxymoronic, for “barefoot doctors are neither barefoot nor doctors.”<sup>42</sup>

The first appearance of the term “barefoot doctor” in nationally circulated press occurred in a June 1968 issue of the magazine *Hongqi*, just three months before the September 1968 report on barefoot doctors that solidified their national profile. The June 1968 issue of *Hongqi* was largely devoted to rural health initiatives, and a first-person account of a health worker tending to the poor in rural Jiangxi mentions the phrase toward the end of the piece. The author, Xiong Haiyi, is a *bannong*, *banyi* rural health worker, and he describes receiving a year and a half of medical training in the early 1960s before being placed as a worker in a rice-growing rural commune, where he notices the suffering of the impoverished peasants around him who fall ill without access to medical care. “Following Chairman Mao’s guidance, and with great class feeling, I decided to treat the poor and lower middle peasants (*pinxia zhong nong*). When I first started treating them, I had no medicine, so I saved up ten *kuai* to purchase a few

<sup>41</sup> Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China’s Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 107-35.

<sup>42</sup> Ruth Sidel, “New Roles for Women in Health Care Delivery: Conditions in the People’s Republic of China,” from *Proceedings of the International Conference on Women in Health, June 16-18, 1975, Washington D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1976), p. 106.



commonly-used medications that I could use to treat common illnesses,” describes Xiong.<sup>43</sup>

Xiong’s unofficial practice grows, and he eventually receives permission from the local party branch and production brigade to create a rural clinic. The bulk of the article describes Xiong’s efforts to treat his most dramatic cases. Xiong’s willingness to discard with decorum in order to offer the most effective treatment—including hospitalizing patients with contagious illnesses in his own home, using his mouth to suck the kidney stones out from the production brigade chief’s urethra, and stumbling through rain and mud at midnight to treat a miscarriage—wins him the favor of the local community.

At the very end of the article, Xiong describes the playful nicknames his rural peers bestow upon him:

Because I am always working alongside the poor and lower middle peasants [in the rice paddies], I wear shorts on hot days and my two naked feet become completely covered in mud. The commune members affectionately call me the ‘barefoot doctor’ (*chijiao yisheng*) and ‘muddy man doctor’ (*niba lao yisheng*), and I’ve realized that this is how the masses express their confidence in me. So long as it benefits the lower middle peasants, I’m willing to be a ‘muddy man doctor’ for the rest of my life.<sup>44</sup>

The first mention of the term “barefoot doctor” is thus one of two nicknames used by local villagers to describe Xiong’s humble practice, and perhaps because “muddy man doctor” is both less specific in its description and less memorable in its construction than “barefoot doctor,” the term “barefoot doctor” caught on. Xiong’s bare feet immediately

<sup>43</sup> Xiong Haiyi, “Wuxian zhongyu Mao zhuxi, yongyuan zhagen zai nongcun” [Limitless loyalty to Chairman Mao forever takes root in the countryside], *Guangming ribao*, June 28, 1968.

<sup>44</sup> Xiong Haiyi, June 28, 1968.

identify him as a participant in communal labor who works in solidarity with his peasant peers, emphasizing the health worker's kinship within the peasant community.

Because the rural health worker programs that served as the model for barefoot doctor programs grew out of experimental policies based around Shanghai, it is perhaps not surprising that the nationwide program would ultimately take its name after the local labor culture of the region—an instance of a local signifier mobilized in the creation of a new, universalist national culture.<sup>45</sup> Yet a surprising reluctance to depict barefoot doctors with bare feet followed the proliferation of visual culture depicting the rural health workers. For example, widely reproduced posters depicting barefoot doctors often feature compositions that cut the barefoot doctor figure off at the waist. Two posters depicting barefoot doctors are examples.<sup>46</sup> In both posters, a woman explicitly identified as a barefoot doctor by the poster's slogan is depicted interacting with local peasants, with all major figures depicted from the waist up. Such framing makes the figures more easily legible by focusing attention on the central figures and their features, but the artistic choice also effectively avoids having to depict any sort of shoes or feet.

<sup>45</sup> See later discussion of Cai Xiang.

<sup>46</sup> See “Chijiao yisheng bian shancun hezuo yiliao qixiang xin [Barefoot doctors are all over the mountain villages, cooperation creates a new atmosphere of medical treatment]” (Figure 3-1) and “Chijiao yisheng fangzhi hao, hezuo yiliao gonggu lao [Barefoot doctors do good prevention, cooperative medicine is strong and reliable].”



Figure 2-1 “Barefoot doctors are all over the mountain villages; cooperation creates a new atmosphere of medical treatment,” Wang Linkun collective work, Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 53 x 77 c.m., Stefan Landsberger collection of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.



Figure 2-2 “Barefoot doctors do good prevention, cooperative medicine is strong and reliable,” artists and publisher unspecified, dimensions unspecified, private collection.

Other representations of barefoot doctors show them with decidedly covered feet, such as the cover of the 1969 Shanghai Science and Technology Press edition of the ‘*Chijiao yisheng*’ *shouce* [*Barefoot Doctor Manual*], a textbook for barefoot doctors printed at low cost in order to facilitate wide dissemination. While the woman barefoot doctor depicted on the front cover has her pant legs rolled up, her feet are covered in cloth shoes. The political scientist Chunjuan Nancy Wei believes the *Chijiao yisheng*

*shouce* was the most widely circulated work in print in the P.R.C. after *Mao Zedong yulu* [*Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*], itself believed to be bested in circulation only by the Bible.<sup>47</sup> Although the *Chijiao yisheng shouce* was printed in different provinces in different versions with varying cover designs (most of which feature simply the title in bold font), that the flagship edition of the manual published by the locality in which the program originated chose to depict a barefoot doctor with covered feet speaks to deep ambivalence over depicting the barefoot doctor's titular trait.

The cultural studies scholar Pang Laikwan has noted the same reluctance to depict barefoot doctors with bare feet, which she traces to the femininity and sexuality with which she believes images of women barefoot doctors were infused. Noting that more women than men tend to be depicted as barefoot doctors, Pang argues that “These beautiful barefoot doctors [were] one of the most accessible feminine images for the youth at a time when sexual differences were carefully contained.” Barefoot doctors were depicted as an “idealized pure young woman” who “[melded] domesticity and femininity” through her entrée into rural homes to treat patients and her embodiment of modern medicine—or, as Pang sees it, the “simultaneous [embodiment] of two kinds of femininity—the traditional domestic version and the modern professional version.”<sup>48</sup>

Pang's discussion of visual culture depicting barefoot doctors focuses largely on two images, Wang Yujue's 1963 painting *Village Doctor*, and Chen Yanning's 1974 painting *Yugang xin yi* [*New Doctor in the Fishing Village*]. In Wang Yujue's painting of

<sup>47</sup> For the circulation of the *Chijiao yisheng shouce*, see Chunjuan Nancy Wei, “Barefoot Doctors,” p. 267. For the circulation of *Mao Zedong yulu*, see Daniel Leese, “A Single Spark: The Origins and Spread of the Little Red Book in China,” in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander Cook (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 23

<sup>48</sup> Pang Laikwan, p. 120-33.

a sent-down woman serving as village doctor, Pang sees a figure “invested with a femininity that has subtle sexual connotations,” highlighting the figure’s “red lips and fragile profile suggest[ing] a traditional Chinese beauty.”<sup>49</sup> In Chen Yanning’s *Yugang xin yi*, a beaming young woman on the docks carries a heavy pail as workers on the docks toil behind her. Her pant legs are rolled up, and Pang suggests in her reading of the painting that the woman’s bare feet are imbued with “heavy sexual connotations” owing to China’s long history of bound feet. Pang concludes that while the barefoot doctor seems to function as vessel for “domesticity and femininity,” depictions of women with bare feet were tinged with a lingering sexual charge, and the erotic overtones of bare feet help explain the overall reluctance to depict barefoot doctors without their shoes on.

<sup>49</sup> Pang Laikwan, p. 120.



Figure 2-3 "A New Doctor in the Fishing Harbor," Chen Yanning, *Renmin meishu chubanshe*, 38 x 26 cm., Stefan Landsberger collection at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

But as a symbolic trope, bare feet cannot be understood exclusively as a signifier of gender. Rather, bare feet equally symbolized belonging within specific communities of laborers. Neither was the depiction of bare feet specific to women. Instead, bare feet should be understood as a symbol of both gender and class, and insisting on an erotic reading of their significance risks combining separate registers of cultural discourse into an imaginary construction of an essentialized and immutable 'traditional' Chinese culture.<sup>50</sup> For example, taking a closer look at *Yugang xin yi*, aside from the central figure, a male worker directly behind the doctor has rolled his pants up similarly to reveal bare feet. The local labor context of the docks serves as the essential context for bare feet,

<sup>50</sup> Class, however, is not separate from gender, a dimension I will explore in further detail as this chapter progresses.

and not the practice of foot binding, which had been thoroughly condemned by the socialist period.

Here, I draw from the contemporary Chinese literature scholar Cai Xiang, who understands the local as “a spatial concept [counterposed] to the centralized power of the national state” encompassing “systems, mores and customs, social groupings, the disposition of the population and its languages (or dialects), as well as those deep accumulated cultural modes that are hidden in the heart of these spaces.”<sup>51</sup> The process of nation-building incorporates local knowledge in the service of articulating new cultures and political visions, a relationship that Cai characterizes as “complex and interactive,” or mutually constitutive. Rather than expurgating itself of all remnants of the traditional, the socialist imaginary “recalled tradition by occasionally treating the local (tradition) as a source for its own imaginary” and thus transforming the local into “a certain form of modernity.”<sup>52</sup>

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the barefoot doctor, whose defining characteristic (bare feet) derives from local labor practices specific to the southern rice-growing regions of the country. Furthermore, the depiction of bare feet as a symbol of class went beyond the medical context. One example comes from the 1975 film *Juelie [Breaking with Old Ideas]*.<sup>53</sup> The film includes a scene in which rural identity is explicitly attached to the practice of forgoing shoes while working in muddy fields. In the scene, two university students from rural backgrounds enter the office of a university

<sup>51</sup> Cai Xiang, “The National/The Local: Conflict Negotiation, and Capitulation in the Revolutionary Imagination” in *Revolution and Its Narratives: China’s Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, edited and translated by Rebecca E. Karl and Xueping Zhong, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 27-84. Originally published as *Geming/Xushu: Zhongguo shehuizhuyi wenxue-wenhua xiangxiang* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives*, p. 79-81.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for further discussion of *Juelie*.

administrator, Cao Zhonghe. They have just come from work in the field, and their pant legs are rolled up, their feet muddied and bare. The administrator, who comes from a bourgeois urban background, scolds their appearance: “Look at you! You don’t even look like college students. From now on, you’re not allowed to go barefoot.” Behind him, the university’s principal, Long Guozheng, enters the office, and observes the interaction to comedic effect. The principal, himself from a humble cattle-herding family, is barefooted with his pant legs rolled up at the calf, and after he sees Cao scold the students, Long chides Cao, teasing that with rules like these, soon even principals will be barred from entering Cao’s office. Cao looks down at Long’s feet and scoffs.<sup>54</sup>As the central protagonist of the film, Principal Long is clearly held in higher moral regard than Cao, a trouser-and-shoe-wearing recidivist bourgeois intellectual. The scene is an explicit attempt to transform a formerly scorned marker of poverty and manual labor into a metonym of the heroic proletarian, and Long’s bare feet mark his class sympathies, as well as his alliance with the peasant students.

<sup>54</sup> Chun Chao, Zhou Jie (screenplay), *Jue lie* [Breaking with Old Ideas], VHS, dir. Li Wenhua (Los Angeles: Voyager Press, 1986).





Figure 2-4 Principal Long enters Cao Zhonghe's office, still from "Breaking with Old Ideas."

Bare feet are similarly mobilized in pivotal scenes from the films *Chunmiao* and *Yanming hu pan*, two of the three films released in 1975 that took barefoot doctors as their protagonists. The heroines of *Chunmiao* and *Yanming hu pan* are two women, Tian Chunmiao and Lan Haiying, respectively, and both characters are selectively depicted with bare feet at pivotal points in the films. When Tian Chunmiao is first introduced, she is shown walking scattering seeds in rice paddies, wading through the water with bare feet. The camera zooms to a close up of her muddied feet before panning to her face, gazing determinedly ahead. Commune members behind Chunmiao are also planting seeds in the paddies, and a boy runs up to Chunmiao, asking that she come attend to a sick child. The scene embodies Chunmiao's dual nature as a barefoot doctor, tending to the young sprouts of her community through equal engagement in healing and in agricultural commune labor.



Figure 2-5 Chunmiao walking barefoot in paddies, still from "Chunmiao."

Bare feet also appear during climactic scenes in which both Chunmiao and Haiying confront the antagonists of their respective narratives. In *Chunmiao*, the antagonist is Dr. Qian Jiren, a doctor trained under the Nationalist medical system who acts against the interests of the rural community due to lingering capitalist and revisionist sympathies. In *Yanming hu pan*, the central antagonist is party secretary Chen Tu, a hidden capitalist roader who provides political support for the corrupt Dr. Lin Daquan. The central conflicts of each film center over the operation of the cooperative health clinic, and in scenes of tense confrontation, both Chunmiao and Haiying's feet not only certify their participation in labor, but interpolate them within communities defined by their labor.

For example, in *Yanming hu pan*, things come to a head when Uncle Lin falls into a well, where he is sickened by noxious fumes. Lan Haiying had championed the digging of the new well as a preventative measure against local diseases (*difang bing*) contracted through the consumption of impure drinking water, while the party secretary Chen Tu

and commune doctor Lin Daquan fought to divert funding and labor to the construction of a surgery theater that would operate for profit. After Uncle Lin is revived, Granny Jiang, an elderly peasant who has been crippled by local diseases, defends Haiying to the crowd that has gathered. “Look at our (*zan ’men*) Haiying! Have a good look at her!” says Granny Jiang as the camera cuts first to Haiying’s resolute face, and then to her muddied feet. “Uncle Lin and Dr. Lan, who was the one who saved them? Haiying did. Who wanted to prevent the lower-middle peasants of Huanshui from getting local diseases, working day and night to dig the well and correct the water (*gai shui*)? It was also Haiying! And yet you accuse her of getting up to no good (*tiao laohu shi*),” says Granny Jiang.

As the conflict unfolds, the crowd’s presence serves to place the conflict on a public stage, and members of the crowd echo their support for Granny Jiang and Haiying. Haiying’s muddied feet serve as evidence in the court of public opinion. Despite her privileged city origins as a sent down youth, Haiying comes by her class feeling honestly, and the depiction of her bare feet constitutes irrefutable physical proof of the sincerity of her identification with the lower-middle peasants of the Huanshui commune. Here, class is no abstract concept: it is physically manifest, written on the body.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, the pale, soft hands of the intellectual similarly testify to the cosseted lifestyle of elites.



Figure 2-6 Close up of Haiying's feet during confrontation, still from "Yanming hu pan"

### **The Enemy Within**

Certainly, depictions of bare feet were not without their gendered dimensions. Yet I find that in barefoot doctor films, women's bare feet served less as a marker of submerged eroticism, and more as an indicator of revolutionary agency. Indeed, revolutionary agency itself is gendered: in *Chunmiao*, *Yanming hu pan*, and *Hongyu*, women protagonists bear the responsibility for rebelling on behalf of their community, compared to the male protagonist of *Hongyu*, who needs only to physically defeat the socially destructive antagonist of his narrative. In order to better understand how barefoot doctor films—*Chunmiao* in particular—innovated upon the existing storytelling techniques for depicting revolution, it is necessary to examine more closely the film's production. *Chunmiao* was adapted from a 1971 script titled *Chijiao yisheng* [The barefoot doctor], and as an intended marquee film event, the development of the film was supervised by Shanghai's highest political leadership. In minutes from a meeting of the city's Standing Committee convened to discuss the new draft of the script, Xu Jingxian,

then deputy director of the city's Revolutionary Committee (*Geming weiyuanhui*) as well as a party secretary to the city,<sup>56</sup> discussed the attention that had gone into the depiction of revolution in his introductory remarks:

As previously discussed, the biggest issue we are concerned about in the film is the depiction of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The third section of the film has been re-written entirely, and is much stronger now. This section was difficult to write, as no script yet has depicted the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.<sup>57</sup>

By this point, the film's script had gone through eight different drafts, each draft attempting to refine the depiction of revolution on screen. In the film's third act, Chunmiao leads a coup (*duo quan*) at the health station, taking away control from Du Wenjie, the revisionist leader there. Xu complains in the meeting of writers who "don't dare to depict the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution [in their scripts.] Their thinking is severely hampered by 'no conflict theory (*wu chongtu lun*),' and they're always writing scripts that end before the start of the Cultural Revolution, with a weak sense of realism (*xianshi yiyi*)." <sup>58</sup>

To the Cultural Revolution film scholar Mu Ting,<sup>59</sup> the depiction of revolution itself in films from the late Cultural Revolution constitutes a fundamental narrative shift in P.R.C. filmmaking. The protagonists of late Cultural Revolution films no longer face "Kuomintang reactionaries, Japanese invaders, or hidden members of the Five Black

<sup>56</sup> At the time, Shanghai had several party secretaries and not one, as is the custom in the present.

<sup>57</sup> Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, 1949-1979* [Research materials on Chinese film, 1949-1979], xia juan (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), p. 288-90.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> This is likely a penname.

Elements [landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, or Rightists].”<sup>60</sup> Instead, external antagonists have transformed into internal ones, capitalist roaders, and Rightists hidden within the body politic itself. Referring to *Chunmiao* as one of several “conspiracy films (*yinmou dianying*),” a label retroactively used by Deng Xiaoping-led reformers to criticize leftist films produced during the late Cultural Revolution, Mu Ting describes the change as an innovative shift in socialist story-telling:

The depiction of rebellion and the seizure of power (*zaofan duoquan*) is an innovation of ‘conspiracy films,’ a development that built upon the model opera... What really struck people is that in the history of Chinese cinema, most heroes were characters that received orders (*mingling de jieshouzhe*) and executed them. High-level leaders always played the role of the giver of orders (*shoumingzhe*), and in a few situations, the giver of orders could be absent or combined into another role. But to take the giver of orders and turn that character into the antagonist of the narrative, that was unprecedented, a narrative change that relied upon the logic of class struggle and two-line struggle that Mao Zedong became ensnared with in his late years, perhaps best expressed by the phrase ‘Capitalist roaders are still out there, and capitalist roaders are within the party itself [*Zouzipai hai zai zou, zouzipai jiu zai dang nei*].’<sup>61</sup>

Mu Ting points to a fundamental shift in the emplotment of late Cultural Revolution films in which the agency traditionally reserved for characters embodying virtuous authority has been given to the film’s antagonist, complicating the depiction of power and its relation to moral virtue and political authority. Giving the agency to propel the film’s narrative forward to the central antagonist—what Mu Ting calls “giving orders (*shou*

<sup>60</sup> Mu Ting, “‘Yinmou dianying’ qianxi [A rough analysis of ‘conspiracy films’],” *Jiyi* [Remembrance] 65, Dec. 30, 2010. <http://www.xujuneberlein.com/rem65.html#C>

<sup>61</sup> Mu Ting, “‘Yinmou dianying’ qianxi.”

ming)—implies that the antagonist has become uncomfortably similar to, even mistakable for, those characters who traditionally embodied the film’s overarching legitimizing moral and political order. If narrative is, at its core, an organizing structure for the reproduction and interpretation of human experience vis a vis the logic of the temporal, then such a shift in revolutionary narrative signifies an increasingly complex contemporary critique of the relationship between power, morality, and realpolitik in the P.R.C.

The shift from externalized to internalized antagonists is mirrored in other aspects of storytelling during the socialist period as well. During the same period, film depictions of medical work shift in an arc that begins with medical expertise embodied in external characters such as the famed Canadian surgeon Dr. Norman Bethune. As a foreign expert with superior training and experience in surgery, Bethune disseminates knowledge to the grateful Chinese staff of his army medical unit. Although the director of the film was careful to avoid portraying Bethune as a “capitalist intellectual in the making,”<sup>62</sup> Bethune is openly critical of what he sees as the incompetent medical work of his subordinates as well as the country’s lack of medical infrastructure, but as the film progresses, Bethune transforms into “both a teacher and student of the Eighth Route Army.”<sup>63</sup> The film centers on Bethune’s heroic transformation from arrogant foreign surgeon to humble contributor to the revolutionary cause, and he is aided in his spiritual growth, his familiarity with China, and his understanding of the socialist cause by the Chinese cast around him. The film’s heroes are antagonized by the encroaching Japanese army, whose

<sup>62</sup> “‘Bai Qiuen Daifu’ he shezhi zu jiao di,” Zhang Junxiang (director and scriptwriter), *Dai chanshu [Director’s commentary]*, July 1, 1963, China Film Archive, *Bai Qiuen Daifu* box.

<sup>63</sup> Zhang Junxiang, “‘Baiqiuen daifu’ he shezhizu jiaodi [A true account of how *Dr. Norman Bethune* was produced], July 1963, *Dr. Norman Bethune* ephemera box, China Film Archives, Beijing, P.R.China.

encroachment on Bethune's mobile surgery theater ultimately cause him to contract blood poisoning and die, as he did in real life.

The literature scholar Cai Xiang argues in *Revolution and Its Narratives* that the local is inextricably involved in the articulation of new national cultures, an interaction he sees as inherently contradictory yet necessary in the creation of a new national culture (as in the rejection of dialects in favor of a standardization of language that ultimately relies on one particular regionalized manner of speaking.)<sup>64</sup> So, too, in depictions of medical practice do local practices come to define national medical culture. *Dr. Norman Bethune's* portrayal of foreign-led medical work gave way to the 1974 short film *Wuyingdeng xia song yinzheng* (the official English title rendered as *A Song of Acupuncture*), whose protagonists are a team of cardiac surgeons at a hospital in Shanghai. When the conservative surgeon Dr. Luo refuses to operate on Master Yang, a worker whose heart condition has derailed his ability to continue smelting steel at the nearby plant, the intrepid young anesthesiologist Li Zhihua eventually succeeds in convincing the team to conduct Yang's open heart surgery with a radical new technique, acupuncture anesthesia. Here, the lionhearted foreign surgeon is replaced by more localized and internalized cinematic heroes: no foreign experts appear in the film, and the primary antagonist is not Japanese, but a conservative and bourgeois-trained senior surgeon on the team, Dr. Luo (although he is ultimately redeemed after witnessing the success of the surgery and admitting the error of his conservatism.)

As medical heroes internalize, medical knowledge itself is increasingly localized: where Bethune's foreign surgery skills took center stage in *Dr. Norman Bethune*,

<sup>64</sup> Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, trans. Rebecca Karl and Xueping Zhong (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 27-9.



*Wuyingdeng xia song yinzhen* celebrates the development of acupuncture anesthesia, an anesthetic technique distinctive to the socialist period and developed from within Chinese medical tradition. When Li Zhihua confronts Dr. Luo over his refusal to sanction operating on Master Yang, she asks him why they can't use acupuncture anesthesia:

Li Zhihua: It's true that Master Yang's illness makes it impossible to administer anesthesia, but why can't we use acupuncture anesthesia to do the surgery?

Dr. Luo: Acupuncture? You want to use acupuncture such an acute condition? It's never been done before.

Li Zhihua: It's true that it's never been done before because acupuncture anesthesia is a new socialist thing (*xinsheng shiwu*)...

Dr. Luo: The technology is most developed abroad. Without anesthesia, the rate of failure for this operation is too high for us to consider it. You should accept that this is a fact.

Li Zhihua: That is in capitalist countries! (She turns away, but then turns back to face Dr. Luo.) I'm confident that so long as we have deep proletarian class feeling in our hearts, so long as we keep developing the treasures of knowledge that we have in this country, we'll be able to achieve things that Western capitalists cannot!

The success of anesthesia acupuncture, then, owes explicitly to its wholly Chinese provenance, and distinctively indigenous knowledge—in this case, acupuncture—speak not only to a culturally specific context, but can also be weaponized as an anti-capitalist resource. The development of acupuncture anesthesia, then, constitutes a singular and defining achievement of the national medical system.

Yet *Wuyingdeng xia song yinzhen* represents a medical culture that remains at arm's distance from the workers they serve. The cardiac team at the Shanghai hospital sport white coats and glasses, ready identifiers of their high level of training and professionalization. Although the

team treats and is deeply involved in the welfare of a local factory worker (referred to as “master” (*shifu*), out of respect for his skill and service as a worker), the hospital stands apart from the greater community. With the exception of the film’s opening and closing scenes, which depict Master Yang at work smelting iron at the factory, the entire film takes place within the confines of the Shanghai hospital, a rarified community of highly trained medical experts. Gated walls metaphorically and visually isolate the hospital and its medical team, and as much as the hospital team’s white lab coats and scrubs distinguish them, they also separate the characters from the masses. Only two characters move between the hospital and the factory: Master Yang, the factory worker, is borne by disease from the foundry to the hospital, and back again. He is accompanied on this journey between worlds by Li Zhihua, who is inexplicably present at Yang’s worksite when he first falls ill, and accompanies him in an ambulance to the hospital. Although she works for the workers’ health and appears at the factory again at the film’s end to welcome Yang back to work, she is not of the factory, and belongs at the hospital.

In contrast, the barefoot doctors of *Hongyu*, *Chunmiao*, and *Yanming hu pan* fully belong amongst the laborers they treat, and represent a fully localized medical tradition. Gone are the foreign surgeons and white-coat wearing city doctors, replaced by Tian Chunmiao, Yan Haiying, and Hongyu. Tian Chunmiao and Yan Haiying are sent-down youth who have been fully adopted by their local communes, while Hongyu is a native son of his Qingshan commune, born and raised for generations in the village. Their medical practice as barefoot doctors relies on the use of acupuncture and herbal medicine, low cost and locally available treatments celebrated in the theme song to *Hongyu*:

*A single silver needle cures a hundred illnesses,*

*A bit of red heart, a bit of red heart*  
*Warms a thousand homes, warms a thousand homes.*  
*Scaling a thousand peaks to make a house call,*  
*Scaling a thousand cliffs to gather medicinal herbs,*  
*Welcoming the trials and tribulations of struggle,*  
*The revolutionary road, oh, the revolutionary road*  
*Is lined with rosy clouds, with rosy clouds.*<sup>65</sup>

The song describes an image of the barefoot doctor scaling mountains to obtain medicinal herbs, a defining image of the medical worker. Photographs of barefoot doctors ascending sheer cliffs were published widely in photojournalism from the period,<sup>66</sup> and each of the three films features scenes of their respective protagonists setting out on physically arduous excursions to collect local herbs from nearby mountains. Although older forms of medical practice challenge the barefoot doctor—such as *Hongyu*'s bourgeois pharmacist Sun Tianfu, *Chunmiao*'s witch-doctor Jia Yuexian, and *Yanming hu pan*'s capitalist Dr. Lin Daquan—ultimately the heroes of each film triumph over their competitors, convincing the members of their commune not only that they provide medical care with the best of intentions, but that their treatments are cheapest and most effective. Filmic barefoot doctor thus produce doubly, producing locally sourced medicine as well as their productivity as full working members of their communes. That the new, localized medical practice of the barefoot doctor is heralded as a defining

<sup>65</sup> Su Min, Wang Jixiao (score), *Hongyu* [The New Doctor], streaming video, dir. Cui Wei (Los Angeles: YiMovi, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, *Medical Workers Serving the People Wholeheartedly* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), p. 71

feature of socialist China's new healthcare system exemplifies Cai Xiang's assertion that the local is inextricably involved in the articulation of new national cultures.<sup>67</sup>

## The Revolutionary Doctor

That *Chunmiao* was heralded as “the first feature film that directly reflects the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,”<sup>68</sup> replete with its strong, daringly realistic (*xianshi yiyi qiangle*) plot,<sup>69</sup> speaks to the extent that the film exemplified these narrative shifts from external to internal enemies, external to internal medical practices, and external to internal cultures. Specifically, the film's claim to depicting the Cultural Revolution on screen lies in a final scene in which Chunmaio confronts Du Wenjie, the director of the commune's health clinic and himself a member of the party. Successfully overthrowing Du Wenjie, Chunmiao seizes control of the health station on behalf of the people, effectively staging revolution within her commune. In an echo of Mu Ting's analysis, the film historian Wu Zhala<sup>70</sup> argues that *Chunmiao*'s critique of both the state of rural healthcare as well as a political leadership run amok was extraordinary at the time, going against the narrative conventions of the Seventeen-year Period when “the suffering of the masses, the wickedness of officials, and the darkness of society” were attributable only to the vilified Nationalist party.<sup>71</sup> The social critique that had previously been staged in an externalized past was now transposed into the present, staged not only within the new state, but within the party itself—a development Wu Zhala says could not

<sup>67</sup> Cai Xiang, *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*, trans. Rebecca Karl and Xueping Zhong (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 27-9.

<sup>68</sup> “Spring Shoot—A Film,” *Peking Review*, 24 (June 11, 1976), pp. 17-8.

<sup>69</sup> “Shanghai wei lingdao dui ‘Chunmiao’ ba gao de yijian,” *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao (1949-1979)*, pp. 288-90.

<sup>70</sup> Pennamen for the retired Beijing Film Academy professor Wu Di.

<sup>71</sup> Wu Zhala, “‘Chunmiao’ du jie [A reading of *Chunmiao*],” *Jiyi* [Remembrance] 65, Dec. 30, 2010. <http://www.xujuneberlein.com/rem65.html#D>.

have failed to astonish audiences accustomed to narratives of socialist righteousness and abundance.

Wu Zhala's analysis is distinguished by his choice to take seriously the contemporaneous description of *Chunmiao* as "realistic," a commitment that implicitly rejects the Reform-era critique of *Chunmiao* as an exemplar "conspiracy film"—or, a politically weaponized work of propaganda authored by the Gang of Four meant to attack their political enemies.<sup>72</sup> Instead, Wu sees the film's attempt to depict the structural challenges faced by the poor as sincere. Citing the sociologist Li Qiang, Wu points out that during the 1970s, China's urban residents "enjoyed socialist benefits including better education, public medical insurance (*gongfei yiliao*), and retirement benefits" that the rural peasantry did not receive.<sup>73</sup> The irony of a film depicting "lower-middle peasants (*pinxia zhongnong*)," a vaunted group of distinguished political status in the P.R.C., being "overlooked, discriminated against, and exploited" by party members, would not have been lost on audiences. Instead, the film suggested that "China's industrialization was built upon the exploitation of the peasants, and that the culture of the cities was predicated upon the ignorance and backwardness of the countryside." In turn, the predicament of the lower-middle peasants of *Chunmiao* "was predicated upon the system that had been built after 1949."<sup>74</sup>

This trenchant and provocative social critique is explicitly articulated, of course, by *Chunmiao*'s titular character. The heroine's gender is no accident. Woman characters voice the most daring critiques of political power and social injustice in late Cultural

<sup>72</sup> Wu Zhala, "'Chunmiao' du jie."

<sup>73</sup> Wu Zhala, "'Chunmiao' du jie," citing Li Qiang, *Dangdai Zhongguo shehui fengceng yu jiaoliu* (Beijing: China Economic Publishing House, 1993), p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> Wu Zhala, "'Chunmiao' du jie."

Revolution films, a trend thrown into high relief in the three late Cultural Revolution-era films that constitute the bulk of this chapter's focus. Scholars of gender and its depiction in socialist China have tended to argue that the period promoted a vision of gender equality based upon cultures of men's labor, celebrating the "iron" women who performed work traditionally associated with men—often depicted as agricultural or industrial labor including welding, driving tractors, or operating machinery. Male privilege (*zhongnan qingnü*) was associated with the old, feudal cultures of the past, and the portrayal of women performing traditionally male labor articulated a new culture of equality.<sup>75</sup> In this vein of scholarship, the militaristic culture of the Cultural Revolution carried the message of gender and equality and proletarian solidarity into an "erasure of gender and sexuality (*xingbie mosha*)" that rendered women into "genderless revolutionaries."<sup>76</sup> To the cultural studies scholar Meng Yue, socialist literature and film "use the female image to signify either a certain class or sociopolitical group or the authority of the Communist Party itself."<sup>77</sup> Film scholar Cui Shuqin argues that Maoist heroines are "erased of anything that is feminine,"<sup>78</sup> and Mayfair Mei-hui Yang that "gender, especially female gender, was invisible."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic*, especially chapters 6 and 8, for an insightful account of the representation of women performing work during the socialist period.

<sup>76</sup> Huang Yufu, "Chinese Women's Status as Seen Through Peking Opera," in  *Holding up Half the Sky*, ed. Tao Jie, Zheng Bijun, and Shirley L. Mow (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Meng Yue, "Female Images and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 118, originally published as "Nüxing xingxiang yu guojia shenhua," *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 4 (1991), pp. 103-12.

<sup>78</sup> Cui Shuqin, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), p. 87.

<sup>79</sup> Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China," in *A Space of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 41.

In her study of model opera during the Cultural Revolution, Rosemary Roberts critiques what Meng Yue, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, and Cui Shuqin call the “masculinization of Maoist heroines” at the cost of women’s reproductive gender roles, pointing out that such a view is possible if one assumes a heteronormative cis-male subject position.<sup>80</sup> Such a view believes that the heroines of Maoist narratives were forced to choose between either “agency in the public sphere” or an “authentic gender identity,” resulting in women characters who occupied an “inauthentic” masculinity that denied their roles as daughters, lovers, mothers, or wives. I echo Roberts’s argument that the culture of the Cultural Revolution is better understood as a “shifting of gender parameters along political lines,” and in my analysis of *Yanming hu pan*, *Chunmiao*, and *Hongyu*, I find that rather than insisting upon the ways characters are or are not allowed to express assumed gender roles, the revolutionary narrative itself appears to be gendered. In *Yanming hu pan* and *Chunmiao*, for instance, Lan Haiying and Tian Chunmiao take direct political action to oppose or overthrow the authority of corrupt male superiors. *Chunmiao*’s climactic final confrontation is staged in front of the village’s health clinic, where Chunmiao clashes with Dr. Qian Jiren over the treatment of a local villager suffering from lumbago. Chunmiao insists that Uncle Shui Changbo’s lumbago be treated with a medicinal soup made from plant matter harvested in the region, while Qian Jiren believes that the village clinic cannot heal Shui Changbo, and that he should be sent to the regional hospital for treatment. Tian Chunmiao overthrows the leadership of the health clinic, seizing control of the health station in a revolution led from the grassroots. Not only is her insurgence celebrated, production materials from the filmmaking process

<sup>80</sup> Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Model Theater: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 19.

indicate that a central motivation for making the film was to depict a rural uprising around access to healthcare.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, in the film *Yanming hu pan*, the barefoot doctor Lan Haiying acts in direct opposition to the figures of political leadership in the film, opposing the party secretary Chen Tu, a hidden capitalist roader, and the corrupt doctor Lin Daquan when they conspire to bankrupt the commune's rural health clinic into closure. (Chen Tu and Lin Daquan's Chinese names further reinforce their defining character traits: Daquan, or "great power," thirsts after power, while Tu, or "path," follows the capitalist road.) Tearing down the "clinic closed" sign Lin Daquan nails to the front of the door, Lan Haiying forces the clinic to remain in operation with the support of the local commune members. While Lan Haiying does not seize control of the clinic herself, her accusations against Lin Daquan result in his dismissal from the clinic, and when he is rehabilitated in the film's second act, she must again defy local leadership to prevent him from implementing destructive capitalist healthcare policies and protect the wellbeing of the rural peasants.

Yet in spite of their aligned interests as barefoot doctors, Tian Chunmiao and Lan Haiying's male counterpart, the young Hongyu, is never placed in a position of having to defy the film's figures of authority. Throughout the course of the film, Hongyu acts within the given political boundaries, making no direct challenge to his superiors: Hongyu never rebels. Like Chunmiao and Haiying, Hongyu is vexed by the machinations of a nefarious and mettlesome bourgeois medical figure—in this case, the pharmacist Sun

<sup>81</sup> "Wenhua bu lingdao shenkan 'Chunmiao' shuangpian de yijian," from *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao (1949-1979)* [Research materials on Chinese film, 1949-1979], ed. Wu Di (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2006), pp. 304-7, also "Shanghai shi wei shenkan 'Chunmiao' shuangpian de yijian," in the same volume, pp. 303-4.



Tianfu. Trained during the Republican period, Sun Tianfu previously operated a pharmacy known for extorting villagers in need of medicine, and smarts under the healthcare system of the new society, where his opportunities for extortion are few. The film never questions the validity of Sun's medical expertise—and in fact, in several scenes characters openly question Hongyu's level of training, preferring to consult Sun—only the purity of his intentions, and Sun has no corrupt party secretary with whom to collude.

The film culminates not in Hongyu's direct challenge to authority, but in a physical confrontation between Hongyu and the reprobate pharmacist, who attacks Hongyu with a knife in the dark. Tumbling into a stream below, Hongyu shouts "Had enough to drink, have you?" as he dunks Sun Tianfu's head under the river. Hongyu extracts a confession from Sun, who reveals that he had attempted to poison another villager and lay the blame on Hongyu. Although Hongyu fiercely defends the interests of the rural peasantry, at no point in the film does he defy the orders of a superior or seize control of the health clinic—here, the depiction of the revolution in healthcare requires no actual revolution, only the physical defeat of a marginalized and disgraced traditional healthcare provider.

In this trio of films, the most powerful revolutionary potential is carried by characters who are women, resulting narratives of revolutionary agency that are themselves inherently gendered. All three films were developed contemporaneously, and while the narratives share many common features—young villagers chose to complete barefoot doctor training, medical authority figures with baleful intentions, an uncle or aunt in the village suffering from a local disease, suspenseful forays into the mountains

to retrieve medicinal herbs, and babies that are sick, dead, or delivered in scenes of difficult labor—the power to wage revolution and challenge authority characteristically belongs to characters who are women, not men. Other plot elements are gendered as well: bourgeoisie, elitism, and traditional knowledge are always embodied by a middle-aged man whose refusal to adapt to the culture of the new society has metastasized into naked greed and animosity, marking traditional authority and knowledge systems as male.

Yet by the end, the revolutionary agency that is celebrated through heroines such as Lan Haiying and Tian Chunmiao operates within the limits of a socialist system that ultimately remains patriarchal. At the end of *Yanming hu pan*, the county party secretary, Lao Dao, places a phone call to Lan Haiying's health clinic. Ranking above Chen Tu, Lao Dao congratulates the members of the clinic for the good work they've done in an explicit validation of Lan Haiying's actions. Further, the party secretary orders that Chen Tu must be dealt with. Lao Dao remains off screen, his disembodied voice heard through the telephone as he tells the clinic members sitting around a table overlooked by Mao's portrait that they must continue Mao's work. Lan Haiying's agitation is validated from above by a man, the county party secretary, who represents the approval of the system as a whole, circumscribing her direct challenge to the leadership of the health clinic and the authority of her village party secretary within the integrity of the overall system.

As a mark of labor practice and of class identity, bare feet, then, qualify Chunmiao and Haiying not only to train as barefoot doctors and treat the members of their commune, but also to challenge authority and, in Chunmiao's case, to lead the revolution. Hongyu, by contrast, does not lead rebellion in his rural health clinic, and perhaps because direct revolutionary agency is gendered female, this might explain why

the depiction of Hongyu's bare feet is minimized in the film. While both *Chunmiao* and *Yanming hu pan* include close-ups of both Lan Haiying and Tian Chunmiao's bare feet, Hongyu never receives such treatment. Instead, when Hongyu shares with his grandmother the news that he has been selected to receive barefoot doctor training, he explains to her that the barefoot doctor's biggest identifying trait is their continued engagement with commune labor. "They are amongst the poor, half-peasant and half-doctor," Hongyu explains, and his grandmother laughs with approval, revealing that she had guilelessly believed barefoot doctors were actually prohibited from wearing shoes.

### **Conclusion: Deng's Theory of Development by Footwear**

After Deng Xiaoping left the screening of *Chunmiao* in 1975, he followed up with explicit criticism of the barefoot doctor program in remarks to foreign visitors to the country. "The barefoot doctors have only just begun; their knowledge is slight," he began. Minimizing the importance of their preventative and public health work, he complained that "they can only treat a few common illnesses." Deng wanted the barefoot doctor to develop their expertise in the "normal" way, building a base of knowledge upon which they could further specialize. Comparing their skill at healing to footwear, Deng remarked that with time, the barefoot doctor could "put on straw shoes; that is, their knowledge will have grown. A few years more, and they will wear cloth shoes."<sup>82</sup> Ostensibly, the barefoot doctor would eventually possess so much specialized medical knowledge and training that they could eventually graduate from cloth shoes to luxurious leather shoes.

<sup>82</sup> Roger Garside, *Coming Alive: China After Mao* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), p. 71.

Deng's remarks were a rejection of the Maoist model of spontaneous and egalitarian empowerment at the grassroots which barefoot doctors had followed, and a harbinger of what would come: by the start of 1977, the consensus on barefoot doctors would change radically, so much so that the teleological vision of the medical establishment's linear development for which Deng had been excoriated would come to be embraced. The headline of a 1980 special report in the *Peking Review* proudly proclaimed that after receiving systemic retraining in "basic knowledge and technique," "Barefoot Doctors Now 'Wear Shoes.'"<sup>83</sup> Where the barefoot doctor's participation in agricultural labor had once been their defining feature, after Mao's death their participation in commune labor was gradually de-emphasized,<sup>84</sup> and policies requiring increased testing and training from barefoot doctors underscored the specialization of their medical expertise over their socialization as workers.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, the consensus on barefoot doctor films began to reverse as well. *Chunmiao*, which had been both the most popular of the barefoot doctor films as well as the most closely associated with Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao, was especially singled out for attention. Following their sensational arrest in October 1976, any organization that had been associated with Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, or Wang Hongwen published denouncements of their influence in order to distance themselves

<sup>83</sup> Lin Yang, "Countryside: Barefoot Doctors Now 'Wear Shoes,'" *Peking Review* Vol. 23, No. 25 (June 1980): pp. 25-27.

<sup>84</sup> In fact, Xiaoping Fang argues that not long after the commencement of the barefoot doctor program on the national level, barefoot doctors had already begun to separate themselves from the agricultural labor of their communes. See Xiaoping Fang, *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine in China*, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup> In October 1979, the State Council proposed requiring barefoot doctors to sit for exams certifying their medical expertise. Barefoot doctors who failed to pass the exam were excluded from the profession. See Xiaoping Fang, "Barefoot Doctors and the Provision of Rural Health Care" in *Medical Transitions in Twentieth Century China*, ed. Bridie Andrews and Mary Brown Bullock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 279.

from their agenda, thereby attempting to ensure the organization's continued institutional viability under a new set of political leaders and a value system in flux.

By spring 1977, criticism of the Gang of Four had reached the film industry, and film studios formed criticism groups to investigate and condemn any malfeasance the institution had committed under the Gang's influence. A criticism group at the Shanghai Film Studio published an editorial in the *Renmin ribao* calling *Chunmiao* an anti-party film that revealed the Gang of Four's evil conspiracy to usurp control of the party.<sup>86</sup> Criticism of *Chunmiao* accused the Gang of forcing the studio's hand, perverting the content of the film through revisions, and of suppressing dissent against the film through control of the media.<sup>87</sup> *Dazibao* written in 1975 by a man identified as a poor commune member who had been brought to Beijing to see *Chunmiao* were published in June 1977 as evidence of an attempt to silence the mass's distaste for the film.<sup>88</sup> Where Tian Chunmiao had once been praised for having a "political consciousness"<sup>89</sup> so advanced she knew when it was just to rebel against corrupt leaders, she was now denounced for criticizing the party, defaming medical workers, and inciting spontaneous mass movement.<sup>90</sup> "After all, our arts and culture (*wenxue yishu*) should celebrate the party's leadership, not oppose it," wrote one critic. The consolidation of cultural organs around the new leadership foreclosed the possibility of a cultural critique of the internal enemy.

<sup>86</sup> Shanghai dianying zhipianchang da pipanzu [Great criticism group of the Shanghai Film Studio], "Zhe bi zhang yiding yao qingsuan: Cong fandang yingpian 'Chunmiao' de chulong kan 'Sirenbang' suandang duoquan de zui'e yinmou [The account must be cleared: The Gang of Four's evil conspiracy to usurp Party control as seen in the anti-party film 'Chunmiao'], *Renmin ribao*, June 25, 1977.

<sup>87</sup> Zhang Zuoguang, "Dianying 'Chunmiao' bixu pipan [The film *Chunmiao* must be criticized]," *Renmin dianying* No. 2-3 (1977): pp. 32-5.

<sup>88</sup> Zhao Anting, "'Chunmiao' shi yike daducao [*Chunmiao* is a poisonous weed]," *Renmin ribao*, June 25, 1977.

<sup>89</sup> Chu Lan, "Yi bu gesong Wenhua dageming de hao yingpian: ping 'Chunmiao' [A good film celebrating the Great Cultural Revolution: reviewing *Chunmiao*]," *Hongqi* No. 1 (1976).

<sup>90</sup> Zhao Anting, "'Chunmiao' shi yike daducao."

And by denying the presence of internal enemies, criticism of *Chunmiao* abrogated the revolutionary agency of the film's heroine.

So great was the stigma of being associated with *Chunmiao* that one of its three directors, Xie Jin, attempted to expunge it from his oeuvre. Pang Laikwan notes that although Xie went on to a career as one of China's most distinguished directors, *Chunmiao* "is seldom mentioned in studies of Xie Jin, and is usually not included in the director's oeuvre." The film is not officially distributed, and any copies now available are contraband.<sup>91</sup> The passage of time has only slightly modified the Dengist consensus on *Chunmiao*: a compendium of films produced in Shanghai remembers *Chunmiao* as an early reflection of the "struggle against capitalist roaders" with heavy Gang interference in its production, but allows that the film was made with exemplary technical mastery of the camera.<sup>92</sup>

The barefoot doctor represented a failed attempt to remake medicine as a social relation through embeddedness in labor. The barefoot doctor was sustained by a Maoist attempt to level the structures of elitism and bureaucratic hierarchy that had prevented the poor from receiving adequate medical training and care, but ambiguity over the barefoot doctor's rejection of traditional professional qualifications and embrace of lay expertise weakened their intervention in the medical system. As an institution, the barefoot doctor was weakened by the implementation of a medical examination system that made expertise, not labor relation, the main criterion for status as a barefoot doctor.<sup>93</sup> Rural

<sup>91</sup> Laikwan Pang, *The Art of Cloning*, p. 128.

<sup>92</sup> See Chen Wenping and Cai Jifu, eds., *Shanghai dianying 100 nian* [One hundred years of Shanghai films] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua, 2007), pp. 415-422. Yao Xiaomeng largely agrees with this view, see also George S. Semsel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong, eds. *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1993), pp. 169-170.

<sup>93</sup> For discussion of controversy over exams as professional or educational qualifications, see Chapter 4.

economic reforms progressively weakened (and eventually dismantled) the commune system that supported them, and when cooperative medical service collapsed, it was quickly replaced with a user-pays system that again exacerbated the urban rural divide in healthcare.

Ultimately, the barefoot doctor's novelty as a new socialist thing was too great to overcome. When Minister of Health Chen Minzhang announced in 1985 the ministry's decision to abolish the title, effectively ending the program, he cited confusion over their name as a prime motivation. "The implications of this term are not clear," said Chen before announcing that barefoot doctors with secondary technical school education (*yishi*) and above would be called village doctors (*xiangcun yisheng*), and those without *yishi* qualifications would be called health workers (*weishengyuan*).<sup>94</sup> As market reforms and the emergence of a post-socialist society transformed the countryside, memories of the barefoot doctor live on as a curiosity.

<sup>94</sup> Chen Minzhang cited in Xiaoping Fang, *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine*, p. 175.

## Chapter 3 | The Laboring of Art: Amateur Art Practice and the Everyday

### Introduction: Hu Xian Peasant Art and the Arrival of the Contemporary

In November 1976, an exhibition of artwork by peasant artists from Hu Xian, a rural county in Shaanxi Province, arrived in London. Consisting of around eighty works by peasants from “red” China, the show had just shown to great acclaim at the 9<sup>th</sup> Paris Biennale. After making its way through several small venues across Great Britain, the show finally arrived in the United Kingdom’s capital city. London was intended to be the final leg of the tour, but the exhibition was so well received that the Chinese officials who had organized the exhibition agreed to extend it. Numerous art institutions across the United Kingdom placed additional requests to host the show in their exhibition spaces,<sup>1</sup> and the critical response was overwhelmingly positive. Prominent mainstream art critics such as William Feaver, chief art critic for *The Observer*, stated that “Only the bleakest Scrooge could avoid being exhilarated by the crop of Chinese peasant paintings at the Warehouse Gallery.” Feaver described the art as “a mass display of confidence” that “bring[s] a sense of sunshine, a vivid, affirmative outburst,”<sup>2</sup> while *The Guardian*’s art critic, Caroline Tisdall, found the works so affective that they could “make even the most hard-bitten Western cynic feel a pang of longing for the collective.”<sup>3</sup> Adrian Rifkin, writing more explicitly from the left in the trendy new contemporary art magazine

<sup>1</sup> Emily Williams, “Exporting the Communist Image: The 1976 Chinese Peasant Painting Exhibition in Britain,” *New Global Studies* 8, no. 3 (January 1, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2014-0030>.

<sup>2</sup> William Feaver, “China at the Double: Art,” *The Observer*, November 21, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Tisdall, “Record of Achievement,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 1976.



*Artscribe*, said it was simply “an honor to have had the exhibition here and to have seen for ourselves one of the fruits, the ‘socialist new things,’ of the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>4</sup>

To its organizers in Beijing, the exhibition was an astounding success by every possible metric. Not only had the exhibition succeeded in sharing with the capitalist West what the organizers saw as a flourishing new contemporary culture in China, but that culture had resonated beyond their wildest expectations. Large crowds in the capitalist world were gathering to see contemporary art from “communist” China, and the most discriminating of the bourgeoisie’s art critics had been won over with a peasant art celebrating socialist values and collective labor. According to a *People’s Daily* report, “During the exhibition, many visitors expressed their passion and approval for Hu Xian peasant art, saying that the art vividly reflected the new socialist villages of China, and that they helped visitors understand the enormous change that China’s revolution had brought to the countryside.”<sup>5</sup> As a proxy for the socialist culture and values articulated by the Chinese state, the success of the Hu Xian peasant art exhibition was a symbolic triumph that signaled both the viability and the persuasive power of contemporary socialist culture outside its own national context.

From London, the show went on to venues in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, Washington D.C., Houston, Toronto, and Christchurch, New Zealand, where it was seen by “several hundred thousand people”<sup>6</sup> across the world. The shows attracted large crowds, and even critics more skeptical of the P.R.C.’s political programs had something nice to say: “This sort of propaganda is, as propaganda goes, minimally bothersome. It is not virulent; it does

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Rifkin, “The Chinese Exhibition at the Warehouse Gallery,” *Artscribe*, February 1977.

<sup>5</sup> “Hu Xian Nongmin Hua Zai Yingguo Shoudao Guanzhong Huanying [Hu Xian Peasant Art Welcomed by Audiences of England],” *Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Richard, “The Happy Peasant Paintings of Huhsien,” *The Washington Post*, October 9, 1978.

not urge the mind to hatred. It is entertaining, colorful, informative and cheery,” wrote one art critic for *The Washington Post*.<sup>7</sup>

By the late 1970s, peasant art from Hu Xian constituted one of the most visible cultural representations of contemporary Chinese culture in the non-socialist world. China and other socialist countries had been conducting exchanges of art and culture since the P.R.C.’s founding in 1949. But because the country had limited exchanges of trade, diplomacy, culture, etc. with non-socialist countries, in the capitalist world cultural products from China were thought of as largely inaccessible.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1970s this status quo famously began to change: Richard Nixon’s historic 1972 visit ended decades of diplomatic freeze between the United States and the P.R.C., and the path to his trip had been paved by the highly visible exchanges of “ping pong diplomacy” the year before.<sup>9</sup> The robust media attention paid to Nixon’s trip and the athletic events had given the American public glimpses of the contemporary P.R.C. culture, from state banquets to model operas and panda husbandry. But with a handful of notable exceptions,<sup>10</sup> few

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Emily Wilcox demonstrates in her history of concert dance in China that the P.R.C.’s programs of cultural exchange were not limited exclusively to the socialist bloc. See *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018 ), especially Chapter 3, “Performing a Socialist Nation.” For a discussion of global film exchange between 1949 to 1957, see Tina Mai Chen, “International Film Circuits and Global Imaginaries in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–57,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 3, no. 2 (January 2009): 149–61, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.3.2.149\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.3.2.149_1). For literary exchanges, see Nicolai Volland, “Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC,” *Twentieth-Century China* 33, no. 2 (April 2008): 51–72, <https://doi.org/10.1179/tcc.2008.33.2.51>; and Volland, *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). For Soviet influence in China, see Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li, eds., *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*, The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 9, “The Sino-American Rapprochement, 1969-1972” in Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, The New Cold War History (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Qian Jiang, *‘Ping Pong’ waijiao muhou [Behind Ping Pong Diplomacy]* (Beijing: Dongfang, 1997); Nicolas Griffin, *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History Behind the Game That Changed the World* (New York: Scribner, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> The most notable exception to this was “The Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People’s Republic of China.” A partial list of the exhibition’s venues includes museums in Australia, Canada, France, Mexico, the United States, and the United Kingdom between 1973 and 1976. See the catalog *The Exhibition of the Archaeological Finds of the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 1974); for an exploration of the exhibition’s reception within the P.R.C., see Juliane Noth, “‘Make the Past Serve the Present:’ Reading *Cultural*

organized exhibitions of Chinese art and culture had been staged in the West with P.R.C. sponsorship, and Western audiences had limited opportunities to learn about trends in the country's contemporary art and culture. In the United States, for example, critics noted that the Hu Xian show was the first exhibition of "contemporary art" from China to be displayed since the founding of the P.R.C.,<sup>11</sup> and the first exhibition of peasant painting from China ever to be shown.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the exhibition had succeeded in a tricky task, leaving foreign audiences in the ideologically hostile West with a positive impression of "New China" and its culture.

In spite of the primacy of place historically seized by Hu Xian peasant art in the Western cultural imaginary of the P.R.C., since the 1970s Hu Xian peasant art has decidedly left the cultural spotlight. It has been supplanted by a narrative of "contemporary Chinese art" that begins not in the socialist period but in the first moments of the post-socialist experience in China, when Mao's death and Deng Xiaoping's reforms marked the passing of the avant-garde mantle from the revolutionary vanguard in the peasantry and proletariat to political and cultural dissidents. Today's narrative of "contemporary Chinese art" traces its origins to art groups and movements that were only nascent at the time, such as the Stars Group (*xingxing huahui*), who later exhibited conceptual art in defiance of the institution in spaces symbolically outside of the establishment, the No Name Painting Society (*wuming huahui*), whose refusal of any moniker is now understood as an act of avant-garde nonconformity, and the April Photographic Society (*siyue yinghui*), whose unofficial photography practice is credited with taking the first steps in "claiming" photographic image-making for the private space.<sup>13</sup> As the field of "contemporary

*Relicis Excavated During the Cultural Revolution*," in *Cultural Heritage as Civilising Mission: From Decay to Recovery*, ed. Michael Falser (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 181–99.

<sup>11</sup> Richard, "The Happy Peasant Paintings of Huhsien."

<sup>12</sup> Diana Loercher, "China's Peasant Art: Political, but More," *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 9, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> For literature on the "origins" of contemporary Chinese art, see Karen Smith, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde Art in New China* (Beijing and Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008); Paul Gladston, Chapter 2, "Modern (Contemporary) Chinese Art" in *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (Chicago: University of Chicago

Chinese art” becomes increasingly codified,<sup>14</sup> political dissidence is woven deeply into the fabric of its narrative of emergent art.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, cultural practices that developed under state sponsorship during the socialist period are excluded from what is considered “contemporary” P.R.C. culture.

Yet the Hu Xian peasant art phenomenon—or, speaking more broadly, the phenomenon of a nationwide amateur (*yeyu*) art practice—occurred contemporaneously to the development of the Stars Group (active 1979 to 1980), the No Name Painting Society (active 1974 to 1981), the April Photographic Society (active 1979 to 1981), and other art groups and practices seen as originators of contemporary Chinese art. While the latter genre of contemporary art practice has traveled with far-reaching global currency since the first Chinese artists were included in the watershed 1989 Centre Pompidou exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre,”<sup>16</sup> the former type of art has disappeared from discussion. We should recall, however, that amateur art practice has its roots in cultural developments taking place beginning in the mid-1950s, and that it spread nationally throughout the 1960s; by the early 1970s locales such as Hu Xian were seen as

Press, 2014); Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014); Lü Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi: 1979-1989* [A history of modern Chinese art, 1979-1989] (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1992); Lü Peng, *A History of Art in 20th Century China* (Milan: Charta, 2010), esp. chapters 16-25; Feng Boyi and Qiu Zhijie, *The Monk and the Demon: Contemporary Chinese Art* (Milan: 5Continents, 2008); Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, “Art After Mao” in *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), and Jennifer Dorothy Lee, “The Aesthetics of Anxiety: Post-Mao Experimentalisms, 1976-1982” (PhD diss., New York University, 2014), and Katherine Grube, “State of Exchange: Contemporary Art and China’s Postsocialist Image Economy,” (PhD diss., New York University, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> For recent discussion of the term and its limits, see Philip Tinari, “Between Palimpsest and Teleology: the Problem of ‘Chinese Contemporary Art’” in *Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017), pp. 51-67.

<sup>15</sup> Xiaobing Tang calls this the “dissident hypothesis.” See *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially Chapter 5, “How (not) to watch a Chinese blockbuster.”

<sup>16</sup> See the exhibition catalog *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1989). The selection of the Centre Pompidou exhibition is somewhat arbitrary, as any number of other exhibitions of Chinese artists abroad could have equally served as a symbolic moment of arrival for contemporary Chinese artists, including the inclusion of twenty Chinese artists in the Venice Biennale in 1999, Johnson Chang’s 1993 exhibition “China’s New Art Post-1989,” or the establishment of the Shanghai Biennale in 2000.

flourishing centers of amateur art as a new rural cultural practice.<sup>17</sup> Hu Xian artists continued to paint, sell, and exhibit art in an undiminished capacity after Mao's death in 1976 and well into the 1980s, while the international exhibition of their art was coordinated simultaneously with the first implementations of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms (beginning in late 1978.)

Temporally, there is no question that amateur art practice belongs as much to the contemporary moment in China as do early figures of what is variously known as "contemporary Chinese art (*Zhongguo dangdai yishu*),"<sup>18</sup> the Chinese "avant-garde,"<sup>19</sup> or "experimental art" (*shiyan meishu*).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in the late 1970s amateur art was a highly visible cultural practice, while the groups, individuals, and activities that would later be identified as comprising the vanguard of contemporary Chinese art would have been invisible to all but a limited circle of domestic art students and educators.<sup>21</sup> The cultural narratives of the contemporary in China fracture in the face of juggernaut of historical transitions during the late 1970s, from the death of Mao Zedong to the arrest of the Gang of Four, the end of the Cultural Revolution, and the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's Opening and Reform policies of 1978-9. When these narratives

<sup>17</sup> Although this chapter will present its own, more nuanced narrative of amateur art practice in the P.R.C., for a condensed version focusing specifically on Hu Xian, see Ralph Croizier "Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity," in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), pp. 136-142.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the term "contemporary Chinese art" and its limits, see Philip Tinari, "Between Palimpsest and Teleology: The Problem of 'Chinese Contemporary Art'" in *Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World*, Alexandra Munroe, Hou Hanru, and Philip Tinari, eds. (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> This is the preferred term of the curator Fei Dawei, who suggested the term "avant-garde" be used in the title of the exhibition. See Fei Dawei, ed., *'85 xinchao: Zhongguo deyi dangdai yundong* [Archives of the '85 New Wave], 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> See Wu Hung, "Introduction" in *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) for his defense of "experimental art (*shiyan meishu*)" as his preferred term.

<sup>21</sup> Foreign tourists were often taken to Hu Xian in the 1970s and 1980s. Ralph Croizier reports that from 1972 to 1983, over thirteen thousand foreigners visited Hu Xian. See Croizier, "Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity" in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, Richard King, ed., (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), p. 144-5. For accounts of outside visits to the artist community of Hu Xian, see Marcelin Pleynet, *Le Voyage en Chine* (Paris: Hachette, 1980), p. 86; Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Éditions des Femmes, 1974); and Chiang Yee, *China Revisited: After Forty-Two Years* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), pp. 116-8.

were regrouped in the 1980s, they no longer significantly included the experiences and cultural practices of the socialist period.

How, then, did amateur art practice get left out of the narrative of the cultural contemporary in the P.R.C., and why does the socialist experience seem to be excluded from our understanding of the constitution of contemporary present? In this chapter, I will argue that leaving amateur art practice—and, more broadly speaking, the cultural legacies of the socialist period—outside of the contemporary is a willfully partial history that impoverishes our understanding of the contemporary, preventing us from making a full account of the legacies of the socialist period and diminishing our capacity to appreciate the complexity of the origins of the present. I will present a case for the inclusion of the socialist experience within the concept of the contemporary, through the defining characteristic of socialist art practice, its embrace of amateurism. The celebrity of the Hu Xian peasant artists served to obscure a widespread nationwide amateur art practice in the socialist period, as those identified as workers, peasants, and soldiers were encouraged to take up paint brushes to depict and critique the world around them.<sup>22</sup> By excluding such artists and their practices from the purview of “contemporary Chinese

<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, although I will refer to China’s rural inhabitants as “peasants,” I wish to draw attention to the meaning of the term. I use the term “peasant” because that is how the term *nongmin* has been translated into English by the artists and the state-employed translators of materials related to their practice. However, I agree with the argument advanced by Joshua Eisenman and others that the P.R.C.’s rural residents do not fit the definition of the peasant as landless rural residents who make their living from the land through partial integration in broader markets and partial reliance on subsistence level farming. Eisenman chooses to refer to commune members during the socialist period as either “team members,” “rural residents,” and “farmers” in order to avoid the inaccurate and pejorative connotations of the term “peasant.” For the purposes of this chapter, I have not eschewed the word “peasant” because that is the term that was embraced by rural artists themselves; I do wish to signal critical attention to the reasons the term was used. For more, see Joshua Eisenman, *Red China’s Green Revolution: Technological Innovation, Institutional Change, and Economic Development Under the Commune* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) p. xxx. For a working definition of the peasant, see Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 59; and Andrejs Plakans, “Seigneurial Authority and Peasant Family Life: The Baltic Area in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 5, No. 4 (Spring 1975): pp. 629-652.

art,” the discourse erases the contributions of poor and rural artists, and re-asserts urban, elite, and professional dominance over the fine arts.

The embrace of the amateur constituted an ambitious re-orientation of fine art practice within the P.R.C., transforming it from the specialized labor of highly credentialed cultural elite to an everyday practice that encouraged the historically disenfranchised to articulate and illustrate a new subjectivity.<sup>23</sup> Amateur art practice was not only meant to be more inclusive, but to make art immediate and relevant to wider audiences as an essential part of a socialist cultural praxis in which subjectivity was transformed through the act of making art. My examination of primary source materials from the socialist period shows how amateur art practice in the P.R.C. challenged the assumptions of gender and class privilege that had previously been coded into the figure of the (urban male) artist, facilitating broad participation in art practice that destabilized the cultural precepts previously defining the figure of the artist. In particular, as amateur art practice spread, the concept of creative and artistic genius came under increasing scrutiny. As academy-trained art educators embraced the need to create art that was compelling to audiences outside the professional realm, the concept of genius as an innate characteristic of a creative individual fell under suspicion for justifying an elite monopoly on fine art practice. Instead, art educators increasingly argued that genius could and should be cultivated through broad public exposure to art instruction. The countryside and its inhabitants were seen as a critical source of realism, and immersion in the countryside an important process for enriching and legitimating the output of the professional artist. The art academy’s position as a legitimizing site of training was weakened, and the countryside emerged as a dominant site of creative activity.

<sup>23</sup> It bears emphasizing that this transformation was roughly contemporaneous with a similar politicization of art practice in the West during the 1960s and 1970s. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

As academy-trained artists began creating a more publicly focused art, the public was increasingly provided with opportunities to create its own art. Instruction from professionals (*zhuanjia*) to untrained amateur artists in factories, the military, and the countryside were an early focus of late 1950s art policy, and technique emerged as a crucial junction at which trained and untrained artist could meet and conduct exchange. The possession of the technical skills considered necessary to create art—such as line drawing, enlargement, shading, creating volume, the use of color, and the realistic depiction of anatomy, expression, and likeness—were not seen as a dividing force between expert and amateur artists. Rather, lack of access to adequate opportunities for training in fine art technique was blamed. Contrary to the popular scholarly consensus, amateur artists worked collaboratively with academy-trained artists to acquire the technical skills seen as necessary to create good art. At the same time, the range of styles and subject matter that constituted exemplary and compelling art broadened, as everyday themes from industrial labor practices to military leisure time and rural recreation were embraced as worthy of depiction in fine art. Folk styles previously seen as gaudy or unrefined were adopted to reflect the interests of more diverse audiences, and established genres of fine art practice with imperial (“feudal”) histories, such as bird-and-flower or scroll paintings, receded from the spotlight. Amateurism facilitated a wide-ranging transformation of art practice in the P.R.C., redefining not only the identity of the artist but also the role played by art in transforming the individual and society. Amateur art practice ultimately changed what it meant to be an artist, what art itself was, and what role it could play in a socialist society. These legacies linger in the present even as the dominant cultural logics of the contemporary obfuscate their presence.

### **Legacies of the Amateur**



The legacy of amateur art practice in the P.R.C. is intimately linked to the historiography of the contemporary, a historiography which, since 1981, has been defined by a repudiation both within and without the P.R.C. of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>24</sup> Where leftists in the West were once excited by the alternatives presented by countries such as China, the P.R.C.'s shift embrace of market economy, as well as revelations about violence committed in the name of the Cultural Revolution in the period following Mao's death, wiped away enthusiasm for both the political and cultural programs of the times. Instead, the 1970s are now condemned by association with the Cultural Revolution, a period that has been officially declared an aberration in the historical record: as an "era of madness" (*fengkuang de niandai*) in which terror and violence reigned.<sup>25</sup>

And just as China specialists felt duped by the Cultural Revolution, so too has that view extended to the history of China's visual arts. In 1984, the art historian Ellen Johnston Laing argued that a stylistic analysis of the most prominent works by Hu Xian peasant painters revealed that those works had, in fact, been largely executed by professional artists, whose contributions were minimized in the service of a pro-peasant political agenda. Laing concludes that the concept of an autonomous and authentic Hu Xian peasant art was—like so much of the socialist period—a fraud. Laing's indictment of peasant art practice remains the defining work of English-language scholarship on the Hu Xian phenomenon, and today even those who visited Hu

<sup>24</sup> In 1981, the Cultural Revolution was condemned in a statement adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China as "the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state, and the people since the founding of the People's Republic. See "Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China,"

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>, accessed May 18, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> For secondary scholarship exploring the significance of the 1981 repudiation of the Cultural Revolution and its legacy, see Anita Chen, "Dispelling Misconceptions about the Red Guard Movement: The Necessity to Re-examine Cultural Revolution Factionalism and Periodization," *The Journal of Contemporary China* 1, No. 1 (Sept. 1992): pp. 61-85; Tony Saich, "Writing or Rewriting History? The Construction of the Maoist Resolution on History" in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven, eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 299-338; Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Party Historiography" in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); and Joshua Zhang and James D. Wright, *Violence, Periodization, and Definition of the Cultural Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Xian at the time question the accuracy of their memories. For example, as a student of the Chinese language at the Beijing Languages Institute in the summer of 1975, the art historian Craig Clunas had the chance to visit Hu Xian, meeting and observing its peasant artists. He memorialized the trip in his diary, writing “This stuff is just the antidote to most Chinese art. When you see what the peasants are actually painting, your faith revives.”<sup>26</sup> Views of the period and the art it produced have changed so much that Clunas now cringes at his earlier assessment: “My enthusiasm for this work... was fulsome to the point of embarrassment.”<sup>27</sup>

Rather than proceeding from an assumption of fraudulent or aberrational art production, the peasant art that Laing and Clunas describe is better understood within the context of longer cultural trends that achieved their final manifestation during the period now known as the Cultural Revolution. Despite the association between Hu Xian’s peasant artists as thriving during the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, amateur art practice emerged out of trends in thought and art practice that can be traced back into the early Republican period, when leading cultural figures made amateur and non-elite involvement in cultural production a focal point of their agendas for cultural reform. Conversely, probing the relationship between the amateur the professional during the revolutionary period sheds new light upon their relationship during the Reform period, when amateurism was devalued and expertise prized.

### **The Art Ecosystems of the P.R.C.**

The first anniversary of the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China (*Kaiguo dadian*) fell on October 1, 1950, the first National day observed in the young country. A festive

<sup>26</sup> Craig Clunas, “Souvenirs of Beijing” from *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, eds. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), pp. 47-61. Clunas also mentions that it was popular in leftist circles at the time to hang Dong Shengyi’s “Commune Fishpond” on the walls.

<sup>27</sup> Clunas, “Souvenirs of Beijing,” p. 53.

parade following the same path as the inaugural military parade held on Oct. 1, 1949 was held to mark the occasion, proceeding down Chang'an Avenue and past Mao Zedong ensconced atop Tiananmen, the gate in the heart of Beijing. The P.R.C's new leaders attached great importance to the National Day ceremony and parade, and representatives from every organization, class, and institution of note participated: the military, followed by the Young Pioneers (*Zhongguo shaonian xianfeng dui*), who symbolized the future of the nation and led groups of workers, peasants, government workers, students, and cultural (*wenyi*) groups. As marchers from the Central Academy of Fine Art (*Zhongyang meishu xueyuan*) in Beijing filed past Mao, he waved as he read their banner, shouting "Long live the Central Academy of Fine Arts!"<sup>28</sup>

The People's Liberation Army had arrived in Beijing (which would imminently be renamed Beijing) on January 31, 1949, and in the year that followed, one of its many tasks was to bring the city's non-Communist artists into the socialist fold. The administrative and institutional re-organization that followed entailed a significant re-organization of the country's art academies, which played a defining role in supporting and structuring the Chinese fine art industry, as well as a significant transformation of the role that the fine arts would play in shaping and reflecting the culture of the new nation. Moreover, the Communist Party's reorganization of the arts was not limited to the administration of the art academies, but constituted a reorganization of the arts accomplished "not in a single act, but in a series of only partially coordinated economic and administrative measures implemented between 1949 and 1957."<sup>29</sup> A decade after the founding of the P.R.C., major long-term changes in the Chinese art world included the state as the major arts patron in the country, the development of a broad

<sup>28</sup> Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Art in China: The New Politics of Culture* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p. 37.

foundation for party and state supervision of the arts, and the disappearance of the popular commercial cultures that had previously supported the arts.<sup>30</sup> Although the transformations of the arts implemented in the 1950s were epoch-making changes whose consequences are still with us, their significance needs to be appreciated in historical context.

Transformations in Chinese society and industry following end of the first Opium War led to rapid growth in the country's modern industries, which in turn drove the founding and expansion of modern schools. These schools were meant to train workers to fill the needs of the emergent job market, and the fine arts were no exception to this rule in the late Qing and early Republican periods. In 1906, the Liangjiang Normal School (*Liangjiang shifan xuetang*) in Shanghai set up the country's first program of art through its painting department, but the department at Liangjiang Normal School was far from the first integration of art into curriculum. As early as 1862, Western drawing techniques were taught as a component of Western science and technology at the Tongwenguan, a government-run institution for the instruction of Western languages and science during the Qing dynasty,<sup>31</sup> while drawing and painting (*tuhua*) became a compulsory part of all levels of curriculum in 1902.<sup>32</sup> In 1912, the Shanghai Academy of Fine Art (*Shanghai meishuyuan*) was founded, a private tutorial art school funded by tuition fees,<sup>33</sup> and in 1918, the National Art Academy of Beijing (*Guoli Beijing meishu xuexiao*) was founded,

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts in China*, p. 37-41 for more details.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Mayching Kao, "Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-style Painting Movement in China," in Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, eds., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1998), p. 147. See Shu Xincheng, *Jindai Zhongguo jiaoyu shi ziliao* [Source materials on the history of modern Chinese education] (Beijing: People's Press, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 408-515 for further details.

<sup>33</sup> See Jane Zheng, *The Modernization of Chinese Art: The Shanghai Art College, 1913-1937* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), for a study of the Shanghai Academy of Fine Art from its founding through the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

funded through Republican government support.<sup>34</sup> By the late 1920s, there were more than a half dozen major art academies or departments of fine art throughout the country, many of which remain in operation to this day.<sup>35</sup>

As the art historian Mayching Kao notes, because Western drawing and painting techniques were introduced as a component of Western technology, “Western art... reached China’s educated class not as a curiosity but as something for practical application, contributing to the progress of China.”<sup>36</sup> Skill in fine art was seen as much a matter of technique as acculturation. Indeed, during the Republican period aesthetics were embraced as a foundation principle of education, and this emphasis was reflected in the adoption of art instruction as a component of the national curriculum.<sup>37</sup> Since 1902, some version of painting or art instruction was a compulsory subject in primary through high school education.<sup>38</sup> The cultural historian Jane Zheng describes the demand for students with training in art practice stemming from two major sources, the first being the need to staff the country’s growing educational system with art

<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive history of the development of fine arts education in China, see Chen Ruilin, *20 shiji Zhongguo meishu jiaoyu lishi yanjiu* [Fine art education in 20<sup>th</sup> century China: a historical perspective] (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> See the index “Name changes of principal art academies” in Michael Sullivan’s *Modern Chinese Artists: A Biographical Dictionary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. xvii—xx, for a full list of the major art academies and their major name changes and administrative re-organizations in China from the late Qing to the present.

<sup>36</sup> Mayching Kao, “China’s Response to the Western in Art: 1898-1937,” (PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1972), p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> The educator Cai Yuanpei played a large role in establishing a modern educational system that emphasized aesthetics. For more, see Xiaobing Tang, “The Beautiful Object of Art” in *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 9-42; Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 45-50; and Cai Yuanpei, “Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education,” trans. Julia F. Andrews, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> See Jane Zheng, “Private Tutorial Art Schools in the Shanghai Market Economy: The Shanghai Art School, 1913-1919,” *Modern China* 35, no. 3 (May 2009): p. 316-7 for a detailed description of how painting and art courses were integrated into national curriculum.

teachers, and the second being urban China's growing commercial market for art, particularly in Shanghai.<sup>39</sup>

To the aspiring artist, art schools were important sites of accreditation, and a degree conferred upon the graduate the necessary credentials to seek work as either an art teacher making a modest but steady monthly salary, or as a commercial artist. Records of oil paintings for sale from at least 1840 indicate the presence of a strong commercial art market,<sup>40</sup> and the availability of artworks produced at French Catholic missionary-run Tushanwan Painting Studio (in operation c. 1864-1914) in Shanghai, as well as commercial painting studios producing large volumes of paintings for export in the southern Chinese port city of Guangzhou attests to the growing market for fine art.<sup>41</sup> By the 1910s, the Shanghai region supported a commercial market for art, and according to Jane Zheng, students hoping to be employed in the commercial art industry upon graduation could expect to work primarily in three lines of work. First, the adoption of lithographic printing in the late nineteenth century made high quality illustrations increasingly common in print media. Artists were needed to create, for example, watercolors for book illustrations or cartoons for newspapers and magazines. Second, commercial clients needed artists to create images for advertisements and calendar posters, the latter of which were usually painted in what was considered a Western style.<sup>42</sup> Last, a growing theater industry meant an

<sup>39</sup> Jane Zheng, "Private Tutorial Art Schools in the Shanghai Market Economy," pp. 315-8.

<sup>40</sup> Ge Yuanxi, "Huyou zaiji [Notes on traveling in Shanghai]," in Zhang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo fengtuzhi congkan* [Chinese local customs], no. 44 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 1876), cited in Jane Zheng, "Private Tutorial Art Schools in the Shanghai Market Economy," p. 318.

<sup>41</sup> For more about the Tushanwan workshops, see William Hsingyo Ma, "Pedagogy, Display, and Sympathy at the French Jesuit Orphanage Workshops of Tushanwan in Early-Twentieth Century Shanghai," (PhD Dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2016). For more about the commercial export painting studios of Guangzhou during the Qing, see Paul A. Van Dyke, Maria Kar-wing Mok, eds., *Images of the Canton Factories 1760-1822: Reading History in Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> For more on advertising in Shanghai during the late Qing and Republican periods, see Jonathan Hay, "Notes on Chinese Photography and Advertising in Late Nineteenth Century Shanghai" in *Visual Culture in Shanghai, 1850s to 1930s*, ed. Jason Chi-sheng Kuo (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Press, 2007), pp. 95-119. On calendar posters, see Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

increased demand for stage designers, who painted scenic backdrops for productions in watercolor.

Accordingly, early curricula at art schools emphasized the technical skills necessary for art production, but as time progressed, art schools added new faculty and departments as the scope of the field broadened. Eventually, some schools possessed not only a wealth of departments to prepare students to participate in a wide variety of art practices (such as Western painting, *guohua* painting, sculpture, architecture, crafts, and design), but also provided instruction in English language, art history and theory, pedagogy, music, and other such supplementary courses considered helpful for success as an art professional or art teacher. The education offered in art schools stood apart from the selective master/pupil model of the dynastic past, and the art historian Michael Sullivan describes Republican art academies as “art schools in the European sense,” by which he means art schools teaching a curriculum of what was considered “modern” art (which often meant art in European mediums such as oil painting).<sup>43</sup> Jane Zheng notes the parallels between private tutorial art schools and early modern educational institutions in Japan, *shijuku*, which attracted a wide national enrollment from varying social classes due to reduced class barriers to entry.<sup>44</sup> In art schools administered by the Republican government, the curriculum stressed national salvation through the invigoration of culture, while the curriculum at for-profit art schools was more closely oriented around meeting market demand.

It should be noted that the Republican market had its limits, especially in times of strife and transition. Most positions teaching art were poorly paid, and many artists supplemented their teaching with editorial work or other employment. Private art schools were particularly sensitive

<sup>43</sup> Michael Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> Jane Zheng, “Private Tutorial Art Schools,” pp. 317-8.

to changes in the market, and at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Art, enrollment varied widely from year to year. Financial instability caused the school to relocate frequently.<sup>45</sup> Yet more so than private patrons, gallery networks, or museum support, art academies were the defining institution supporting the fine art industry in twentieth-century China. The art school was not only the single most important site of legitimization for aspiring artists, it was a major employer of artists, supporting top graduates through salaried faculty positions. The fine art industry was driven more by the growth of higher education in Republican China than it was by any other institution or constituency. Thus, to call oneself a professional artist during the Republican era indicated not only that one created artwork for financial reward, but that one had also received academy training in art practice.

The concept of amateurism, on the other hand, re-emerged during the late Qing and Republican period under guise of the term “*yeyu*,” meaning afterwork, or the surplus time outside of work or industry. The term *yeyu* began appearing in print publications in treaty-port cities as a prefix indicating amateur activity, including amateur athletics, amateur theater, amateur choir, and amateur art.<sup>46</sup> The term appears to a transcultural one: in the English poet and art scholar Laurence Binyon’s *Painting in the Far East*, Binyon appears to use the term “amateur” for the Chinese 文人 *wenren*, or literati, as does the British diplomat and sinologist Herbert Giles in his *Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*.<sup>47</sup> Binyon and Giles were struck by literati painter’s casual engagement, lack of formal or institutional structure,

<sup>45</sup> Jane Zheng, “Private Tutorial Art Schools in the Shanghai Market Economy: The Shanghai Art School, 1913-1919,” *Modern China* Vol. 35 No. 3 (2009), p. 325.

<sup>46</sup> The term “*yeyu*” begins to appear in Chinese periodicals in the 1910s and 1920s. It often appears in bilingual Chinese English publications as a neologism, and its first usage accompanies articles on amateur sport competitions in Shanghai. Usage spreads to include amateur theater, choir, art, and literary organizations by the 1940s.

<sup>47</sup> See Laurence Binyon, *Painting in the Far East: An Introduction to the History of Pictorial Art in Asia Especially China and Japan*, Third edition (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1923); and Herbert Giles, *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art* (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1905). I am grateful to Marty Powers for pointing out the longer transcultural histories of the term “amateur.”



fellowship within a network of other leisurely passion-seekers, and distance from the hallmarks of the analogous commercial painting practice: they described theirs as a culture of amateurs. The return of the *wenren* culture to the Chinese language as *yeyu* is roughly congruous with the rise of amateur discourses in the United States. Because the earliest record of the term *yeyu* that I have been able to locate occurs in Chinese translations of English language print media, *yeyu* seems to be a neologism of the English “amateur,” itself a discourse in part popularized by Western discussion of literati Chinese painting culture.

Under this guise, the concept of the amateur gained traction predominantly in urban Chinese cities during the early twentieth century, and by the late 1920s, was being explored as a matter of social formation and art practice by prominent urban Chinese cultural figures. For example, the Republican author, photographer, and man of letters Liu Bannong (Liu Fu) translated amateur as “*fei zhiye*” in his preface to a volume of photography by a group of photography enthusiasts who called themselves the Beijing Light Society (*Beijing guang she*):

The Light Society is an amateur (*fei zhiye*) organization of comrades in photography. In English and French, this word is ‘amateur,’ the opposite of which is ‘professional’ (*qiye*.) In Latin, on the other hand, the word ‘amator’ is translated as ‘lover’ and comes from ‘amare,’ which means ‘to love.’ There are some folks who like to play at being clever and translate ‘amateur’ as ‘*aimei de*’ (lover of beauty), as if the meaning of these words is only related to fine art (*meishu*), but actually the word’s meaning includes ‘love’ and not ‘beauty.’... As long as what one does has nothing to do with one’s own profession, then one can be called ‘an amateur.’<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Liu Bannong, “Beijing guang she preface,” in *Bannong tan ying* [Bannong on photography] (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 2000), p. 8. I am grateful to Stephanie H. Tung for alerting me to this text. This translation is a modified version of Tung’s original translation of Liu Bannong’s preface.

Liu's comments on the role of the amateur emphasize one's deep personal passion for an activity as its defining characteristic. By understanding amateurism as a private realm defined by interiority and desire, and his amateur photography practice exists fully separate from the wage labor that otherwise structures social relations in his society, fueled by consumption as by desire.

In her study of amateur film practice in the United States, Patricia R. Zimmerman argues that "the social formations and ideologies of professionalism and amateurism" rose together in the early nineteenth century in the United States (which she sets roughly from 1840 to 1887) as modern professions grew.<sup>49</sup> Thus, as historical and cultural phenomena, the professional and the amateur are best understood not as mere binary opposites, but rather as mutually constitutive social roles. Zimmerman describes the relationship between the two as a symbiotic mitigation of the divide between work and freedom, where the amateur ideal promises the illusion of passion and choice within the realm of the private as the economy controls and fragments wage labor in the professional realm. The growth of the modern capitalist economy gave birth to a culture celebrating captains of industry and Horatio Alger stories, a mythology of entrepreneurial heroism that obscured the widespread penetration of industrial production models built around increasing productivity and efficiency (such as the assembly line.) As both entrepreneurial folklore and industrial manufacturing became more widespread, the cultural functions of the professional and the amateur came into higher relief. Thus, from the 1880s to 1920s, amateurism in the United States functions as the "cultural inversion to the development of economic capitalism," and the imagined fluidity between the professional and the amateur sustained myths of personal fulfillment otherwise obstructed by the increased economic regimentation of daily life.

<sup>49</sup> Patricia R. Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 5.

The amateur art practice of the socialist period grew out of cultural and intellectual trends explored by leftist Republican figures. Academics at Peking University, for example, were increasingly interested in the countryside as a source of national culture. At Peking University, Liu Fu, Shen Yinmo, and Zhou Zuoren spearheaded a folk literature movement for studying the “literary products of humble folk,” as Chang-tai Hung describes in his monograph on the movement.<sup>50</sup> The folk literature movement wholly coincided with the May Fourth movement, an embrace of “new” cultural vitality that stood as counterpart to the movement’s rejection of Confucian tradition, but scholars such as Chang-tai Hung believe that the movement ultimately never left the confines of the university. Where Liu Bannong’s concept of amateurism was formulated in bourgeois contradistinction to the commercialism of professional (profitable) art practice, amateur art practice in the socialist period was rooted in leftist discourses of popularization (*puji*) and massification (*dazhonghua*) proposed by Mao Zedong in the early 1940s while the Communist party was based in rural and remote Yan’an, the seat of its wartime operations. Mao made clear in his January 1940 “On New Democracy” that the vitality of a new Chinese nation would depend upon the vitality of a new Chinese culture, imagining “an enlightened and progressive China under the sway of a new culture” that would be a “national, scientific, mass culture” based upon an elevated version of existing peasant cultures.<sup>51</sup>

Yet Mao’s call was not immediately followed up by significant efforts to popularize literature and the arts, and David Holm notes that few writers at Yan’an were actively working on popularization.<sup>52</sup> Mao’s 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” were meant

<sup>50</sup> Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Culture, 1918-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “On New Democracy,” from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 340. Reproduced on the Marxists Internet Archive, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_26.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm) (accessed Nov. 8, 2018).

<sup>52</sup> David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 98.

to clarify what the cultural priorities and policies of the C.C.P. would be. The speech revisited many of the areas Mao first addressed in “On New Democracy.” For example, Mao redefined the scope of massification: whereas massification had previously been presented as a question of utilizing literary and artistic forms that would facilitate greater engagement with the masses, now Mao described artists themselves as needing to be massified. “The writers and artists do not have a good knowledge either of those whom they describe or of their audience; indeed they may hardly know them at all,” said Mao, urging them to “remold their thinking and their feelings.”<sup>53</sup> To accomplish this, literary and art workers “must... shift their stand,” to physically “move their feet over to the side of the workers, peasants, and soldiers,” and change their perspective “through the process of going into their very midst and into the thick of practical struggles and through the process of studying Marxism and society.”<sup>54</sup>

For the urban intellectual, the process of reorientation that Mao described was that of “*xiaxiang*,” or the deployment of established cultural figures to the countryside to live amongst the masses and engage in basic cultural work. *Xiaxiang* was one component of a two-pronged approach toward developing a vibrant new socialist culture, the first being the elimination of “incorrect” and pernicious views in cultural affairs, and the second being the aforementioned program of learning from the masses by going down to the countryside. In his speech, Mao encouraged “specialists in literature” to heed the “wall newspapers of the masses,” “specialists in drama” to pay attention to small theater troupes in the army and villages, for music specialists to seek out “the songs of the masses,” and the “specialists in fine arts” to study “the fine arts of the

<sup>53</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an forum,” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 3* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 72. Reproduced online at the Marxists Internet Archive, [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3\\_08.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm) (accessed Nov. 8, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at Yan’an,” pp. 77-8.

masses.”<sup>55</sup> Art forms that were seen as belonging to the masses are the key to what Mao called a “literature and art in a budding state” (*mengya zhuangtai de wenyi*), and Mao believed that engaging with these forms would give urban, bourgeois artists an entrée to engaging with politics and culture on a grass-roots level. David Holm argues that Mao’s intention was “not so much [to discuss] form as the need for professional artists to link up with amateurs,”<sup>56</sup> thus making the implications of Mao’s speech as much a policy for the new literature and art as it was a policy toward the urban intelligentsia itself.

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Soviet War was disruptive to all aspects of life, including fine art practice. The Japanese bombing of Shanghai, the occupation of Beijing and other major cities during the war damaged or destroyed many art schools, teaching facilities, art studios, and artworks, while those artists and art teachers who escaped physical harm were scattered in all directions. Some artists moved with the Nationalist government to the country’s interior, in Sichuan and southwest China, setting up interim versions of the home institutions that they had fled. Other artists remained behind in the occupied regions, sought out the Communist base in Yan’an, or simply tried to stay one step ahead of the invading Japanese army.<sup>57</sup> When the war ended in 1945, artists returning to their home cities resumed the teaching and practices that had been disrupted by the conflict. According to Ellen Johnston Laing, “by 1947 the arts had begun to recover,” as evidenced by the 1946-1947 yearbook for the arts, which recorded the biographies of over 1,700 artists and documented over 150 public exhibitions of art.<sup>58</sup> By the late 1940s, prominent art schools academies including the National Art Academy in Beijing, the

<sup>55</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at Yan’an,” pp. 34-5.

<sup>56</sup> David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> See Ellen Johnston Laing, “Introduction” in *The Winking Owl: Art in the People’s Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Laing cites Wang Yichang, ed., *Zhonghua minguo sanshiliunian Zhongguo meishu nianjian* [China art yearbook 1946-1947] (Shanghai: Shanghai Municipal Cultural Movement Committee, 1948) on p. 2 of her “Introduction” in *The Winking Owl*.

Nanzhong Private Academy of Fine Art in Guangzhou, the Shanghai Academy, the Suzhou Academy, and the fine art department of the Hubei Province Women's Normal Academy.

Thus, when the Chinese Communist Party gained control of the country from the Nationalist government in 1949, they inherited a robust network of art schools, artists, and art educators. Yet neither that system nor the individuals who populated it were necessarily knowledgeable about or receptive to the ideals of the C.C.P. Although organizations such as the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Art—which later was formed into a larger conglomerate of cultural organizations called the North China United University—had been established during the wartime years while the party was based in Yan'an, a minority of the total population of practicing artists and existing art institutions in 1949 had connections with the leftist cultural programs developed during the Yan'an period.<sup>59</sup> In the fine arts, the C.C.P.'s task upon arriving in new cities was manifold: not only take over administrative control of the existing art academies, but in the long term to reshape them such that the artists and the art that they produced would reflect the culture and values of a new socialist Chinese state.

In his study of cultural life during the P.R.C., Richard Kraus argues that this goal was accomplished with relative ease owing to the weakness of the country's pre-1949 art market.<sup>60</sup> While a demand for art and artists certainly existed, many artists made their living in a piecemeal fashion. Thus, “the Communist revolution did not so much destroy the arts market as stabilize

<sup>59</sup> For more on the cultural programs of the Yan'an period, see David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Liu Zhuo, “Wengongtuan and the Rural Literary Popularization Movement in Yan'an,” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 6, 1(2012): pp. 39-55; Gao Hua, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930-1945*, trans. Stacey Mosher and Guo Jian (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2017).

<sup>60</sup>Martin J. Powers disputes Kraus's account of the pre-1949 art market as weak. Martin J. Powers, email correspondence with author, Nov. 26, 2018.

and expand opportunities for steady employment,” and “the vast majority [of artists] either regarded the new regime as an improvement or were in no position to leave.”<sup>61</sup>

In Beijing, the National Beijing Art College was taken over by the military little more than a month after the P.L.A.’s arrival. While the administrative changes in the fine arts institutions of Beijing were specific to that particular city, many of the larger trends in art education and administration occurred in similar patterns around the country. Sha Kefu, the director of the College of Arts and Literature at North China United Revolutionary University in the Jin-Cha-Ji border region, was assigned as military representative to the school, and he formed a “Cultural Takeover Small Group” comprised of former administrators from the North China United Revolutionary University, including the poet Ai Qing, the artist Jiang Feng, the art theorist and sculptor Wang Zhaowen, and the composer Li Huanzhi. The group decided that the college would be funded by the Beijing Municipal Military Affairs Committee, and the college’s president, the realist painter Xu Beihong, would be retained as director, as well would be the existing faculty.<sup>62</sup>

Temporary military oversight of cultural institutions is typical of this early period, and creating a long-term party structure within existing institutions was a high priority. In Beijing, the military administration of the National Beijing Arts College was soon replaced with a new Communist party group overseeing the college,<sup>63</sup> and the college was also incorporated into the fine arts department of Huabei University (*Huabei daxue disanbu meishu ke*) and renamed the Central Academy of Fine Arts (*Zhongyang meishu xueyuan*, or CAFA, the name it still bears

<sup>61</sup> Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts*, p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> See Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 34.

<sup>63</sup> The group included president Xu Beihong, Hu Yichuan, Luo Gongliu, Wang Zhaowen, Zhang Ding, and Jiang Feng, most of whom were veterans of the Yan’an woodcut movement. For more details, see Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China*, pp. 40-1.

today.) The reorganization was an elevation in status for the Central Academy of Fine Arts, which had previously come second to the more prestigious National Art School in Hangzhou. The Central Academy of Fine Arts was brought directly under the Ministry of Culture's purview, as opposed to the local cultural affairs bureau, and the Hangzhou academy was demoted to a subsidiary campus of CAFA,<sup>64</sup> which Julia Andrews believes was because the faculty in Beijing were already more sympathetic to the Communist cause than were the faculty in Hangzhou.<sup>65</sup>

Changing the administrative structure of art schools was just one tactic by which dynamics in the fine arts changed after 1949. Generally, the number of government employment opportunities for artists increased dramatically through the 1950s as the state created or expanded cultural organizations, often with structures reflecting strong Soviet influence.<sup>66</sup> These institutions include the Ministry of Culture, established in October 1949 overseeing an extensive network of arts organizations; the Communist Party Propaganda Department, reporting to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and responsible for broad oversight of culture and ideology; and the China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles, the umbrella organization for a broad network of artists, filmmakers, musicians, writers, actors, directors, etc.<sup>67</sup> The People's Liberation Army became a major employer of artists through its army bands, opera companies, dance troupes, novelists, and poets and their corresponding cultural institutions. These bureaucracies all operated in parallel to one another, and penetrated from the central level down to the provincial and local levels. Furthermore, these four major organizations comprised a mix of institutions operated by the state (such as the Ministry of Culture or the

<sup>64</sup> The Hangzhou academy retained this status until 1958, when it was renamed the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (*Zhejiang meishu xueyuan*). In 1993, it was renamed the China Academy of Art (*Zhongguo meishu xueyuan*), the name it bears today.

<sup>65</sup> Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China*, p. 35, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts*, pp. 40, 42.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts*, p. 42-4.



PLA's culture department), the party (such as the Propaganda department), and "mass groups" (such as the China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles and its subgroups.) As Richard Kraus cautions, although these distinctions are important, ultimately they are often obscured by the high overlap between individuals who might play leadership roles in multiple organizations in addition to possessing party membership.<sup>68</sup> Kraus adopts the term "cultural system" (*wenhua tizhi*) to describe this set of bureaucracies responsible for supporting and developing the arts in the P.R.C., a term that insists upon recognition of the party-state's involvement in the arts not as a totalizing, centralized top-down operation, but rather as a body of constituent parts with overlapping interests whose conflicting agendas are sometimes concealed, but never resolved, by the constancy of the party's presence.

The China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles in particular traces its history back to the first All-China Congress of Literary and Art Workers (*Zhongguo quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui*). The congress was a national convention held in Beijing from July 2 to 19, 1949, and attended by representatives from all recognized cultural fields. Speakers included Zhou Enlai and Jiang Feng, who laid out visions for early P.R.C. cultural policy. Zhou Enlai's speech laid out five overarching principles by which the arts should be restructured. Taken in total, the speech reflected a dramatically different vision of the role that the professional artist was to play in the new state:

First, he said, unification of all China's literary and art workers was essential. Zhou identified several different types of art workers, including those in the PLA, those in PLA-controlled areas, and those in areas controlled by the Nationalists. He urged delegates to promote a united spirit among all cultural workers in their home regions. Second, artists were to serve the people,

<sup>68</sup> See Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts*, pp. 45-6.

especially the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Third, popularization was to take precedence over raising of standards. Fourth, old literature and art were to be remolded. Old contents were to be remolded first, but attention should also be paid to old forms so that contents and forms might be unified. Fifth, artists and art leaders must avoid particularism but instead consider the needs of the whole country in their art.<sup>69</sup>

In order to accomplish these objectives, the congress established the China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles, which was to oversee five subgroups: the All-China Art Workers Association (*Zhongghua quanguo meishu gongzuozhe xiehui*), the All-China Film Art Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo dianying yishu gongzuozhe xiehui*), the All-China Music Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo yinyue gongzuozhe xiehui*), the All-China Literature Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo wenxue gongzuozhe xiehui*), and the All-China Theater Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo xiju gongzuozhe xiehui*).<sup>70</sup> CFLAC and its subgroups would be responsible for implementing this vision not only by reshaping the existing art practice, but also by training new artists and expanding the purview of the arts. Like the titles of the organizations suggest, the groups were also meant to foster “unity”—the first priority on the cultural affairs agenda, according to Zhou Enlai’s speech—as well as the reclassification of artists, filmmakers, writers, actors, directors, etc. from intellectual literati to “workers.” By replacing the suffix “*jia*” with “*gongzuozhe*”—for example, from “artist” (*yishujia*) to “art

<sup>69</sup> Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China*, p. 36.

<sup>70</sup> All these groups remain active today. The China Federation of Literary and Art Circles is a founding organization of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, a political advisory body whose yearly meeting usually coincides with that of the National People’s Congress in an event referred to as the “*lianghui*.” The All-China Art Workers Association was the forerunner to today’s China Artists Association (*Zhonghua meishujia xiehui*). The All-China Film Art Workers Association is now called the China Film Association (*Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui*). The All-China Music Workers Association is now called the Chinese Musicians Association (*Zhongguo yinyuejia xiehui*). The All-China Literature Workers Association is now called the Chinese Writers Association (*Zhongguo zuojia xiehui*), and the All-China Theater Workers Association is now called the China Theatre Association (*Zhongguo xijujia xiehui*). The China Television Artists Association (*Zhongguo dianshi yishujia xiehui*) was added in May 1985.

worker” (*meishu gongzuozhe*)—the congress “[signaled] the intention to redefine the identity of artists and writers as part of the working class,”<sup>71</sup> and to recognize cultural work as a type of labor as opposed to creative genius or commercial trade.

To be described as a “professional” artist on the cusp of the mid-century in China meant belonging to a complex social category whose identity was in flux, as indicated by the rivalry between terms like “*meishujia*,” “*yishujia*,” and “*huajia*” (artist, painter) with the neologism “*meishu gongzuozhe*” (art worker.) What would it mean to be a professional artist in a society striving toward communist ideals, including the abolishment of private property? Would art be a private commodity or a public good? Would it be bought and sold, and to whom would it belong? Would the livelihood of artists depend upon the robustness of the art market, or would they be supported by state-run institutions?

By the tenth anniversary of the P.R.C.’s founding in 1959, answers to many of these questions were apparent. It was clear, for example, that the ecosystem for cultural production had expanded significantly post-1949, with dramatic increases in the number of museums, cultural centers, and art academies in the country.<sup>72</sup> It was also clear that the party-state, as the driver behind all this growth, would play the dominant role in shaping the development of the arts, and that the state was now the major patron of the arts. The C.C.P.’s assault on landlords and capitalists had eliminated wide swaths of wealthy Chinese who might have otherwise constituted the commercial market for art. And by creating a large institutional infrastructure for administering the arts, the state had also created a glut of new employment opportunities for

<sup>71</sup> Yan Geng, *Mao’s Images: Artists and China’s 1949 Transition* (Berlin: Springer, 2018), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Between 1949 and 1962, the number of museums in China increased from 21 to 230, and county and municipal cultural centers from 826 to 2,514. See Zhu Zongyu, Yang Yuanhua, Zhen Junyan, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo zhuyao shijian renwu* [Important events and persons of the People’s Republic of China] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1989), p. 464. Cited in Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts*, p. 66.

artists. New art academies, universities, and departments of fine art were established in the 1950s, such as the East China Art School (*Huadong yishu zhuanke xuexiao*),<sup>73</sup> the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (*zhongyang gongyi meishu xueyuan*),<sup>74</sup> and the art department of the Central Minorities Institute (*zhongyang minzu xueyuan yishu xi*) in addition to the establishment and expansion of important cultural units including the Ministry of Culture, the P.L.A.’s cultural department, the Propaganda department of the C.C.P., and the China Federation of Literary and Arts Circles and its subgroups.

State sponsorship of artists was a major stabilizing force for the field, but also further professionalized and bureaucratized artistic work. Again, the meaning of the “professional artist” remained in flux: artists were increasingly described as “experts” (*zhuanjia*) in addition to “artist” (*huajia, yishujia, meishujia*), foregrounding their training, skill, and expertise. The meaning of “professional” as indicative of financial remuneration for performing work receded, and the professional artist increasingly came to mean not only a trained artist, but one legitimized through employment as an artist in the state-sponsored art education or art administration systems.

To find success in the post-1949 art world, the trained artist needed to reshape their practice in the service of the people. In theory, an artist whose work found broad support amongst workers, peasants, and soldiers was one making healthy contributions toward the cultural development of the new socialist state. Artistic practices—like certain types of opera, for example—that were seen as commercial were stigmatized as decadent, redolent of bourgeois ideals and the feudal past. The bird-and-flower style of painting, for another example, was seen to be at odds with revolutionary needs, and was removed from art school curricula during their

<sup>73</sup> Known today as the Nanjing Art Academy (*Nanjing yishu xueyuan*).

<sup>74</sup> Today, the Academy of Arts and Design at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

reorganizations in 1950, and bird-and-flower painters did not fare well in the decade that followed.<sup>75</sup> The most prominent genres in art academies in the early 1950s were those that were seen as broadly popular with the masses: New Year's prints, for example, received special attention in the immediate aftermath of C.C.P. takeover of art academies.

But the art academy was not to be the only location from which socialist culture was authored. Control of the nation's fine arts institutions was only one aspect of the socialist cultural agenda in China, and the transformation of the Chinese fine arts would be deeper than an ideological shift amongst the existing fine artists. Changing art in the P.R.C. meant changing the artist, and transforming the fine arts from a practice of consumption to one of production. Going into the second half of the century, amateur art practice was productive in multiple senses, producing not only new art but new subjectivities, new communities, and new cultures.

### **Amateur Art Practice and the New Socialist Artist**

Amateur art practice played an outsized role in challenging traditional and commercial concepts of the artists. Where the artist was typically seen as an urban, male, and educated member of the upper and middle classes, amateur art practice asked for members of the masses—particularly workers, peasants, and soldiers—to fill the role, challenging not only the idea that one needed to belong to a privileged and urban class to be taken seriously as an artist, but also that one needed to belong to a certain gender. In its attempt to eliminate the barriers to art practice, amateur art took the fine arts out of the academy and centered art practice at the grassroots level, in the military barracks, in the factories and work units, and in the collectives and communes. Amateur art practice changed the scale on which art was practiced, transforming

<sup>75</sup> See “Li Kuchan’s Eagle Fazes Far” in Shelley Drake Hawk’s *The Art of Resistance: Painting by Candlelight in Mao’s China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), pp. 75-94, for an account of one bird-and-flower painter’s experiences post-1949.

it from the highly individualized, specialized pursuit of small, credentialed, and professionalized communities, to a mass activity built up from the bottom level of society.

This change was accomplished gradually across a period of several decades, and on a nationwide scale with dispersed geographic points of focus. Redefining who could be an artist also changed the function of art itself, as it went from commodity object to a part of the productive process. One of the first applications of amateur art in factories was to encourage workers in particular to identify problems in the productive process, and to create drawings which illuminated the problem, or cartoons which satirized inefficient productive or administrative practices. Similarly, peasants were encouraged to criticize problems in the commune. As amateur art practice spread, amateur artists increasingly turned their attention from exposition to the representation of the world around them, and amateur art practice increasingly became a process through which the artist asserted and explored their class identity. At the height of amateur art practice's popularity in the socialist era, artistic accomplishments were hailed as belonging to a lineage of humanistic achievement built upon the fruits of labor.

In order to accommodate the amateur, the concept of the artist as a cultural formation had to be adjusted. Two concepts—technique and genius—needed to be shifted in order to allow untrained, non-professional, and atypical individuals to be taken seriously as art practitioners. Rather than separating trained and untrained artists, artistic technique was understood as a modular skill that could be acquired simply through extended practice and a shared interest that brought together artists with disparate levels of experience in art. Amateur art practice significantly destabilized the concept of creative genius, which had previously functioned as one of the artist's defining qualities. Pre-existing concepts of genius were identified as harmful to the amateur, cultural formations that explicitly excluded the masses from being recognized for their

creative accomplishments. By the beginning of the P.R.C.'s transition from socialist to post-socialist cultural mores, amateur art practice had left the fine arts changed in fundamental ways.

Scholarship on peasant art in the P.R.C. generally concurs that the practice can be traced to the 1950s, when art study groups (*meishu xiaozu*) were first formed in rural communes for workers to meet, discuss, and practice drawing and painting together. These groups usually met under the guidance of art students or instructors affiliated with nearby regional art academies. The small group (*xiaozu*) was essentially a study group that could be focused around a wide variety of subjects, including the study of specific documents, the political reform of its members, or, in this case, art practice. The small group was ubiquitous during the socialist period, and Martin King Whyte traces its form from the organization of Bolshevik Party cells to earlier Russian narodnik revolutionaries. But the Chinese small group differed from its Soviet counterpart in that Soviet small groups were never as widespread as they were in China, where they “[systematically] extended to the ordinary populace.”<sup>76</sup> The small group format traveled outside the Soviet Union and the P.R.C.; for example, in Japan during the 1950s, literary groups of leftist factory workers formed, writing poetry on walls in a “workers’ culture circle” movement that bore many parallels to amateur cultural activities in the P.R.C.<sup>77</sup>

Hu Xian peasant art specialist Duan Jingli believes that “peasant art” originated in either Pi Xian in Jiangsu Province, or Shulu Xian in Hebei Province. Pi Xian’s first art study group formed in 1956. Founded by a commune member named Zhang Kaixiang, the group’s mission statement declared the members’ intention to examine the state of ideological consciousness (*sixiang qingkuang*) amongst its members, to express progressive values, criticize backward

<sup>76</sup> Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 23.

<sup>77</sup> Mitsuda Yuri, *Tokyo, 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, ed. Doryun Chong, Michio Hayashi, Miryam Sas, Mika Yoshitake (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), p. 160.

practices, and invigorate agricultural production through painting and drawing (*huihua xingshi*). Shulu Xian's first art small group formed in 1958 in response to the Great Leap Forward, coining a couplet (“*jiajia shige huhu hua, renren dou shi yishujia* [Every family a poem every household a painting, each and every one is an artist]”) to encourage peasant involvement in art. Hu Xian's first art study group was organized by Chen Shiheng, a young graduate from the Xi'an Provincial Art Academy. Asked by the academy's party secretary to conduct research on socialism in the countryside, Chen was sent to rural Shaanxi for his mission, where he wandered between villages for several months before arriving in Hu Xian, where the local party secretary and commune members welcomed his presence.

In Hu Xian, Chen organized a night course in beginning drawing and painting, with over twenty students in the first class. Hu Xian's commune was in the midst of building a reservoir, and so Chen decided to locate his classroom on the site of the construction project in order to facilitate the participation of peasant workers. Chen taught nightly lessons from November to December of 1958, and described the difficult conditions in his memoirs of the period: “There were no desks, writing boards, easels, or blackboards to use when we held class, not to mention the worrying fact that at night there were no lights, and no fire in the classroom.”<sup>78</sup> Because his classes were held in winter, Chen describes several instances in which his students were reluctant to paint due to the cold: while working outside on wall paintings, some students had difficulty holding the brush without gloves or mittens in the cold, and in another instance, students couldn't see well enough during an evening class to draw indoors as their room had no lighting. They could open the classroom door to let in an outside source of light, but couldn't stand to leave the door open long in the middle of winter.

<sup>78</sup> Chen Shiheng, quoted in Duan Jingli, *Hu xian nongmin hua yanjiu*, p. 17.



Chen's arrival in Hu Xian coincided with the start of the Great Leap Forward, most commonly remembered as a failed economic campaign in which the P.R.C. reorganized labor into communes, attempted to surpass developed Western countries in production, and in which millions of Chinese starved to death. However, the historian Maurice Meisner emphasizes that when the Great Leap Forward was first announced, its economic policies were far from clear. At the outset, its concrete programs consisted of ambitious attempts at cultural change, with the formation of rural communes and steel production targets only following later.<sup>79</sup> Cultural change and structural economic change were seen as mutually linked processes, and the Great Leap Forward was accompanied by "the expectation that rapid economic growth would be accompanied by (and indeed, propelled by) equally rapid processes of radical social and ideological change." This was "an inseparable and essential" part of the movement, a dialectical approach whose cultural pillar has been minimized in the historical narrative.<sup>80</sup>

With the exception of Duan Jingli, scholarship on "peasant art" describes it as a cultural initiative of the Great Leap Forward, taking a political marker—the year 1958, when the policy was announced—as its starting point. Ellen Johnston Laing, for example, describes peasant art as a program "to immortalize the positive benefits of the Great Leap and the commune in stories, poems, plays, and pictures," and this direct causal link between the Great Leap Forward and the peasant art movement is repeated by scholars including Joan Lebold Cohen, Michael Sullivan, and Ralph Croizier.<sup>81</sup> Laing describes the early output of peasant artists as crude, "exactly what one would expect of untutored painters," and a high portion of these works were outdoor murals painted on the sides of homes and local buildings, a highly publicly visible and more temporary

<sup>79</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 204.

<sup>81</sup> Laing, p. 6.

genre of style not easily given to collecting called “wall art” (*bi hua*).<sup>82</sup> In this narrative, not only was peasant art practice a consequence of the Great Leap Forward, but socialist amateur art practice before 1958 is non-existent because such art practice was “a deliberate creation of the cultural arm of the Communist Party.”<sup>83</sup>

Yet primary sources indicate that amateur art practice had been prevalent several years prior to the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, if not earlier, in the form of art study groups. *Meishu*, the flagship art publication of the P.R.C.’s socialist period, published articles discussing amateur art practice almost as soon as the journal was established in 1954.<sup>84</sup> The May 1954 issue includes an article titled “Art creation activities by Shanghai workers” by Li Cunsong, with the bulk of the article dedicated to discussing groups of workers in Shanghai area factories who formed art study groups in which they drew and commented on each other’s work under the guidance of an experienced artist, the same model followed a few years later in Shulu Xian, Pi Xian, and Hu Xian.<sup>85</sup> Often, the workers drew scenes from factory life with the intention of drawing critical attention to an undesirable work habit, such as production geared toward quantity and not quality. Li notes that following Liberation in 1949, sketching and painting became popular with workers who had “turned over (*fanshen*),” recognizing it as a powerful propaganda tool. Duan Jingli dates the formation of Pixian’s art study group to 1956, and their organizing may have been contemporaneous with other unconnected amateur art groups.<sup>86</sup> It is reasonable to infer that amateur art practice in the P.R.C. began before the start of the Great Leap Forward, and that it drew upon precedents that pre-date the formation of the P.R.C., reflecting a

<sup>82</sup> The September 1958 issue of *Meishu* is a special issue devoted to rural wall art (*nongmin bi hua zhuan hao*).

<sup>83</sup> Sullivan, p. 147.

<sup>84</sup> The journal was relaunched from the title *Renmin meishu* [People’s Art.]

<sup>85</sup> See Li Cunsong, “Art creation activities by Shanghai workers [Shanghai gongren meishu chuanguo huodong],” *Meishu*, May 1954, p. 38.

<sup>86</sup> Duan Jingli, *Hu Xian nongmin hua yanjiu* [Research on Hu xian peasant art], (Xi’an: Xi’an chubanshe, 2001), p. 6.

cultural vision much broader than simply the endorsement and promotion of the Great Leap Forward campaign.

Because of its celebrity, Hu Xian has come to stand in for the entirety of peasant art practice—or indeed, all amateur art practice in the P.R.C. Yet the record is clear that peasant art practice did not originate in Hu Xian, with earlier precedents in Pi Xian and Shulu Xian, and that untrained artists had been practicing together well before the launch of the Great Leap Forward. Furthermore, “peasant art” has come to stand for the entirety of amateur art practice, overlooking amateur art practice by industrial workers and rank members of the military. Although worker art and soldier art never reached the international profile that peasant art did, domestically they carried as much significance as peasant art, and their prominence in exhibition records from the period suggests that they were as prevalent as peasant art, if not more so prior to the early 1970s. The first showing of amateur art listed in an official exhibition history published by the Chinese Artists Association is an April 1955 exhibit jointly organized by the China National Art Workers’ Association and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, “First Annual All-China Exhibition of Amateur Art by Workers,” and exhibitions of artwork by workers and peasants were shown in art venues throughout the country with as much frequency as exhibitions of peasant artwork during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>87</sup>

The participation of amateur artists challenged existing concepts of the artist, and immediately art publications began to reflect these changes. From its launch in January 1954, the journal *Meishu* carried articles on different aspects of amateur art practice in every issue. At first, these articles were authored by the trained academy artists who made up the publication’s editorial board, but beginning in 1957, the journal began to run pieces written by amateur artists

<sup>87</sup> Liu Xilin, *Zhongguo meishu nianjian 1949-1989* [Annual of Chinese Art 1949-1989] (Nanning, China: Guangxi Fine Art Publishing House, 1993), p. 1020.

themselves, lending space in the publication for them to speak on their experiences with art. A collectively authored piece signed by seventeen workers in a Shanghai area factory (“Wo men de yeyu meishu xuexi he chuangzuo [Our amateur art study and practice]”) is the first piece written by amateur artists to be published in *Meishu*, and the authors describe their diligent approach to studying art, participating in art study groups, listening to talks from art experts (*zhuanjia*), seeking critique of their work, and going on trips to sketch from nature. Their approach to art is notable for its collaborative nature, working in groups to critique each others’ work and suggest ways of improving. “We are confident in feeling that as members of the working class, we are not only materially wealthy creators (*chuangzuo zhe*), but capable of learning how creation creates spiritual wealth,” the authors conclude. Their editorial emphasizes not only the material aspects of fine art practice but the intangible satisfaction it brings its practitioners.<sup>88</sup>

In spite of an amateur art phenomenon that was growing in popularity across the country, there were still barriers to amateur participation, chief among them a lack of preparation in art practice. Hitherto, public perceptions of the artist included the entrenched expectation that the artist possess a sufficient degree of authoritative knowledge of art and art practice to present him or herself as a legitimate artist, a knowledge most frequently glossed as technique (*jishu*), or the set of specialized skills acquired through experience and training that enable one to create art. Previously, training at art academies or in commercial practice were the primary means through which art skill was recognized, and the specialized nature of these skills were reflected in the names of art institutions—the Chinese name of the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, *Shanghai meishu zhuanke xueyuan*, for example, emphasized the institute’s specialized nature with the word “*zhuanke*,” and socialist art groups often styled their modest activities in the same manner

<sup>88</sup> Hong Guangwen et al., “Wo men de yeyu meishu xuexi he chuangzuo [Our amateur art study and practice],” *Meishu* 2 (1957): p. 20.

(for example, the Hu Xian art small groups chose the name *Hu Xian meizhuan* for themselves.)<sup>89</sup> But as the P.R.C.'s cultural programs began encouraging its untrained, non-elite, and sometimes uneducated citizens (the worker-peasant-soldier masses *gongnongbing qunzhong*) to participate in the creation of art, the possession of specialized knowledge became an increasingly difficult standard by which to recognize the output of amateur artists, some of whom may not have possessed any formal education.

Technique emerged as a highly contested grounds over which the qualifications to be considered an artist were fought, and debates over technique were part of wider reflections on removing structural inequities from society. The cultural programs of the Great Leap Forward targeted erasing the distinctions between the urban and the rural, between mental and manual labor, and between industry and agriculture (as proclaimed by the slogan “*Xiaomie san da chabie.*”)<sup>90</sup> “Pioneering peasants” were seen as having the agency to eliminate the differences between the city and the countryside, between peasants and workers, and between elite and non-elite forms of labor. Mao took his cues from Marx, who had written of a post-revolutionary worker whose “productions would be so many mirrors reflecting our nature” in “a free manifestation of life and enjoyment,” a foundation upon which Mao imagined a utopia that allowed for “everyone [to be] a mental laborer and at the same time a physical laborer; everyone can be a philosopher, scientist, writer, and artist.”<sup>91</sup> The alienation of capitalist workers, who had to separate their labor from their livelihoods, was meant to be corrected by a non-alienated form of work in which workers could control both the means and products of their labor. Marx and

<sup>89</sup> The title “specialized art academy” (*meishu zhuanke xueyuan*) would prove so popular that by the 1950s and 1960s, aspirational art study groups such as in Hu Xian would title themselves simply “*Hu Xian meizhuan.*”

<sup>90</sup> See Mao Tse-tung, “On the Ten Major Relationships” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), Vol. 5, pp. 284-307.

<sup>91</sup> Maurice Meisner, “The Deradicalization of Chinese Socialism” in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience*, ed. Maurice Meisner and Arif Dirlik (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), pp. 341-61.

Mao imagined a post-revolutionary worker whose material needs had been met by society, and whose activity was truly free.

The role that technique would play in realizing a more utopic present was not immediately clear. On the one hand, technique (understood as a specialized skillset) could divide types of labor into groups qualified and unqualified to perform it, and accordingly separate the masses from free activity and the uninhibited pursuit of human potential. On the other hand, the acquisition of technique could also act as a democratizing power that, if wielded by the masses, would usher in a revolution in science, knowledge, and human accomplishment. Technique could contribute to the change in consciousness advocated by the Great Leap Forward by elevating and uniting the masses, or it could further alienate and exploit.

The trained artists and cultural Party cadres responsible for developing and executing policies on art began to articulate a critique of technique in the late 1950s, questioning a valuation of art that placed technique above all else, and insisting upon a good politics as an equally important criteria of evaluation. Their comments on the relationship between good technique and good art loosened the correlation between the two, ultimately making it easier to take the creative output of untrained artists more seriously. For example, an article authored in 1958 by the editorial board of *Meishu* stressed that professional artists must re-orient their practices toward the experiences of workers and peasants, a policy in-keeping with the Great Leap Forward drive to embed artists within the masses. The article begins by criticizing opinions voiced by professional artists during the Anti-Rightist Campaign a year earlier:

“We wish there was more time to practice sketching (*sumiao*); we wish that when cadres attended advanced studies courses at the art academy there were extra lessons on technique; we wish there were more conferences on art technique; we wish we had more opportunities to travel to scenic places to draw from life (*xiasheng*); we wish we didn’t have the responsibilities of our jobs (*gangwei*) to

keep us from becoming professional artists (*zhiye huajia*); we wish we didn't have to attend so many societal activities (*shehui huodong*)...Before the Anti-Rightist campaign occurred in the art world (*meishu jie*), if you asked young art workers for their opinions, you'd hear a lot of responses like this. It was especially common to hear about the need to practice technique. If these wishes hadn't been realized, then you'd hear people saying things like, 'O, flourishing creation (*chuangzuo*)—I don't even have the basic conditions to create!'"<sup>92</sup>

Their words dripping with sarcasm, the editors say that in emphasizing the acquisition of technical skill above all else, young artists appear to believe that nothing but technique is required of an artist: "This type of thinking is completely mistaken, and extremely pernicious." Instead, art should be infused with moral purpose. Or, put another way, artistic skills must be built upon the foundations of socialist morality. "The duty of the arts is not only to possess skills adequate to the task of depicting life, but also to be familiar with the essential politics (*zhengzhi tounao*) of life," the editors write. "Thus, artistic creation is not simply a product, but uses technical skills to manifest the products of thought (*sixiang de chanwu*)."<sup>93</sup> In other words, a high level of skill doesn't necessarily result in the creation of good art. The editors conclude that single-minded application to the acquisition of artistic technique (which they summarize in sayings like 'You take care of the thought, I'll take care of the technical skills' and 'having technical skills is everything') is a vestige of bourgeois individualism's influence on the arts, and needs to be discarded in favor of a socialist artistic praxis.

Other artists and cultural cadres went even further in their critique of technique, questioning whether or not the existing concept of technique was valid as new artists were

<sup>92</sup> Editorial board of *Meishu*, "Yu gongnong jiehe: geming meishujia biyou zhilu [Joining the workers and peasants: the road revolutionary artists must take]," *Meishu* 1 (1958): pp. 1-5.

<sup>93</sup> Editorial board of *Meishu*, p. 3.

embraced by the fine art establishment. Huang Dingjun defended worker and peasant artists, criticizing the trained artists who didn't take their untrained peers seriously: "There are some comrades with conservative thinking who have always felt that workers and peasants lack artistic talent, and that fine art shouldn't be theatrical, performative, or contain those sorts of things that appeal easily to the masses," writes Huang. "Those friends who have not yet become endeared to the art of workers and peasants have no basis upon which to perform guidance work (*fudao gongzuo*)."94

Still others went even further than Huang, questioning the very standards upon which art had hitherto been evaluated. The painter and woodcut artist Li Qun described the challenges in evaluating art in a November 1958 issue of *Meishu*. Pointing out that artistic achievement was much more difficult to measure than crop yields or iron production, as a result it was much more difficult to get everyone to agree on the merits of art made by workers, peasants, and soldiers. Li Qun takes it upon himself to delve into the assumptions underwriting this bias against amateur art:

Of course not every work by a worker, peasant, or soldier is great. Some are good and some are bad, and even good artwork has its shortcomings. Naturally we should point these out in the spirit of seeking truth from facts. But the problem is that there are people who cannot perceive the strengths of even works that are overwhelmingly good (*da you haochu de zuopin*), and this is what we really need to understand better. Obviously this involves issues relating to the standards and methodologies (*biaozhun he fangfa*) by which we appreciate art (*xinshang yishu*).95

<sup>94</sup> Huang Dingjun, p. 37.

<sup>95</sup> Li Qun, "Ruhe kandai gongnongbing meishu chuanguo [How to regard the artistic creations of the worker, peasant, and soldier]," *Meishu* 11 (1958): pp. 8-9.



Targeting those in the cultural sphere who were biased against art created by untrained artists, Li Qun proceeds to explain that the typical standards by which art has hitherto been judged are inherently problematic, and in need of radical rethinking as art practice in the P.R.C. changes:

The standard that is actually being used here is ‘artistry (*yishuxing*) as the only standard for fine art.’ And the idea of supposed artistry is very problematic; this idea of artistry doesn’t account for the predominant thought (*zhuti sixiang*), for the formalism (*xingshi zhuyi*), or for the naturalism (*ziran zhuyi*) of artistry. And neither is this the revolutionary realism (*geming xianshi zhuyi*) or revolutionary romanticism (*geming langman zhuyi*) of artistry. Therefore, we have standards in common with them [the culturally conservative]. Taking the art of workers, peasants, and soldiers as an example, if you cast aside the spirit of the content, in which the content is depicted, the arrangement of the composition (*gousi buju*), the people who are depicted, and the spirit of the times, and your only concern is the accuracy of the sketching, shading, line drawing, coloring, volume, and anatomy—then you can only come to a negative verdict (*fouding de jielun*). Because if you take these to be the essential qualities of artistry or the fundamentals of artistic standards, then naturally it is difficult to find the merits of worker, peasant, and soldier art.<sup>96</sup>

Li takes a drawing by a soldier named Yu Simeng as an example (Figure 2-1). Titled “The Political Commissar Pays a Visit to the Company, Sharing War Stories with the Soldiers,” Li praises the work: “I think this is fundamentally a good drawing (*hao hua*). Even though it looks like an early preparatory sketch, I’m very fond of it.”<sup>97</sup> Li proceeds to explain to the reader why he believes this work is good, and in the process proposes a new set of standards for evaluating the quality of art. The work is strong, he argues, not because it depicts the soldiers’ bodies with anatomical accuracy or the volume of their bunk bed with

<sup>96</sup> Li Qun, “Ruhe kandai,” pp. 8-9.

<sup>97</sup> Li Qun, “Ruhe kandai,” p. 9.

depth and precision, but because the viewer comes away with a clear sense of the image's narrative and of its subjects' relationship with one another. "It doesn't use illustration to explain how life is, but rather generalizes (*gaikuo*) life with an image."<sup>98</sup>

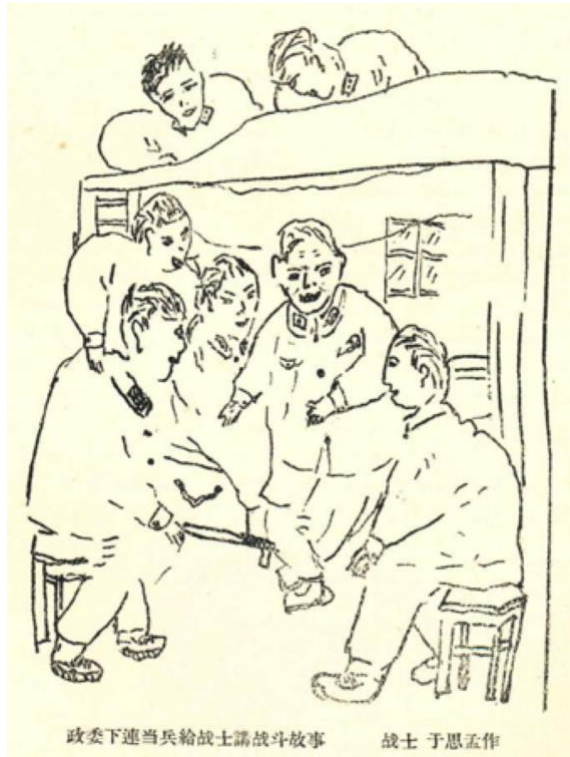


Figure 3-1 "The Political Commissar Pays a Visit to the Company," sketch by Yu Simeng, a soldier, reproduced in Meishu (11) 1958: p. 8.

Li extracts a lengthy narrative from the sketch, imagining the warm relationship between the commissar and the soldiers based on the body language depicted, and the riveting stories that the commissar shares with them. "This is an exemplary concept and arrangement," Li pronounces before conceding that "there are also parts that are incorrect (*bu zhengque de difang*)."<sup>99</sup> He lists a litany of elements that could use technical improvement, including the depiction of clothing, furniture, anatomy, and the lack of detail

<sup>98</sup> Li Qun, "Ruhe kandai," p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> Li Qun, "Ruhe kandai," p. 9.

in the work. Still, “we absolutely cannot look at these technical inaccuracies without seeing how thematically accurate it is. That would be missing the forest for the trees.”<sup>100</sup>

In effect, Li proposes that mastery of technical details no longer serve as the primary criterion by which art be evaluated. Furthermore, his new standards for appreciation includes significant attention to the identity of the artist. While he recognizes the numerous technical difficulties that would handicap Yu Simeng’s sketch had it been completed by a trained artist, Li simultaneously “readily acknowledges [his own] interiority” in depicting brigade life. Li argues that he is essentially unqualified to depict a military life, and if the point of artistic creation is to depict the lives of the worker-peasant-soldier masses (which it is, as many contemporary primary source documents testify), then only a soldier is truly an authority in depicting the life of the soldier.

Li acknowledges that for the academy-trained artist, this can be a bitter pill to swallow—possessing the technical skills needed to execute an artwork but not the personal experience that would qualify one to be the artist can leave trained artists feeling like a warrior without a battle to fight (*yingxiong wu yong wu zhi di*).<sup>101</sup> He readily points out that he would never have been able to author such a composition primarily because he doesn’t understand brigade life well enough to know what type of composition would best reflect its truth. He mocks the superficiality of professionally trained artists who portray soldiers simply by putting themselves in a uniform and drawing themselves from the mirror, pointing out that these artists still wouldn’t have access to the details necessary to create a convincing depiction of a soldier’s life: for example, what uniforms at different ranks look like, or the fact that generals tend to be older, with battle-worn faces covered in wrinkles

<sup>100</sup> Li Qun, “Ruhe kandai,” p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Li Qun, “Ruhe kandai,” p. 9.

such as the commissar in the sketch. Li concludes that for the trained artist, the only worthwhile task is to aid the amateur artist in improving their art—a process that results in the creation of outstanding works of art such as the model opera, “The White-Haired Girl.” “If the experts (*zhuanjiamen*) cannot see the strengths of worker, peasant, and soldier art, then it is impossible to build upon the foundations of their artistic creation. How will we be able to create a work like ‘The White-Haired Girl’ in the arts?”<sup>102</sup>

Campaigns around technique were multi-directional, and aimed to shift multiple subjectivities. In her monograph on mass sketching during the Seventeen years period, Christine Ho argues that mass sketching was one such attempt to precipitate a “state-led shift to processual methods of art-making, an approach to cultural production that brought to the fore experiential and communitarian registers within modern artistic practice in China,” a fundamentally anti-academic act that was paradoxically prescribed by state institutions.<sup>103</sup> For the professional artist, relocation from urban centers of culture like Beijing, Hangzhou, and Shanghai to the countryside were meant to “reeducate” the privileged, whose subjectivities were expected to change after extended contact with the peasantry.<sup>104</sup> For the peasantry, a bottom-up approach of “technique dissemination” would allow those who hadn’t been previously exposed to the arts to gain the “basic skills” needed to create art. For example, a little less than a year after *Meishu* had been launched, the publication began running in serial form translated excerpts from a text titled “Sketching and Painting Teaching Materials for Amateur Artists (*Yeyu huajia sumiao yu huihua jiaocai*)” by Nadezhda Krupskaya, the Bolshevik revolutionary, Soviet educator,

<sup>102</sup> Li Qun, “Ruhe kandai,” p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> See Christine I. Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People’s Republic of China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> See Ellen Johnston Laing, p. 29 for further details.

and wife of Vladimir Lenin. The course was explicitly targeted at encouraging amateur, non-professional artists, and over the course of several chapters, Krupskaya's text instructs readers in lessons on sketching, modeling volume, portraiture, etc. Yet the number of rural readers with access to *Meishu* suggested that the magazine might not be the best form of outreach, and in the 1960s and 1970s, instruction guides meant for rural readership were published, which laid out the basics of sketching and drawing in step-by-step format.<sup>105</sup>

Yet amateur artists were not trained in isolation, and the relationship between trained and amateur artists was the subject of much attention. The relationship went both ways: professional artists (*zhuan ye huajia*) sought to learn from the masses, while the masses sought technical instruction from professional artists. The guidance provided by professional artists was no secret, and the relationship between professional and amateur was widely discussed in the pages of *Meishu*. A special December 1958 issue dedicated to the nation-wide conference on art work in the same year included statements on issues in art practice from nearly a dozen worker and peasant artists across the nation. A worker at a power plant in Wuhan, Xu Pinxiang, elaborated on the relationship between professional and amateur artists (*yeyu meishu gongzuo zhe*) in a piece titled "We need the help of professionals:"

I remember how difficult it was when I first started learning how to draw, enlarging the grids and drawing them one by one. I'd watch the workers in the workshop, and record their postures in my mind. When I went home, I'd call my kids over and ask them to serve as my models. Slowly, I learned how to draw. After that, a professional artist was sent to coach us, and that helped a lot but it still wasn't enough. I welcome the help of professional artists very much, but at the same time we have to hold firm in our own views. There are professional artists with bourgeois thinking, and they

<sup>105</sup> *Nongmin meishu shouce* [A guide to fine art for peasants] (Shijiazhuang, Hebei province: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1975).

need help and criticism. Recently, a professional artist has been assigned to my power plant. He helps me learn to how to make art, and I make suggestions to him. We help each other learn, helping each other improve together. Next year, the Party says that we'll need newer and better artwork for the celebration of our country's ten-year anniversary... We will all have to work together to accomplish this, and we need to invite professional artists to come help out.<sup>106</sup>

Professional artists were seen as very much necessary to the success of amateur art practice, as without them, worker, peasant, and soldier artists would struggle to learn the technical “basics” of art practice. Acknowledgement of the role played by professional artists in developing the art practice of amateur artists was consistent across the socialist period.<sup>107 108</sup>

Yet the academy-led re-evaluation of the relevance of technique was not without challenge. The Anti-Rightist Campaign and Great Leap Forward were seen as tarnishing the reputations of the artist and intellectual, and by 1960 the blowback against the denigration of professional artists was such that Zhou Yang, then vice-president of the China Federation of Literature and Art, commented on it in a speech. In remarks delivered prior to the opening of the Third National Art Exhibition of 1960, Zhou Yang defined technique as “a means with which the writer or the artist, based on his world outlook, his general culture and profound observation of life, gives an artistic representation of reality.”

<sup>106</sup> Xu Pinxiang, “Women xuyao zhuanjia de bangzhu [We need the help of professionals],” *Meishu* 12 (1958): p. 41. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

<sup>107</sup> Even Li Fenglan, whose work Ellen Johnston Laing finds particularly fraudulent, mentions in her essay for the 1974 catalog of art by Hu Xian peasants that she works alongside professional artists (*zhuan ye yishu gongzuozhe*) to create art: “[I work] together with professional art workers to research, and only after several revisions does my artwork look the way it does here.” See Li Fenglan, “Wei geming kulian jibengong [Working hard to practice basic skills for the revolution]” in *Hu Xian nongmin hua xuanji* [Selected works by Hu Xian peasant painters], (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1974), pages unnumbered.

<sup>108</sup> In fact, open criticism of the involvement of professional artists only seems to begin post-1976. Professional artists are smeared in publications like *Meishu* for being loyal to the gang of four, and for manipulating peasants into creating art in support of the Gang of Four's agenda. Although prior to 1976 peasant artists were often critical of professional artists for harboring bourgeois tendencies, in the written record peasant artists consistently welcomed their help.

To Zhou, technique is “a product of highly skilled and meticulous labor,” therefore disregard for technique was tantamount to “a contempt for human labor and wisdom.”<sup>109</sup> Zhou elevated the status of technical accomplishment by linking it to reality, on the one hand, and labor on the other, symbolizing the accumulation of labor and dignified by the moral purpose of its mission to depict reality. Zhou proposed that professional and amateur artists work together to make better art, but stressed that the point of such collaboration wasn’t to make better art, but to have a richer spiritual life. “Aesthetic education is an important aspect of communist education.” By 1960, then, the ideal purpose of art was no longer to function as a luxury commodity object. Rather, cultural officials praised art’s potential to serve as “aesthetic education,” valorizing the process of making art over the final object itself.

Amateur participation in art practice also challenged the cultural traditions that had previously defined who could be taken seriously as an artist, and chipped away at the aura of those who had previously been considered creative “geniuses.” In a 1955 *Meishu* article on genius, the painter and woodcut artist Li Qun explored the concept of genius (*tiancai*) as it relates to the fine arts (*meishu*). Li’s article is primarily addressed to young art students and his colleagues in China’s major art institutions, and he both affirms that “genius exists” (which he repeats three times in the space of the article), and that it allows certain individuals to make extraordinary contributions to the cultural heritage of mankind, while also striving to prove to his peers that genius is not an innate quality, and that it is not pre-ordained at birth.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Chou Yang, “The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China,” *Peking Review*, 1960 No. 39, p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> The gender and race dimensions of genius are, of course, always operative as well, although Li Qun does not discuss them.

To Li, the presence of genius can be confirmed whenever genius is widely recognized by society, and whenever an individual makes an enormous contribution to humanity. He stresses that genius is not a term to be used lightly, and indeed any who would declare themselves a genius prove that they are not through the very act of self-declaration. “Does [genius] rely on having a superior physiology (*shengli*)? In reality, it’s clear that the existence of genius is inseparable from its cultivation, from limitless loyalty to the people, from scientific working methods, from the ingenuity of labor, from the difficulty of hard work and the relationship with the people.”<sup>111</sup> Although Li concedes that the mental make-up (*tounao goucheng*) and biological properties (*jiti suzhi*) of a genius may differ from those of a non-genius, without the right material environment, moral cultivation, and political direction, genius will not flourish. “A supposedly innate (*xiantian*) ‘genius’ is just quality (*sushi*) that has to be nourished through dogged practice in order to be expressed and to make a great contribution. Otherwise, this supposedly innate ‘genius’ is empty,” wrote Li.<sup>112</sup>

Li devotes considerable attention to the modesty that he sees as true genius’s calling card. “There’s no lack of people who think they’re geniuses just because they’ve made a bit of art,” Li writes. “But this is just evidence of their own bloated self-appraisal. Whosoever uses the word ‘genius’ to describe a young art worker or student can ruin a person’s capacity for achievement if they harbor bad intentions and encourage that person to feel proud. Pride is the mortal enemy of improvement.”<sup>113</sup> Li cites the Russian playwright Anton Chekov’s description of the Russian realist painter Ilya Repin

<sup>111</sup> Li Qun, “Cong ‘tiancai’ tanqi [Taking ‘genius’ as point of departure]” *Meishu* 10 (1955): pp. 39-40.

<sup>112</sup> Li Qun, “Cong ‘tiancai’ tanqi,” p. 39.

<sup>113</sup> Li Qun, “Cong ‘tiancai’ tanqi,” p. 40.



extensively as proof of the humility necessary in the fine arts. Repin clearly suffered from what we would now refer to today as imposter's syndrome, referring to himself as talentless to Chekov, repeatedly denigrating his work's quality, and bemoaning the many mistakes he believed he had made. Li cites approvingly Chekov's description of Repin's dim view of his own talents as actually being proof of Repin's genius.

Although Li Qun bemoans the capitalist division of labor that separates art from the people, his understanding of a people's art does not seem to involve the people becoming artists. Rather, he concludes the article by citing the culture czar Zhou Yang, who urged artists to devote their *métier* to the people. "Artists must always show concern for the people's lives, understand their mindset and their needs, love them passionately and sincerely serve them. Only then can they say without shame that they are the people's artists," wrote Zhou.<sup>114</sup> Li agrees with Zhou that being a people's artist is a realization of fine art's highest ideals, but to Zhou and Li, being a people's artist means professional artists devote their art to the people.

Li's editorial is meant to encourage young artists and art students that through humility, dedication, and the right morality, they too can become geniuses, and yet it is access to training that eventually allows an artist to achieve genius. When artists were sent down to the countryside to learn from the masses beginning in 1958, the discourse in *Meishu* began to shift toward consideration of peasants themselves as creators of art, and not simply artists who worked in the service of the lower classes. A 1958 profile of two peasant artists allowed the image of the amateur artist to come into sharp relief, asserting their identity in competition with existing representations of the artist. Zhang Shaonan and Zhang Penqing, two "well-known peasant artists from East village in Zhujiaji, Zhejiang county," are described as broad-shouldered with rough

<sup>114</sup> Zhou Yang cited in Li Qun, "Cong 'tiancai' tanqi," p. 40.

hands and strong legs from work in the fields. They walk barefoot, and their appearance is consistent with that of “sincere old peasants.<sup>115</sup>” The two Zhangs are committed members of their commune and very busy with work, yet they manage to find the spare time to paint. Peasants in neighboring villages invite them to draw on their communal blackboards, to paint murals on their walls, and design works of propaganda for them, and they have over ten thousand completed works under their belt. Their authenticity as peasants (*didi daodao de nongmin*) allows them to create images reflective of peasant life that resonate with locals. They are distinguished by their lack of familiarity with the lifestyles and values of the upper classes, and credit the creation of the new state with allowing people like them to be recognized as artists.

Perhaps the most celebrated amateur artist of the socialist period is Li Fenglan, the celebrated mother of four who painted some of the most well-known works from Hu Xian, including “Spring Hoeing” and “Joyful Cotton Picking.” In the catalog essay to the international exhibition of art from Hu Xian, Li Fenglan describes some of the challenges she faced in pursuing art, especially as a peasant and a woman. “There were people with conservative thinking (*sixiang shoujiu*) who didn’t want peasants to make art, and especially not peasant women.<sup>116</sup> She concludes that there is no reason a peasant cannot learn to make art: “We lower-middle peasants are completely capable of learning the skills needed to make art. It’s necessary to have only revolutionary ambitions (*geming zhiqi*), to be willing to study diligently and train hard (*qinxue kulian*).”<sup>117</sup> Li sees artistic technique as a modular skill that can be acquired through regular practice regardless of background or preparation. “These basic skills don’t drop down

<sup>115</sup> Zou Shencheng, “Liang wei nongmin huajia [Two peasant artists],” *Meishu* 6 (1958): p. 20.

<sup>116</sup> Li Fenglan, “Practicing Basic Skills for the Revolution [Wei geming kulian jiben gong],” *Hu Xian nongmin xuan ji* [Selected works of the Hu Xian peasants] (Shaanxi People’s Press, 1974), unnumbered pages, first page of Li Fenglan essay.

<sup>117</sup> Li Fenglan, first page.

from heaven, and they aren't endowed at birth. They have to be learned from life, from the masses, and from art practice," she elaborates. Li recounts two instances in which her own technique fell short: one in which she didn't use the right paint color for painting a backdrop to a slide projector, and another in which a portrait she drew didn't look enough like its subject. In each instance, Li sought the criticism of others, including professional artists, and was able to correct the inaccuracies in her work to create more convincing artwork.

### **Conclusion: Labor Creates Wealth!**

Today, the Hu Xian peasant painting community remains active. Although interest in Hu Xian's artist community peaked in 1976, during the Reform era that followed Hu Xian and its painters managed to successfully navigate the cultural politics of the new era. In the years immediately following Mao's death, art from Hu Xian remained popular domestically and abroad. "Mao Zedong thought and the mass line were still icons used to legitimate party rule," notes Ralph Croizier, and "peasant art continued to be used in political campaigns.<sup>118</sup> According to Croizier, during the late 1970s Hu Xian painters continued to send works to prominent national exhibitions, and contributed art used to promote campaigns including Smash the Gang of Four and the Four Modernizations.

Meanwhile, the market for "peasant" art continued to grow. Thanks in large part to the successful exhibitions of works by artists from Hu Xian, as well as Hu Xian's primacy of place on the travel itinerary of foreign visitors, foreign demand for distinctively Chinese paintings grew, especially as the country welcomed larger numbers of foreign tourists. By the mid-1980s, hotel shops in all major cities sold artwork by peasants, including from Hu Xian.<sup>119</sup> Sale to

<sup>118</sup> Ralph Croizier, "Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity," in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, ed. Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), p. 152.

<sup>119</sup> Croizier, p. 156.

foreigners effectively made export art out of amateur art practice, as peasant artists chose artistic subjects that appealed to buyers and worked in portable, easily saleable mediums that easily lent themselves to commodification, as opposed to the media of its origins, cartoons and wall art, neither of which lend themselves as easily to fine art collection.

The growing market for art by peasants, as well as the progressive dismantling of the agricultural commune, meant that increasingly, peasant artists were no longer involved in peasant labor. Several of the most well-known painters from Hu Xian, such as Liu Zhide, went into administrative teaching positions, official jobs that often entailed a state sinecure. But official positions were extremely limited, with no jobs available for the vast majority of artists who trained in art practice during the socialist period. Those who remained artists sought opportunities outside the state system, working as independently and relying on sales for a living. In Hu Xian, the children of well-known peasant artists soon began choosing to pursue painting in the footsteps of their parents: Li Fenglan's daughter, Li Xiaolan, is herself a painter, working under the name Shen Yingxia, while the son, daughter-in-law, and grandson of Liu Qunhan, one of the first Hu Xian residents to take up painting, also work as artists. Painting in Hu Xian now appears to be an entirely professional *métier*, and the children of artists face much lower barriers to entry in the profession.

Gradually, the term “amateur” (*yeyu*) has disappeared from discussion of art by workers, peasants, and soldiers, collapsing a widespread national art practice into an exclusively “peasant” practice. To a certain extent, the label “peasant” art has also become synonymous with “folk” art, reflecting a revival of interest in the decorative arts and crafts that are perceived to reflect the ethnic character and folk origins of rural art practice. Even then, interest in “peasant” or “folk” art has dropped so low that by the early 2000s, the art critic Gu Chengfeng bemoaned “the

absence of peasants in Chinese contemporary art,” estimating that at the country’s most high-profile art events, “less than two percent of the exhibits concerned peasants.”<sup>120</sup>

As the proletarian amateur has receded from view, the art academy has re-emerged as the pre-eminent site of credentialing and legitimization for aspiring artists, even for those of rural origins. Croizier recounts a visit in the early 2000s to the then newly built Peasant Painting Center, where a painter, Cao Quntang, had an exhibition on display. The artist was present, and Croizier recalls that Cao was more eager to share with him detailed and technical sketches from his notebook than the works on the wall, which were done in a bright, folk style. “He [Cao] explained that in recent years he had studied drawing and printmaking at the Xi’an Provincial Art Academy,” acquiring the professional skills that he was proud to claim that he was proud to claim as a graduate of the art academy.<sup>121</sup>

But even as the ecosystem supporting art practice has radically reorganized itself around market lines, vestiges of the past remain—not only in the living history of contemporary art practice in China, but also through what remains of its re-organized institutions, including a considerable cultural infrastructure at the provincial and district levels, including cultural cadres, administrators, exhibition venues, programming and association-recognized artists. In Hu Xian, art looks less like an everyday practice for the amateur, and more like the specialized work of trained professionals. As other former centers of worker, peasant, and soldier art have dropped out from view, the most well-known, including Hu Xian, still produce a thing called “peasant” art even though its artists are only peasants in the sense that they still live in predominantly rural

<sup>120</sup> Gu Chengfeng cited in Yi Gu, “The ‘Peasant Problem’ and Time in Contemporary Chinese Art,” *Representations* 136 (Fall 2016), p. 54.

<sup>121</sup> Croizier, “Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity,” pp. 160-1.

communities. And even that is changing.<sup>122</sup> The amateur art practice of small art study groups comprised of peasants, workers, and soldiers has past. On the website Hu Xian yinxiang [Hu Xian impression], an official retailer for several of the most famous of the Hu Xian artists, the website's page banner is an image of Li Fenglan's *Spring Hoeing*. The words "laodong chuangzao caifu! [labor creates wealth!]" are emblazoned across the image.

<sup>122</sup> In 2016, Hu Xian was renamed Huyi District, one of eleven urban districts of the prefecture-level city of Xi'an. The majority of the district's population remains predominantly rural, although as a whole, the nation is urbanizing and is no longer majority rural.

## Chapter 4 | The Laboring of Education: *Juelie* and the Making of the Socialist Student

### Introduction: The Uses and Abuses of the Horse's Tail

An iconic comedic sequence from the 1976 film *Juelie* [Breaking with Old Ideas] begins with a pedantic, bespectacled teacher standing in front of his classroom. His name is Sun Ziqing, and he is a career educator, having worked in education before the P.R.C. was founded in 1949. The year is now 1958, and he lectures a classroom full of students at the newly established Songshan campus of the Jiangxi Communist Labor University (*Jiangxi gongchanzhuyi laodong daxue*, or Gongda for short), located in a rural mountain community in Jiangxi province.

With a model horse beside him, the camera closes in on him as he begins lecturing in a practiced drone: “A few days ago, I went over the digestive and respiratory systems of the horse, as well as the characteristics of its bone structure.” The classroom is silent. He continues: “Today, I’m going to lecture on the functions the horse’s tail,” gesturing at the blackboard behind him, where he has written “Functions of the Horse’s Tail” (*ma weiba de gongneng*) for emphasis.

The turgid silence is interrupted by a pitiful bleat coming from outside. Perturbed, Teacher Sun tries to continue with his lecture, but the animal outside continues to wail, and Sun goes outside to investigate. A water buffalo stands outside the door to the classroom, its handler beaming beside it.

“Teacher, I’m from the Shanping Production Brigade. This buffalo is sick. Could you take a look?”

Horrified by the outlandish request, Teacher Sun shoos the man away. But the buffalo handler is not discouraged, and the camera stays with him after Sun returns to the classroom. The man hitches the buffalo—still bleating—to a tree, and comes inside the classroom, where he asks Sun once again for help. Disrupting the planned lesson, he explains that the buffalo outside is his brigade's best cow, but it stopped eating yesterday and is running a fever. With spring ploughing to start soon, the brigade needs the buffalo back in good health to work. Given Sun's expertise with veterinary science, he asks again for Sun to examine the animal.

But Sun is unmoved, and he scolds the man, telling him, "This is a university, not a livestock veterinary station!" It is not clear if Sun is bothered more by the request or the challenge to his control of the classroom. Sun insists the villager leave, and when he finally does, Sun returns to his lecture: "Now, let's continue discussing"—he slows for emphasis—"the functions... of the horse's... tail."

A student in the back stands. His name is Xu Niuzai, and he was recruited to attend the university from a cattle-herding family in the local mountain village (in fact, his name might be translated as Cowboy Xu.) He's been sitting in Sun's classroom for too long, but the peasant's interruption emboldens him, and now he finally speaks his mind. The camera frames Sun and Jiang standing directly across from one another, emphasizing their confrontation.

"You've lectured us on horses for several months. But is the college going to send us to Inner Mongolia to herd horses?" It's a rhetorical question, and his classmates laugh at the absurdity of it. "Horses are rare in this part of the country, particularly in the mountainous areas. Even the horses on the blackboard are the first one's I've ever seen. And, your lecturing his hard to understand." The class laughs again, relieved that someone has had the guts to call out Teacher Sun's abstruse lecture style.



“The harder it is to understand, the more profound the knowledge,” Teacher Sun responds. Unfazed, he returns to the front of the room, where he picks up a teaching display of various horses. “Take a good look. This is the Mongolian horse of China. And this is the zebra of Africa. Today, we’ll go through all the horses of the world, all right class?”

“I’m not done!” interrupts Jiang from the back. He straightens his back and squares his shoulders. “I suggest making a change to the class. We should learn less about horses, and more about pigs and cows (*shao jiang yidian'er ma, duo jiang zhu he niu*).”

Teacher Sun is enraged. “Since you’re not interested in learning, you can leave!” Furious, Xu storms to the door, but he won’t be silenced. “I’ll still have my say, even if it’s from outside the class!” As Xu leaves, the camera cuts away from the classroom to the next scene: big character posters (*dazibao*) emblazoned with the phrase “Teach Less About Horses, More About Pigs and Cows” are plastered on the school’s walls.<sup>1</sup>

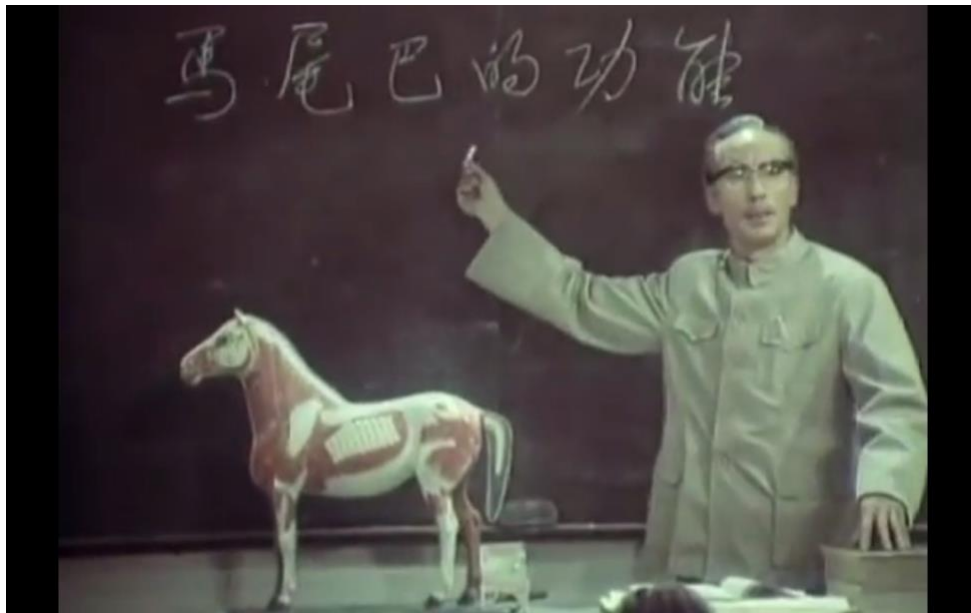


Figure 4-1 Ge Cunzhuang as Sun Ziqing, still from "Juelie."

<sup>1</sup> Li Wenhua, *Breaking with Old Ideas [Juelie]*, VHS (Voyager Press, 1986); Chun Chao and Zhou Jie, “Juelie,” *Renmin Dianying*, no. 1 (1976): 41–76.

## **Part-Work, Part-Study: The Socialist Student**

When *Juelie* was filmed in 1975, the release of a major motion picture enacted a very different set of cultural precepts than those that operate in the release of a major film now. A film made during the mid-1970s in the P.R.C. was neither a work of art made by a visionary auteur, nor was it a work of capitalist corporate entertainment. Instead, a film was made and meant to shape and reflect national mass culture, to defend national policies, and to showcase socialist culture and entertainment. In those terms, *Juelie* was intended to celebrate the success of a new national educational culture, a culture exemplified by the film's depiction of Gongda's establishment and early operation. This new educational culture was practical, cultivating useful skills such as animal husbandry and agricultural production over useless knowledge, such as of European literature. It was also egalitarian, striving to offer rural students as much access to higher education as their wealthier urban peers. Gongda's curriculum reflected these values by adopting a "part-work, part-study" model (*bangong, banxue*) for students, integrating the lessons of the classroom with the lessons of labor in a unification of theory and practice.

But *Juelie* and its depiction of education were controversial even at the time the film was made, in particular the film's depiction of the "open-door" enrollment policies implemented during the Cultural Revolution. In order to allow students from poor and rural backgrounds to attend college, many of whom had not had the opportunity to attend secondary or even primary school, the Ministry of Education adopted enrollment policies that relied more heavily on political recommendations than educational credentials, and an enrollment scene (*zhao sheng xi*) from *Juelie* depicted these new policies: without holding a high school diploma or sitting for an entrance exam, village students are admitted to university for being devoted to their work and to the communist cause. When these policies were reversed in the political and ideological fallout

after Mao's death, the idea that a student could be admitted to college without the "proper" credentials (*wenping*) came to be seen as non-sensical, and *Juelie*'s recruitment scene was a clear example of the ideological excess of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, *Juelie* would be banned from screening and the film's director placed under house arrest for his activity during the period.<sup>3</sup>

*Juelie* represents a moment in P.R.C. cultural history when the student was radically re-conceptualized, not only in terms of their subject position (rural/urban, female/male, red/expert) but also through a consideration of the student's production through knowledge and labor. More than a comedic catchphrase, the iconic "horse's tail" sequence asks questions of the episteme in which the category of "student" is immersed: What does the student learn, and whom does that knowledge serve—the teacher or the cowherd, the school or society? Should schools teach theory—a striped horse they will never see—or practice, the care of the cows and pigs in their own communities? Who is in control of the classroom, and what is the student's agency? Where does their future lie?

In this chapter, I examine the figure of the student during the socialist period in the P.R.C. My reading is grounded in the film *Juelie* as the most extensive narrative from that period to explore the student and the university. I approach the student through a consideration of the student's labor, asking what was the work of the student, and what did it produce? I argue that the student's labor was a key site through which the student, as a figure of the cultural imaginary, was reconsidered during the period, as they were transformed from the bespectacled urban

<sup>2</sup> For an illustrative example of such criticism, see Fang Yanming, "Yiding yao suqing *Juelie* de liudu [*Juelie*'s baleful influence must be eliminated]," *Renmin ribao*, January 10, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Li Wenhua, *Wang Shi Liu Ying: Li Wenhua de dianying ren sheng*, (Beijing: Hua wen chu ban she, 2011), pp. 212-3.

intellectual of the May Fourth era into a diffuse, pluralistic subject position embedded within the socialist project and its productive social relations.

At the time *Juelie* was made, the film, its production, and its reception were embedded within a dialectic conversation negotiating the boundary between narrative fiction and recent history. At its boldest, *Juelie* aspired to represent the Cultural Revolution on screen, adapting stories of real-life experiments in proletarian education and of student rebellion onto the screen. But *Juelie* can also be understood as a response to the crises that had been raised by the Cultural Revolution, particularly through its student activism. Student action during the historic Cultural Revolution had materialized the unresolved tensions and contradictions inherent to the new socialist order, and representations of the student engaged in both study and labor (*bangong*, *banxue*)—of which *Juelie* is the premiere example—formed part of a larger intellectual project through which education was integrated with production and production itself understood as an education.

The historical, social, and educational policies of integrating production with education (such as the establishment of communist labor universities such as Gongda and the rustication of students to the countryside) were not merely policy decisions intended to contain the violent and unruly factions of activist students. Rather, they were instances in which the student's labor functioned as the key site through which socialist subjectivity was re-inscribed. *Juelie* fully participates in this social, historical, and ideological project. Its depiction of student rebellion on the Gongda campus is a filmic embrace of the historic student activism of the Cultural Revolution. But where the Red Guard student activists of the Cultural Revolution challenged and disrupted the historical conditions that defined them, *Juelie's* narrative re-inscribes student agency within a socialist moral universe as delimited by the institutions of the state.

## Education as Social Reproduction

Materialist social theory begins from the proposition that human societies and their cultures are best understood as systems of social and cultural production. Education is a prime site for such materialist theorizing: schools are incubators of society's youth, where children are socialized to become fully participatory social subjects through the acquisition of the necessary skills, knowledge, and values (i.e. literacy, geography, patriotism). But understanding who produces the student, what labor goes into the student's production, and how that labor is rewarded or recognized is not straightforward.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the educator or the teacher, here theorized as any individual participating in structuring and executing the program of activities that occur under the auspices of the school on any given day, is responsible for directing the social reproduction of the next generation. The teacher is the agent of the reproduction of a social and educational system's values, and during the socialist period, teaching was recognized as formal employment through compensation as salaried employment.

On the other hand, the student's willing participation in the educational system is equally necessary to accomplish the social reproduction of the next generation. Yet attending school is rarely seen as work, in spite of requiring an incredible expenditure of time and energy on the student's part. Students' work—attending class, studying and completing homework and assignments, interacting with peers, extra-curricular pursuits, traveling to and from school—is rarely, if ever compensated; homework is not piecework. In capitalist societies, education itself is often conceptualized as a commodity that can be bought and sold, often with the expectation that

<sup>4</sup> Or, as Louis Althusser put it, "What, then, is the reproduction of the conditions of production?" See Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [Notes Toward an Investigation]," in *Mapping Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek, ed., (New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 100–140.

more expensive education can provide social mobility to its recipient, and those engagements required of the student by the educational system understood as a non-working form of activity.

During the socialist period in China, a widespread reconsideration of the labor of social reproduction explicitly addressed the role of the student in their own production. The student was understood both as a laborer, as well as a passive vessel and active agent of their own social reproduction. When people's communes (*renmin gongshe*) were formally established in 1958, the architects of the people's communes recognized that greater production could only be achieved by establishing wide-ranging social services to facilitate the full participation of all available agricultural workers. "Farm co-operatives must be not only organizers of production but also organizers of the way of life," wrote the editors of *Hongqi* magazine in 1958, explaining that people's communes would also establish "public canteens, nurseries, kindergartens, sewing teams, etc.,"<sup>5</sup> and the Great Leap Forward period saw a widespread expansion of the rural educational system, particularly at the primary and secondary levels.<sup>6</sup> By sending their children to school, rural women would not need to look after them at home, thus enabling their participation in agricultural labor.

A 1958 article titled "How to Run a People's Commune" summarized the commune's expansive scope: "The people's commune combines industry (workers), agriculture (peasants), exchange (traders), culture and education (students), and military affairs (militia) into one, and

<sup>5</sup> Editors of *Hongqi* magazine, "She Lun: Huanjie Renmin Gongshe Hua Gongshehua? de Gaochao [Commentary: Greet the Upsurge in Forming People's Communes]," *Hongqi*, no. 7 (1958): 13–15. Uncredited English translation included in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), pp. 10-5.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 12, "The Great Leap in Education" in Suzanne Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 278-301. Pepper states that secondary school enrollments were reported to have doubled from 1957 to 1958 through the establishment of *minban*-style agricultural middle schools that adopted work-study curricula. See also Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), pp. 24-5. Han states that in Jimo county, a rural district of Qingdao in Shandong province, the number of primary schools doubled between 1957 and 1958, as did the county's expenditure on education.

takes charge of political, economic, cultural, and military affairs at the same time.”<sup>7</sup> These services were described as the seven basic services that would be afforded to commune members free of charge: “eating, clothing, housing, childbirth, education, medical treatment, marriage and funeral expenses.”<sup>8</sup> The education of a commune’s youth fell under “culture and education,” and communes were tasked with establishing or running primary, secondary, and technical schools that commune members could send their children to for free. By taking responsibility for the education of its youth, a commune fostered the “high educational level” of its members, and contributed to the “[gradual elimination] of the difference between mental and manual labor.”<sup>9</sup> Further, by imagining that the expansion of the nation’s social services, the education system chief among them, would transform the overall productivity of agricultural labor, the commune was introduced as a new “basic unit of socialist society” that restructured social relations around the rural resident’s capacity for productive agricultural labor.

Offering universal primary and secondary school through the people’s commune was a policy extension of the previous popular rural literacy campaigns.<sup>10</sup> For many rural communes, this meant establishing schools that had not previously existed, and educating rural children who had not previously attended school. A cultural shift in how education was understood drove the rapid expansion of China’s educational infrastructure: where it had previously been seen as the prerogative of the wealthy, by the mid-twentieth century education was increasingly understood to be a basic human right in China and elsewhere in the world.<sup>11</sup> The schools set up by

<sup>7</sup> “Cong ‘Weixing’ Gongshe de Jianzhang Tan Ruhe Ban Gongshe [How to Run a People’s Commune, with Reference to the Regulations of the Sputnik People’s Commune],” *Renmin ribao*, September 4, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> Wu Zhipu, “Cong Nongye Shengchan Hezuo She Dao Renmin Gongshe [From Agricultural Producers’ Co-Operatives to People’s Communes],” *Hongqi* 8 (1958): 5–11.

<sup>9</sup> “Cong ‘Weixing’ Gongshe de Jianzhang Tan Ruhe Ban Gongshe [How to Run a People’s Commune, with Reference to the Regulations of the Sputnik People’s Commune].”

<sup>10</sup> For more on mid-century literacy campaigns in the P.R.C., see Glen Peterson, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*, Contemporary Chinese Studies (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, pp. 21-2.

communes were intended to allow their workers to, “in a short period, attain an adequate amount of general and scientific knowledge, and to master science, technology, and culture.”<sup>12</sup> These were the skills that were seen as necessary for achieving greater industrial and agricultural productivity. But, education was additionally part of an egalitarian social mission, itself fueled by the widely held proposition that more widespread educational attainment would create the conditions for equality as the basic logic of the socialist order.

By making the people’s commune responsible for setting up and running primary, secondary, and technical schools, as well as conducting scientific research, the institution integrated education within the purview of productive labor, thus articulating and creating the conditions for the re-conceptualization of education as a social right rather than a social privilege. Education was thus embedded into the very definition of productive labor. Increasingly, this entailed a major shift in the image of the student in the cultural imaginary, as the imaginary student transformed from romantic urban intellectual into a well-rounded laborer.

In this sense, the film *Juelie*’s depiction of young students transformed through participation in productive labor was not exceptional during the Maoist period (although the film was certainly exceptional in other ways.) For example, between 1970 and 1976, at least fifteen full-length novels were published that included primary characters who are students.<sup>13</sup> In most of these stories, the young protagonists are either young members of agricultural communes or sent-down youth either on holiday or assigned to work on a rural commune. The narrative arc of each

<sup>12</sup> Wu, “Cong Nongye Shengchan Hezuo She Dao Renmin Gongshe [From Agricultural Producers’ Co-Operatives to People’s Communes].”

<sup>13</sup> In mid-1966, the events of the Cultural Revolution forced nearly all publishers to cease their operations. They resumed normal business in 1970. Although by today’s standards, fifteen novels doesn’t constitute a major portion of yearly publishing volume, from 1970 to 1976 this was a significant number of original books. See Beijing Tushuguan banben shuku bian [Edited by the Beijing Library Publications Storage Facility], *Quan Guo Zong Shu Mu [National Index of Book Publications]*, vols. 1970-1976 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1970-8). to see complete lists of published titles from each year. (The index was published beginning in 1956, and did not publish from 1966 to 1969, resuming publication in 1970.



novel is structured around the student's participation in the productive labor of their commune, which is often growing crops, converting wasteland into arable land, or developing technological innovations that spur on greater levels of agricultural productivity.<sup>14</sup> By narrating their experiences working as members of agricultural communes, the novels illustrate the transformative power of participation in labor. *Juelie's* depiction of a student body learning both from the classroom and from the fields was part of a greater cultural narrative asserting that production itself constituted an education, and that education was best served through production.

### **'Full of Realistic Color': A Production History of *Juelie***

In 1974, Li Wenhua was a rising filmmaker affiliated with the Beijing Film Studio. He began working as a cinematographer in his twenties, and a decade later had nearly a dozen film credits under his belt, including the nationally prominent *Zaochun Eryue* [Early Spring in February, 1963] and *Qianwan buyao wangji* [Never Forget, 1964]. After serving as cinematographer for the 1970 filmed performance of *Hongse niangzi jun* [The Red Detachment

<sup>14</sup> Novels published during the Cultural Revolution featuring students as their protagonists include Beijing Shi Tong Xian san jiehe chuanguo zu (The 'Three-in-one' Writing Group of Tong County, Beijing City), *Chengguang Qu* [A Song of Dawn] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue Chubanshe, 1976); Bian Zizheng, *Zaolin Cun* [Zaolin Village] (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1976); Ding Mao and Wang Lin, *Xique Cun de haizi* [The Children of Xique Village] (Hehehaote: Neimenggu Renmin Chubanshe, 1976); Guan Jianxun, *Yunyan* [The Swallow through Cloud] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1976); Guo Xianhong, *Zhengtu* [Long Trek] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1973); Hong hua chuanguo zu [The "Red Flowers" Writing Group], *Hong Hua* [Red Flowers] (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 1976); Zhenguo Song, *Cha Shan Chun* [Spring Comes to the Tea Mountains] (Wuhu: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1976); Lei Wang, *Jianhe Lang* [Waves on the Jian River] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1974); Shimei Wang, *Tie Xuanfeng* [Mighty Whirlwind] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue Chubanshe, 1975); Xiaoyang Wang, *Hong Yan* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1975); Yanhe zai zhauhuan xiezuo zu [The writing group of The Yan River is Beckoning], *Yanhe Zai Zhaohuan* [The Yan River Is Beckoning] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue Chubanshe, 1976); Changgong Zhang, *Qingchun* [Youth] (Hulanhaote: Nei Menggu Renmin Chubanshe, 1973); Zhang Jianguo, *Xia Man Longwan* [Pink Clouds Envelop Dragon Bend] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue Chubanshe, 1976); Zhang Kangkang, *Fenjie Xian* [Demarcation] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1975); Zhou Jiajun, *Shanfeng* [Mountain Wine] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1975).

of Women], Li made his directorial debut with *Zhencha bing* [Scouts, 1974], a military espionage thriller set during the Chinese Civil War.

*Zhencha bing* was released to mixed reviews. Although audiences were attracted to the film's thriller genre, reviews criticized the plot as contrived and unrealistic (“*tuo li shenghuo, xujia*”).<sup>15</sup> Yet despite the public criticism of *Zhencha bing*, neither Li nor his film were accused of ideological blunders more outrageous than simply having an unrealistic plot, and the film screened without disruption. Smarting from the criticism of his last film and on the hunt for his next project, Li was especially keen to find a script that would showcase “real life” (*shenghuo*), or narratives grounded in the detail and richness of everyday experiences shared by members of the broad masses.

An unsolicited manuscript from an administrator at the Jiangxi Communist Labor University had caught the attention of top brass at the Beijing Film Studio. Titled *Wan dai hong* [A thousand generations of red],<sup>16</sup> the studio had shopped the script to multiple directors. Upon reading it, Li was immediately interested. The script checked every box: “The script’s overall direction was right (*da fangxiang*), the artistic value was strong, and it was full of realistic color (*shenghuo secai*).”<sup>17</sup> Wang Yang, then director of the Beijing Film Academy, greenlit the project and hired Zhou Jie, a career screenwriter, to revise the script with Hu Chunchao.

Part of the project’s appeal lay in the sterling political credentials of its subject, the Jiangxi Communist Labor University. Founded in 1958, the university's mission was to create “an educated labor force dedicated to work in the countryside” through a curriculum of

<sup>15</sup> Fang Jin, “Nuli shixian, jilei jingyan: gushipian *Zhencha bing* guanhou [Work hard at practice, accumulate experience: the narrative ],” *People’s Daily*, Aug. 14, 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Liu Shu, *Ru ying sui xing: Li Wenhua de dianying shijie [Shaped like a shadow: the film world of Li Wenhua]* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying Chubanshe, 2014), p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Di Di, “Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis],” *Dianying Yishu*, no. 2 (1993): p. 77.

productive labor combined with study.<sup>18</sup> At the time, it was a risky venture and the first of its kind in the nation. But with the continued support of top leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Zhu De, by the mid-1970s the institution's position was more secure, having been granted the on-going affirmation (*kending*) and support of the country's top leadership. With Li Wenhua as director, a well-liked filmmaker and a party member himself, and the Beijing Film Studio as production unit, the film could not have been helmed by a more qualified team, leveraging the publicly solicited distinctions of the studio, subject, and director to animate the film into production.

A cast and crew were quickly assembled, and the film's principals selected following conventions of *typage*.<sup>19</sup> Guo Zhenqing, a lead actor at the Changchun Film Studio, was cast in the role of the principal; his "hale physique" (*tige jianzhuang*) would be convincing for the character's worker background. Character actors Ge Cunzhuang and Chen Ying would play the film's conservative educator antagonists, and Wang Suyu, who had distinguished herself in her performance in the film *Zhanhuo zhong de qingchun* [Youth in the midst of war's flames], was cast as the university's model student. The film was expected to pass easily through official inspection and approval processes. In fact, when a member of the P.L.A. propaganda unit was assigned to oversee the project as the film's party secretary, actor Guo Zhenqing recalled that although the propagandist was technically the director's superior, in practice the propagandist took direction from Li Wenhua.<sup>20</sup> Before beginning production, the script needed to go through revisions; at the bare minimum, the language needed to be updated for the context of 1975. Hu

<sup>18</sup> John F. Cleverley, *In the Lap of Tigers: The Communist Labor University of Jiangxi Province* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. xxiv.

<sup>19</sup> For more on *typage* as a casting practice, particularly in the Soviet Union, see, for example, Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *Movie Acting, the Film Reader* (New York, N.Y.; London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Di, "Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis]," p. 77.

Chunchao and Zhou Jie retitled the project *Juelie*, and in July of 1974 it was one of several feature film projects reviewed by a conference of top culture officials.<sup>21</sup> The conference, the All-China Feature Film Creation and Production Meeting (*Quanguo gushipian chuanguozuo shengchan zuotan hui*), was convened by the Culture Group under the State Council in Beijing. The Chinese film historian Yang Yuanming describes the meeting as taking place within the context of the campaign to Criticize Lin [Biao], Criticize Confucius (*Pi Lin, pi Kong yundong*). At the meeting's conclusion, the Culture Group resolved that films in production needed to strengthen their depiction of line struggle and class struggle, recommendations that prompted every major film studio to modify films they then had in development.<sup>22</sup> The resolutions produced by the meeting prompted a set of prophylactic changes to *Juelie*'s script, but because the Culture Group had not singled out *Juelie* specifically for negative comment, production went ahead. The script was updated to remove historic events placing the narrative within the late 1950s, and the language was updated to reflect the contemporary parlance of the mid-1970s.<sup>23</sup> The protagonist, the brigade leader turned principal Long Guozhen 龙国震, became Long Guozheng 龙国正, changing from one who shocks (*zhen*) the nation (*guo*) to one who represents the righteousness (*zheng*) of the nation (*guo*). By changing Long's first name, the script reflects a desire for the principal to be understood less as a brave rebel and more as the emissary of an upright national

<sup>21</sup> Liu Shu, *Ru ying sui xing: Li Wenhua de dianying shijie [Shaped like a shadow: the film world of Li Wenhua]*, p. 146.

<sup>22</sup> Yuanying Yang, ed., *Bei Ying Ji Shi, Di 1 ban* (Beijing: Zhongguo dian ying chu ban she, 2011), p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> In spite of these changes, throughout revisions, *Juelie* was always set during the Great Leap Forward. It can be difficult to understand why a film set during the Great Leap Forward would remove references to events from the late 1950s and update the language to reflect the concerns of the early 1970s, when the script was written. But think, for example, of the HBO television series *Deadwood*, which is set in the 1870s. *Deadwood*'s showrunners went to great lengths to communicate a convincing sense of the historical period in which the show is set, including through dialogue, and yet the show's distinctive cursing is decidedly historically inaccurate, opting for more contemporaneous swearwords that would sound unmistakably vulgar to modern ears. See Matt Feeny, "Talk Pretty: The Linguistic Brilliance of HBO's *Deadwood*," accessed February 25, 2020, <https://slate.com/culture/2004/05/deadwood-s-linguistic-brilliance.html>.

order. But although Guozhen (“shakes the nation”) may correspond more closely with contemporary (i.e. the present of 2020) understandings of the Cultural Revolution as a period of anti-bureaucratic disruption, the name Guozheng (“righteousness of the nation”) is consistent with contemporary (i.e. the present of the early 1970s) understanding of the period as a re-entrenchment of the state’s revolutionary mandate.

Other characters who were renamed include an antagonist, Deputy Party Secretary Zhao (赵副书记), whose renaming demoted him to Deputy Commissioner Zhao (赵副专员).

Although Deputy Commissioner Zhao does not receive much screen time, he is essential because, as the antagonist Cao Zhonghe’s superior, he enables Cao to enact his conservative agenda at the school as his ally and co-conspirator in party leadership. Where Long Guozheng’s renaming re-enshrined the righteousness of the state’s revolutionary project, Deputy Commissioner Zhao’s renaming minimizes the film’s critique of powerful bad actors within the ranks of party leadership. The heroic peasant student Zheng Saizhen (“competing for pearls”) gets the less feudal-sounding name Li Jinfeng (“golden wind,” perhaps an evocation of the gentle breezes of the countryside and her talent at coaxing golden wheat seedlings from the ground), while the antagonist Cao Zhongping becomes Cao Zhonghe. As a conservative career educator, Cao Zhonghe’s name does not change much (from “mid-evenness” to “mid-peace”), perhaps reflecting the ambivalence with which his character is ultimately portrayed in the film.<sup>24</sup>

By the summer of the following year, Li Wenhua sent a revised draft of the script to its original writer, Hu Chunchao, for comment; Hu gave the draft his blessing. The studio then submitted the script to a committee of high-ranking film officials and culture czars, who

<sup>24</sup> See later in this chapter.

endorsed the project, but outlined several issues that needed to be addressed in further revisions, ultimately recommending that the studio continue its research before moving into production.<sup>25</sup>

The committee's comments were conceptual, and aimed at strengthening the core project of the film. For example, the committee felt the main character, Long Guozheng, had not been developed enough to carry the film. Long lacked a credible sense of interiority, and as a result came off not “elevated (*gao*)” enough, not “typical (*dianxing*)” enough, and without sufficient artistic appeal (*yishu ganranli*). This came through in details as small as Long's leisure reading material (he should read Marxist-Leninist classics, and not the latest in agricultural technology), and as large as the manner in which he resolves conflict (he should do it with collective support, and not on his own). The script hewed too closely to the real-life Jiangxi Communist Labor University, which confined the narrative to specific concerns of the historic university, and not the loftier universal concerns raised by the case of Gongda. And, the script played it safe by only depicting events prior to the start of the Cultural Revolution, and was not set during the Cultural Revolution itself—a serious anachronism for a narrative premised upon a revolutionary project for higher education itself only made possible by the greater project of the Cultural Revolution writ large.

But perhaps the script's biggest issue, according to the committee, was its failure to explain “why establishing a communist labor university was necessary, what plan the communist labor university would follow, and what were its biggest breaks with precedent in education?”<sup>26</sup>

The committee felt the script essentially punted on answering these key questions, and it would

<sup>25</sup> Dianying ju [Film Bureau], “Dui Yingpian Juelie de Yijian [Opinion on the Film Juelie],” in *Zhongguo Dianying Yanjiu Ziliao, 1949-1979* [Collected Research Materials of Chinese Film, 1949-1979], ed. Wu Di, vol. 2 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu Chubanshe, 2006), p. 309.

<sup>26</sup> Gushipian chuangzuo huiyi choubei zu [Preparation group for the feature film creation meeting], “Dui Dianying Wenxue Juben Juelie de Yijian [Opinion on the Script for the Film Juelie],” in *Zhongguo Dianying Yanjiu Ziliao, 1949-1979* [Collected Research Materials of Chinese Film, 1949-1979], ed. Di Wu, vol. 2 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu Chubanshe, n.d.), p. 309.

need to answer them successfully and repeatedly in order for the project to be successful. As it was written, the script failed to communicate why it was important to place proletarian class politics above all else, and it simply emphasized the importance of productive labor over the importance of education. This was an “inversion of priorities,” and one that placed productive labor (*shengchan laodong*) into conflict with education (*xuexi wenhua*). “All work at schools goes toward changing student thought,” the committee emphasized. Education should not be at odds with productive labor, but rather education and production should be unified (*jiehe*.) When the two were joined, “a struggle in political thinking would occur,” turning the labor of both production and education into powerfully transformative experiences.

In spite of the committee’s comments, the Beijing Film Studio had high confidence in the project, and sometime in June of 1975 the studio gave the order to begin production. Production teams were sent to Jiangxi, where they were embedded onto the Ji’an, Lianhua, and Yongxin campuses of Gongda. They were broken into two groups: Li Wenhua led one team, which was charged with researching and revising the script through fieldwork and interviews with staff and students at Gongda, while cast were sent to observe their real-life counterparts. The actor Guo Zhenqing, for example, who had been cast as Long Guozheng, shadowed a principal for several weeks on the Lianhua county campus of Gongda, while Wang Suyu, cast as the peasant student Li Jinfeng, was embedded with Gongda students. Through interactions and observations with the Gongda community, the film’s cast learned to perform the authenticity that would translate into an authoritative portrayal of the school, leveraging the experiences of the less well-known members of the Gongda community into “authentic” performances on screen.

Final revisions to the script were done collaboratively, and involved the input of a group including the director, assistant director, script editor, script supervisor, cinematographer,

production designer, sound editor, party secretary, PLA propaganda supervisor, the heads of relevant film and production bureaus, as well as lead actors.<sup>27</sup> According to actor Ge Cunzhuang, a high-demand character actor who played Sun Ziqing, this collaborative production model for script revisions had been adopted from the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, and revisions on *Juelie* proceeded smoothly; all parties provided their input and in the end, Li Wenhua, as the director, would make the final decision.

According to Li, even after receiving the written opinion of the film bureau, the main revisions to the script were not extensive. “We finished revisions to the script while blocking the scenes (*fenjingtou*), and kept the main outline. We made a few changes during filming, mostly adding in a few lines about ‘capitalist roaders’ (*zou zipai*).”<sup>28</sup> During filming, a campaign to “describe the struggle against capitalist roaders inside the party within the era of socialist revolution” gained momentum, and Yu Huiyong, the Minister of Culture, passed the message onto playwrights and screenwriters, telling them to ensure works included depictions of the duplicitous nature of capitalist roaders.<sup>29</sup> Notes from the ministry and the studio were well-received, according to the film historian Di Di, who interviewed key actors and the director in the early 1990s. “The recommendations didn’t feel contradictory in the slightest to the film’s creators. They largely agreed with them and incorporated suggestions into the script.”<sup>30</sup>

On July 7, the studio approved the crew’s blocking, and the movie went into production.<sup>31</sup> Filming lasted for two months. Cast and crew recall a hot summer with rough conditions on a closely supervised set. “Men and women weren’t supposed to interact with each

<sup>27</sup> Di, “Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis],” p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Di, pp. 77-8.

<sup>29</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 433-4.

<sup>30</sup> Di, “Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis],” p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> Liu Shu, *Ru ying sui xing: Li Wenhua de dianying shijie [Shaped like a shadow: the film world of Li Wenhua]*, p. 147.



other in order to focus on filming, and if you broke the rules someone would report you right away,” recalls Guo Zhenqing. Cast and crew spent long hours on set, and were expected to read alone in their rooms during down time. Outdoor scenes were shot at the Lianhua campus of Gongda, where actor Ge Cunzhuang remembers bringing “our own bedrolls and sleeping twenty to a room in the lecture hall of [campus].”<sup>32</sup>

The film wrapped in early October, and once a final cut had been made, it was sent to the Film Bureau and Ministry Culture for approval (*shencha*). The film passed through inspection easily, and in their written opinion, the bureau wrote that “the main ideological themes (*zhuti sixiang*) are good, the realism is strong, and artistically it is well-made, with many moving scenes filmed outdoors or with close-ups to good effect.” The Ministry of Culture decided to give the film top billing, scheduling the premiere for New Year’s Day 1976.

### **“I’m an educated person now:” The Bourgeois University and Unproductive Social Relations**

*Juelie*’s fictional depiction of a real-life university, the Jiangxi Communist Labor University, presented a critique of the “bourgeois” university through its depiction of an educational institution that integrates productive labor within the university experience. Unlike most other higher education institutions in China at the time, Gongda was registered as both a university and a productive unit, and received no funds from the Ministry of Education. Instead, the university relied on the sale of products from its farms and small factories to fund its operations, primarily bamboo and timber products from logging sites throughout Jiangxi, but also pork, soap, insecticide, printed goods, and medicine.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Di, “Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis],” p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> See Cleverley, *In the Lap of Tigers*, p. 22, 72. The school also manufactured products to facilitate its production, such as tools, explosives for quarrying, and cement. Branches ran shops for mechanical repairs as well as apiaries,

No sequence from the film makes the critique of the bourgeois university more explicit than the new school principal's tour of the country's "famous universities" (*mingpai daxue*). The film's hero, Long Guozheng, is a production brigade leader and veteran of the Long March. When Long is tapped to serve as principal for the new Songshan branch of the Jiangxi Communist Labor University, he wonders aloud why the country's educational system has not been transformed along with the rest of China. "We've been liberated for nine years. Why haven't we transformed (*gai zao guolai*) the bourgeois universities yet?" As head of the newly established Songshan campus of Gongda, this will be precisely his task.<sup>34</sup> When he arrives at the university, Long immediately sets to work changing it, beginning with challenging policies and practices of the bourgeois vice-principal, Cao Zhonghe, and a dean, Sun Ziqing. As career educators, Cao and Sun began teaching during the pre-Communist Republic of China era, and they bring the ways of the "old" society into the new. Sun and Cao believe that the best university would be located close to the city, where the best students can be found, and that admissions should be offered on the basis of entrance exam scores and the possession of a high school diploma. Once at the university, students should learn for the sake of learning (and not for the sake of doing), a privileging of mental labor over manual labor and of expertise over practice. Cao and Sun believe that a university diploma should afford its holder with greater access to a higher-paying job, a view that sees college as a marker of higher class. Above all, this

and sericulture, aquaculture, and cuniculture farms. Some campuses eventually had their own vineyards and distilleries, and apparently a medicinal tonic produced by the university's July 30 Medical Factory campus called "Lingzhi grass" was so popular with party cadres that sale of the medicine became a very profitable venture for the school.

<sup>34</sup> The real-life Gongda consisted of over thirty branch campuses and farms producing a variety of goods described above. See Cleverley, p. 22. By the time the film was made, Gongda had a branch campus and farm in every county of Jiangxi province. The Songshan campus was fictional, although it became so well-known through the film that the fictional Songshan campus has now eclipsed any real Gongda campus in celebrity. See also Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, p. 281.

envisioning of the university is one that emphasizes its social goal of the reproduction of the bourgeoisie itself.

Long Guozheng's mission is to transform the university from bourgeois reproductive stronghold to proletarian productive bulwark. Because he was born to a poor cattle herding family, Long understands better than Cao Zhonghe and Sun Ziqing how education reproduces social inequality, and he fights to implement university policies that allow the youth of the surrounding village community to both obtain an education and to make good use of it upon graduation. Unlike Cao and Sun, Long believes that universities should be located close to the rural communities where they are needed, and that strict entrance criteria prevent poor students without schools in their area from being educated. Curricula should be practical, teaching students the skills they would need to work locally upon graduation, and above all, the purpose of education should be to produce "educated workers with socialist consciousness" (*you wenhua, you shehuizhuyi jiewu de laodongzhe*).

In order to transform the university, first the content it teaches must be transformed. *Juelie* makes clear that certain approaches to teaching are classed, and a curriculum that is not anchored in practice results in a socially destructive education, which the film illustrates through the inclusion of an unnamed peasant university student who attends an unspecified famous university elsewhere in the country. Instead, rather than producing and reproducing an intellectual class, *Juelie* depicts the university as a space where worker-students are socialized, integrating production with education to ensure that the university fulfills its productive socializing potential.

The most prominent example of the university's capacity for the destruction of existing social relations comes when Principal Long is sent on a national tour of famous universities.<sup>35</sup> Although Long's journey through the country is filmed against montages of the country's majestic natural scenery, his time at the universities is a veritable tableau of the horrors of bourgeois education. For example, when Long visits the university library he sees students immersed in their studies, but when he asks what they are reading he learns it is scholarship by famous foreign authorities. When Long inspects a university's wheat fields, a student researcher in the fields casually tosses ripe wheat to the ground, a waste of harvest that pains Long and the humble agricultural worker who is with them.<sup>36</sup>

But perhaps the most horrifying illustration of the bourgeois university's destructive potential comes when Long meets an amiable peasant woman on the train to the university. The two chat happily on the train, and Long learns that she is traveling to visit her son, who is in his third year at the unnamed university. She shows Long a basket full of walnuts, peanuts, dried fruit, and rice cakes, gifts from the villagers of his hometown who ask after him.

When she arrives at the university, the mother goes to visit her son in his dormitory, an exchange that Long witnesses when he passes by the student's dorm room and sees inside the woman he had befriended on the train. The camera takes on Long's perspective as the mother chats with her son: at first, the mother's banter is lighthearted, as she comments on her son's outward changes in appearance. "What's the matter, my child? You're so thin and pale, and you're wearing glasses now," she chuckles. But her son has soured to her, and one by one, he refuses the gifts she has brought. He rejects a handmade jacket as too ugly to wear out, while the

<sup>35</sup> Long is sent on this tour by Associate Director Zhao, who schemes with Cao Zhonghe to send Principal Long away so that Cao can implement his own conservative agenda at the campus.

<sup>36</sup> When the agricultural worker asks the student researcher not to waste so much of the harvest, the student arrogantly tells the worker that the grain is inconsequential in comparison to his dissertation.

cloth shoes she has spent months making are unsophisticated (*tuqi*). He tells his mother that he's a college student now, and she realizes with devastation that the son she raised has changed from the inside out. The camera pans down in a close shot as the mother looks her son up and down: behind thick black-rimmed glasses he has a cross, exasperated expression on his face, and he wears a striped collared shirt with a pen tucked into the front pocket. His smart chino pants are held up with a black leather belt, and black leather oxfords cover his feet—each item distinctly unaffordable to the lower-middle peasant, and the sign of a privileged urban intellectual.

The son's smart clothes serve as physical evidence not just of classism, but as a material manifestation of corrupted social relations. Although his new glasses and shoes have bought him membership within an exclusive new community of elite students, they detach him from the community of the poor mountain village he comes from, and he arrogantly rejects the fruit basket and handmade clothes as unwanted reminders of embarrassing origins. Realizing the severity of the situation, the mother suddenly urges her son to leave the university with her, lest he be lost to her permanently. She reminds him that his dream when he left for college was to come back to his home village and to use his education to improve it. But he now sees his earlier ambitious as naïve to the point of being risible: "How can I go back to that mudhole?" her son exclaims. Things are different now that he has been educated (*"Wo xianzai shi you zhishi de ren"*), and he rushes off to attend a Professor Ouyang's lecture.<sup>37</sup> The camera returns to a neutral point of view as Long enters the dormitory to comfort the desolate mother, who wonders how such a good child could be ruined.

<sup>37</sup> Professor Ouyang merits only one reference in the film, but the choice of family name is telling, given the surname's historical association with prominent scholars, as well as the suggestion that Professor Ouyang was born into his professorship. For more on social mobility in China across historical periods, especially as tracked through correlation between occupation and surname, see Yu Hao, Chapter 1, "Social Mobility in China, 1645-2012: A Surname Study," in "Social Mobility Under Three Regimes, China, 1645-2012" (PhD Dissertation, UC Davis, 2013), pp. 1-58.

Through the peasant woman's eyes, Long witnesses her son's transformation from poor country boy to slick and arrogant college student. The transformation illustrates the destructive potential of education conceived as a generator of class distinction. Although the village boy achieves social mobility, moving from the lower-middle peasant class (*pinxia zhongnong*) into the educated, urban upper class, he removed from the generative social relations of his birth. By embracing a bourgeois identity, he no longer wishes to return to his home village, thus removing himself from his village's productive social relations. The knowledge he has attained has changed him as much as attending university has, revealing the problematic equation of knowledge with class standing. The village boy turned college student illustrates the perils of education for education's sake, a fundamentally destructive pursuit that prevents the production of a new socialist subjectivities, that of the educated peasant.



*Figure 4-2 Close up of college student's clothing, still from "Juelie."*

### **A Model of Socialist Consciousness: Li Jinfeng**

By contrast, the film's heroine, Li Jinfeng, demonstrates what it means to be an educated worker with socialist consciousness. First introduced during the enrollment scene as a team

leader, model worker, and gifted grower of rice seedlings, Li is nominated by her work team to apply to the Songshan campus of Gongda. She is so well-liked that the class representative is moved to speak on her behalf, telling of her hardship, poverty, and bravery before 1949. Principal Long asks Li if she can read and write, and Li explains to him that although she never had the chance to attend school, she took night courses after 1949, where she learned to read and write. Long asks her to demonstrate, and she writes a sentence—“Chairman Mao is our great liberator”—but not before her daughter runs up through the crowd and playfully tugs on her mother’s skirt. Stunned speechless by Li’s ability to write in neat calligraphy, as well as her sterling choice of sentence, Long admits Li to the college on the spot.

The qualifications and illiteracy of the peasantry were a huge point of anxiety for supporters of mass education, and Li Wenhua’s direction of Li Jinfeng’s admission scene cinematically underscores her dignity and heroism in a rebuke of these concerns. When Li is first introduced on camera, a group of villagers bring her to the front of the room, presenting her to Principal Long and the village representative (*lao daibiao*) for admission. As the village introduces Li to Principal Long, narrating her suffering as a poor peasant woman prior to Liberation, the camera moves in for a close-up of her face: she gazes resolutely yet demurely off-camera to a sublime horizon beyond the screen in what Stephanie Donald has described as “the socialist realist gaze.”<sup>38</sup> The scene is blocked around Li Jinfeng’s centrality and filmed with frontal staging, artistic decisions Li Wenhua described in an article for the *Guangming ribao*. When Li Jinfeng’s beautifully written sentence is revealed to the audience, the revelation of her words is paired with the climax of the scene’s orchestral score.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See Stephanie Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 59-67.

<sup>39</sup> Li Wenhua, “Gan Ka Ding Feng Chuan [Dare to Sail into the Wind],” *Guangming ribao*, February 15, 1976.

By writing in beautiful calligraphy, Li Jinfeng dispels the hypothetical audience's concern that she is not sufficiently educated or literate to attend university. Her beautiful calligraphy and political devotion prove to Long that she exceeds the minimum standard for admission, making an equivalence of literacy with formal education that echoes earlier dialogue in which characters use the term "wenhua," typically translated as "culture," to mean "educated."<sup>40</sup> In fact, the university's admission of poor and informally educated folk was, at the time, the most controversial scene from the film. A collectively authored piece by the film's crew in 1976 described how Long Guozheng's assertion that callouses on the hands of villagers were credentials enough to be admitted made some of them uneasy, which was a problem of "sentiment (*ganqing wenti*)" and a "question of class line in running schools" (*banxue de jieji luxian wenti*).<sup>41</sup> The scene attempts to defend the poor, rural student's right to attend the university, going to great lengths to establish Li Jinfeng's dignity and worthiness even as she remains conventionally qualified by virtue of her literacy-as-education.

But it is Li Jinfeng's status as a mother that characters in the film find most challenging to her identity as a college student. Sun Ziqing is alarmed when Long admits Li to the university, and asks in a derogatory tone whether she intends to bring her daughter to college with her, a clear violation of Sun's concept of who a student should be (i.e., young, unmarried, and childless). Li responds that she will leave her daughter with her mother-in-law while she is at university, and her daughter remains off screen for the majority of the film. But crucially, her

<sup>40</sup> Earlier in the scene, Sun Ziqing rejects Jiang Danian's application on account of his lack of formal education, which Sun describes as "wenhua tai di." Although "wenhua" is commonly translated as "culture," Sun is not accusing Jiang of being uncultured so much as uneducated, a usage that continues to the present.

<sup>41</sup> Beijing dianying zhipian chang "Juelie" shezhi zu dangzhibu [Party branch production unit of "Juelie" at Beijing Film Factory], "Tong Xiuzheng Zhuyi Luxian Duizhao Gao: Paishe Caise Gushipian 'Juelie' de Yixie Tihui [Going against the Revisionist Line: A Few Experiences from the Filming of the Color Feature Film 'Juelie']," *Renmin ribao*, February 21, 1976. Indeed, as I discuss later in this chapter, this scene remained controversial even after the end of the Cultural Revolution.



daughter re-appears near the end of the film, when Li is criticized at a commune-wide meeting for skipping an exam to save the university's crops from infestation.

It is no coincidence that Li Jinfeng, a mother, is the story's heroine. In contrast to the third-year student from the famous university, Li expands and redefines the social identity of the student even as she gains a college education, her motherhood recognized by the audience as she pursues actions in the interests of her community. When she decides to skip final exams to save the school's crops, it is her socialist consciousness that compels her to act. Li and the fellow students who skipped exams with her are expelled for "flunking" their final exams, and as news of Li's act of loyal disobedience spreads, it becomes a focal point for discussing the legitimacy of the university and Long's methods as a whole. The meeting to criticize Li's actions serves as the dramatic confrontation of the film, and Li is ultimately vindicated by a letter from Chairman Mao himself, a filmic representation of a real-life letter Mao wrote in July 1961 in which he praised Gongda as a model university.<sup>42</sup> At this point, Li's daughter re-appears, handed back to Li as a crowd gathers around to celebrate her success.

The socialist consciousness that Li Jinfeng exhibits, valuing crops over exams, allows her to act as the catalyst that transforms the spiritual heart of the university, signifying its transition from a contested battleground of the two-line struggle to a wholly proletarian institution. Significantly, as the central model of an educated worker with a socialist consciousness, Li is explicitly reproduced in the form of her daughter. The inclusion of Li's daughter serves multiple ends, asserting that motherhood and education are not incompatible, and embodying Li's biological reproduction in the figure of her young daughter. But ironically, by keeping Li's

<sup>42</sup> Mao wrote a letter on July 1961 in support of Gongda. A series of educational reforms earlier that year had weakened Gongda's future, and as enrollments dwindled, university leadership sought backing from high-level leaders. The full text of the letter was published widely in national press in late July 1977, a decision John Cleverly attributes to then party chairman Hua Guofeng. See Cleverly, *In the Lap of Tigers*, pp. 117-9.

daughter largely off screen and not including the daughter's father in the film, the reproductive labor of bearing and rearing children itself also happens off screen and outside the school.

## **Conservative and Radical Agendas in the P.R.C.'s Rural Education System: An Institutional History**

In 1949, when the C.C.P.'s Ministry of Education set to their task of running the country's schooling system, it was informed by more than two decades of experience running schools for the C.C.P. in the Jiangxi Soviet and Yan'an. In Yan'an, the American reporter Edgar Snow had observed three basic educational systems in place: institutional, military, and social. The Yan'an educational program was designed to apply Marxist principles to educational reform by creating an adaptive schooling system that was sensitive to specific manpower needs. The first institutional system was "more or less run by the soviets," and consisted of elementary school training for children, plus training courses for the teachers and cadres who taught the children. The military system replicated the general education system but was run for soldiers by the army, and the third system consisted of literacy training and social programming for adults run by Communist social organizations.<sup>43</sup> The educational system at Yan'an, in turn, was informed by experiences educating rural Jiangxi communities during the brief tenure of the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s. In Jiangxi, the C.C.P. and Kuomintang competed for rural support. Rural reconstruction programs in Kuomintang-controlled areas initiated by such figures as Y.C. James Yen focused on mass literacy as the first component of a holistic program that understood illiteracy, poverty, disease, and civic disengagement as interlocking problems. Yen's method led to dramatic results in Hebei Province's Ding County, where illiteracy was

<sup>43</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), pp. 235-6; also Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, p. 129.

eliminated three years after the start of his experimental development project, but without ambitions to systemically transform the position of the rural peasant, C.C.P.-led alternatives attracted strong support.<sup>44</sup> A directive issued by Mao on September 15, 1933 constituted the first clear educational policy for the Jiangxi Soviet, stipulating that a system of universal mass education must be created for children alongside anti-illiteracy programs for adults. A year later, a 1934 report to the Second National Soviet Congress claimed over three thousand “Lenin primary schools” and over six thousand night schools had been established in the province.<sup>45</sup>

Early communist approaches to education were shaped by repeated calls for universal education in the previous decades. Throughout the Republican period, modernizing educators such as Tao Xingzhi championed interest in popular (*pingmin*) education.<sup>46</sup> Increasingly, education came to be seen as a universal right that should be accessible to all, and not a distinction afforded only to the wealthiest.<sup>47</sup> Mao’s famous 1927 report on an investigation of five counties in Hunan was a landmark document reflecting CCP embrace of mass education as a key political cause, and laid a framework for approaching education as part of an ambitious orientation around rural, rather than urban, concerns. In it, Mao argued that mass education could only develop after the landlords and other power-holding classes were overthrown: “In China, education has always been the exclusive preserve of the landlords, and the peasants have had no access to it,” wrote Mao.<sup>48</sup> The ruling classes weaponized educational achievement as a means of

<sup>44</sup> Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, p. 118-9.

<sup>45</sup> Pepper, pp. 123-4.

<sup>46</sup> See Yusheng Yao, “National Salvation through Education: Tao Xingzhi’s Educational Radicalism” (PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> For histories of perceptions of education as a right versus commodity in the American context, see Alex Molnar, *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*, (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Kenneth J. Saltman, *The Edison Schools: Corporate Schooling and the Assault on Public Education*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “Report on Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 23–59.

oppressing the poor, resulting in classed forms of learning and the corresponding institutions that disseminated them. Revolution was thus a prerequisite for the education of the proletariat, and true mass education could only develop after the landlords and other power-holding classes were overthrown.

But where Mao, in 1927, theorized a direct and irrevocable relationship between the oppression of the peasantry through elite control of private education, by the time of the September 15, 1933, directive on education policy in the Jiangxi Soviet, the C.C.P. was willing to work with loyal intellectuals to achieve its goals in spite of their belonging to the power-holding classes. “Bourgeois intellectuals and experts who are enthusiastic in wanting to serve the Soviet must also be used to participate in education work,” wrote Mao, and any intellectual working as a teacher or in “any other nonexploiting occupation” was classified as performing mental labor for the Soviet and thus afforded its legal protections.<sup>49</sup> Suzanne Pepper identifies this as a key “paradox” of the CCP’s approach to education: “The land and valuables of the [propertied elite] could be divided up and redistributed to the poor, as was done during land reform. Intellectual resources, however, could not be separated from their owners in quite the same way.”<sup>50</sup>

When the new state arrived in 1949, these contradictions were inherited by the new Ministry of Education, which now set about its task on a nationwide scale. The ministry had inherited a system of higher education that had been diminished by over a decade of warfare, with many college and universities displaced into the country’s interior due to Japanese invasion. And the number of college graduates in the country was miniscule: an estimated one hundred

<sup>49</sup> Mao Zedong, “Guanyu Jiaoyu Gongzuo [Directive on Education Work],” in *Mao Zedong Ji [Collected Works of Mao Zedong]*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), 29–31.

<sup>50</sup> Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, p. 124.

and fifty thousand students were enrolled from 1947 to 1948, representing a sliver of a fraction of the country's total population.<sup>51</sup>

On the one hand, the Ministry was expected to train the expert personnel necessary to modernize the nation, while at the same time to broaden the reach of its mass education. Jonathan Unger characterizes this as the push and pull between a “conservative” and “radical” agenda in education, respectively, with the pendulum swinging decisively toward the “conservative” agenda at the start of the 1950s.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, the state's first five year plan (1953-1957) emphasized developing the expertise necessary to fulfill the plan's larger production and growth targets over mass education, a point Zhang Xiruo, appointed Minister of Education in 1953, made explicit in a directive explaining that mass education would take the backseat to training personnel for economic growth.<sup>53</sup>

The consequences of the “conservative” approach to education can be traced through policy and into culture, and back again. In accordance with the educational goals of the first five-year plan, several comprehensive universities were consolidated and converted into technical institutions, such as Tsinghua, which was re-organized into a polytechnic industrial university.<sup>54</sup> In order to better identify students who would excel in university and in the technical positions that required higher education, a national examination system was implemented in 1952.<sup>55</sup> Prior

<sup>51</sup> According to S.Y. Chiu, there were fifty-five universities and colleges with an enrollment of around 148,000 from 1947-1948. This equates to less than three-hundredths of a percent of the country's total population of around 541 million. S.Y. Chiu, “Public Education,” in *The Year Book of Education, 1949*, ed. George B. Jeffrey (London: Evans, 1949).

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Unger, *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980*, Studies of the East Asian Institute (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 48. Joel Andreas also identifies a similar swing in his study of Tsinghua University during the socialist period; see Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*, Contemporary Issues in Asia and the Pacific (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Zhang Xiruo, “Muqian Guomin Jiaoyu Fangmian de Qingkuang He Wenti [The Present Situation and Problems in National Education],” *Renmin ribao*, June 21, 1956.

<sup>54</sup> For more details on Tsinghua in the early 1950s, see Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, pp. 42-4.

<sup>55</sup> While I do not wish to discount the voluminous scholarship on the long historical roots of exam culture in China, neither do I wish to construct a continuous socio-political history of the exam system from imperial times to the

to 1952, many universities administered their own entrance exams, but by 1952 this process was centralized and standardized.

The class of 1953 was thus the first selected through the national examination system, an admissions process underpinned by the meritocratic belief that the brightest students could be identified through performance on exams. Yet as Joel Andreas demonstrates, during the period the national examination system was in place (1952 to 1965), students from only a small number of educated families made up the majority of students accepted into college.<sup>56</sup> At Tsinghua University alone, the 1953 class comprised a disappointing 14 percent of students from working-class or peasant families, far from conclusive proof that the exam was an effective means of guaranteeing equal access to college. Andreas concludes that “as long as admission was regulated by examinations, most students who tested in Tsinghua and other top universities were from the old elite classes.”<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the inequitable distribution of educational resources did not begin at the college level, nor was it necessarily entirely a product of an impassioned conviction in the superiority of meritocratic education policies. At the primary and secondary school levels, an acute scarcity of schools themselves created competition over entry, even in the comparatively wealthier urban areas where there were more schools. When the P.R.C. was founded, peace-time

present. As this chapter demonstrates, this culture went through significant ruptures, disruptions, and contestations at various points, no more so than during the socialist period. For further reading on exams in imperial and modern China, see Deng Siyu, *Zhongguo Kaoshi Zhidu Shi [History of Chinese Exam Institutions]* (Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1967); Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Benjamin A. Elman, Alexander Woodside, and Joint Committee on Chinese Studies (U.S.), eds., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, Studies on China 19 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Thomas D. Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China: The Failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation = [Minguo Shi Dai de Jiao Yu Gai Ge: Jiao Yu Jia Chuang Zao Xian Dai Min Zu de Shi Bai]*, Chinese Studies, v. 40 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005); Ye Liu, *Higher Education, Meritocracy and Inequality in China* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2016); Iona Man-Cheong, *The Class of 1761: Examinations, State, and Elites in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, pp. 61-86.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas, p. 43.

conditions after more than a decade of war resulted in a population boom over the course of the following decade. The population boom of the 1950s resulted in a surplus of potential students and a shortage of schools. By the early 1960s, students at all levels of education faced intense competition to attend the existing schools.

Stop-gap measures implemented to address the shortage of schools included the establishment of private schools (*minban*), set up in make-shift classrooms to absorb some of the overflow.<sup>58</sup> But most schools simply became more selective, and began to specialize in enrolling certain types of students. Schools targeted different student profiles by adjusting the amount different admission criteria were weighted. In secondary schools, admission typically depended on a student's record of academic performance (*chengji*), class origins (*chengfen*), and political performance (*zhengzhi biaoqian*). But the best secondary schools (key-point schools, *zhongdian xuexiao*), seeking to enroll an academically distinguished student body that would go on to attend college and work in white-collar jobs, weighted grades more heavily than class origins or political performance. Hence, their students came from educated families living in urban areas. Other schools specialized in attracting students with poorer grades but from politically powerful families ("aristocratic," *guizu*). As a result, the high school system channeled students from different backgrounds into different schools, resulting in "different 'classes' of youths... [being] concentrated at secondary schools of different qualities."<sup>59</sup>

The lack of schools was even more pronounced in the countryside, where there were fewer schools than in the cities. Because cities already possessed a more developed educational

<sup>58</sup> See Unger, *Education under Mao*, p. 17 for more details about *minban* schools. Although *minban* schools were meant to redress the shortage of schools, poorer families and families with more children were less equipped to send their children to *minban* schools, which charged higher tuition. *Minban* schools were only a solution for wealthier urban families.

<sup>59</sup> Unger, pp. 26-8.

infrastructure, it was easier for the Ministry of Education to invest its resources in urban areas. Additional support to urban schools could fund the expansion of the existing school systems, which still could not keep pace with growth in the number of eligible students. But in the countryside, these schools simply did not exist. Greater upfront investment was needed to build new schools than to expand the capacity of existing ones. By funding urban education at a higher rate than rural education, the Ministry of Education essentially funded an urban/rural disparity that became increasingly pronounced through the 1950s and 1960s, as rural students were increasingly excluded from the educational system.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the figure of the student indexed a host of complex issues, from class, family background, and political engagement to urban/rural disparity. By the mid-1960s, the consequences of the new educational system were apparent, chief among them the extent to which education played a determining role in reproducing and exacerbating class differentiation. Because class was encoded within an official categorization system, students were increasingly aware of the extent to which their background defined their opportunities and interests. Jonathan Unger argues that by 1966, four distinct groups of students were apparent: “cadres’ children, the worker-peasant children, the middle-class children, and the bad-class background children.”<sup>61</sup> Haiyan Lee goes so far as to present the problematic argument that class was so dominant as an identifying category that it was effectively “racialized to serve as a principle of exclusion and closure in Mao’s China.” By conflating class conflict with racism, Lee’s argument that class struggle constituted the most “virulent form of ‘class racism’”

<sup>60</sup> Up through the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, there were various initiatives at local and provincial level to require primary education, further increasing the strain on the rural education system. However, universal compulsory education was not enacted until April 1986 with the adoption of the “Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo yiwu jiaoyu fa [Compulsory Education Law of the P.R.C.]. See Lu Wang and Keith Lewin, *Two Decades of Basic Education in Rural China: Transitions and Challenges for Development*, 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Unger, *Education under Mao*, p. 109.



highlights the dominance of class within the revolutionary episteme, but erases the importance of race itself as a site of inequity and othering within the P.R.C.<sup>62</sup>

Students were among the first to heed Mao's call to arms in the opening months of the Cultural Revolution, and conventional histories of the period include university-based events such as the formation of the Red Guards at Tsinghua University, and Nie Yuanzi's big character poster at Peking University as definitive moments in the opening salvos of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>63</sup> Responding to an educational system that seemed deeply inequitable, dysfunctional, and resistant to reform, big character posters articulated the injustices of the school and of the body politic. It was not uncommon for the student body at a single school to split into opposed groups, each claiming loyalty to Mao. This phenomenon is usually glossed as "factionalism," a term that trivializes the larger systemic social critique of student activists in favor of viewing their activism as a matter of petty self-interest.

Student activism during the Cultural Revolution also enacted a politics that exceeded the established order of the socialist state, disrupting the boundaries that had hitherto defined the role of the student. Mao's reputation as an educational reformer lent credibility to his calls for cultural revolution, making the school a central national stage upon which the Cultural Revolution was waged. But students also formed alliances that traversed the boundaries of social organizations such as the school and the *danwei* (work unit), with some student groups forming broader coalitions with factory workers, demobilized soldiers, and personnel in urban

<sup>62</sup> See Haiyan Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), but especially Chapter 5, "The Enemy Within," pp. 197-242.

<sup>63</sup> Representative histories of the Cultural Revolution that include campus organizing as significant early episodes include MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*; Jiaqi Yan, Kao Kao, and D. W. Y. Kwok, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, SHAPS Library of Translations (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996); Richard Curt Kraus, *The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

administrative organs.<sup>64</sup> Incredibly, this was accomplished even while most students continued to attend school: in fact, schools largely did not disperse for the entirety of the Cultural Revolution, and many students remained at school during the worst years of combat.

## **The Cultural Revolution on Screen**

*Juelie*'s depiction of the Cultural Revolution was no accident. By design, the film was intended not only to historicize the Cultural Revolution by depicting it for the cinema, but also to provide a narrative that would justify the Cultural Revolution, as well as respond to criticisms of it. When a high-level committee charged with developing feature films reviewed a draft of *Juelie* in July of 1975, one of their main criticisms was over the depiction of the Cultural Revolution. Because the film was set in the late 1950s during the Great Leap Forward, they complained that "the script only addresses events prior to the Cultural Revolution."<sup>65</sup> The limited historical purview of the film raised glaring continuity issues, namely that "from 1958 to 1961, Liu Shaoqi's 'revisionist line' dominated education policy," and revisionist educators were "restrictive and utterly opposed to Chairman Mao's advice on the revolution in education."<sup>66</sup> Thus, there would have been no person like Deputy Secretary Tang in a position of leadership at the time, making his character a conspicuous anachronism.

Instead, it would take a pervasive cultural revolution to change minds and change policies. That cultural revolution, in turn, could only be initiated by a vision of the epochal leader: a Mao Zedong, not any ordinary deputy secretary. Furthermore, because Deputy Secretary Tang acts of his own accord in establishing the Songshan campus, and in appointing

<sup>64</sup> See Unger, *Education under Mao*, p. 130; also Chapter 4, "Revolutionary Alchemy: Economism and the Making of Shanghai's January Revolution," in Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> Dianying ju [Film Bureau], "Dui Yingpian *Juelie* de Yijian [Opinion on the Film *Juelie*]."

<sup>66</sup> Dianying ju [Film Bureau].

Long as principal, the script as it was written gave the impression that one determined individual would be enough to reverse the tide of history. “But Gongda is absolutely not the sort of thing that one person can determine, and [Tang] wasn’t the only person who supported it,” wrote the committee. Instead, establishing a radical university required support from a coalition of leaders and the masses. Depicting the progressive legacy in the hands of just one individual left the film open to the revisionist criticism that leftist radicals had hijacked the schools for their own purposes.

Instead, the legitimacy of the Maoist education agenda needed to be unassailable, and that historical legitimacy that could only be delivered by the events of the Cultural Revolution itself. “As the bureau leadership have pointed out..., if you want to write about the period after the Cultural Revolution but only depict events before the Cultural Revolution, you’ll create problems that are difficult to resolve,” cautioned the committee. Depicting the Cultural Revolution was therefore a necessity both for historical continuity as well as the immediacy of its moral claim. Depicting the Cultural Revolution on screen was therefore non-negotiable: “If you don’t write about the Cultural Revolution, then don’t make your film.”<sup>67</sup>

*Juelie* was thus explicitly intended to stage the Cultural Revolution on screen, and many moments from the film depicted historical events of the Cultural Revolution in order to make that clear. For example, when the student Jiang Danian storms out of the classroom because his teacher refuses to hear his comments on the course’s content, Jiang amplifies his critique by posting *dazibao* all over the Songshan campus. By posting *dazibao*, Jiang not only draws parallels between himself and other students made famous for posting *dazibao* during the Cultural Revolution, but also utilizes an expressive medium closely associated with the Cultural

<sup>67</sup> Dianying ju [Film Bureau].

Revolution.<sup>68</sup> Later, the film reaches its narrative resolution when a letter from Chairman Mao arrives at the university. Addressed to the entire university, Mao's letter overturns the decision of the college's conservative Party Committee to shut down the Songshan campus after an episode of student activism, and a portion of a letter Mao sent to the real-life Gongda is read on camera: "Comrades, I am in full agreement with what you've done."<sup>69</sup> The film drew so closely from real-life that community members complained the actor Long Guozheng bore a striking similarity to the president of the Chaoyang Agricultural University, with whom Long had spent time in preparation for his role.<sup>70</sup>

## Red Exams

But the most explicit staging of the Cultural Revolution within *Juelie* is the film's central conflict over Li Jinfeng's decision to skip a final exam. By choosing to save the university's crops from infestation instead of sitting for a final exam, Li submits a "blank exam" (*baijuan*), and "grading" that blank exam pits the university's revolutionaries against its revisionists. Instead of commending the students for their dedication to the crops and offering them the chance to make-up the exam, Vice Principal Cao conspires to expel Li and fourteen of her classmates, mostly of peasant origins including Jiang Danian and Xu Niuzai. When Principal Long Guozheng, who was away on a tour of Chinese universities, learns of Vice Principal Cao's

<sup>68</sup> For an account of the close association of *dazibao* with the Cultural Revolution, see Sheng Hua, "Big Character Posters in China: A Historical Survey," *Law Journal Library* 4, no. 2 (1990): 234–56. See also For recent work on *dazibao*, see Chapter Four, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Wall Posters," in Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 73-96 .

<sup>69</sup> For Mao's full letter to Gongda, see Zedong Mao, "Letter to Comrades: Communist Labor University of Jiangxi Province, July 30, 1961," *Peking Review*, August 12, 1977, pp. 3-4. According to John Cleverly, during the production of *Juelie* Zhang Chunqiao and Chi Qin disagreed over the extent to which Mao's letter should appear in the film, and Mao himself was reportedly upset when he saw how little of his letter ended up being quoted in the film. See Cleverley, *In the Lap of Tigers*, p. 176.

<sup>70</sup> Cleverley, *In the Lap of Tigers*, p. 180.

actions upon his return, he defends the students vigorously in a heated meeting with Cao: “These blank exams show us a lot (*hen shuoming wenti*). They show high political consciousness, and deep class feelings.” Although nothing had been written on them, the blank test papers “represented the students’ sweat, and the many tons of grain they saved for the peasants. What they did was good and right.”<sup>71</sup> Long is filmed sympathetically, and the audience is cued to agree with him, but ultimately he is unable to convince the obstinate Cao, and the matter escalates.

When *Juelie* was released, the drama over Li Jinfeng and her “blank exam” stood out as a key highlight of the film. Several newspaper articles were published in praise of Li’s blank exam, dissecting the positive lessons behind the scene. An article by Cheng Zhiwei, a high-ranking cadre in the arts and culture wing of the propaganda bureau, described Li’s blank exam as “a powerful critique of the revisionist line in education” that Li “dares to submit to the bourgeoisie with the full support of the lower-middle peasants.”<sup>72</sup> Another writer, Zuo Hong, compared Li Jinfeng’s “blank exam” (*baijuan*, where *bai* can mean white but also blank or empty) to a “red exam” (*hongjuan*), arguing that Li Jinfeng’s “white” exam was actually full of “red” feeling.<sup>73</sup> “Did [Li Jinfeng and the other students] skip their exam? No, they sat for a very unusual (*ji bu chang*) exam. Their exam wasn’t in the classroom, but rather in the vastness of the countryside; their ‘examiner’ (*kaoguan*) was not an expert professor (*zhuanjia jiaoshou*), but rather the lower-middle peasants; what they submitted was not a ‘white exam’ but rather an extremely commendable ‘red exam.’”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Chun and Zhou, “Juelie,” pp. 72-4.

<sup>72</sup> Zhiwei Cheng, “Zhe Zhang Baijuan Jiao de Hao [You Did Right by Turning in This Blank Exam],” *Renmin ribao*, January 18, 1976.

<sup>73</sup> “White” functions here on multiple levels. Not only is “white” sometimes used to modify nouns and verbs to indicate emptiness, or an action undertaken with no results and performed in vain, during the socialist period “white” was also frequently used in contrast to red as a label for bourgeois professionals, such as “white experts.”

<sup>74</sup> Hong Zuo, “‘Baijuan’ Yu ‘Hongjuan’ [‘White Exams’ and ‘Red Exams’],” *Guangming ribao*, January 7, 1976.

In some respects, the film's decision to describe a group of students skipping a final exam as an submitting a "blank exam" is unusual, since no exam was taken and no exam papers submitted. But using the term "blank exam" was a deliberate choice meant to draw comparisons between the fictional students of Gongda and the real life "hero of the blank exam" (*baijuan yingxiong*), Zhang Tiesheng. Zhang Tiesheng rose to fame in the summer of 1973 for submitting an empty answer sheet during county college entrance exams. Six years earlier, he had been sent to the Liaoning countryside to work as a member of the Baita commune. When he was given the chance to sit for college entrance exams, he found he could not answer the questions, and submitted a blank answer sheet with an explanation on the backside. Even though he couldn't pass the test, he asked that he still be considered for admission: "I do eighteen hours of heavy labor every day, and there's no time to study," he wrote. "To be frank, I'm not terribly inclined to accept those bookworms who've never worked, and live leisurely, unprincipled lives. They truly disgust me, and this test is unwittingly complicit in giving them a monopoly over college."<sup>75</sup> Zhang's exam caught the attention of officials in Liaoning, including Mao Yuanxin,<sup>76</sup> then party secretary of Liaoning Province, and it was published first in the *Liaoning ribao*, and then in the national press, turning Zhang into a celebrity.

Zhang's blank exam reflected a moment of deep suspicion toward entrance exams and admission criteria to high school and college. With entrance exam requirements increasingly seen in the public eye as an impediment to mass education, Zhang's act of principled dissent crystalized the flaws with the system: that a promising and intelligent child could devote his youth to the socialist cause in the countryside, and be denied an education because of it. With his

<sup>75</sup> Tiesheng Zhang, "Yi Fen Fa Ren Shensheng de Dajuan [A Thought-Provoking Answer Sheet]," *Renmin ribao*, August 10, 1973.

<sup>76</sup> Also the nephew of Mao Zedong.

failing exam elevated to a critique of the entire educational system, his rebellion was celebrated high and low; even Jiang Qing commended him as “a hero who goes against the tide” (*fan chaoliu yingxiong*). To be certain, Li Jinfeng’s “blank exam” improves upon Zhang Tiesheng’s: whereas Zhang hadn’t studied and wasn’t capable of passing his exam, Li makes the active choice not to sit for her exam, a narrative gloss that neatly side-steps the question of whether or not the rural student is able to do well on an exam.

But Zhang was not alone in going against the tide. In 1973 and 1974, Zhang was one of at least three prominent heroes who “went against the tide.”<sup>77</sup> A few months after Zhang’s famous exam, the diary of a twelve-year old primary school student living in Beijing, Huang Shuai, was published in the *Renmin ribao*, in which Huang criticized the authoritarian tendencies of her teacher (the diary was completed as a homework assignment, and Huang could have expected that it would have been read by others.) Then, a year later, when a Nanjing University student named Zhong Zhimin wrote a letter requesting an assignment in the countryside, it was also published on the front page of the *People’s Daily*. The son of a Long March veteran, Zhong had been admitted to college through his family’s connections; he preferred to withdraw from university rather than stay in school through the “back-door” (*zou hou men*).

On screen, Li Jinfeng is not the only student who dares to go “against the tide.” In the film’s final act, she is joined by Cao Xiaomei, the daughter of the villainous Cao Zhonghe, in denouncing the corruption of the educational establishment. Through a narrative with clear parallels to the story of Zhong Zhimin, Cao Zhonghe arranges for his daughter to leave Gongda and attend a prestigious university outside the area; he justifies using the “back door” by saying the country owes him a few favors after years of dedicated service. But at the end of Li’s

<sup>77</sup> Each of these heroes spawned numerous copycats, but according to Jonathan Unger the original three were Zhang Tiesheng, Huang Shuai, and Zhong Zhimin.

struggle session, Xiaomei storms the stage and reveals her father's actions to the crowd. Refusing her father's offer, Xiaomei declares to the audience that she will stay on at Gongda, where she can follow Mao's exhortation to make revolution in the countryside. As the audience cheers her decision, an elderly man and woman in the front row embrace Xiaomei while telling her that she has the support of the lower-middle peasants, and Xiaomei completes her transformation from the innocent, politically uninitiated daughter of a disloyal intellectual removed from the community, into an active, mature, and enlightened political subject fully socialized within her community. Cao Xiaomei and Li Jinfeng thus go against the tide from opposite directions, and in spite of their diametrically opposed backgrounds, they arrive on the same red path.

The historian Suzanne Pepper understands the publicity around Zhang Tiesheng, Huang Shuai, and Zhong Zhimin as components of a larger "going against campaign" which sought to "[institutionalize], for post-mobilization use in all sectors, the original 1966 rallying cry: '[to rebel] is justified.'"<sup>78</sup> In the aftermath of the worst violence of the Cultural Revolution, Pepper understands the public celebration of student activism as a staging of student agency within contained settings, and Jonathan Unger echoes Pepper's understanding of the campaign as an attempt to stir up an activist student body within controllable limits.<sup>79</sup> Neither Zhang's exam, Huang's diary, nor Zhong's letter had been written for the front page of a national newspaper, but these documents were thrust into the spotlight as an indictment of an entire system. The authors themselves were positioned as the solution: by expanding the category of the "student" to include political actors on the larger social stage, the young students offered a corrective to systemic injustice through their dissent. In the winter of 1974, a flurry of big character posters

<sup>78</sup> Pepper, *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China*, p. 469.

<sup>79</sup> Unger, *Education under Mao*, p. 179.



posted by students further amplified the anti-equality tendencies of education's elders, particularly teachers.<sup>80</sup>

By the mid-1970s, the student had become a dominant figure in the cultural imaginary of China. At exactly the same time *Juelie* was being revised for production, newspapers were filled with countless stories of the heroic deeds of students, and the student loomed large as a symbol of social inequity and the promise of social resolution. Benefitting from the conviction and moral clarity of youth, the student was simultaneously powerless as well as infinite; a perfect mass subject. By interweaving cinematic narrative with historical texts, *Juelie* sought to stage the politics and social imaginary of the Cultural Revolution on screen, and at the university.

### **Good Students and Poisonous Weeds**

Yet precisely which act constituted the Cultural Revolution on screen? Was it Mao's letter? The posting of *dazibao*? Li Jinfeng's blank exam? Cao Xiaomei's refusal of her father's back-door entrance to college? Intriguingly, although all of these historical incidents occurred during the Cultural Revolution, none of them constituted the Cultural Revolution depicted on screen. Production documents from other mid-1970s films, such as *Chunmiao*, reveal that studios and high-level cultural cadres placed a high premium on depicting the Cultural Revolution on screen, and paid close attention to the manner in which it was depicted.<sup>81</sup> For example, Li Jinfeng's decision to save the crops is the central dramatic conflict of *Juelie's* second half, but that act is ultimately not the event that threatens the future of the school. Rather, after Li Jinfeng is expelled, the district work team arrives at the community. The work team is helmed by corrupt bureaucrats devoted to the restoration of the pre-Liberation status quo, Secretary Qian and his

<sup>80</sup> For a description of the winter 1974 big character posters on school campuses, see Unger, pp. 182-7.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for more analysis.

superior, Deputy Commissioner Chao. At a public meeting, the work team announces a new policy, the “Three Selves and One Guarantee” policy, in which communal property will be returned to private hands, private plots increased in size, and greater free market small business allowed. On top of that, anyone who produces over a new production quota will be allowed to keep the surplus for themselves.

The title of the policy signals to the viewer that it is regressive, especially in its emphasis on multiple guarantees due to the individual self as opposed to the collective good. The policy attacks the integrity of the commune as an organizing unit of labor, effectively reversing the advancements of the people’s commune. Li Jinfeng is present at the meeting, and she stands up immediately to oppose this new policy. Frontally framed by the camera with the seated audience behind her, she tells Deputy Chao that his report is a “poisonous weed” that will lead to the return of capitalism. She is cheered on by the rest of the meeting’s attendees. Sensing that they are losing public support, the work team throws Li into detention, and later issues accusations of crimes including “inciting the people to oppose the work team.”

When Li Jinfeng’s criticism meeting is held, then, it is not in response to her “blank exam” but rather her defiance of the work team’s new policies. Her opposition to the work team constitutes a serious act of insubordination; after all, the state relied upon work teams being able to implement directives. Li Jinfeng’s rebellion is thus a direct challenge to a corrupted body of the state, in this case a work team that has been infiltrated and taken over by counter-revolutionary elements. This, then, is the Cultural Revolution depicted on screen: by daring to question the authority of the work team, Li constitutes a serious threat to a corrupted established order. She rebels not as a student, but as a member of the community whose socialist consciousness alerts her to the threat of these new policies.

Yet when Li Jinfeng's criticism meeting is held, her alleged crimes as a member of the commune are transposed onto her role as a student. Filmed inside a cavernous hall with no score save for the restive chattering of the crowd, Secretary Qian sits with Deputy Chao on a stage. He begins the meeting by telling the crowd that they "are here to criticize a Gongda student, Li Jinfeng," listing the charges against her. She is accused of attempting to "sabotage the new policies" of the work team, but "most importantly, she opposes Deputy Chao," Secretary Qian explains. "Opposing him means opposing the district committee, and opposing the committee means she is opposing the Party!" The implications are severe. Her insubordination has given the conservatives the ammunition they need to agitate for shutting down the school. Li's future, as well as that of the entire college, hangs in the balance.

But before Li Jinfeng can make a self-criticism, Principal Long comes to her defense. As principal of the school, he's aware that by speaking for Li, he takes symbolic responsibility for her as a student and product of the university. "Is Li Jinfeng a good student or a bad student?" Long asks the crowd. Medium close-ups of Long speaking are interspersed with reaction shots of the audience, who issue largely haptic utterances in support of Long and disapproval of Qian. The question of whether or not Li Jinfeng is a good student or not is unrelated to the charges against her, and yet the substance of the entire meeting hinges not around whether or not she opposed the work team, but rather whether or not she is virtuous as a student of Gongda, a referendum not so much on Li's ability to perform well at school but on whether or not the type of student produced by Gongda is a good member of society. To that question, Long Guozheng has his answer: "Can you call someone opposed to the capitalist road a bad student?" he asks the crowd. "The answer is a resounding no: ... she is the best student at Gongda."

Yet Cao Zhonghe retakes the stage to disagree with Long Guozheng, mounting a case against Li Jinfeng as promoting her own self-interests in the name of the party. With the school's leadership at an impasse, Principal Long suggests that the lower-middle peasants who are present in the audience should have the final say on whether or not Li is guilty of her alleged crimes, putting justice in the hands of the masses. Finally, Li ascends the stage to defend herself. As she steps into the spotlight, the camera pulls in for a close-up, her eyes again trained in the socialist realist gaze. An elderly peasant in the audience encourages her to speak her mind—"Child, speak up!" The community's recommendation got Li into college, and now it delivers to her a voice. Filmed close up with high contrast lighting against a dark background, Li delivers her self-defense with steely resolution, refusing to make any self-criticism and concluding that "Only socialism can save China!" As the audience applauds and rushes to embrace Li, the elderly peasant turns toward her neighbor and tells him, "She is one of us."

But while approval of the masses spares Li Jinfeng, it doesn't spare the college. After the meeting, the fate of Gongda remains uncertain. Principal Long is summoned to meet with Secretary Qian and Deputy Secretary Chao, who threaten to remove him from office and strip him of his party membership if he persists. Principal Long defies his political superiors, telling them that "Your actions only convince me further that Gongda is good." Deputy Secretary Chao explodes in response, "What's so good about it? People are saying that Gongda is a farm, a labor camp—it's a mess!"

Enraged by Long Guozheng's obstinacy, Chao decides to shut down Gongda at once, setting up the film's final scene: at an outdoor rally to unite the Gongda community, Principal Long tells the entire mountainside community of Deputy Chao's decision. Standing on a stage encircled by the crowd, Long tells them they must make their final appeal to the highest power as

a zoom shot closes in on his torso. But just as he tells them “We must write to Mao!” a sedan pulls up through the crowd, its horn cuing the film’s triumphant, violin and brass-dominant orchestral theme. Party secretary Tang Ning steps out, and Principal Long immediately rushes to him to let him know of Gongda’s peril. “I already know about this,” he replies with severity. “The decision is wrong.” With the entire Gongda and mountain community watching, Secretary Tang tells the crowd that Mao has written a letter to Gongda praising the school and affirming its orientation. He reads from the letter to the crowd, and the crowd erupts in joy, bringing a decisive conclusion to the saga of Gongda.

In thus staging the Cultural Revolution within the university, *Juelie* shows how the actions of a lowly student—a peasant, a woman, and a mother, at that—can challenge and ultimately prevail in the face of systemic corruption. In doing so, *Juelie* depicts a revolution in education in all, including the most literal, senses: by the end of the film, the university has been removed from the control of the elite few, and delivered into the hands of the lower-middle peasants, who choose to enroll as students members of their own community who, upon graduation, will remain contributing members of the community. Li Jinfeng’s opposition to the orders of Deputy Secretary Chao and the work team is a directly confrontational revolutionary act, but her rebellion is justified in its opposition to an organ of the state itself opposed to the socialist project. While *Juelie* creates a narrative depiction of the Cultural Revolution that interacts with the historical narrative of the Cultural Revolution, the two differ in important ways. Where the historical response of the state was to foreclose the possibility of a student-articulated politics outside the state (by dispersing students to the countryside), Mao’s letter reinscribes Li’s social critique within the auspices of the school and the party by the end of the

film. *Juelie* ultimately narrativizes the return of the student to a historically and politically determined subject position that fulfills the nationalist and developmental project of the state.

But even as *Juelie* puts forth a revolutionary vision for higher education, the unresolved tensions entailed by that project remain apparent. This ambivalence is best embodied in the fate of the antagonist educator Cao Zhonghe. Both Cao and Sun Ziqing enter the film as vestiges of the pre-revolutionary past, accustomed to running school to educate bourgeois students in accordance with bourgeois values and reluctant to change. But by the end of the film, Sun has a change of heart prompted by the old village representative, who shows to him the “red exam” submitted by the villagers: a signed petition opposing the school’s decision to expel the students who missed their exam. After the students are reinstated at the school, a montage showcases the successes of proletarian learning: Long, the former cowherd, lectures to a classroom, Li Jinfeng, a mother of peasant origins, conducts experiments in a laboratory, and Sun Ziqing teaches cow anatomy shoulder to shoulder with his erstwhile student, Xu Niuzai. When a villager tells Sun that the cow he has brought in for treatment is the calf of the one he had brought to the classroom earlier, Sun smiles and admits “Back then, I had a lot of wrong ideas.”

Cao Zhonghe, however, remains unrepentant. When he and Deputy Chao are foiled in their attempts to impede the success of the labor university are foiled at the end of the film, it is unclear what fate will meet them. Will they continue to work in education? Will they be imprisoned and tried for crimes against the Party, as Li Jinfeng was? Will they be demoted, transferred, or expelled from the party? The film ends without meting out retribution to Cao and Chao, thus leaving unanswered the question of how bad elements in the party and university should be dealt with. Unlike land reform, which upended an existing system of reproduction

without much concern for the fate of the former landlord class, *Juelie* depicts a university system in the midst not so much of violent rupture, but of peaceful transition.

Yet earlier drafts of *Juelie* had included a scene of confrontation between Long Guozheng and Cao Zhonghe that resulted in his ideological transformation (*sixiang zhuanbian*.) After receiving notes on the script from the film bureau, the reviewers suggested the script include more political lines (*zhengzhi taici*).<sup>82</sup> Yu Huiyong, then Minister of Culture, was also encouraging film and theater producers to depict duplicitous capitalist roaders in their works. The production team gave added lines to Long Guozheng and made room for the additions by cutting dialogue from the scene of Cao Zhonghe's confrontation, ultimately removing the transformation entirely. Cao's unresolved fate speaks to deep ambivalence over the question of whether, and how, the existing university could be reformed. Even as *Juelie* asserts a bold new vision for the transformation of the nation's educational agenda, Cao's unresolved fate manifests the unsettled tensions of that project. Ironically, when the film was the subject of "conspiracy film" attacks several years later, *Juelie*'s critics pointed to the depiction of Cao Zhonghe as proof of its confused agenda.<sup>83</sup>

### **Propaganda as Contextualization**

The question of whether or not *Juelie*'s message of radical education reform was credible or not lies at the heart of its reception, as well as the extent to which Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and other allied officials were involved in its reception. The reception of the film can be divided into two periods: during the first period, immediately following the film's release in the early months of 1976, reviews and commentary on *Juelie* were overwhelmingly positive,

<sup>82</sup> Di, "Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis]," p. 78."

<sup>83</sup> Fengsong Xie, "Yingpian Juelie Shi Shenme Huose? [What Kind of Trash Is the Film Juelie?]," *Renmin ribao*, January 10, 1979.

praising its depiction of the on-going struggle for proletarian transformation of the university. In this second period, which lasted from late 1978 to the first half of 1979, a campaign to condemn the art and culture most closely associated with the Cultural Revolution implicated the film and its director. Discussions of the film in print media were blisteringly negative, condemning it as preposterous “trash” that dared to claim illiterate peasants and hoodlums made for the nation’s best and brightest.

Making sense of the disparity between these two responses requires bringing greater depth and nuance to our understanding of the cultural institutions of the socialist period, the events that shaped the direction of their history, as well as the complexity and intermediality of the processes by which the production of culture signified meaning. In 1976, when a film such as *Juelie* was first shown, the release of a major studio film signified an object produced through complex institutional processes with creative agency and responsibility diffused across multiple departments, organizations, and individuals. The film’s message was not the message of a single individual—not of the director as auteur, and not of a single diabolical propagandist—but a message that spoke across multiple registers and for multiple social processes. *Juelie* needed to speak, for example, not only for the vision of the cast and crew, but also for a university’s history, for the validity and success of an ambitious new set of educational policies, as well as for the inevitability of a broader social movement.<sup>84</sup>

If a single film, in 1976, was designed to speak across multiple registers, it was also intended to be understood not as an isolated artifact (art for art’s sake), but as an exemplar of a new mass culture that was fully participant in contemporary grassroots mobilization campaigns.

<sup>84</sup> This coupled with the fact that so many individuals and organizations were involved in crafting the narrative, from Li Wenhua as the director, the studio headed by Wang Yang, the film bureau, the Ministry of Culture headed by Yu Huiyong, to even Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, and the other members of the Culture Group, who created the directive to depict the Cultural Revolution on film.



Indeed, as Timothy Cheek points out, propaganda in Maoist China was “not only a total media system; it was a project” that formed a “key link in the transformational process [of] empowering the masses and [reconnecting the] educated elite with China’s heart and soul, its people.”<sup>85</sup> As a project, film did not stand on its own, and was not meant to be interpreted in isolation from other cultural products. *Juelie* was contextualized in a variety of ways, as Laurence Coderre demonstrates in her reading of the film *Fanji* [Counterattack]. Much of that contextualization was already implicit simply in the audience’s lived historical experience of the period. Audiences in the mid-1970s were “very familiar with revolutionary nomenclature—for instance, that capitalist roaders are bad—and with Cultural Revolution narrative tropes simply by virtue of having lived during this period, ... the slogans and beliefs found in [the film]... would hardly have seemed controversial.”<sup>86</sup> Although Coderre writes specifically of *Fanji*, her comments are equally true of *Juelie*, especially given the procedural overlap between the two films.<sup>87</sup>

Instead, the interpretive project at hand was to highlight the right understanding of the film within the given historical framework, a project that was accomplished, in part, through the publication of a host of different types of writing on the film. A nationally-prominent film from a major production studio such as *Juelie* could expect to be featured in editorials and commentary published in official newspapers and magazines, including the newspapers *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily] and *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily], and the film magazine *Renmin dianying* [People’s Cinema].<sup>88</sup> Tina Mai Chen understands these writings as attempts to define

<sup>85</sup> Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao’s China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*, Studies on Contemporary China (Oxford [England] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 14-5.

<sup>86</sup> Laurence Coderre, “Counterattack: (Re)Contextualizing Propaganda,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 4, no. 3 (January 2010): 211–27, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.4.3.211\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.4.3.211_1).

<sup>87</sup> The success of *Juelie*’s release was supposedly responsible for the commissioning of *Fanji*, although the extent to which that is true would be the object of discussion in late 1978 and early 1979. Both *Juelie* and *Fanji* were directed by Li Wenhua, and produced by the Beijing Film Factory.

<sup>88</sup> Normal publishing activities were severely disrupted from 1966 to 1969. In 1970, some publications resumed printing, but few publications remained in print throughout the entirety of the years 1966 to 1976, and from 1978 on,

the permissible boundaries of discourse around a film and its content, a construction of a film's ideal audience through the modeling of appropriate responses.<sup>89</sup> Coderre calls this the “contextualization” of a filmic text, and considers it to be an essential part of a larger propaganda narrative process.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, the publication of articles reviewing and commenting on *Juelie* in national newspapers and film publications were an essential component of the film's overall messaging.

### ***Juelie's* Reception in 1976**

Reviews and commentary on *Juelie* published in 1976 were fully participant in the film's agenda. As an officially styled medium, publications about *Juelie* nearly universally begin with opening paragraphs affirming the necessity of the “proletarian education revolution” (*wuchan jieji geming*) and the film's depiction of it, suggesting the contours of a genre or form of writing to which article authors and publication editors adhered. Coverage of *Juelie* was also coordinated within and across national newspapers. On January 7, the *Guangming ribao*, a national newspaper with a reputation for catering more to intellectual readership, put *Juelie* on the front page above the fold with a full page of articles following inside.<sup>91</sup> *Renmin ribao* followed on January 18 with a package of articles on the first three pages of the paper celebrating new directions in the nation's educational policies, with the third page of the paper devoted exclusively to articles on *Juelie*.<sup>92</sup> On January 23, *Guangming ribao* published another full page

some publications changed their name while many others were launched (and in some cases, re-launched.) For a history of the publishing industry during the Cultural Revolution, see Qidong Yun, *China's Publishing Industry: From Mao to the Market* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2019).

<sup>89</sup> Tina Mai Chen, “Propagating the Propaganda Film: The Meaning of Film in Chinese Communist Party Writings, 1949-1965,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 154–93.

<sup>90</sup> Coderre, “*Counterattack*,” pp. 219-21. Indeed, Coderre's discussion of *Fanji* illustrates exactly what happens when this process of contextualization is interrupted and completed by hostile actors.

<sup>91</sup> See *Guangming ribao*, Jan. 7, 1976.

<sup>92</sup> The front page reports on new guidance from Mao on university policy, while the second page contains five articles on different aspects of rural education. See *Renmin ribao*, Jan. 18, 1976.

of *Juelie* coverage inside the front page,<sup>93</sup> and the January edition of *Renmin dianying* contained commentary on the film, the score to its theme song, color stills, and the full script.<sup>94</sup>

Because of archival limitations, materials such as internal film studio and bureau production materials or unedited screening records and viewer reports are extremely limited or simply unavailable.<sup>95</sup> Access to such materials would certainly flesh out a more detailed picture of how *Juelie* was made and seen, but even in the absence of these materials, we can note that articles about *Juelie* were written by a wide variety of individuals. In addition to pieces published by the director, the screenwriters, and collectively authored by the entire *Juelie* production unit, reviews and commentaries on the film included pieces written by:

- 1) media workers and propagandists working for the cultural division of the Ministry of Propaganda, the Tsinghua Propaganda Team, and the Chaoyang Agricultural Academy Propaganda Team;
- 2) film critics and film industry professionals;
- 3) workers from factories in Tangshan and Shanghai;
- 4) students and teachers from Peking University and Tsinghua University, including a student from Tsinghua's Department of Precision Instruments, students at Peking University's Chinese department, a teacher from Tsinghua's School of Civil Engineering, and another from Tsinghua's Department of Machinery;
- 5) teachers, students, staff, and administrators at Gongda, including the Gongda party secretary, an instructor in the department of agriculture, a student of animal husbandry, the lower-middle peasants class representative, and a recent graduate.

Within this wide group of different authors, commentary varied in its emphasis. Some articles explained through a prism why the film was good, such as Cheng Zhiwei's "Zhe zhang baijuan jiao de hao" [It was right to turn in this blank exam], which praised the character Li Jinfeng for skipping an exam to save the commune's imperiled crops, or Chen Guanbai's "Cong zhaosheng zhan de yichang douzheng shuoqi" [On the scene of class struggle at the recruitment center], which explored how *Juelie* disrupted the dynamics of class reproduction in higher education

<sup>93</sup> See *Guangming ribao*, Jan. 23, 1976.

<sup>94</sup> See *Renming dianying* 1 (1976): pp. 41-76. The third issue put *Juelie* on its cover and included more commentary.

<sup>95</sup> For an exploration of sources for gauging audience during the Maoist period, see Paul Clark, "Closely Watched Viewers: A Taxonomy of Chinese Film Audiences from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution Seen from Hunan," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 5, no. 1 (January 2011): 73-89, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.5.1.73\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.5.1.73_1).

through new student recruitment policies.<sup>96</sup> Other articles focused on the emotional and intellectual process through which the authors arrived at their support for the project, such as “Tong xiuzheng zhuyi luxian duizhe gan: pai caise gushipian *Juelie* de yixie tihui” [Going against the revisionist line: Some experiences from filming the color feature film *Juelie*] collectively authored by *Juelie*'s production unit: the group describes their first impression of the project through the script, which they liked without fully understanding why it was good. After conducting extensive research on education and film, as well as fieldwork at Gongda and the Chaoyang Agricultural School, the cast and crew wrote that they came to truly understand and support the film's mission.

Although different authors agree that the film is good, they disagree over details from it: the *Juelie* production team notes, for example, that some members of the team were uncomfortable with the film's assertion that a worker's rough calluses are qualification enough to enter university, while others disagree over the narrative arcs given to Cao Zhonghe and Sun Ziqing, the antagonists of the film.

In March 1976, media commentary on *Juelie* dropped off. Although it was a major release with a timely subject matter speaking to broad and important social concerns, other film releases crowded the calendar, and the press moved on to promoting other films, such as *Chunmiao* [Spring shoots], *Shanshan de hongxing* [Sparkling red star], and *Huanteng de Xiaoliang He* [The jubilant Xiaoliang River], all also released in 1976. The model of film production operating in 1976—specific in style and process to the ideals and institutions of the late Cultural Revolution—was just kicking into higher gear. Compared to the early years of the Cultural Revolution, when no new films were made from 1967 to 1969, by 1974 film production

<sup>96</sup> Cheng, “Zhe Zhang Baijuan Jiao de Hao [You Did Right by Turning in This Blank Exam].”

had worked back up to its pre-Cultural Revolution levels: seventeen new films came out in 1974, twenty-five in 1975, and in 1976 thirty-seven new films were released.<sup>97</sup>

### **Conspiracy Film Criticism: ‘Just What Kind of Trash Is *Juelie*?’**

National film production might have continued apace into the remainder of the late 1970s were it not for Mao’s death on September 9, 1976. Mao’s death—or the “last revolutionary disruption,” as Zhuoyi Wang refers to it—was a profound national trauma felt across the nation.<sup>98</sup> In the film industry, it threw the day to day business of film production into disarray as the fates of high-level officials aligned with Mao and the cultural officials associated with them lay in limbo. Through September and into October, films in development and in production were suspended. Some resumed, while others were frozen or canceled. *Shengli de jieri* (Grand Festival), for example, had begun production at the Shanghai Film Studio in mid-August, but when the Gang of Four was arrested in early October, production came to a halt.<sup>99</sup> From 1976 to 1977, yearly film output was halved from thirty-seven to nineteen,<sup>100</sup> with officials, producers, and directors unsure of which narratives would receive approval and support.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> See the Appendix to Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*, Cambridge Studies in Film (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 185-6. These numbers do not include filmed musicals. The number of feature films produced increased dramatically beginning in 1974. Film historian Zhai Jiannong attributes this to a Jiang Qing and Gang of Four led push to increase the number of films representing the struggle against capitalist roaders, while Li Wenhua recalls in an oral history of the film that Zhou Enlai had ordered the production of an increased number of feature films (*gushi pian*). Jiannong Zhai, *Hong se wang shi: 1966-1976 nian de zhong guo dian ying, Di 1 ban* (Bei jing: Tai hai chu ban she, 2001), p. 146.

<sup>98</sup> Zhuoyi Wang, *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 177.

<sup>99</sup> Jian Guo, Yongyi Song, and Yuan Zhou, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Historical Dictionaries of Ancient Civilizations and Historical Eras, no. 17 (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 126.

<sup>100</sup> Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, p. 185.

<sup>101</sup> For others, the fall of the Gang of Four was a blessing. The director Xie Tieli was to be the subject of a criticism meeting scheduled for the week of October 11, but the Gang’s arrest on October 6 almost certainly saved him from being sent to labor camp. The director Li Wenhua was not so lucky, and was placed under house arrest when his films fell under suspicion. The two had both played leading creative roles in the production of many films distinct to the Cultural Revolution, including their work together on *Zao chun er yue* [Early Spring], with Xie as director and Li as cinematographer. See Zhuoyi Wang for more discussion of Xie Tieli, *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*, p. 178.

A little less than a year after Mao's death, his successor, Hua Guofeng, formally declared the end of the Cultural Revolution at the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China in a speech that thoroughly excoriated the Gang of Four.<sup>102</sup> The Gang was accused of conspiring to usurp control of the Party and state, nefarious designs that extended to the realm of culture. Works of art overseen by the conspiracists was labeled "conspiracy art (*yinmou wenyi*)," defined as "[art] that purported to depict 'capitalist roaders,' but [in reality] wantonly attacked and vilified party leaders."<sup>103</sup> In the following months, a campaign to criticize the Gang of Four's influence in the cultural realm was already undertaken, and newspapers and industry publications were filled with articles decrying the involvement of the Gang of Four in attempts to purge institutions of their influence. The term "conspiracy art," or art that enforced a "dictatorship of the black cultural line (*wenyi heixian zhuanzheng*)" was quickly followed by the term "conspiracy film (*yinmou dianying*)," films which acted in service of the same agenda.<sup>104</sup>

Five films were officially labeled conspiracy films: *Chunmiao* [Spring Shoots], *Huanteng de Xiaoliang He* [The jubilant Xiaoliang River], *Fanji* [Counterattack], *Shengda de jieri* [Grand Festival], and *Qian qiu ye* [The Thousand Autumns Enterprise]. Two additional films were also criticized as conspiracy films, although they existed only as screenplays and had not yet been committed to film: *Jinzhong chang ming* [The Golden Bell Rings Forever] and *Zhan ling song* [Eulogy for the Occupation].<sup>105</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Culture undertook a "re-examination

<sup>102</sup> Held August 12 to 18, 1977. Hua Guofeng, "Eleventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party," *China Report* 8, no. 3 (1977): 57–84.

<sup>103</sup> Hua Guofeng, "Zai Zhongguo Gongchandang Di Shiyi Ci Quanguo Daibiao Dahuishang de Zhengzhi Baogao [Political Report at the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China]," *Renmin ribao*, August 23, 1977.

<sup>104</sup> Qi Zhi, "Yinmou Dianying Wu Ti [The Five Conspiracy Films]," *Dianying Yishu* 4 (2002): 117. The associate minister of culture, Wang Lanxi, on June 9, 1976, at a meeting of the film bureau, labeled *Chunmiao*, *Huanteng de xiao Lianghe*, *Qian qiu ye*, *Shengda de jieri*, and *Fanji* as conspiracy films.

<sup>105</sup> Mu Ting, "'Yinmou dianying' qianxi [A rough analysis of 'conspiracy films']," *Jiyi [Remembrance]* 65, no. 23 (December 30, 2010).

(*fushen*)” of the over six-hundred and five feature films produced since 1949, approving the re-release of five-hundred and eighty-two of them.<sup>106</sup>

Officially, *Juelie* was not designated a conspiracy film, but nevertheless it fell under suspicion for its close association with the personnel, ideals, and production processes of the period. Li Wenhua had directed both *Juelie* and *Fanji*, the latter of which had been designated a conspiracy film, and because it had been greenlit off the positive momentum generated by *Juelie*, some considered it to be a sequel of sorts to *Juelie*.<sup>107</sup> Soon after the Gang of Four was arrested, the *Jiangxi ribao* published an editorial in which *Juelie* was accused of being “reactionary,” and shortly thereafter the Beijing Film Studio suspended Li Wenhua from his official responsibilities and placed him under inspection. Both *Juelie* and *Fanji* were blacklisted by the Ministry of Film, and the Beijing Film Studio formed a special group to investigate Li.

In the following months, the campaign to criticize conspiracy art and conspiracy film extended to *Juelie*, and the movie was lambasted in the press over the course of late 1978 and early 1979. Criticism of *Juelie* highlighted how controversial education policy during the Cultural Revolution was. A letter to the *Renmin ribao* by a college-educated media worker argued that in fact, *Juelie* repudiated the progress made in the field of education during the Seventeen Years period (1949-1966). Using the growth of the field of geology as example, the letter’s author, Fang Yanming, defended the value of gradual institutional growth, describing how the study of geology was founded within Chinese universities in 1952 and by building on

<sup>106</sup> The Ministry of Culture conducted the review from November 1977 to February 1979, a furious rate of review that equates to about thirty-eight films reviewed a month. See Zhuoyi Wang, *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*, p. 178.

<sup>107</sup> Other than the fact that both films were directed by Li Wenhua at the Beijing Film Factory, there is little in the plots of the two films to suggest that they are sister films: *Juelie* concerns the founding of *Gongda* in 1958, while *Fanji* depicts the Anting Incident in Shanghai of November 1966. It is unclear to me if the term “sister film” is a retroactive label used to justify the attacks on *Juelie*, or if *Fanji* was considered a sister film to *Juelie* at the time it was conceived.

yearly growth, went on to become a major contributor to the nation's wealth and development, with post-49 educated geologists in every province by 1979. According to Fang, the Cultural Revolution disrupted the "normal" operation of schools, <sup>108</sup> most of all in the process of college admissions, and it defied logic that a worker's callouses could prove that they deserved an education. "Are callouses greater than the Four Modernizations? Can callouses get a satellite to the sky? A country overrun with illiterates cannot build socialism," concludes Fang.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps the most severe commentary on *Juelie* was written by Xie Fengsong, a writer and film industry professional who had moved up the ranks of a film production company in Guangzhou to Beijing.<sup>110</sup> In an article titled "Yingpian *Juelie* shi shenme huose? [Just what kind of trash is the film *Juelie*?]," Xie took the movie to task for its subversion of Mao's ideals, especially in the field of education. The film betrayed a consistent lack of respect for things that were "common knowledge (*changshi*)," he charged, such as the necessity of universal admission standards, and had an anti-intellectual character. The film's protagonists treated knowledge as a sin, he argued, believing that "the more knowledge you have, the more reactionary you are."<sup>111</sup> Long Guozheng was a farce of a principal, an "extreme leftist" (*jizuo*) who acted on his own to enroll unqualified peasant and student workers in total disregard of the law.<sup>112</sup> Xie's disregard

<sup>108</sup> Fang does not distinguish between historical causes or periods of the Cultural Revolution in his analysis; the entire decade is lumped into one. It's not clear, for example, if the disruption of "normal" schooling occurred from 1966 to 1969, during the period of factional violence, or if the educational policies of the early and mid-1970s were disruptive.

<sup>109</sup> Fang, "Yiding Yao Suqing Juelie de Liudu [Juelie's Baleful Influence Must Be Eliminated]."

<sup>110</sup> In 1979, he was just launching what would go on to be a career as a powerful figure in film and writing during the Reform Era. Xie Fengsong is perhaps most well-known for writing the screen play to the 1988 production of *Hong lou meng* [A Dream of the Red Chamber], but he held a number of important high-level positions in various official cultural bodies.

<sup>111</sup> Xie, "Yingpian Juelie Shi Shenme Huose? [What Kind of Trash Is the Film Juelie?]."

<sup>112</sup> Ironically, the committee reviewing the script to *Juelie* in 1975, composed of high-level political and cultural officials, also took issue with the independence of Long Guozheng's actions. "When he faces difficult situations, [Long] always faces it singlehandedly, like a lone army going into a fight." The committee emphasized that the things Long wants to accomplish are impossible for a single person to accomplish; they require broad mass support in addition to coordination with the party, and the committee recommended that these scenes be rewritten. Four



for uneducated peasants and laborers is palpable in his description of the student Zhang Tiesheng as no more than an illiterate hoodlum (*wenmang jia liumang*). Far from being a “battle song of the proletarian education revolution,” Xie concludes that *Juelie* was in fact its precise opposite, “revisionist trash.”<sup>113</sup>

Criticism of *Juelie* was not long-lasting, however, and by mid-1979, discussion of the film again drops off in press. Although the Cultural Revolution was still being litigated, most visibly through the public broadcast of the trial of the ten officials accused of being its ringleaders,<sup>114</sup> exciting new developments in the film industry demanded attention as the range of permissible narratives expanded and new talents emerged. Li Wenhua remained under house arrest (*ruanjin*) for nearly two and a half years (from late 1976 to early 1979), and he was released with his name cleared only after writing a direct petition to Hu Yaobang, a high-level official who himself had recently been rehabilitated and was involved in re-assessing judgements from Cultural Revolution cases. Upon release, Li Wenhua returned to filmmaking by directing *Lei hen* [Tear stains],<sup>115</sup> a film that depicted the traumas of the Cultural Revolution and forcefully indicated Li’s distance from its cultural politics.<sup>116</sup>

years later, Xie’s critique emphasizes that legitimacy comes not through broad social support, but through actions performed within the purview of the law.

<sup>113</sup> Xie, “Yingpian Juelie Shi Shenme Huose? [What Kind of Trash Is the Film Juelie?].”

<sup>114</sup> Alexander C. Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>115</sup> The film won the Hundred Flowers award.

<sup>116</sup> Years later, Li Wenhua reflected on the film during an interview conducted in the 2000s. Although he still stood by it and believed in the integrity of its message, he regretted being unable to recognize how politically sensitive it would be. “Why did I proactively go about filming it?” Li learned many years later that Chi Qun had made suggestions to the script to Hu Chunchao, which Li believed proved that the project was tainted from the start by the Gang of Four’s influence. See Li, *Wang Shi Liu Ying*, p. 213.

## The Making of a Cinematic Auteur: The Gang of Four

The 1976 praise for *Juelie* and its subsequent condemnation in 1978 and 1979 should not be understood separately, but rather as two parts of the same process of contextualization of meaning. Indeed, *Juelie* is best understood as the same filmic work subjected to two different processes of propagandistic contextualization, and the same could be said of any of the officially labeled conspiracy films, including *Fanji*.<sup>117</sup> The criticisms of the late 1970s stand in contrast to the acclamations of 1976, yet it is dangerous to then conclude that one response has a greater claim to truth than the other, or that its conclusions were generated through a more neutral, impartial, and disinterested process of criticism. As Zhuoyi Wang points out, attacks on *Juelie* and conspiracy films were short-lived, and “ended with the Maoist revolution.”<sup>118</sup> Yet that revolution’s methods and legacies extend well beyond the date of Mao’s death.

It can be difficult to reconcile the fact that a propaganda process of contextualization belonging to a revolutionary period was commandeered to support decidedly un-revolutionary principles. Articles written in support of *Juelie* and articles written against it both share in the conviction that Mao’s “education thought” (*jiaoyu sixiang*) is fundamentally good and necessary, and yet the critiques of the late 1970s reverse much of the substance of what that was. The unification of production and education, for example, is now suspect, and instead, higher levels of education and increasing specialization are idealized and pursued. Knowledge is decoupled from both productive relations and from overt class politics, with *Juelie*’s critics defending the value of “knowledge for knowledge’s sake.” The education (and by extension, the educated class) are rehabilitated, while the lower classes (the uneducated) are denigrated as ignorant illiterates and criminalized as thuggish hoodlums (*liumang, diduan renkou, suzhi di de ren*), and

<sup>117</sup> Coderre, “Counterattack,” p. 225-6.

<sup>118</sup> Wang, *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*, p. 178.

these insights are depoliticized by being presented as “common knowledge.” In perhaps the biggest break with Maoist thought, the processes of gradual change are preferable to continuous revolution waged within the university.

Today, the conclusions of the Dengist campaign to criticize leftist film made under the patronage of Maoist political leadership remain largely unchallenged in the scholarship. Although these criticisms carried powerful political agendas with them, they are now understood divorced from those agendas as non-political universal truths. Indeed, the conclusions of the campaign to criticize conspiracy films form much of the basis upon which contemporary critiques of revolutionary films are built. Yingjing Zhang’s reading of *Juelie*, for example, as a document of high-level “political intrigue” produced by a cast and crew “brainwashed by years of ultra-leftist ideology” does not extend to the conspiracy campaign against the film, and indeed, Zhang reproduces the language of the 1978/9 attacks through his adoption of terms like “ultra-leftist.”<sup>119</sup>

The theory of film authorship called “auteurism” sees the films of certain directors elevated to a “pantheon” of great art through the director’s ability to maintain artistic control of all elements of the filmmaking process, executing a single vision of the film as art without commercial or studio intervention.<sup>120</sup> Show runners, producers, and directors play into auteur narratives by encouraging audiences to see themselves as the visceral embodiment of the work of the hundreds or even thousands of professionals in the crew and studio.<sup>121</sup> By contrast, film production in the P.R.C. during the late 1960s and the 1970s decidedly did *not* operate according to an individual auteur model of creative agency and of authorship; in name, and in process,

<sup>119</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 1st ed, National Cinemas (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.223.

<sup>120</sup> Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982).

<sup>121</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Console-Ing Passions (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 14.

films were created through wide, diffuse “actor-networks” involving input across multiple institutions, and even multiple levels within the same institutions. Films were explicitly made to both encourage and reflect grassroots support.

It is ironic, then, that the campaign to criticize the art and culture made with the support of the Gang of Four operated by the same logic: by arguing that the Gang of Four was the primary creative author behind conspiracy culture (*yinmou wenyi*), denunciations of the Gang and its influence elevated the Gang to the role of individual auteur. “In a systematic, organized, and planned manner, the Gang of Four held managerial authority over an entire field of conspiracy art and culture in a politically ambitious but futile and mistaken attempt to usurp control of the Party,” write film industry veterans Zhang Junxiang and Ding Jiao in the pages of *Renmin dianying*.<sup>122</sup>

Articles denouncing the Gang’s influence repeatedly stressed the Gang’s artistic control over all elements of the filmmaking process, authoring works that executed a single vision that belonged to the Gang. By continuously stressing the Gang’s artistic control over culture, the Gang emerges as the single physical embodiment of the hundreds of individuals whose work created the films of the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, labeling a selection of works “conspiracy films” created an official pantheon of Gang films that are made with a distinctive Gang style (referred to as “*bangqi*”) identifiable across a wide body of feature films produced at different times and at different film studios.

Mao’s death certainly was a watershed event, and yet even cataclysmic, epochal change is a process that unfolds over time. In the years following, cultural institutions still operated according to the revolutionary principles and procedural precedents established in the previous

<sup>122</sup> Zhang Junxiang and Ding Jiao, “Qingsuan ‘sirenbang’ Gao Yinmou Dianying de Zhengzhi Yinmou,” *Renmin Dianying* 8 (1978): 1–5.

decades. Making sense of the disparity between the Maoist and post-Maoist responses to *Juelie* requires the re-politicization of the conclusions of the late 1970s. Politics did not leave us in the late 1970s, but the literature written since then has become increasingly successful at denying its presence. In order to re-evaluate and bring new insight to our understanding of this film, this period, and its ideals, we must bring critical distance to bear not only upon the revolutionary discourses but also the reformist discourses beginning in the late 1970s.

### **Conclusion: The Nostalgic Return to the Horse's Tail**

Over forty years have passed since the release of *Juelie*, and although the culture and the film system that produced the original movie have long been transformed beyond recognition, *Juelie* is still remembered for its horse's tail sequence. The Jiangxi Communist Labor University still exists, albeit renamed and restructured as the Jiangxi Agricultural University.<sup>123</sup> Its graduates are often teased, asked if their teachers still lecture on the functions of the horse's tail.<sup>124</sup> The scene is so well known that in 1995, a commercial for a health drink featured a research scientist, who told viewers that he had given up lecturing on the uses of the horse's tail to develop a scientifically nutritious beverage.<sup>125</sup>

Yet the film's legacy remains unresolved, with contemporary audiences drawn to but often baffled by the epistemological universe in which *Juelie* was located. On the culture review website Douban, *Juelie* has over nine hundred reviews, many of which consist of just the catchphrase "the functions of the horse's tail." Although the *Juelie* was never officially blacklisted as a Gang of Four produced conspiracy film, discussion of the film cannot be undertaken without reference to the Maoist political leaders of the period, particularly Jiang

<sup>123</sup> The school was renamed in Nov. 1980. See <http://www.jxau.edu.cn/4/list.htm>, accessed Feb. 11, 2020.

<sup>124</sup> Cleverley, *In the Lap of Tigers*, p. 177.

<sup>125</sup> Cleverley, p. 177.

Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Chi Qun, and the leftist political and cultural leaders under whose patronage the film was produced. Douban user xiaomaiwang writes, “So ‘the functions of a horse’s tail’ comes from this—is this political satire? Is this the suicide of culture (*wenhua de zisha*)?”<sup>126</sup> The film’s association with these political leaders, and the outsized role they are presumed to have played in ushering the project to completion, play a determining role in its contemporary reputation for being a work of arch propaganda, irrevocably wedded to the politics of the period.

*Juelie* was an ambitious cinematic attempt to assert that the culture of education could be remade through its integration with labor. By highlighting Gongda, one of only a handful of colleges across the nation to recruit students from rural backgrounds and institute curriculum of education through labor (and vice versa), *Juelie* was part of a project to disrupt the cycles of social reproduction that had previously divided wealthy urban elites from the poor rural masses, and to create new cycles of social reproduction that would ensure the success and vitality of the proletariat. In order to radically re-conceptualize the object of education, *Juelie* sought to re-write its student subject, embracing gender and class as key sites through which the subjectivity of the student could be re-defined.

*Juelie* imagined a national educational culture that would fully socialize the student as the nation’s future workers. The re-positioning and re-imagining of the student were necessary because the student on the eve of the Cultural Revolution was in crisis. After seventeen years of the “new society” (*xin shehui*), new inequalities specific to the P.R.C. had emerged and the student now stood “at the intersection... [of] unresolved tension between the state project of

<sup>126</sup> “Juelie (1975),” accessed February 25, 2020, <https://movie.douban.com/subject/1306207/>.

disciplined reproduction... and the promise of political and intellectual independence.”<sup>127</sup> By making visible the unresolved tensions and contradictions of the socialist sociological order, *Juelie* articulated a larger intellectual project through which the integration of education and production would resolve the inequities that had become manifest in the socialist experience.

But *Juelie*'s vision of the utopic proletarian university was ultimately short-lived, its ideological agenda orphaned and its creators attacked not long after its release. The education officials who directed the country's education system in the wake of Mao's death “were intent on restoring as perfectly as possible the status quo... before the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>128</sup> This entailed breaking with the egalitarian goals of the Maoist university system. Entrance exams were reintroduced in December 1977, and university admissions again relied more heavily on selection exams, and not political recommendations, as *Juelie* had illustrated so memorably in its recruitment scene. Students were once again to be taught “according to ability,” and greater emphasis was placed on postgraduate programs. New school programs were “more elitist and more ‘talent’ oriented than any that existed in the ‘50s and ‘60s,” according to Jonathan Unger, and students were no longer required to perform productive labor on campus factories, farms, or construction sites as part of the curriculum.<sup>129</sup> In the Central Committee's 1981 resolution on party history officially repudiating the experience of the Cultural Revolution, resolution declared that “We must firmly eradicate such gross fallacies as the denigration of education, science and culture, and discrimination against intellectuals.”<sup>130</sup> This affirmation of mental labor's

<sup>127</sup> Fabio Lanza, *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing*, Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 208.

<sup>128</sup> Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, p. 229.

<sup>129</sup> Unger, *Education under Mao*, p. 207.

<sup>130</sup> See “Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China,” Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, housed online at <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>.

superiority to manual labor was understood as a return to the “natural” order of things, and in 1979, Jiang Nanxiang, then the minister of education, delivered a speech in which he stated that “the outstanding problem today, is that intellectuals make less money than a worker of the same age.”<sup>131</sup> Not long after, Jiang’s education system corrected the error. Since then, there has been little confusion over the importance of mental over manual labor in China.

<sup>131</sup> Jiang Nanxiang cited in Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, p. 231.



## Chapter 5 | The Laboring of the Home: Women Work and Reproduction in the Countryside

*“Realize the slogan of women’s liberation.”*

*– Resolution on the Women’s Movement, 1928*

### Introduction: It’s Nothing, Just Some Housework

In January 1980, the writer Ru Zhijuan penned a short story set during the Cultural Revolution. Jinfeng, the protagonist of the story, describes herself as “a thoroughly normal (*putong*) member of the masses.”<sup>1</sup> A typist in regular times, she has escaped exceptional attention during the Cultural Revolution, yet her family has still been fundamentally altered by the demands of the era. An unnamed husband has gone off to play his part in the revolution, while her teenaged daughter, Xian Xian, left just that morning for Heilongjiang with other sent-down youth. Her youngest daughter, eight-year-old Tao Tao, will be home alone tomorrow when Jinfeng must return to May Seventh Cadre Camp.

The story is titled “Housework [*Jiawu shi*],” and it follows Jinfeng over the course of one day, from the time she sees off her first daughter to the time she needs to leave her second daughter the following morning. Before she leaves, Jinfeng needs to do the laundry, wash the dishes, shop for groceries, and cook four or five days worth of food for Tao Tao. She spends the majority of her time doing chores, incapacitated by the thought of doing them, or failing to do

<sup>1</sup> Ru Zhijuan, “Jiawu shi [Housework],” *Caoyuan shang de xiao lu* [The path in the prairie] (Tianjin: Baihe wenyi chubanshe, 1982), p. 147. Translation my own.

them: nobody makes it to the store to buy soy sauce before it closes, and a pan full of yellow croaker, meant feed Tao Tao through the next week, burns while Jinfeng looks after her.

The story juxtaposes the call of revolutionary times with the banality of everyday housework, as the narrator strives and fails to look after her family during extraordinary times. Although Jinfeng is devastated to be separated from her youngest child, she makes no explicit criticism of her circumstances. “I think revolution is required of me, too,” she states in the beginning of the story. But when Tao Tao compares her mother to the bough of a majestic tree and herself as a branch growing off of it, Jinfeng struggles with knowing how to represent to her daughter their place in society. She finally settles upon a much more modest metaphor, hoping that Tao Tao will understand the humility and insignificance of their lives in the grand scheme of things: “I’m a little branch, and you’re a little knot on that branch.”

Ru’s short story makes clear that ultimately, it is a mother’s housework that is the essential work of keeping families together, and that there is a desperate excruciation in a mother being denied the ability to care for her family. In Jinfeng’s absence, there is no one to step in: Tao Tao’s father is away, present only in the monthly remittances he makes to their home; Xian Xian has been rusticated, and the next door neighbor, known as Lion Cub’s grandma, will share the dinner she prepares for her grandchild with Tao Tao, but Tao Tao must wake up in an empty house, prepare breakfast, go to school, and look after herself all on her own. There is no greater social unit for Jinfeng’s family to call upon; Jinfeng’s family can only rely upon itself, and it has been split asunder by the demands of the state’s various revolutionary projects. “Housework” exemplifies the sacrifice of the essential ordinary for the extraordinary demands of the times, as well as the reality of the expectation that women must do the work of caring for families: Jinfeng teaches Tao Tao how to cook and clean for herself, initiating her daughter in the responsibilities

of reproductive labor, and thus reproducing herself in her daughter. At the story's end, when a cadre school leader asks Jinfeng what's bothering her on the train back to camp, Jinfeng responds, "It's nothing, just some housework (*mei shenme, buguo shi xie jiawu shi*)," a woman's resigned acceptance of her responsibility in upholding the status quo, as well as an indictment of the times.

But two decades earlier, Ru Zhijuan had written very differently about women, families, and housework. The 1959 short story "The Warmth of Spring [*Chun nuan shijie*]" again features a young mother, Qinglan, as its protagonist. Like Jinfeng, Qinglan is married with two children, but her husband, Mingfa, hasn't been sent away on any public infrastructure projects—he works as a machinist at the factory. "The Warmth of Spring" again follows a housewife as she goes about a day's chores: Qinglan shops for groceries, prepares dinner, and serves it to her family, but all while feeling that something is missing, particularly between herself and Mingfa, who politely eats the food he's served but doesn't particularly notice or care what she makes for dinner. After dinner, Qinglan is so overcome with feelings of neglect that she breaks down in tears, and Ru Zhijuan explains to the reader that Qinglan's feelings are due to the fact that she does not "[realize] that her husband's world was larger than hers, his interests wider and his aim in life higher."<sup>2</sup> Her world is contained within his.

Later that evening, Qinglan learns at a meeting of the neighborhood women's committee that the factory has received an urgent order to manufacture ten thousand transmitters within seven days. Qinglan, who normally takes only a dispassionate interest in the affairs of the greater community, becomes obsessed with the idea of creating a machine that will automate production

<sup>2</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Warmth of Spring," trans. Gladys Yang, *Chinese Literature* 7 (1961): pp. 67-81. Originally published as Ru Zhijuan, "Chun nuan shijie," *Renmin wenxue* 7 (1959): pp. 64-71. The short story was only Ru Zhijuan's fourth published work.

of transmitters, thus allowing the factory to fulfill the order in time. Qinglan first seeks out Sister Chu, head of the women's committee, for help, but the wooden device they create together won't do. Then, she seeks the local shoe cobbler, who works with her to shape a piece of rubber to her needs, but again the rubber won't suffice. In the midst of it all, Qinglan completely forgets her responsibilities at home, neglecting to cook, clean, or look after her family. But each time she returns home she finds that someone else has done the essential work for her—first her husband makes dinner for their two sons, and another night her neighbor, Sister Chu, feeds them.

Finally, when she is at her most desperate, Qinglan goes to Mingfa to tell him how frustrated she is at not being able to make a device that will automate transmitter production. When she explains to him the type of component she needs to complete her automation device, Mingfa tells her that he can easily make what she needs on factory equipment. Although it's late, the task is urgent, and they set off immediately for the factory. But Mingfa insists that they have dinner at a late-night snack stall before they make the piece on the factory's lathe. Offering her the shrimp from his bowl of noodles, Qinglan is verklempt at her husband's consideration, and she cries again. In a flash, "that invisible, intangible 'barrier'" between them has "vanished completely."<sup>3</sup> When the two of them set off for the factory, "they walked close together, not saying a word but very close in spirit. Working for the same end, they were traveling the same road."

For Qinglan, companionate marriage and emotional intimacy are realized not in the home, but through shared experiences of productive labor outside the home. In Ru Zhijuan's telling, the home is a separate space that is subordinate to the factory as a privileged site of production, and what a woman can offer to her husband inside the home, from childcare to a

<sup>3</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Warmth of Spring," p. 80.

meal of shrimp laden with Proustian significance—pales in comparison to the rewards of shared devotion to the community’s productivity. When Qinglan puts everything into transmitter manufacturing, she “had never known such a heavy responsibility, such fearful anxiety,” but the experience is invigorating, and “The Warmth of Spring” celebrates a housewife’s arrival in the same public arena for productive labor that her husband already occupies.<sup>4</sup>

Still, Qinglan’s entrance on the factory floor does not absolve her of her responsibilities in the home, and Ru Zhijuan’s narrative is attentive to the needs of Qinglan’s children in the midst of her manufacturing crisis. Every time Qinglan forgets to feed her children, a member of her community steps up and does it for her; and if worst were to come to worst, Qinglan always has canteen tickets in the back of her pocket. Qinglan’s ability to focus on manufacturing is enabled by her community’s willingness to compensate for her absence from domestic labor, and Ru Zhijuan treats housework as a minor detail ultimately of little consequence: realizing one evening that she’s forgotten to make dinner again, Qinglan hurries home, thinking “Never in over a dozen years had she failed her family like this before.” And yet Qinglan “knows it was of no great consequence: Mingfa wouldn’t make an issue of it, and it wouldn’t hurt the boys.”<sup>5</sup> Still, Qinglan is sick with worry, and her transition from housewife to a one-woman manufacturing phenomenon is depicted as a largely internal, psychological process of learning to let go of her devotion to house chores that her husband doesn’t think are important anyway. Thus, Qinglan’s labor power as a woman is “liberated” through a relatively small, easy, and diffuse socialization of her chores, as well as the transformative internal recognition of housework as ultimately inconsequential, just as her husband sees it.

<sup>4</sup> Ru Zhijuan, “The Warmth of Spring,” trans. Gladys Yang, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Ru Zhijuan, “The Warmth of Spring,” trans. Gladys Yang, p. 78.

“Housework” and “The Warmth of Spring” present two very different portraits of a woman navigating her role in the home and within society. In the first, a mother is frustrated at not being able to do the essential work of caring for her family, particularly her young daughter, eventually resigning herself to the dissolution of her family at the behest of the revolution. In the other, a young mother only becomes full partner to her husband and fully participant in her society when she commits herself to the pursuit of productive labor. Her reproductive labor is rendered negligible and non-essential, and her children are an afterthought in her transformation from subordinate to full and equal participant in the affairs of her community.

This chapter examines depictions of reproductive labor in literature from the first two decades of the P.R.C., work that is often, but not exclusively, performed by women. From its moment of inception, theorizing and transforming specific gendered forms of labor posed a series of challenges and contradictions to the Chinese revolution. Whereas traditional Marxist accounts of labor privileged the factory as a space of revolutionary mobilization, the possibilities for transforming the conditions of gendered forms of labor under socialism remained an open question for large portions of the P.R.C.’s modern history. But for a brief moment in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Chinese Party-state made a serious, if short-lived attempt to socialize women’s reproductive labor through the introduction of people’s communes. This chapter focuses around depictions of the socialization of what is variously known as household labor or domestic labor from literature published around the Great Leap Forward period, when people’s communes included provisions meant to collectivize the domestic labor of women through mechanisms including communal canteens (*gonggong shitang*), sewing groups (*fengren zu*), nurseries (*tuo er suo*), primary schools, and maternity wards (*chan yuan*), thus enabling women to participate more fully in productive or agricultural labor. In practice, these initiatives were

largely unfunded and short-lived. Many meal halls, for example, did not last for more than two months.<sup>6</sup> Yet the period remains one of the most significant attempts to reconcile women's reproductive labor alongside the nation's productive labor, and literature from the period explored the new structures of feeling that would enable these decisive structural social shifts to take place.

In this chapter, I explore literature written from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s depicting women, primarily on rural communes, and their engagement with domestic and productive labor. I focus on short stories written by Ru Zhijuan, a Han woman writer who rose to prominence in 1958 when her short story "Lilies" (*bai he*) was singled out by the Minister of Culture Mao Dun, as well as the author Li Zhun, a Mongolian male author and contemporary of Ru Zhijuan's famed for his light-hearted depiction of rural life. After experiencing a period in which the Chinese countryside had been plunged into reproductive crisis, authors including Ru Zhijuan and Li Zhun explored in their works the vicissitudes of the new social and cultural norms that had stabilized rural China, chief among them the social innovations of the people's commune. Ru Zhijuan's work in particular encapsulates late 1950s debates over the representation of domestic labor and the emotional lives of families, probing the difference between what Gail Hershatter calls the separate temporalities of "campaign time" and of "domestic time."<sup>7</sup>

Narratives of social change and family transformation in the countryside are underscored by the performance of reproductive labor. Through the depiction of exceptional country women, the short stories discussed in this chapter create an impossible standard for women's entry into

<sup>6</sup> See Li Chunfeng, "Historical Observations Regarding the Large-Scale Establishment of Rural Public Canteens in Hebei Province," in *Agricultural Reform and Rural Transformation in China Since 1949*, eds. Thomas David DuBois and Li Huaiyin (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 115-132.

<sup>7</sup> See Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), see "Introduction" and Chapter 4, "Activist," pp. 1-13, 96-129.

productive labor: in order to do a man's work, women must learn to endlessly reproduce themselves throughout the countryside, a trope that simultaneously minimizing the importance of women's domestic vis a vis productive labor even as their domestic labor haunts the text.

### **Coming to Terms with Women and Work:**

The question of what constitutes work is central to understanding how women's contributions are valued by a society, and in the following section I will offer remarks on how I understand and use the basic terms that underpin this discussion. The Marxist understanding of labor-power is rooted in the corporeal form, understanding labor-power as a commodity that exists only in the "living body." Theoretically, then, the female act of reproduction, or the production of children, meant that women and their bodies provided the very means of human existence itself, a responsibility rivaled by scant others in importance. "According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final existence, the production and reproduction of immediate life," wrote Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and State*.<sup>8</sup> The "production and reproduction of immediate life" encompassed "the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species," but also "the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing, shelter and the tools necessary for that production," wrote Engels.

Engels and Marx had written in 1846 that "The first division of labor is between man and woman for the propagation of children," suggesting that gendered divisions of labor owed to biological differences between men and women.<sup>9</sup> But by the time Engels wrote *The Origins of*

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and State*, trans. Tristram Hunt (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 35-6.

<sup>9</sup> See Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 217, in which Engels cites an unpublished manuscript he and Marx had written in 1846, which would later be published in 1932 as *The German Ideology*.



*the Family* in 1884, his understanding had changed; Engels now understood the structure of the family as a shifting superstructure that was formed and reformed by changing economic conditions over time, making the particulars of family relations a fact of successive modes of production forming one after the other.<sup>10</sup> Citing communal forms of production with matrilineal family structures, Engels believed that male supremacy over women was a recent phenomenon, and that it was linked directly to the advent of private property, which caused the family to be “based not on natural but on economic conditions—on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property. The Greeks themselves put the matter quite frankly: the sole exclusive aims of monogamous marriage were to make the man supreme in the family and to propagate, as future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own.”<sup>11</sup> According to this logic, the invention of property rights required that men have monogamous partners in order to ensure a child’s undisputed right to patrilineal capital inheritance. A further consequence of this arrangement entailed women being barred from participation in social production, forced instead into the “open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife,” who differed from the prostitute only “in that she does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery.”<sup>12</sup>

If women’s inferior social status owed directly to their exclusion from productive labor, then Engels believed the antidote was equally powerful and simple: women needed to participate in productive labor. “The emancipation of woman will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an

<sup>10</sup> See Tristram Hunt’s introduction to *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* for more on the sources of Engel’s understanding of the family structure as a kinetic organization, especially in the writings of the American anthropologist and social theorist Lewis Henry Morgan, “Introduction,” *The Origin of the Family*, pp. 12-83.

<sup>11</sup> Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 95-6.

<sup>12</sup> Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, pp. 101-2, 105.

insignificant part of her time,” he wrote. This seemed not only necessary but inevitable, because “modern large-scale industry ... does not merely permit the employment of female labor over a wide range, but positively demands it.”<sup>13</sup> Fortuitously, the exploitative structure of capitalism itself also contained within it the key to women’s liberation from family-based exploitation through women’s participation in wage labor, which would allow them to achieve economic independence. By changing women’s relationship to production, oppressive family structures and patriarchal attitudes would inevitably follow suit, making women’s involvement in productive labor a primary concern, and rendering domestic labor and familial relations of secondary consequence.

Although Engels did not make use of the term “reproductive labor,” it is clear that his concept of the “production and reproduction of immediate life” included both “the production of human beings themselves” as well as “the production of the means of existence.” But “domestic labor,” as he called it, was the largest obstacle to women’s liberation, and according to Engels women’s liberation would consist not of a different valuation of reproductive labor, but of women’s ability to perform other, more socially valued forms of labor. Engel’s solution to the gender-based exploitation of women was also dependent upon the realization of socialist society. He believed modern industry would facilitate a simultaneous “channeling” of “private labor” into “public industry,” suggesting that reproductive labor might become socialized, and thereby minimized in the home. But this was imagined with less clarity than women’s participation in productive labor. Perhaps abstract systemic change is easier to imagine than what it would be like for men—or even one specific man—to take up the burden of women’s work.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 221-2.

<sup>14</sup> For a sense of the private domestic arrangements that may have characterized Engels’s life, see Mike Dash, “How Friedrich Engels’ Radical Lover Helped Him Father Socialism” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Aug. 1, 2013,

Thus, the paradox of Engel's approach to women's liberation becomes clear: women will be freed by performing productive labor, which they will be able to do when they no longer need to perform domestic labor. But, as many have noted, in a capitalist society, which does not provide adequate mechanisms through which the burden of domestic labor can be reduced, the Engelsian solution creates the expectation that women perform productive labor as well as reproductive labor, effectively doubling women's labor load,<sup>15</sup> creating a clear valuation of productive labor as more socially meaningful than domestic labor, privileging the sites of productive labor (i.e. the factory, the field) over the site of reproductive labor (the home), as well as creating productive public domains in opposition to the private domestic one.

But before women could participate in the productive realm, their position in the private realm needed to be transformed. In 1907, the anarcho-feminist He-Yin Zhen wrote that the emergence of private property “[marked] the beginning of the system of women as private property as well as the beginning of the system of slavery.”<sup>16</sup> The history of the “bodily slavery” of women in China was long and familiar, she argued: “Today, they are the slaves of capitalists, whereas of old they only were being ordered around as servants.”<sup>17</sup> Following the collapse of the “communal system,” systems for “pillaging women for marriage and slavery” emerged, co-eval processes that condemned women at birth to a lifetime of exploitation at the hands of men and the systems of capital that they upheld. To He-Yin Zhen, the link between domestic labor and

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-friedrich-engels-radical-lover-helped-him-father-socialism-21415560/>, accessed Feb. 9, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> For scholarship on the double burden of labor of women, see Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: An Historical Overview* (New York: Feminist Press, 1993); and Jacqueline A. Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> He-Yin Zhen, “Economic Revolution and Women's Revolution,” in *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*, eds. Lydia Liu, Rebecca Karl, and Dorothy Ko (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 92.

<sup>17</sup> He-Yin Zhen, “On the Question of Women's Labor,” in *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*, eds. Lydia Liu, Rebecca Karl, and Dorothy Ko (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 81.

servitude was clear, and rooted in social systems that treated women as private possessions. “Today’s marriage, hence, is exactly marriage based on money. It would be no exaggeration to call it a form of property-marriage,” wrote He-Yin Zhen.<sup>18</sup> To break down the structures that made property of women, He-Yin Zhen it was necessary to abolish the state itself, which could only ever buttress the reproduction of the hierarchies that subjugated women.

Indeed, domestic labor and forced labor have long been intertwined categories of work, and many Chinese feminists recognized that marriage was the mechanism that ensured women were reduced to sources of reproductive labor in their husband’s households. In the pages of *Jiating yanjiu* [Family research], a popular journal devoted to family-reform published in Shanghai during the 1920s, a contributor named Liao Shuan summarized the New Culture movement’s marriage reform platform in an article titled “Hunyin wenti zhi yizhong zhuzhang [An opinion on the marriage problem]:” first, men and women should be completely free to enter into marriage agreements of their own accord, and their relationship should be based on the “spiritual union” of the couple. The new couple should form their own new family unit (*xiao jiating*) separate from their existing families, and each should pursuing their own “economic independence” without reliance on the other. Dissatisfaction with the relationship, the taking of concubines, the collection of slaves, and “other vile improprieties” all constituted legitimate grounds upon which a marriage could be dissolved.<sup>19</sup> Although Liao recognized that marriage was at once an economic and an interpersonal arrangement, marriages in which “a man and a woman who do not know each other are forced to live together is simply barbaric marriage,

<sup>18</sup> He-Yin Zhen, “On the Question of Women’s Labor,” p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> For more on Liao’s essay and May Fourth view of marriage and family reform, see Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), especially Chapter 1, “Saving Self and Nation: The New Culture Movement’s Family-Reform Discourse,” pp. 27-80.

marriage as commerce, slave marriage.”<sup>20</sup> May Fourth intellectuals believed that making marriage a free choice between spiritually bonded individuals would not only free men and women from being forced to marry against their will, it would prevent women from becoming slaves in their own homes.

As the Republican period endured, support for marriage reform grew, and in 1924 and 1926 the ruling Kuomintang party passed resolutions abolishing the legal slavery of women and girls through the purchase-marriage system, giving women freedom in marriage and divorce among other guarantees.<sup>21</sup> Five years later, not long after its establishment the Jiangxi Soviet issued the “Jiangxi Chinese Soviet Republic Marriage Regulations,” which aimed to “completely execute the emancipation of women, acknowledge marriage freedom, practice various methods to protect women, enable women to practically gain the material foundations to gradually disengage with household constraints, and participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society.”<sup>22</sup> Both marriage initiatives sought a broad transformation of women’s rights, including the emancipation of women and girls from marriage as servitude by giving women freedom of choice in marriage, while the Jiangxi Soviet Marriage Regulations further tended to the material circumstances of women. However, guaranteeing the protections of both resolutions was a different matter. He Xiangning, head of the K.M.T.’s Central Women’s Department, told the leftist American journalist Anna Louise Strong that “Women do not even know that the new laws exist,” while the provisional wartime nature of the Jiangxi Soviet meant resources for guaranteeing regulations were scarce.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is the 1950 New Marriage Law of the C.C.P,

<sup>20</sup> Liao Shuan cited in Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> See Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the Jiangxi Soviet Marriage Regulations, see Xiaofei Kang, *Women, Family, and the Chinese Socialist State, 1950-2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp 96-8.

<sup>23</sup> See Johnson, *Women, Family and the Peasant Revolution in China*, pp. 43-5; and Kang, *Women, Family, and the Chinese Socialist State*, p. 97.

that is primarily remembered for transforming the institution of marriage in modern China. Drawing on the precedent set in the Jiangxi Soviet, the P.R.C.'s New Marriage Law prohibited concubinage, child betrothal, interference with the remarriage of widows, and emphasized the free choice of partners, monogamy, equal rights for both genders, and the care of the young and old.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the depiction of marriage prior to 1949 suggests that the boundary between free and servile (or serf, or even slave) women was enacted by the state in the years immediately following Liberation. In Li Zhun's "Two Generations," Gao Xiuzhen, mother to Zhuzhu and a member of the fictitious Chaohua People's Commune, reflects on how the social initiatives of the new state have transformed her life, not least of all her marriage. Xiuzhen was married before 1949, and although Li Zhun is short on details about this time, Xiuzhen recalls that she was sold as a child-bride to her husband's family, where she "worked like a mute for thirteen years without daring to speak to [her husband.]"<sup>25</sup> With no voice, Xiuzhen began her married life as a subaltern, and Li suggests that her relationship with her husband was previously best characterized as that between chattel and owner. The line is a typical illustration of a rural woman's backstory for the time, establishing that prior to the arrival of the C.C.P., her marriage had amounted to little more than the sale of a unit of domestic and reproductive labor, that it had occurred without her consent, and that the terms had left her without a voice.

<sup>24</sup> For further scholarship on marriage reform in the P.R.C., see Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Revolution of Chinese Women* (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1983); Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Margery Wolf, *Revolution Post-Poned: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1985); Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Social Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); C.K. Yang, *The Family in the Communist Revolution* (Cambridge, M.A.: The MIT Press, 1972); and Ellen Judd, *Gender and Power in Rural North China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Li Zhun, "Liang dai ren [Two Generations]," *Renmin wenxue* p. 112.

Similarly, in another Li Zhun's novella "Li Shuangshuang," the peasant Li Shuangshuang's marriage to Sun Xiwang is transformed from an abusive purchase-marriage to a romantic, companionate marriage in the P.R.C.'s "new society." The narrator recalls that "Shuangshuang's family had been destitute peasants before Liberation, and she had been given in marriage to Xiwang the year she turned seventeen."<sup>26</sup> Not only had Shuangshuang been sold to her husband, before Liberation, Xiwang beat her too. But the co-eval processes of land reform and the new marriage law change that: "After [that], Xiwang didn't dare hit her all the time. For one thing, life was getting a bit better, and he was afraid she would divorce him." Even more so, after Liberation Xiwang is able to admit to himself that he "actually did like Shuangshuang," and the story, in part, depicts Xiwang's process of learning to accommodate his wife's vibrant personality and growing leadership role in the commune. Although both Shuangshuang and Xiwang's marriages began by their sale, without their consent, and on abusive terms in Shuangshuang's case, they are grandfathered in after the establishment of the P.R.C., and transformed into warm, supportive, companionate relationships, suggesting that the establishment of the P.R.C. itself served as a boundary between marriage-as-slavery and marriage as companionate relationship predicated upon individual choice.

### **Reforming Labor Through Land**

Marxist views on the sources of women's subordination, and especially Engels's *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and State*, were an important starting point for both Chinese Marxists as well as Western socialist feminist analyses of gender and labor.<sup>27</sup> In her

<sup>26</sup> Li Zhun, "A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang," trans. Johanna Hood, Robert Mackie, and Richard King, in *Heroes of the Great Leap Forward: Two Stories*, ed. Richard King (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), p. 21. See also Li Zhun, *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> See Tamara Jacka, *Women's Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform*, especially Chapter 1, "Theorising Gender," (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 10.

study on patriarchy in the first decades of the P.R.C., Judith Stacey argues that “family revolution” in the countryside was “at the center of the social revolution that brought the CCP to state power,” and that much of the theoretical and political framework for the Party’s approach to the organization of labor, ownership, and the family in the countryside, especially as it related to women, was established from the late 1920s to the mid-1940s, when the CCP forged alliances with rural Chinese after being largely expelled from the country’s urban centers by the Kuomintang.<sup>28</sup> From Jinggangshan to Yan’an, experiences of wartime retreat and mobilization provided opportunities to experiment with rural reconstruction policies that dramatically changed the texture of rural life. After 1949, experiences from the Yan’an period in particular seemed to directly inform many of the signature new policies and initiatives of the new government, resulting in a cultural and political model that Mark Selden and others have famously called the “Yan’an Way.”<sup>29</sup>

But as Kay Ann Johnson points out, approaches toward reorganizing labor and social relations implemented at Yan’an often also entailed comparatively conservative social policies toward women and family structure. “The wartime setting and the particularly restrictive cultural traditions of the remote, mountainous areas of the North and the Northwest strengthened the most conservative and cautious tendencies in the Party on family reform issues,” Johnson writes, avoiding challenging the ways in which the existing structure of the family unit disadvantaged

<sup>28</sup> Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 108-15.

<sup>29</sup> See Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), *China in Revolution: Yanan Way Revisited* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995); Feng Chongyi and David S.G. Goodman, eds., *North China at War: The Sociol Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Li Jinzheng, “Nongmin heyi zhichi yu canjia zhonggong geming?,” *Jindaishi yanjiu* 4 (2012): 134-151; Tony Saich, “Introduction: The Chinese Communist Party and the Anti-Japanese Base Areas,” *The China Quarterly* 140 (1994): 1000-6; Tian Youru, *Zhongguo kangri genjudi fazhanshi* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1995); and Lyman P. Van Slyke, “The Chinese Communist Movement during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 13, *Republican China, 1912-1949: Part 2*, eds., John King Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 609-721.



women.<sup>30</sup> Judith Stacey notes that in comparison to Engels's praise of unrestrained "sex love" or the early Bolshevik advocacy for free love and the weakening of family ties,<sup>31</sup> Chinese leftists saw no need to do away with the family as the underlying social unit structuring the countryside.<sup>32</sup> The resulting Yan'an wartime production model was labor intensive, and relied on pulling women from the home in order to meet those labor needs, thus centering women's liberation around their participation in public spheres of labor and minimizing the necessity of addressing their role in domestic labor.<sup>33</sup> Basing rural women's liberation on their ability to participate in labor outside the home, then, was a comparatively conservative stance.

The success of the Yan'an experience seemed to validate the Engelsian approach to women's liberation, and after 1949, the new state drew from this experience as the basis of their approach to both rural development and rural women's liberation. After the "victory of the socialist revolution" (i.e. 1949), women's liberation through full production participation was a key objective for the new state. Mao stressed that building a "great socialist society" would necessarily entail "[arousing] the broad masses of women to join in productive activity." Beyond that, it was imperative not only to produce more by working differently, but also to construct a new socialist society out of the capitalist one the P.R.C. had inherited, for "Genuine equality

<sup>30</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 87-9.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Bolshevik feminism, see: Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Lapidus, eds., *Women in Russia* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Although at Yan'an, CCP leaders encouraged women to spin and weave in order to strengthen the economy of Communist-controlled regions as well as draw women into social and public life. See Jacob Eyferth, "Liberation from the Loom? Rural Women, Textile Work, and the Revolution in North China," from *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday life in China's High Era of Socialism*, Jeremy Brown, Matthew D. Johnson, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 139.

between the sexes can only be realized in the process of socialist transformation of society as a whole,” making the socialist mission an inherently feminist one.<sup>34</sup>

After the founding of the P.R.C., change in the countryside unfolded in stages. The cumulative effect was the transformation of private farming into a system of collectivized agricultural production, a total reorganization of the means of production that entailed widespread and pervasive social and cultural change.<sup>35</sup> If change in rural women’s lives was to be centered around their relationship to production, then in rural areas, the land itself constituted the means of production, making land reform an immediate priority. Land reform made women and certain forms of their labor visible through women’s involvement in its implementation, as well as its toppling of male monopoly over land ownership.

Although land reform is most commonly remembered as a signature policy and first order of business implemented in 1950, the CCP had begun organizing land reform much earlier in the Jiangxi Soviet.<sup>36</sup> As Delia Davin notes, change in the countryside did not arrive across the nation in one fell swoop. Conditions in the northern “liberated” areas often differed significantly from those that were not under CCP control until 1949 or later (the “old” *jiu* areas), which meant that mutual aid teams and agricultural co-operatives were already implemented in some northern areas before 1949, well before the process of land reform had begun in other regions of the country.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Mao Zedong, *Socialist Upsurge in China’s Countryside* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Here, my account of agricultural collectivization over the course of more than a decade will necessarily be abbreviated, as I will focus on narrating systemic change in the countryside with an eye for material changes in the arrangement of women’s labor.

<sup>36</sup> See Brian DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China’s Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Delia Davin, *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 115.

The first land laws were drafted in December 1928, and they entailed the confiscation of all land to the Soviet government. The land would be redistributed back to poor rural residents, but they would not receive land ownership rights.<sup>38</sup> Experiences with rural revolution, in particular sabotage from middle peasants who had their land confiscated, quickly moderated expectations of land reform, and where the “Land Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic” of December 1931 again entailed the confiscation of all major land and other assets of landlords, warlords, temples, and other wealthy landowners, it did not abolish private ownership of land. Instead, the law aimed to make private land ownership more accessible to poor and middle peasants, redistributing land back to them along with land deeds.

Parcels of land were allotted to rural residents according to family size, either by the number of family members or according to the amount of labor power in a family.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, work teams counted women as full household members when they made allocations. But by distributing land according to family size, the land reform implemented by the Jiangxi Soviet thus solidified the rural family as the production unit of the countryside, creating small independent family-run farms where previously the agricultural economy had been dominated by wealthy landlord control. When the Jiangxi Soviet met its violent end in 1934, efforts to redistribute land were resumed again only after the CCP had established a secure base area in northern China, but again military conflict with Japan delayed land reform, and entering into partnership with the Kuomintang moderated policies again. “Ten Great Policies” were announced in August 1937; where land was concerned, they suspended the seizure and redistribution of land in favor of protections for rural poor against usurious rent collections and exploitative labor practices, such as instituting a ceiling on land rents collected in CCP-areas that

<sup>38</sup> Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Chao Kuo-chün, *Agrarian Policy of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1959*, p. 22.

had not conducted land revolution, and protecting tenant farmers against advance rental collections, rent deposits, and compulsory labor.<sup>40</sup>

When war with Japan and against the Kuomintang ended, land policy again returned toward redistribution. The land law of September 1947, produced at a land reform conference held the same year, laid out land revolution policy, a process through which poor rural residents were mobilized to confiscate a landowner's assets through force and then redistribute those assets back to the community. Women played a key role in the process of land reform, and were present in the land law document itself, in no small part due to efforts by Deng Yingchao, then a prominent member of the preparatory committee for the Women's Federation.<sup>41</sup> The mobilization of laboring women (i.e. women involved in productive labor) had been an essential component of successful land reform, leading "speaking bitterness (*suku*)" sessions and confiscating landlord property. In areas where all a village's men had been recruited to the army, land reform was carried out by women alone,<sup>42</sup> and Deng argued at the conference that land reform could not be effectively carried out without due attention to organizing women. Critical of the scarce attention that was paid to the issue at the National Land Reform Conference, Deng wrote that land reform needed to mobilize women alongside men, and that "There must be no

<sup>40</sup> Judith Stacey notes that land laws implemented in the Ten Great Policies bore more than a striking resemblance to the Kuomintang land law of 1930, which had never been implemented. See Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> See Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 46-7 for more on the role Deng Yingchao played in drafting the land laws of 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Qi Wang, "State-society Relations and Women's Political Participation" in *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation*, Jackie West, Zhang Minghua, Chang Xiangqun, and Cheng Yuan, eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 22.

division with ‘men first, then women.’<sup>43</sup> By March 1949, implementation of land reform in existing liberated areas and the newly-secured northeast were largely complete.<sup>44</sup>

By 1949, the C.C.P. had already become quite experienced in implementing land reform, and in 1950, it went about completing land reform nationwide. Like the land law of 1947, the Common Program of 1949, the interim constitution of the P.R.C., and the Agrarian Land Reform Law of June 1950 revoked all land ownership rights of landlords and redistributed their property to rural farmers. The landlord, as a class, was abolished, and landlords as well as rich peasants were branded class enemies before being displaced, abused, and killed.<sup>45</sup> Prior to reform, landlords had owned about half the land, which they leased to households, but beyond access to the land itself, they had not contributed much to the processes of agricultural production (such as tools or draft animals for working the land.)

Although the New Marriage Law of 1950 often takes pride of place when discussing signature early P.R.C. policies that promoted gender equality, the process of land reform constituted a significant material transformation in the lives of rural women and the valuation of their labor. On the one hand, land reform struck at the core of women’s rights through its simultaneous toppling of male monopoly over land ownership along with the landlord system. Previously, inheritance of land rights passed from father to son, or to other male relatives.

<sup>43</sup> Deng Yingchao, *Land Reform and the New Tasks of Woman-Work*, included in All-China Women’s Federation, ed., *Important Documents of the Chinese Women’s Movement* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979.)

<sup>44</sup> See Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> For more on land reform, see Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon’s Village* (New York: Penguin, 1980); Stephen Endicott, *Red Earth: Revolution in a Sichuan Village* (New York: New Amsterdam Book, 1991); Charles Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); William Hinton, *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Random House, 1984); Victor D. Lippit, *Land Reform and Economic Development in China: A Study of Institutional Change and Development Finance* (London: Routledge, 1975); Vivienne Shue, *Peasant China in Transition: The Dynamics of Development Toward Socialism, 1949-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); John Wong, *Land Reform in the People’s Republic of China* (Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 1974); and David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-81* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Although widows may have held land on behalf of their male children, it was more commonly entrusted to a male relative of the deceased father. Since 1931, Republican law had technically granted men and women equal rights of inheritance, along with elevating a widow as her husband's legal heir, but as Delia Davin and Mark Van Der Falk have written, these legal guarantees were rarely enforced in the countryside.<sup>46</sup> After land reform, agrarian law required that men and women receive equal shares of land, requiring separate property deeds to be issued where necessary, in what was ostensibly an incentive that encouraged women to work the land. Issuing land deeds in women's names had a powerful effect, as many rural women were given formal names for the first time when they registered land deeds in their own names, as opposed to those of their husbands or fathers.<sup>47</sup>

But on the other hand, another consequence of land reform was the assignment of class status, which carried with it access to certain political rights and material rewards as well as one's susceptibility to the punishments of revolutionary justice. Crucially, class status was assigned not to individuals, but to entire families. This meant that a woman's political identity was therefore embedded within the family, recognizing the family both as a political unit as well as a production unit. Although class status often took into account the length of time a woman had been married as a complicating factor in determining her status, class status overwhelmingly consigned a woman's political identity to the family unit. Judith Stacey argues that "by submerging a woman's political identity in that of her patriarchal family, the party structurally denied that a history of sex oppression constituted legitimate grounds for material

<sup>46</sup> See Delia Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 115-6, and Marius Hendrikus van den Valk, *An Outline of Modern Chinese Family Law* (Beijing: H. Vetch, 1939), pp. 123-41. For contemporary gender inequality in the accumulation of property wealth, see Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> See Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*, footnote 19, p. 273.

compensation,” resulting in policies and practices that Stacey says transformed “land-to-the-tiller” programs into “land-to-the-families-of-tillers.”<sup>48</sup>

Because class distinction was carried by the family, women’s political identities were consigned to the patriarchal family unit. The classification system was an administrative strengthening of the family as the dominant organizing structure for rural life as well as an equalization of the “distribution of patriarchal authority” in rural China. Land reform was mostly completed by the spring of 1953. For many rural Chinese, the campaign secured independent family farming as a viable means of living after decades of precariousness. But where land reform transformed the practices of land ownership through a democratization of land wealth, it also enshrined the patriarchal family as the unit of production and of political class. With the independent family unit as the dominant organizational structure for rural life, an economy of small, private farmers emerged.<sup>49</sup>

### **Mutual Aid Teams**

Where land reform took land out of the hands of a few wealthy landowners, thus making small family farming a viable livelihood, land reform itself did not collectivize agricultural production. The collectivization of agricultural production began instead with the establishment of mutual aid teams, or a handful of households in the same area that organized into a unit sharing its resources with one another, from farming tools and draft animals to field labor. The formation of mutual aid teams tended to track closely with the process of land reform, as land was typically distributed on a per capita basis. Families with small children often received more

<sup>48</sup> Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, pp. 127-8. Stacey also describes the sexual violence meted out to women classified as members of the landlord class through marriage or kinship ties.

<sup>49</sup> William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 31.

land than they could reasonably manage, while families with older children might have a surplus of labor. Thus, the mutual aid team allowed small groups of families to pool their resources, and share them as they saw fit. During busy parts of the growing season, this might mean directing everyone to participate in agricultural labor, or to share farming tools and draft animals. While tools and animals were sometimes distributed following land reform, they were not provided in quantities sufficient to allow every household their own set of tools, for example, or their own draught animal. Previously, a rural household might acquire “one leg of an ox,” as a quarter share of an animal was known.”<sup>50</sup>

As with land reform, some northern areas under Communist control had already been organized into mutual aid teams prior to 1949. Nationwide, mutual aid teams were established predominantly between 1954 and 1955, although specific experiences different greatly depending on region. In Guangdong, for example, mutual aid teams were formed in 1953, consisting of about seven to eight households,<sup>51</sup> while elsewhere they typically consisted of around ten families.<sup>52</sup>

The formation of mutual aid teams raised questions of how labor would be counted, valued, and rewarded, and debates over who should receive how much reward for which types of labor directly addressed issues of women’s capacity for labor (of all types), as well as the gendered distribution of labor in rural households. Instead of wages, mutual aid teams introduced the work point as a measurement of labor performed. The number of points awarded to an individual varied based on the type of task and the presumed intensity of the (manual) labor. Immediately, work point standards that valued the labor of men over that of women emerged.

<sup>50</sup> Delia Davin, *Woman-Work*, p. 141.

<sup>51</sup> Parish and Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China*, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> Joshua Eisenman, *Red China’s Green Revolution: Technological Innovation, Institutional Change, and Economic Development Under the Commune* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 33.



The work of the mutual aid team was organized around the traditional family division of labor, and mutual aid teams systematically discriminated against women by awarding them fewer points than men. Work point standards varied from village to village, but women were usually awarded half the work points of a man for productive labor owing to the assumption that a woman was only capable of half a man's output, known as the "*lao wu fen*."

Often, this distribution of work points was not borne out by women's record of performance, and anecdotes abound of women who performed their tasks as quickly as or faster than their male counterparts. In 1948, Luo Qiong, then the leader of the Women's Federation, reported that women in mutual aid teams demanded not only that they receive the same number of work points as men, but that they also receive them directly, and have them recorded separately from the family tally in a measure of economic independence from the family unit.<sup>53</sup> The problem was persistent, and a September 1956 editorial in the *People's Daily* titled "How to Deal Correctly with Equal Pay for Men and Women" exhorted groups to pay men and women according to the labor performed. Many still continued to classify productive labor according to age and gender.

While mutual aid teams reinforced traditional gendered divisions of labor by recognizing the individual family as the basic unit of production, they also laid the foundations for the collectivization of agriculture that would eventually replace the small family mode of agricultural production. Significantly, mutual aid teams created new labor roles for women chipped away at traditional divisions of labor. For example, cooperative labor made the participation of women possible in areas where the traditional division of labor barred women from agricultural work. In villages where labor was short, women played a leading role in the

<sup>53</sup> Delia Davin, *Woman-Work*, p. 141.

processes of land reform and agricultural production, and mutual aid teams appeared first and were more prevalent in areas that were “forced” to rely on women for agricultural production. Mutual aid teams also organized villagers into new groups, forming social networks that rivaled the kinship networks that were already in place. As collectivization began to replace the private family economy, the transformative implications of reform were expanded, as mutual aid teams weakened traditional bases of patrilineal authority.

### **Agricultural Co-operatives**

If mutual teams were a beginning step toward the collectivization of agricultural production, the agricultural cooperative was the second step. Agricultural cooperatives further entrenched new hierarchies of labor, rewarding productive labor above all else. Introduced between 1956 and 1957, agricultural producer cooperatives operated at the village or subvillage level and allowed many households to collectively manage their land and to share the costs of farming the land. In principal, a larger cooperative would allow the group to work more efficiently, meeting the pronounced demand for agricultural labor during the busy season and directing workers during the down season for capital infrastructure projects. Income was distributed to families based on the proportion of agricultural labor, land, and other resources that family had contributed to the cooperative.

Already in 1955, 17 million households had joined six-hundred and thirty cooperatives across the country, and Mao called for a further expansion of the cooperative, resulting in the Higher-Level Producer Cooperatives of 1956, in which the cooperative oversaw use of all agricultural resources from the land to draught animals. Higher-Level Producer Cooperatives also ended the award of work points based on the contribution of resources, awarding work points based solely on contributions to productive labor. Productive labor was thus recognized

above other forms of labor as legitimate work. The number of work points awarded to each household was calculated after a harvest was sold, dividing the collective income by the total number of member work points earned. By February of 1956, more than half the villages in the P.R.C. had opened a Higher-Level Producer Cooperatives, and by the end of the year, more than ninety percent of the country's farmers belonged to a Higher-Level Producer Collective. In some areas, mutual aid teams were converted directly into Higher-Level Producer Collectives, skipping over the agricultural producer cooperatives.<sup>54</sup>

The Higher-Level Producer Cooperatives were often the same size as the village itself. Previously, as an institution the village exceeded the mutual aid team or agricultural producer cooperative, but with larger cooperatives the village as a political unit and the cooperative as an economic unit were now responsible for the same people and geographic area. Quickly, the economic mandate of the Higher-Level Producer Cooperatives began to overwhelm its counterpart political institutions. Where the cooperatives were responsible for organizing agricultural production, collecting taxes, and distributing work points and food, townships (*xiang*) were responsible for implementing and enforcing party policies, army recruitment, and maintaining the police. Because administration of the township was now being overwhelmed by the cooperative, in 1955 and 1956 townships were re-organized into big townships (*da xiang*) in order to better extend political control over the cooperative. By 1957, there was one big township for approximately every seven and a half cooperatives.

Within less than a decade, the countryside had been significantly reorganized, going from a model of agricultural production based around landlord and private ownership of farms to collective ownership and administration of farms, and the collectivization of the countryside

<sup>54</sup> Eisenman, *Red China's Green Revolution*, p. 34.

necessarily exceeded well beyond the limits of productive labor and into the realm of reproductive labor. Indeed, reorganizing the site of productive labor would necessarily involve reorganizing multiple other sites of labor, as proletarian ownership of the means of production also entailed a vast change in the character of social relations. The commune itself would be the institution that could deliver both of these shifts, simultaneously revolutionizing social relations as they ushered in greater and more equitable economic prosperity.

### **People's Communes**

Although the processes of land reform and the formation of mutual aid teams and agricultural cooperatives had significantly transformed the material circumstances of women's labor in the countryside, the commune was the first program that fully attempted to address women's obligation to domestic and reproductive labor. The formation of people's communes was announced in national press beginning in late summer 1958, and from the start, the implementation of the commune was undertaken with consideration to the onerous burden of housework that rural women bore. A September 1958 editorial in *Hongqi* magazine explained that in order "to make full use of labor power" (the opposite of which was less than full efficiency and a failure to contribute adequately to the nation's growth), women needed to "play their full part in field work," thereby ensuring that "there is no waste of labor time of men and women." In order to ensure the full participation of both men and women, "the farm cooperatives must be not only organizers of production, but also organizers of the way of life."<sup>55</sup> It was not enough, then, to simply collectivize agricultural labor, as the mutual aid teams and cooperatives had done. Communes required "organization with higher efficiency," and if

<sup>55</sup> "Greet the Upsurge in Forming People's Communes," *Hongqi*, 7 (Sept. 1958): p. 13. Also included in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 10.

domestic labor prevented women from working in the fields then it was hardly efficient to exclude half the population from productive labor.<sup>56</sup>

Properly collectivizing agricultural production entailed making a host of other social services available, thus ensuring that commune members were equally able to fulfill their productive duties. Time that was spent cooking, cleaning, sewing, or looking after children was time that detracted from one's ability to work in the fields, and so it became necessary for the commune to address the burden of domestic labor in order to free up (wo)manpower for the fields. Thus, in order to free commune members for productive labor, the commune would step in to provide the social services necessary to keep women in the fields. Wu Zhipu, party secretary of Henan county, where the nation's first commune was established, promised that people's communes would fulfill the "seven basic requirements: eating, clothing, housing, childbirth, education, medical treatment, and marriage and funeral expenses."<sup>57</sup> A few of the seven basic requirements were understood as exclusive domain of women, namely raising children, and feeding and clothing families. To relieve women of their childcare, cooking, sewing, and weaving responsibilities, the commune would organize sewing circles (*fengren zu*), public canteens (*gonggong shitang*) to eliminate the need to cook daily, and nurseries (*tuo'er suo*) and kindergartens to substitute for at home childcare.

<sup>56</sup> "Hold High the Red Flag of People's Communes and March On," *Renmin ribao*, Sept. 3, 1958. Reprinted in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Wu Zhipu, "From Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives to People's Communes," *Hongqi* 7 (Sept. 16, 1958): pp. 5-11. Reprinted in *People's Communes in China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), p. 37. Wu waffled a bit between seven and ten basic requirements, describing in the same breath the "ten basic requirements," which included the first seven as well as fuel for winter, haircuts, and theater.

## Women's Work

What was “women-work” in the P.R.C.? I speak here not in the abstract sense of any work done by women, but in terms of a specific utterance, *funü gongzuo*.<sup>58</sup> Delia Davin translates the term as “woman-work,” which she uses to refer to “all sorts of activities among women, including mobilizing them for revolutionary struggle, production, literacy and hygiene campaigns, social reform, and so on.”<sup>59</sup> “Woman-work” was a state project, occurring under the auspices of party-organized groups and associations for women, including “unions, schools, and newspapers for women,”<sup>60</sup> and it should be understood in this context and not abstractly as any work performed by women. Wang Zheng, who translates *funü gongzuo* as “women-work,” emphasizes in her discussion that “women-work” was a term that re-packaged and camouflaged the feminist projects of the May Fourth period for contemporary parlance. As opposed to *nüquan zhuyi*, which fell out of favor as intellectual feminist projects collided, “women-work” allowed the socialist state feminists of Wang’s study to legitimize and promote women’s liberation through state organs, as well as mobilize women through chapters of the All-China Women’s Federation (*Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhehui*), established in late March of 1949.<sup>61</sup> To Elisabeth Croll, “woman work” is another name for “the women’s movement,” and a formal and integral aspect of the revolutionary front.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> I adopt the hyphenated “women-work” enclosed in quotations; the typographical distinctions set it apart and serve to remind myself that this term comes from another time, context, language, and usage..

<sup>59</sup> Delia Davin, *Woman-work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 32. Tamara Jacka adopts Davin’s translation of *funü gongzuo* in her study *Women’s Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in and Era of Reform* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Davin, *Woman-work*, p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> See Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), p. 5, also pp. 30-47 and 57-70.

<sup>62</sup> Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), especially Chapter 7, “‘Woman Work’: Community China, pp. 185-222 and particularly pp. 190-1.

Yet “women-work” remains a slippery term, as Tamara Jacka notes.<sup>63</sup> If, in the abstract, women’s work refers to any and all work done by women, then in the specific, “women-work” *funü gongzuo* is also vague; again referring to any and all work done by women falling under the umbrella of institutions such as the Women’s Federation. Like a *chengyu*, it is even unclear what particle of speech “women-work” is, an ouroboros-like portmanteau of noun and verb, subject and object, indicating work performed for women, by women, to further their own interests in concert with the interests of the state project.

In Li Zhun’s 1959 short story “Two Generations (*Liang dai ren*),” a mother and her daughter discuss just exactly what “women-work” is as the mother readies her daughter to succeed her as the head of the local Women’s Federation chapter.<sup>64</sup> “‘This ‘women-work,’ what does it consist of?,’ she [Xiuzhen] quizzed her daughter. Zhuzhu counted on her fingers: ‘Announcing meetings, cleaning the offices, wiping out illiteracy, helping families resolve their problems, organizing vaccinations, and also intervening in fights and mediating disputes, because we can’t let men bully women!’” Xiuzhen laughs heartily as her daughter recites the components of “women-work,” teasing that if she tries to rattle everything that qualifies as “women-work” off on her fingers, she’ll be there until midnight. Zhuzhu has missed the forest for the trees, and Xiuzhen tries to get her daughter to see the bigger picture: “Women-work, it’s about caring about people’s work (*ren de gongzuo*), taking an interest in every woman in every home (*guanxin ge jia xiaohu mei yige funü*), and helping them to elevate their consciousness, to

<sup>63</sup> “I will use Davin’s term ‘woman-work,’ ... although clumsy...” Tamara Jacka, *Women’s Work in Rural China*, footnote 58, p. 219.

<sup>64</sup> Li Zhun, “Mother and Daughter,” trans. unattributed, included in *Not That Road and Other Stories* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962), pp. 102-117. Also included in *Li Zhun zhuanji* [Collected works of Li Zhun], ed. Bu Zhongkang (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1982) and *Li Zhun xiaoshuo xuan* [Li Zhun short story selections] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981). Originally published in *Renmin wenxue* No. 10 (1959): pp. 51-57. Although the short story has appeared in translation as “Mother and Daughter,” I will refer to it as “Two Generations.” Where I have cited “Two Generations,” the translation is my own, and where I note “Mother and Daughter,” I cite the unattributed 1962 Foreign Languages Press translation.

organize their participation in production (*zuzhi canjia shengchan*). In every center's work, you must listen to the party and help the party execute every task."<sup>65</sup> As Xiuzhen explains, "women-work" goes beyond the Women's Federation, and even beyond the party itself: "It's a question of what road we rural folk will take," she concludes, turning "women-work" into a set of values more than any specific set of tasks.

Yet even as Xiuzhen and Zhuzhu discuss what exactly "women-work" is, as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that the short story encapsulates not just "women-work," but *all* the work that engenders the new subjectivity of women in the countryside. Over the course of the short story, Zhuzhu learns not only how to take over her mother's responsibilities in the women's association but also in the home and in the commune maternity ward. As her mother passes from one site of labor to the next, her daughter learns how to compensate for her mother by performing the same work as her, taking over for her not once but three times, with the short story broken up into three numbered sections, each corresponding to an instance of Zhuzhu "taking over" for her mother. In my reading of Li Zhun's text, reproductive labor is the essential component of women's work, gendered to the point of being exclusive to women.

At the start of "Two Generations," the commune leader has just asked Gao Xiuzhen to accept a position as factory manager of the commune's new distillery, a position that Xiuzhen at first refuses because she assumes it is a man's job. "How can you give this work to me? You need skills (*jishu*) and an education (*wenhua*) for a job like that, how could a woman (*funü jia*) possibly pull it off?"<sup>66</sup> The commune secretary disabuses Xiuzhen of her mistaken notion that women cannot lead factories, telling her she's already proven she can get the job done, and Xiuzhen accepts the decision, indicating that her daughter will step up into her position as

<sup>65</sup> Li Zhun, "Liang dai ren," p. 54.

<sup>66</sup> Li Zhun, "Liang dai ren," p. 52.



chairwoman (*zhuxi*) of the women's association so that she can begin working in the factory. (*Zhuxi* is rendered as "chairman" in the Foreign Language Press's unattributed English translation.)<sup>67</sup>

In fact, Xiuzhen's capable daughter has already "taken over" for her mother several times, and the story jumps back through time to recall the first occasion upon which daughter replaced mother. On the first occasion, in the years immediately following 1949 Xiuzhen becomes increasingly involved in village political work when a work team arrives. This development is of great concern to her husband, Yang Zhengxiang, a conservative rural man who has heard that the women who attend political meetings always end up asking for a divorce, no doubt due to rumors that have spread related to the New Marriage Law of 1950. When Xiuzhen is called to attend three days of rallies and meetings in town, her husband is beside himself with distress, convinced that his wife intends to leave him. Her sister-in-law takes her brother's side in the fracas: "Going to a meeting? More like mucking around with men, I say (*Genzhe nanrenmen chuan, laomei*)! Who's going to cook for you while you're gone, huh? I'm not going to!"

Instead, twelve-year old Zhuzhu rushes to her mother's defense, offering to cook for the three days she is gone. Xiuzhen teaches Zhuzhu how to make noodles before she leaves, initiating her daughter in the domestic work of the house. While away, Xiuzhen finds it difficult to concentrate with her family on her mind, and she worries constantly that they will not be able to take care of themselves in her absence. When she returns on the fourth day, she beams with pride at the sight of Zhuzhu in an apron boiling noodles for dinner, a marker of Zhuzhu's initiation in the reproduction of her mother's domestic labor.

<sup>67</sup> Li Zhun, "Mother and Daughter," *Not That Road and Other Stories*, pp. 105-6.

Xiuzhen's return also transforms her relationship with her husband, who had become convinced Xiuzhen would use the meeting as a pretext to run away, abandon her family, seek a divorce, and leave him without anyone to perform the essential domestic labor upon which he depends. Although Li Zhun depicts Xiuzhen's husband as irrational and a borderline hysteric, he may have cause for concern, for their relationship began when Xiuzhen was sold to her husband's family as a child bride, where she "worked [in the Yang home] like a mute for thirteen years without daring to speak to [her husband.]"<sup>68</sup> With no voice, Xiuzhen began her married life as a subaltern, and Li suggests that her relationship with her husband was previously best characterized as that between chattel and owner.

But participation in village political work gives Xiuzhen a voice, and that voice, in turn, endows her with a subjectivity; she is no longer an object owned by the Yang family, but a subject who expresses her will and agency as she organizes her community. When Xiuzhen returns home, Zhengxiang is overjoyed not to have lost his wife; "he couldn't wipe the grin off his face." Just as Xiuzhen has transformed under the new social conditions of the countryside, so too has their marriage, and Zhengxiang "never lost his temper with her again. On the contrary, he seemed fonder of her than before."<sup>69</sup> By proving to her husband that she will not abandon her domestic responsibilities in spite of gaining a newfound confidence and political subjectivity, Zhengxiang and Xiuzhen's relationship transforms into an affectionate companionate marriage. But whether their marriage is based upon the principles of love or property rights, Zhengxiang continues to enjoy the same benefits, with the expectation that other immediate kin—either his wife or his daughter—will perform domestic labor on his behalf.

<sup>68</sup> Li Zhun, "Mother and Daughter," p. 112.

<sup>69</sup> Li Zhun, "Mother and Daughter," p. 112.

As time goes on, Zhuzhu learns to perform an increasing amount of her mother's work in the home, allowing Xiuzhen greater participation in her newfound political identity. The two women pass responsibility for the reproductive work of tending to the family from one generation to another, with men exempted from the cycle. By "taking over" for her mother, a hierarchy of labor and subjectivities becomes apparent: Xiuzhen's initiation as a political subject is valued over her performance of household labor, and she is "liberated" from her chores only by displacing that labor onto another young woman, her daughter.

The chapter's hierarchical division of labor is further elaborated when Zhuzhu replaces her mother a second time. This time, when Xiuzhen is sent to the district to run the maternity ward, Zhuzhu is elected to her mother's place as head of the women's association. As this is Zhuzhu's second instance of replacing her mother, and as her responsibilities are greater than the needs of their one small household, Li Zhun elevates "women-work" over the domestic labor of an individual household, and taking care of the collective women is valued over taking care of the private family. After their conversation about the nature of "women work," Xiuzhen tells Zhuzhu that above all, she must rely on the Party's guidance. "The Party will help you, and you must do the work it gives you," explaining to Zhuzhu that it isn't enough simply to run the women's organization, but through that role, to support the productive goals of the mutual aid team. This, then, is the heart and soul of "women-work:" helping women resolve any of the distinctly feminine problems that might prevent them from participating in the productive and social life of the community (like spousal abuse, or a limited feudal consciousness), and organizing them so that the mutual aid team can achieve greater productivity. Although the specifics of "women-work" varies from day to day, whether it's mediating in domestic disputes or tidying up the women's association facilities, ultimately all acts, large or small, help facilitate

women's support of the larger community's productivity. When Zhuzhu begins working as leader of the women's association, she begins to "imitate her mother's methods and mannerisms," furthering her transformation into from child to ideal adult female member of the community.<sup>70</sup>

By beginning work in the women's association, Zhuzhu is also initiated in labor that goes beyond the needs of their individual family. Because Zhuzhu now serves the larger community, her relationship with her mother is cathected through the public, and Zhuzhu sometimes calls Xiuzhen "Comrade Mother" (*Mama tongzhi*). The unusual and comical moniker combines the private intimacy of their parent-child bond with their public relationship as colleagues working in the same organizations within the community. Soon, Zhuzhu begins training to work as one of many new-style midwives in the maternity ward, receiving formal training in maternal and public health in the county seat, including instruction in the use of new, sterile midwifery techniques.

Zhuzhu's final occasion of taking over for her mother occurs when Zhuzhu takes over for her mother as head of the district maternity ward. This time, Xiuzhen feels no anxiety over passing the baton on to her daughter, as her daughter's knowledge of new-style midwifery has surpassed her own. But being promoted to head of the maternity ward still signifies a large increase in responsibility, and Zhuzhu is eager for the challenge. She tells her mother how jealous she was when Xiuzhen participated in the construction of Great Leap infrastructure projects, telling her "Look at my hands—how soft they've grown" in the maternity ward. "I've been dying to get back to the land," Zhuzhu tells her mother. She longs to recover her calluses as

<sup>70</sup> Li Zhun, "Mother and Daughter," p. 109.

well as the purpose and dignity they conferred, a clear idealization of manual labor over the reproductive responsibilities of the maternity ward.

But even if Zhuzhu is ready for the promotion and Xiuzhen is assured of her daughter's competence, the passing of the crown is still perhaps Zhuzhu's most momentous transfer of responsibility yet, and Xiuzhen speaks with great affect, "as if preparing her daughter for a wedding."<sup>71</sup> Responsibility for the reproductive labor of the community thus carries a deep emotional charge, and Xiuzhen treats it as a sacred social rite of passage for her daughter. Xiuzhen is transformed into both metaphorical bride and mother to the extended community. By serving as midwife to the pregnant women of the community, Xiuzhen completes the final stage in her transformation from girl to woman, with her arrival at symbolic sexual maturity signified by her ability to direct the delivery of the community's babies.

As Xiuzhen and Zhuzhu move between roles, each transfer of responsibility from mother to daughter occurs within an explicitly gendered site of labor until Xiuzhen arrives at the threshold of the factory floor. Housework, organizing the women's association, and obstetrics are all presented as inherently gendered forms of labor, and no men are involved in performing them throughout the course of the novel. They are also all forms of reproductive labor; childbirth explicitly so, while house chores and organizing the women's association fall under Engels's mantle of "the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing, shelter, and the tools necessary for [the] production of life." As Xiuzhen and Zhuzhu pass from one site of labor to another, their labor rises in prestige, becoming increasingly socially valued in their community, until finally Xiuzhen is able to free herself from the limits of feminine labor and enjoy the "liberation" of performing men's productive labor.

<sup>71</sup> Li Zhun, "Mother and Daughter," p. 109.

Ironically, after years of passing on skills, knowledge, and responsibility to her daughter, it is Zhuzhu who finally molds her mother into a factory manager. Looking at the “old-fashioned, cumbersome coil in which Xiuzhen wore her hair,” Zhuzhu insists that Xiuzhen cut her hair into a more fashionable and factory-appropriate bob. “You’re in industry now, remember. You’re a factory manager,” she reminds her mother. But Xiuzhen refuses. “Why should I cut my hair to run a factory?,” she asks, telling her daughter that “You can’t expect a woman nearing fifty to go round with a bobtail like yours.”<sup>72</sup> But during her afternoon nap, she awakens to the sound of shears at her ears: Zhuzhu has gone ahead and snipped her hair into a bob without her permission. At first, Xiuzhen is enraged at her daughter’s violation of her bodily autonomy, presented by Li Zhun as the work of an impudent, mischievous, but ultimately strong-willed and well-meaning daughter. But when her husband looks at Xiuzhen with her new hairstyle, her feelings soften when she sees the smile that dawns on his face. Looking into a mirror, the entire family agrees: Xiuzhen looks a decade younger.

Thus, Xiuzhen’s entry into Marxism’s most privileged site of labor, the factory floor, transforms her traditional rural femininity into a distinctly new one, necessary for women’s participation in productive labor. Xiuzhen’s braid is symbolically cumbersome, and while she has been fit to perform reproductive labor thus far in her life, ultimately it and the traditional rural female subjecthood that it represents, have held her back. In order to participate in the productive public sphere, a new subjectivity is required. By forcefully cutting off Xiuzhen’s braid, her daughter physically remakes her mother, revitalizing her and taking years off her appearance in order to prepare her for her entry, in her fifties, into the male realm of productive labor. But the incident also suggests that even in the new society, Xiuzhen was not fit for

<sup>72</sup> Li Zhun, “Mother and Daughter,” p. 116.

productive work in either age or appearance. Her lack of consent to the haircut is further evidence of her fettered thinking, and not a violation of her bodily autonomy, and the hairstyles link feudal ways of thinking with age itself. New China will be best served by new women.

Li Zhun's story celebrates Xiuzhen's transformation from mute child bride to productive community leader, but Xiuzhen has paid a high price to get there: after four decades of often thankless reproductive labor, Xiuzhen has earned her entry into the factory by reproducing herself not just once, but three or four times, depending on how one counts. Where historians write of the double-burden of labor (productive and reproductive) weighed upon rural Chinese women during the collective era, Xiuzhen has not reproduced herself not only by giving birth to her daughter, but by training her to reproduce her mother's labor in the home, in the women's association, and in the maternity ward. Through "Two Generations"'s depiction of the accomplishments of two exceptional country women, the narrative creates an impossible standard for women's entry into productive labor: in order to do a man's work, a woman must learn to endlessly reproduce herself throughout the countryside's defining new social institutions.

Ru Zhijuan's "Maternity Ward," originally published in 1960 as "*Jingjing de chanyuan li*," similarly explores the reproductive labor of women, this time centered exclusively in the maternity ward.<sup>73</sup> The Great Leap Forward entailed supporting women not only in caring for children, but in giving birth to them. Childbirth was one of the "seven basic requirements" that the commune was responsible for providing to its members, and the Sputnik People's Commune (*Weixing renmin gongshe*) in Henan Province, whose constitution was consulted as a draft for others, stipulated in Article 14 that every woman was guaranteed a month's maternity leave at

<sup>73</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Maternity Home," trans. Tang Sheng, *Chinese Literature* No. 8 (1960): pp. 6-21. Originally published as "Jingjing de chanyuanli" in *Renmin wenxue* No. 6 (1960): pp. 12-22.

half wages.<sup>74</sup> By establishing “birth stations” (*chan yuan*) and rural hospitals, the countryside would achieve a “Great Leap Forward” in health work, and the establishment of people's communes was accompanied by an explosion in the number of the country's maternity wards. The journalist Anna Louise Strong wrote in 1959 of “the rapid growth of a system of maternity care such as no country in history has set up in such a short period,” with over “[one-hundred thousand maternity homes, an average of four to a commune,” already in place within a year of the establishment of people's communes.<sup>75</sup> Maternity wards were to be made available to all expectant mothers in communes free of charge.

In reality, the establishment of “birth stations” for childbirth was “brief and more decentralized than the term ‘stations’ would suggest,” as Hershatter observes. Like most other Great Leap Forward social programs, the birth stations were another unfunded mandate, and rural governments were already cash-strapped. Hershatter notes that individual commune members were often asked to donate money in order to fund maternity wards.<sup>76</sup> By 1959, many maternity wards reported difficult working conditions, and most were disabled when collective dining halls were disbanded.

The short story follows the midwife Aunt Tan's encounter with a younger midwife, Hemei, who arrives to Aunt Tan's ward fresh from completing an obstetrician course in town. Although Aunt Tan is singularly devoted to delivering children and her work in the maternity ward, the story does not mention whether or not Tan herself is a mother, focusing instead on the socialized reproductive labor that she performs. Aunt Tan's identity as a midwife, and the arrival

<sup>74</sup> “Tentative regulations (draft) of the Weixing People's Commune,” *Renmin ribao*, Aug. 8, 1985. Also included in *People's Communes in China*, p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> Anna Louise Strong, *The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes—and Six Years After* (Beijing: New World Press, 1964), pp. 73-7.

<sup>76</sup> Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory*, p. 172.



of the maternity ward itself, arrive coeval to the community, and the opening pages of the short story linger over the materiality of the ward's facilities: "As [Aunt Tan] snapped on the electric light, this combined office and delivery room appeared spacious. Every object in it seemed to glow: the smooth white sheet on the bed and the white screen round it, the white desk, white walls and ceiling."<sup>77</sup> "It was wonderful the electric light made everything so much whiter and smater," thinks Aunt Tan to herself, and the illuminated room reinforces the enlightened science and social practices that the maternity ward symbolizes. The room is clean, simple, and well-appointed, its presence signifying not only the material improvement of the community, but the arrival of new technologies for managing childbirth that will contribute to the social and material wealth of the community.

The short story centers on conflict provoked by Hemei's arrival to the maternity ward. Aunt Tan is challenged by the new midwifery techniques and aspirations of the younger midwife, who arrives with ambitions and midwifery techniques that Aunt Tan has never heard of. Although Hemei has not come to replace Aunt Tan, she does represent the future of the profession, and in that sense Aunt Tan is reproduced in the younger figure, making the maternity ward a site of reproduction twice over. Ultimately, in order to serve the community's pregnant women and ensure the safe delivery of their children, Aunt Tan comes to see that she must remake herself as a midwife, both in mind and in practice. At the story's conclusion, Hemei upgrades the facilities so that they are now able to use running water, a more hygienic practice, and the material conditions of the maternity ward itself represent Aunt Tan herself, who upgrades both her thinking as well as her skill as a midwife.

<sup>77</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Maternity Home," p. 6.

Like Xiuzhen in Li Zhun's "Two Generations," Aunt Tan in Ru Zhijuan's "The Maternity Home" similarly must reproduce herself in order to meet the needs of the community. Only Aunt Tan's remaking of herself does not allow her to serve the productive needs of the community, but rather its reproductive ones. Aunt Tan reproduces herself in the image of her young successor, Hemei. Like Hemei, in her youth Aunt Tan had been an innovator, introducing new techniques to the community through her rural midwifery practice, such as the use of a dedicated maternity ward for deliveries, the sterilization of equipment, and the use of electric lighting during birth. The challenges of ushering in new midwifery techniques are engrained deep in Aunt Tan's memory, and before Hemei is set to arrive, she recalls how difficult it had been to get the villagers to come to her side. "When the country was first liberated, who had heard of a maternity home, sterilizer, or electric lights in a village? In those days, childbirth was a trip through the valley of death."<sup>78</sup> Her attempts to help the villagers were often met with fierce resistance, and Aunt Tan is filled with gratitude that the obstetric methods she introduced are now commonplace.

Yet Aunt Tan's experiences with resistant villagers do not prepare her for the new maternal healthcare techniques that Hemei introduces when she arrives at the maternity ward. The morning after her arrival, Hemei begins teaching women who have just given birth that perform post-natal stretching exercises, an activity that Aunt Tan finds distasteful and unbecoming for new mothers. Hemei also insists that that ward install running water; Aunt Tan cannot understand why the need running water when they've been getting by with a water basin just fine. Neither is Hemei terribly impressed with the materiality of the ward facilities themselves. When she first arrives, Aunt Tan is proud of the ward and its accomplishments,

<sup>78</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Maternity Home," p. 7.

eager to show it off to her. “In our two years of history, we haven’t let a single accident occur. No harm has come to any mother or child. A woman comes in alone but leaves with a baby in her arms,” she tells Aunt Tan, but almost immediately she is overwhelmed with emotion, and unable to speak when she considers how much the maternity ward has meant to the community. “Since words were not enough to express what she felt, Aunt Tan stood up to show Hemei the whole [ward],” from the beds to the contents of her desk. “But Hemei did not understand her pride in them,” and instead she looks around the room, ignoring the gleaming medical instruments that Aunt Tan wishes her to look at.

When Aunt Tan becomes insulted when Hemei agrees with her that their humble maternity ward can’t match the county hospital, and their interactions become vexed. Aunt Tan takes Hemei’s failure to appreciate the splendor of the maternity ward personally, as if the material surroundings and medical implements represented Aunt Tan and Hemei had turned her nose down at Aunt Tan herself. Immediately, generational resentment boils to the surface, and Aunt Tan begins to resent the privilege that she perceives Hemei as having been born into. “These youngsters! ...They’ve had white rice in their bowls ever since they can remember. To have land to till and food to eat, to go to school or attend training courses are all things they take for granted. So are this maternity home, the electric light, tractors, and everything.” Aunt Tan’s exasperation serves as much as insight into the character’s internal monologue as it does to remind the reader of the commune’s advancements.

But over the course of the story, Aunt Tan slowly begins to realize that she has misjudged Hemei. When a pregnant woman begins to fatigue during a long labor, Aunt Tan realizes that the situation has become dire. But the maternity ward is unable to handle any complications in childbirth, so Aunt Tan rushes to the telephone to call for help. But time is short, and Hemei tells

Aunt Tan they cannot wait to send the patient to a bigger hospital or for another doctor to arrive. The childbirth requires the use of forceps, which Aunt Tan has not been trained to use. But Hemei has, and as she guides Aunt Tan through the procedure, Aunt Tan realizes that Hemei's new techniques benefit the women and children of the community. After the birth, feeling newly accepting of Hemei with her sense of purpose renewed, Aunt Tan sits in happy silence in the ward. "This quiet maternity home, together with all the villages and towns of China, moved forward into a new day."<sup>79</sup>

Throughout the story, Aunt Tan is reproduced through both the younger nurse as well as the material ward itself. Indeed, Hemei and Aunt Tan's read less as two separate personalities than they do as two incarnations of the same midwife, each trained during a different time period and with their defining concerns extending out of that specific historical context. Hemei is a younger version of Aunt Tan, an enthusiastic rural midwife eager to serve her community who, like Aunt Tan before her, improves upon the existing reproductive practices. Teaching Aunt Tan new delivery techniques, such as the use of forceps during delivery, Hemei upgrades Aunt Tan's knowledge base, teaching her new skills that allow her to handle deliveries of increasing complexity. Just as the contributions of Aunt Tan's new, hygienic childbirth practices are symbolized in the physical space of the maternity ward itself, Hemei's improvements are symbolized through the facilities upgrade she delivers in the form of running water. Hemei's material improvements and knowledge transfer to the maternity ward have the net effect of allowing the rural ward to be less reliant on outsiders, with less need to call for an outside doctor or to rush a patient to a bigger hospital. The material innovations of the maternity ward are met with scientific innovations in maternal care, made possible through the mental transformations of

<sup>79</sup> Ju Chih-chuan, "The Maternity Home," p. 21.

the nurses who work inside. In order to serve the commune's reproductive needs, Aunt Tan then remakes herself, not once, but twice: first by creating herself in Hemei, and then by allowing Hemei to remake her as a midwife. "Maternity Ward" and "Two Generations" present narratives of reproductive labor in which the essential reproduction is not that of others, but of the self.

Both Ru Zhijuan's "Maternity Ward" and Li Zhun's "Two Generations" depict the complex processes of social reproduction that occur on the rural commune. Each story is centered in sites that are explicitly gendered as a woman's space, from the home to the women's association to the maternity ward, and they depict transformations rural women must undergo in order to serve the literal and figurative reproductive needs of their communities. In Li Zhun's "Two Generations," on the final occasion in which Zhuzhu takes over for her mother, she learns to handle her mother's responsibilities as head of the maternity ward so that her mother is free to work as a floor manager in the commune's new liquor factory venture, a position of leadership and considerable status. Only after Xiuzhen has reproduced herself in the home, in the body, and in the gendered community is she fit for a public role in a privileged site of productive labor, the factory. Aunt Tan, on the other hand, must be continually made and remade, like the maternity ward itself: when the novelty of electricity wears off, running water is installed, and when the novelty of socialized midwifery becomes widespread, Aunt Tan must learn a new and improved set of medical skills. "Maternity Home" and "Two Generations" serve as parables, then, of how women's new subjectivity is produced under the new social conditions of the Chinese countryside.

## Chapter 6 | Conclusion

I began working on this dissertation project in earnest in the summer of 2016, and so it bears the dubious distinction of having been written largely under the rise of the Trumpian political era. Donald Trump's election in November 2016 was a watershed in many ways. In the days, then months, and now years that have followed, there have been many moments when my dissertation did not feel like the most urgent task in front of me, and when I was not sure that this was the most meaningful work I could contribute to society. But as the era has endured, I have noticed an ever-increasing number of palimpsests of the revolutionary past. At "Trump on Show," a ribald Cantonese opera that premiered in Hong Kong in May 2019, for instance, playwright Li Kui-ming portrayed Trump as the inheritor to the chaos and excess of the Cultural Revolution, drawing explicit parallels between the cult of personality, even the "dragon energy," that he believes the two men share.

Other themes from the past reappear in new form: in the throes of the 2020 Democratic presidential primary election, Elizabeth Warren, for example, emerged as the "plan-maker" to Bernie Sanders's "earth-shaker"<sup>1</sup>—the engineer to his spontaneous storm, the Liu Shaoqi to his Mao Zedong. Warren's "I've got a plan for that" belies a faith that the system can be fixed, while Sanders's vision promises systematic political re-alignment powered through spontaneous mass mobilization. On the left, the characterization distinguishing Sanders's supporters from Warren's

<sup>1</sup> I borrow here language used by labor historian Gabriel Winant to describe the two in a widely-circulated essay exploring the re-appearance of Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich's term "professional-managerial class." See "Professional-Managerial Chasm," *n + 1*, Mar. 12, 2020, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/professional-managerial-chasm/>.

has often been characterized as that between the “working class” and the “professional-managerial class.” The term professional-managerial class, in particular, has emerged as a “sociological designation turned into an epithet and hurled like a missile.”<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, “white” has returned as a pejorative in mainland China, this time in the guise of the “white left (*baizuo*),” a sneering insult used to describe believers in Western liberalism whose political commitments are limited to identity politics and incremental adjustments to the capitalist order.<sup>3</sup>

By making this comparison, I do not mean to suggest that today’s presidential primary candidates draw directly from revolutionary Chinese thought in formulating their campaign platforms, and neither do I find most attempts to condemn Trumpian excess through comparisons to the Cultural Revolution particularly informed or persuasive. Nativist neo-fascism can easily be condemned on its own grounds. But I do want to point to how in each time, and in each society, conflicts around parallel ideas persist, and their unsettled legacies carry into the future. The professional-managerial class has emerged today as the contested boundary between the working class and the elites—or what might have been called in other times the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. But how exactly is the professional positioned in society? Is the professional a member of the petty bourgeoisie, a “transitional class” where the interests of capitalists and proletarians combine into a politically capricious whole? Or, because they rely on the sale of the labor-power to make a living, are they already members of the proletariat, and primed for sympathy to their struggles? Whither the professional?

When I took up the question of the conceptual and cultural transformation of labor during the socialist period in the P.R.C., it was immediately apparent that the nature of the professional

<sup>2</sup> Winant, “Professional-Managerial Chasm.”

<sup>3</sup> Dylan Levi King, “‘White Left’: The Internet Insult the West has Gotten Wrong,” Sixth Tone, Jul. 10, 2017, <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000477/white-left-the-internet-insult-the-west-has-gotten-wrong>.

in a socialist society was a central, yet deeply vexed issue. It was also one that the country's brightest leaders approached with signature élan, imagining with bold iconoclasm how the professional class could systematically be remade through the embrace of labor. Where some saw the "white" class as existing in an inherently antagonistic relationship to the "red," others believed that white experts could be remade as "red and expert." If the problem with the professional class was their ambivalent position between labor and capital, belonging fully to neither, then remaking the professional *through* a relationship to labor would resolve their class contradictions in the service of a technocratic socialist future: a "regiment of sci-tech (*kexue jishu*) cadres, ... professors, educators, scientists, journalists, artists, lawyers, and Marxist-Leninist theoreticians" belonging to the proletariat, as Liu Shaoqi proclaimed.<sup>4</sup>

In many ways, each of my chapters describes variations on this vision of a utopic, technocratic socialist future in China: once the bourgeoisie is replaced by a new class of red experts, fields as diverse as the fine arts, medicine, education, and even gender itself would be transformed in a just and egalitarian centering of proletarian interests. In order to do so, the revolutionary project needed to articulate how the ideals embodied by a professional ideology necessarily betrayed the social world in which those professions were located: hence white-coated doctor from *Chunmiao* who is so distracted by the needs of ego and the conventions of his profession that he refuses to heal the sick, or the veterinary teacher from *Juelie* so blinded by the abstractions of theory that he misses the veterinary praxis right in front of his eyes. As cultural texts, these works of film, literature, journalism, and art imagine the alignment of professional and working class interests through the embrace of the labor associated with the proletariat: the

<sup>4</sup> Liu Shaoqi, "Liu Shaoqi tongzhi zai Beijing gejie qingzhu Shiyue shehuizhuyi geming sishi zhounian dahui shang de jianghua [Remarks by Liu Shaoqi at the all-inclusive fortieth anniversary celebration of the socialist October revolution in Beijing]," reprinted as the introduction to *Lun youhong youzhuan* [On being red and expert] (Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958), p. 3.



doctor who walks rice paddies without shoes; the artist who understands the daily lives of the lower-middle peasants because they are a lower-middle peasant; the college student who studies not to better themselves, but to better society; the housewife dignified by her new position of leadership on the factory floor.

During the socialist period, the revolutionary episteme made a conscious effort to recognize and resolve major social conflicts that were understood as the vectors of injustice in the old society: the conflict between urban and rural, between mental and manual labor, and between industry and agriculture. The forms of labor associated with the underhand (rural, manual, and agricultural labor) were used to transform the upper hand (urban, mental, and industrial labor). I have borrowed gratefully from the historian Michael Denning to describe this as a “laboring” of modern Chinese culture occurring during the socialist period, infusing its rhetoric, narrative, and thinking with an increased visibility of rural, lower-class Chinese and the forms of labor they were most closely associated with. The laboring of culture challenged the reification of professional work, and because any division of labor is also gendered, it also challenged the exclusion of women from the most privileged forms of labor.

When I write of the socialist period in China, I am referring broadly to the period from the late 1940s to the early 1980s. I stretch my boundaries before 1949 and after 1976 because, as a cultural historian, I am interested not in top-down political histories motivated by a few elites, but in the broad cultural shifts brought in like the tide on waves of entrenched expectations around the constellations of ideas that produce our societies. In this dissertation project, I have found that while the broad cultural shifts in concepts of labor that I examine have roots prior to the establishment of the P.R.C., during the Great Leap Forward they took center stage. In today’s scholarship, the Great Leap Forward is typically understood backwards—that is to say, as if it

was birthed from Mao's mind like Athena, a mature policy reflecting the culmination of considered debate and research that sprang forth fully grown. But in fact, as Maurice Meisner emphasizes, when the Great Leap Forward slogan was announced in January 1958, "there were no detailed blueprints. It was the product of a utopian social vision, not an economic plan on the order of a five year plan."<sup>5</sup> The Great Leap Forward reflected a Maoist vision for the reorganization of society through permanent revolution, but the specific policy initiatives for which the Great Leap Forward is remembered—the people's communes, the backyard furnaces, the large-scale irrigation projects—were improvised, and produced as the revolutionary Maoist episteme took hold.

Instead, I have endeavored to understand the Great Leap Forward first and foremost as a way of thinking, that eventually produced the signature policies with which it has now been conflated. Although this emphasis may seem like a minor matter of historiography, the conventional approach to the Great Leap Forward—through its failures first—can only ever result in a pre-determined analysis of the period that can only explain culture as propaganda and broad popular support as the brain-washing of a captive people. Instead, in each chapter I trace a culture of new medical, artistic, educational, and domestic labor stretching from the Great Leap Forward to its fullest expression during the mid-1970s, at the tail end of the period that is now known as the Cultural Revolution.

The question of the professional was paramount during the Cultural Revolution, functioning as an index for the complications of class and of class analysis within a socialist society. And if the Cultural Revolution was a revolution against the bureaucracy, what is the bureaucracy if not a professional class? Scholars such as Richard Kraus argue that the Cultural

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 192.

Revolution constituted an antibureaucratic analysis of socialism in which the root of the problem could be traced back to the socialist state. “In this view, socialist classes were based ultimately upon power relationships in a highly bureaucratized society,” writes Kraus, making the Maoist critique of the party and its institutions a class analysis of a socialist society.<sup>6</sup> Maurice Meisner believed that this made Mao unique amongst his socialist contemporaries in articulating that “a socialist society, if left to its own devices, would generate a new exploiting class.”<sup>7</sup>

Although Maoist critique carries Mao’s name, it would have been powerless had it not reflected sweeping and pervasive views within socialist society, culminating in widespread programs to remake the professional, expert, and bureaucratic through their relation to labor. This process was simultaneously top-down and bottom-up: the professional would be socialized, and the proletariat would be intellectualized. By re-defining the doctor, the artist, and educator, and the woman through their relationship to labor, the cultural texts of the socialist period were a conscious attempt to recognize and resolve the conflict between educated and poor, the professional and amateur the urban and the rural, the revolutionary woman and the bureaucratic man.

Gender was perhaps the central site through which the laboring of the socialist period occurred precisely because women’s labor had for so long been invisible, largely excluded from forms of labor privileged by the immediate recognition of “productivity.” To be clear, women have always worked—but they have not always been recognized as named workers. Indeed, as Gail Hershatter argues, “China’s modern history is not comprehensible without close attention to

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 50.

women's labor, and Woman as a flexible symbol of social problems, national humiliation, and political transformation.”<sup>8</sup>

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated how revolutionary narratives themselves were gendered during the socialist period, whether through the bare feet of Chunmiao or the contested blank exam of Li Jinfeng. As characters, women characters offered their narratives the most dramatic opportunities for transformation, sublimating their subaltern status into an active and noble revolutionary subjecthood. As the amateur artists or lay medical experts of their communities, women were a powerful symbolic reminder of the labor transformations that were possible: look no further than Li Jinfeng, the peasant mother of four who transformed into a celebrated and accomplished painter. Because they both embodied and executed the cycles of social reproduction essential keeping the countryside afloat, women made the idea agents through which the engines of society could be retooled, from Li Jinfeng, the humble wheat grower who becomes an exemplary college student, or Gao Xiuzhen, the housewife who learns to lead her commune.

These cultures reached their fullest expression during the Cultural Revolution, which rendered their collapse in the years following Mao's death all the more spectacular. The failure of the Cultural Revolution was also the failure of an anti-bureaucratic vision of society, and the reform era that followed not only repudiated, but effectively reversed the signatures of the revolutionary era. Barefoot doctors, peasant artists, labor universities, and people's communes were “orphaned” by the failure of the Cultural Revolution. Linking the late 1950s to the late 1970s in a trajectory of revolutionary cultural thought demonstrates how the repudiation of the Cultural Revolution by the C.C.P. in 1981 in fact entailed the denial of a much more extensive

<sup>8</sup> See Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), p. 2.

intellectual project and history. The Maoist cultural imaginary ceased to hold its persuasive power, gradually replaced with the embrace of an elite, urban, technocratic, and episteme of reform. The great irony, perhaps, is that the productivist bent of the socialist period turned out to be completely compatible with the productivist imperative of the capitalist system.

Given its failures, what vestiges, then, remain of China's revolutionary society in the present? Increasingly, linkages between the revolutionary period and the present are being explored by scholars such as Cai Xiang, Paul Clark, Laurence Coderre, Jie Li, and Pang Laikwan, who emphasize long and connective cultural histories over the short and precise narratives of political intrigue that have hitherto dominated the study of the P.R.C. Other scholars are beginning to tease out ideological frameworks established during the Cultural Revolution that remain operative today, such as Xiaohong Xu, who argues that the Cultural Revolution initiated a process of separation between the "political" and the "economic" that enabled neoliberal logics of development and global integration to take root in the P.R.C.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, we arrive at a moment in the present in which work is understood as nearly exclusive to waged labor, with gendered, classed, and racialized divisions of labor once again consolidated around the reification of productive and professional forms of work. The failure of the ambitious projects of the socialist period—to labor the work of the professional, and to make visible and elevate the multiple forms of labor that rural women perform—have ultimately contributed to the collapsing of the concept of "work" around waged labor, a productivist conceit shared by capitalist and socialist epistemes alike. Medicine ultimately had could not accommodate the presence of a lay laborer, and the socialist amateur finds herself equally

<sup>9</sup> See Xiaohong Xu, "The Great Separation: How the Cultural Revolution Shaped China and Its Relationship with Global Capitalism," presented to the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies Interdisciplinary Workshop, University of Michigan, Feb. 20, 2020.

abandoned by the fine arts. In this dissertation, I have sought to make legible the ambitious transformations of multiple contexts of labor during the socialist period of the P.R.C. So long as they remain illegible, they remain inert. But illuminated within the context of their own times, perhaps there is something still that can be gleaned.

## Bibliography

Andors, Phyllis. *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, 1949-1980*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Wheatsheaf Books, 1983.

Andreas, Joel. *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

———. *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*. Contemporary Issues in Asia and the Pacific. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Andrews, Julia Frances. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Andrews, Julia Frances, and Kuiyi Shen. *The Art of Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Atkinson, Dorothy, and Alexander Dallin, eds. *Women in Russia*. Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978.

Bai, Yun. "Weishengbu fuzeren zai quanguo weishengting juchang huiyi shang xuanbu bu zai shiyong 'chijiao yisheng' mingcheng gonggu fazhan xiangcun yisheng duiwu." *Renmin ribao*, January 26, 1985.

Bakker, Isabella. "Social Reproduction and the Constitution of a Gendered Political Economy." *New Political Economy* 12, no. 4 (December 2007): 541–56.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563460701661561>.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Mirror of Production*. St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975.

Becker, Jasper. *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.

- Beijing dianying zhipian chang “Juelie” shezhi zu dangzhibu [Party branch production unit of “Juelie” at Beijing Film Factory]. “Tong Xiuzheng Zhuyi Luxian Duizhao Gao: Paishe Caise Gushipian ‘Juelie’ de Yixie Tihui [Going against the Revisionist Line: A Few Experiences from the Filming of the Color Feature Film ‘Juelie’].” *Renmin Ribao*, February 21, 1976.
- Beijing Shi Tong Xian San Jiehe Chuangzuo Zu (The ‘Three-in-one’ Writing Group of Tong County, Beijing City). *Chengguang Qu [A Song of Dawn]*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976.
- Bennett, Gordon. *Huadong: The Story of a Chinese People’s Commune*. S.l.: Routledge, 2020.
- Bernstein, Thomas P., and Hua-Yu Li, eds. *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*. The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Bhattacharya, Tithi, and Liselotte Vogel, eds. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
- Bian, Zizheng. *Zaolin Cun [Zaolin Village]*. Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1976.
- Binyon, Laurence. *Painting in the Far East: An Introduction to the History of Pictorial Art in Asia Especially China and Japan*. Third edition. London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1923.
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia. *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Burawoy, Michael. *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism*. London and New York: Verso, 1985.
- Burawoy, Michael, and János Lukács. *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary’s Road to Capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Button, Peter. *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.



- Cai, Xiang. *Geming/Xushu: Zhongguo Shehuizhuyi Wenxue-Wenhua Xiangxiang*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010.
- . *Revolution and Its Narratives: China's Socialist Literary and Cultural Imaginaries, 1949-1966*. Translated by Rebecca E. Karl and Xueping Zhong. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Caldwell, John Thornton. *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Chan, Anita. *China's Workers Under Assault: The Exploitation of Labor in a Globalizing Economy*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2001.
- . "Labor Standards and Human Rights: The Case of Chinese Workers Under Market Socialism." *Human Rights Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1998): 886–904.
- Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Chao, Kuo-chün. *Agrarian Policy of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1959*. London: Asia Publishing House, 1960.
- Cheek, Timothy. *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Chen, Anita. "Dispelling Misconceptions about the Red Guard Movement: The Necessity to Re-examine Cultural Revolution Factionalism and Periodization." *The Journal of Contemporary China* 1, no. 1 (September 1992): 61–85.
- Chen, C.C. *Medicine in Rural China: A Personal Account*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

- Chen, Jian. *Mao's China and the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Chen, Ruilin. *20 Shiji Zhongguo Meishu Jiaoyu Lishi Yanjiu [Fine Art Education in 20th Century China: A Historical Perspective]*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2006.
- Chen, Tina Mai. "International Film Circuits and Global Imaginaries in the People's Republic of China, 1949–57." *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 3, no. 2 (January 2009): 149–61.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.3.2.149\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.3.2.149_1).
- . "Propagating the Propaganda Film: The Meaning of Film in Chinese Communist Party Writings, 1949-1965." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 154–93.
- Chen, Wenping, and Jifu Cai, eds. *Shanghai dianying 100 nian [One hundred years of Shanghai films]*. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2007.
- Chen, Yuan-tsung. *The Dragon's Village*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Cheng, Zhiwei. "Zhe Zhang Baijuan Jiao de Hao [You Did Right by Turning in This Blank Exam]." *Renmin Ribao*, January 18, 1976.
- Chiang, Yee. *China Revisited: After Forty-Two Years*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.
- Chiu, S.Y. "Public Education." In *The Year Book of Education, 1949*, edited by George B. Jeffrey. London: Evans, 1949.
- Chong, Doryun, Michio Hayashi, Mika Yoshitake, Miryam Sas, Yuri Mitsuda, Masatoshi Nakajima, and Nancy Lim. *Tokyo, 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012.
- Chou, Yang. "The Path of Socialist Literature and Art in China." *Peking Review*, no. 39 (1960): 24–30.

- Chu, Lan. “Yi Bu Gesong Wenhua Dageming de Hao Yingpian: Ping ‘Chunmiao’ [A Great Film in Praise of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Review of ‘Chunmiao’].” *Hongqi*, 1976.
- Chun, Chao, and Jie Zhou. “Juelie.” *Renmin Dianying*, no. 1 (1976): 41–76.
- Clark, Paul. *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*. Cambridge Studies in Film. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- . “Closely Watched Viewers: A Taxonomy of Chinese Film Audiences from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution Seen from Hunan.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 5, no. 1 (January 2011): 73–89. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.5.1.73\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.5.1.73_1).
- Cleverley, John F. *In the Lap of Tigers: The Communist Labor University of Jiangxi Province*. Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Clunas, Craig. “Souvenirs of Beijing.” In *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, edited by Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, 47–61. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.
- Coderre, Laurence. “Counterattack: (Re)Contextualizing Propaganda.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 4, no. 3 (January 2010): 211–27. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.4.3.211\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.4.3.211_1).
- Collins, H. M., and Robert Evans. *Rethinking Expertise*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People’s Republic of China. *Rural Health in the People’s Republic of China: Report of a Visit by the Rural Health Systems Delegation, June 1978*. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, 1980.
- “Cong ‘Weixing’ Gongshe de Jianzhang Tan Ruhe Ban Gongshe [How to Run a People’s Commune, with Reference to the Regulations of the Sputnik People’s Commune].” *Renmin Ribao*, September 4, 1958.

- Cook, Alexander C. *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Croizier, Ralph. "Hu Xian Peasant Painting: From Revolutionary Icon to Market Commodity." In *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976*, edited by Richard King, 136–42. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.
- Croll, Elisabeth. *Feminism and Socialism in China*. New York: Schocken Books, 1980.
- Cui, Shuqin. *Women through the Lens*. University of Hawaii Press., 2003.
- Cui, Wei. *Hongyu [The New Doctor]*. Los Angeles: YiMovi, 2017.
- Curran, Thomas D. *Educational Reform in Republican China: The Failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation = [Minguo Shi Dai de Jiao Yu Gai Ge: Jiao Yu Jia Chuang Zao Xian Dai Min Zu de Shi Bai]*. Chinese Studies, v. 40. Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.
- Dash, Mike. "How Friedrich Engels' Radical Lover Helped Him Father Socialism." Smithsonianmag.com, August 1, 2013. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-friedrich-engels-radical-lover-helped-him-father-socialism-21415560/>.
- Davin, Delia. *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- DeMare, Brian James. *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- . *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Deng, Siyu. *Zhongguo Kaoshi Zhidu Shi [History of Chinese Exam Institutions]*. Taipei: Student Bookstore, 1967.

- Deng, Yingchao. "Land Reform and the New Tasks of Woman-Work." In *Important Documents of the Chinese Woman's Movement*, edited by All-China Women's Federation. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Updated paperback ed. London: Verso, 2010.
- Denton, Kirk A., ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Di, Di. "Juelie Jishi Yu Fenxi [Breaking with Old Ideas: A Chronicle and Analysis]." *Dianying Yishu*, no. 2 (1993): 76–84.
- Dianying ju [Film Bureau]. "Dui Yingpian Juelie de Yijian [Opinion on the Film Juelie]." In *Zhongguo Dianying Yanjiu Ziliao, 1949-1979 [Collected Research Materials of Chinese Film, 1949-1979]*, edited by Di Wu, Vol. 2. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006.
- Dikötter, Frank. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958 - 62*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Ding, Mao, and Lin Wang. *Xique Cun de Haizi [The Children of Xique Village]*. Hehehaote: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 1976.
- Ding, Shu. *Yangmou: "Fanyou" Qianhou [Open Conspiracy: The Complete Story of the Chinese Communist Party's Anti-Rightist Campaign]*. Hong Kong: Jiushi niandai zazhi she, 1991.
- Dirlik, Arif, and Maurice J. Meisner, eds. *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1989.
- Dittmer, Lowell. *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

- Dittmer, Lowell, and Guoli Liu, eds. *China's Deep Reform: Domestic Politics in Transition*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.
- Donald, Stephanie. *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Duan, Jingli. *Huxian Nongmin Hua Yanjiu [Research on Huxian Peasant Art]*. Xi'an: Xi'an chubanshe, 2001.
- Editorial board of Meishu. "Yu Gongnong Jiehe: Geming Meishujia Biyou Zhilu [Joining the Workers and Peasants: The Road Revolutionary Artists Must Take]." *Meishu*, no. 1 (1958): 1–5.
- Editors of Hongqi magazine. "She Lun: Huanjie Renmin Gongshe Hua de Gaochao [Commentary: Greet the Upsurge in Forming People's Communes]." *Hongqi*, no. 7 (1958): 13–15.
- Editors of the National Library Publications Archive. *1970: Quan Guo Zong Shumu [National Index of Books]*. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1971.
- Eisenman, Joshua. *Red China's Green Revolution: Technological Innovation, Institutional Change, and Economic Development under the Commune*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Eley, Geoff. "Reading Gramsci in English: Observations on the Reception of Antonio Gramsci in the English-Speaking World, 1957-82." *European History Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (October 1, 1984): 441–78.
- . *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. Cambridge, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- . "The Past Under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary." *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 3 (July 2011): 555-573.
- Elman, Benjamin A. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

- Elman, Benjamin A., Alexander Woodside, and Joint Committee on Chinese Studies (U.S.), eds. *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Endicott, Stephen Lyon. *Red Earth: Revolution in a Sichuan Village*. New York: New Amsterdam, 1991.
- Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Translated by Tristram Hunt. London: Penguin, 2010.
- Epstein, Steven. *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Medicine and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- “Everybody Works for Good Health.” *China Reconstructs* XX, no. 11 (November 1971): 20–22.
- Eyferth, Jacob. “Liberation from the Loom? Rural Women, Textile Work, and the Revolution in North China.” In *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China’s High Era of Socialism*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 131–52. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Ezrahi, Yaron. *The Descent of Icarus: Science and the Transformation of Contemporary Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Fairbank, John King, and Merle Goldman. *China: A New History*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Fan, Fa-ti. “‘Collective Monitoring, Collective Defense’: Science, Earthquakes, and Politics in Communist China.” *Science in Context* 25, no. 1 (2012): 127–54.
- Fang, Jing. “Nuli Shixian, Jilei Jingyan: Gushipian Zhencha Bing Guanhou [Work Hard at Practice, Accumulate Experience: Reflections on the Narrative Film Scout].” *Renmin Ribao*, August 14, 1974.

- Fang, Xiaoping. "Barefoot Doctors and the Provision of Rural Health Care." In *Medical Transitions in Twentieth Century China*, edited by Birdie Andrews and Mary Brown Bullock, 267–82. Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 2014.
- Fang, Yanming. "Yiding Yao Suqing *Juelie* de Liudu [*Juelie*'s Baleful Influence Must Be Eliminated]." *Renmin Ribao*, January 10, 1979.
- Feaver, William. "China at the Double: Art." *The Observer*. November 21, 1976.
- Federici, Silvia. "Notes on Gender in Marx's Capital." *Continental Thought and Theory* 1, no. 4 (2017): 19–37.
- Feeny, Matt. "Talk Pretty: The Linguistic Brilliance of HBO's Deadwood." Accessed February 25, 2020. <https://slate.com/culture/2004/05/deadwood-s-linguistic-brilliance.html>.
- Fei, Dawei, ed. '85 *Xinchao: Zhongguo Diyici Dangdai Yundong* [*Archives of the '85 New Wave*]. 2 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007.
- Feng, Boyi, and Zhijie Qiu. *The Monk and the Demon: Contemporary Chinese Art*. Lyon: Musée d'art contemporain, 2004.
- Feng, Chongyi, and David S. G. Goodman, eds. *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945*. World Social Change. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.
- Ferguson, Susan L. "Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms: Toward an Integrative Ontology." *Historical Materialism* 24 (2016): 38–60.
- Fineman, Stephen. *Work: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012. <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1043123>.
- Fraser, Ronald. "Note on 'Work' Series." *New Left Review* 1, no. 53 (February 1969): 68.
- , ed. *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*. London: Pelican Original, 1968.



- , ed. *Work, Volume 2: Twenty Personal Accounts*. London: Pelican Original, 1969.
- Frazier, Mark W. *The Making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace: State, Revolution, and Labor Management*. Cambridge Modern China Series. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Gallagher, Mary Elizabeth. *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Gao, Hua. *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origin and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930-1945*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2017.
- Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: London: MIT Press ; in association with China Art Foundation, 2011.
- Garnaut, Anthony. "Hard Facts and Half-Truths: The New Archival History of China's Great Famine." *China Information* 27, no. 2 (July 2013): 223–46.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X13485390>.
- Garside, Roger. *Coming Alive: China after Mao*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.
- Giles, Herbert. *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*. Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1905.
- Gladston, Paul. *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.
- Glosser, Susan L. *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*. Asia--Local Studies/Global Themes 5. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Gráda, Cormac Ó. "Great Leap into Famine: A Review Essay." *Population and Development Review* 37, no. 1 (March 2011): 191–202.
- Greene, Maggie. *Resisting Spirits: Drama Reform and Cultural Transformation in the People's Republic of China*. China Understandings Today. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019.

- “Greet the Upsurge in Forming People’s Communes.” In *People’s Communes in China*, 10. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958.
- Griffin, Nicolas. *Ping-Pong Diplomacy: The Secret History Behind the Game That Changed the World*. New York: Scribner, 2014.
- Gross, Miriam. *Farewell to the God of Plague: Chairman Mao’s Campaign to Deworm China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016.
- Grube, Katherine. “State of Exchange: Contemporary Art and China’s Postsocialist Image Economy.” PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2018.
- Gu, Yi. “The ‘Peasant Problem’ and Time in Contemporary Chinese Art.” *Representations* 136 (Fall 2016): 54–76.
- Guan, Jianxun. *Yunyan [The Swallow through Cloud]*. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1976.
- Guo, Jian, Yongyi Song, and Yuan Zhou. *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*. Historical Dictionaries of Ancient Civilizations and Historical Eras, no. 17. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2006.
- Guo, Moruo. “Taolun Hong Yu Zhuan-- Da Qingnian Tongxuemen de Yi Feng Gongkaixin [A Discussion of Redness and Expertise: An Open Letter to Young Students].” In *Lun You Hong You Zhuan [On Being Red and Expert]*, 108–11. Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958.
- Guo, Xianhong. *Zhengtu [Long Trek]*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973.
- Gushipian chuanguo huiyi choubei zu [Preparation group for the feature film creation meeting]. “Dui Dianying Wenxue Juben Juelie de Yijian [Opinion on the Script for the Film Juelie].” In *Zhongguo Dianying Yanjiu Ziliao, 1949-1979 [Collected Research Materials of Chinese Film, 1949-1979]*, edited by Di Wu, Vol. 2. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, n.d.

- Habermas, Jürgen. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [Notes Toward an Investigation]." In *Mapping Ideology*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, 100–140. New York: Verso, 1994.
- . *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon, 1985.
- Han, Dongping. *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact on China's Rural Development*. New York: Garland Publisher, 2000.
- Hawks, Shelley Drake. *The Art of Resistance: Painting by Candlelight in Mao's China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017.
- Hayford, Charles Wishart. *To the People: James Yen and Village China*. The U.S. and Pacific Asia--Studies in Social, Economic, and Political Interaction. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- "Health and Medical Care for the People." *China Reconstructs* XX, no. 6 (June 1971): 4.
- Hendrikus van den Valk, Marius. *An Outline of Modern Chinese Family Law*. Peiping: H. Vetch, 1939.
- Hershatter, Gail. *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past*, 2013.
- . *Women and China's Revolutions*. Critical Issues in World and International History. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.
- . "Women and China's Socialist Construction." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 17, no. 12 (2019): 1–27.
- Hinton, William. *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.
- . *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1983.

- Ho, Christine I. *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Anne Machung. *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012.
- “Hold High the Red Flag of People's Communes and March On.” In *People's Communes in China*, 19. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958.
- Holm, David. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Hong Fincher, Leta. *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China*. London: Zed Books, 2016.
- Hong, Guangwen et al. “Wo Men de Yeyu Meishu Xuexi He Chuangzuo [Our Amateur Art Study and Practice].” *Meishu*, no. 2 (1957): 20.
- Hong hua chuangzuo zu [The “Red Flowers” Writing Group]. *Hong Hua [Red Flowers]*. Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1976.
- Hua, Guofeng. “Eleventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.” *China Report* 8, no. 3 (1977): 57–84.
- . “Zai Zhongguo Gongchandang Di Shiyi Ci Quanguo Daibiao Dahuishang de Zhengzhi Baogao [Political Report at the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China].” *Renmin Ribao*, August 23, 1977.
- Hua, Sheng. “Big Character Posters in China: A Historical Survey.” *Law Journal Library* 4, no. 2 (1990): 234–56.
- Huang, Yiping. *Agricultural Reform in China: Getting Institutions Right*. Trade and Development. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Huang, Yufu. "Chinese Women's Status as Seen Through Peking Opera." In  *Holding Up Half the Sky*, edited by Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow, 28–54. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004.
- Hung, Chang-tai.  *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918-1937*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- "Huxian Nongmin Hua Zai Yingguo Shoudao Guanzhong Huanying [Huxian Peasant Art Welcomed by Audiences of England]."  *Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 1976.
- Irwin, Alan.  *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise, and Sustainable Development*. Environment and Society. London ; New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Jacka, Tamara.  *Women's Work in Rural China: Change and Continuity in an Era of Reform*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Jasanoff, Sheila.  *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007.
- Jenner, W.J.F. "The New Chinese Revolution."  *New Left Review* 1, no. 53 (February 1969): 83–96.
- Johnson, Kay Ann.  *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*. Paperback ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Jones, Caroline A.  *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Jones, Jacqueline.  *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010.
- Ju, Chih-chuan. "The Maternity Home." Translated by Sheng Tang.  *Chinese Literature* 8 (1960): 6–21.
- . "The Warmth of Spring." Translated by Gladys Yang.  *Chinese Literature* 7 (1961): 67–81.

- Judd, Ellen R. *Gender and Power in Rural North China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- “Juelie (1975).” Accessed February 25, 2020. <https://movie.douban.com/subject/1306207/>.
- Kang, Xiaofei, ed. *Women, Family and the Chinese Socialist State, 1950-2010*. Historical Studies of Contemporary China, volume 3. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2020.
- Kao, Mayching. “China’s Response to the Western in Art: 1898-1937.” Stanford University, 1972.
- Karl, Rebecca. *China’s Revolutions in the Modern World: A Brief Interpretive History*. New York and London: Verso, 2020.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview*. New York: Feminist Press, 1993.
- King, Dylan Levi. “‘White Left’: The Internet Insult the West Has Gotten Wrong,” *Sixth Tone*, July 10, 2017. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000477/white-left-the-internet-insult-the-west-has-gotten-wrong>.
- King, Richard, Zhun Li, and Yigong Zhang, eds. *Heroes of China’s Great Leap Forward: Two Stories*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2010.
- Komlosy, Andrea. *Work: The Last 1,000 Years*. London ; New York: Verso, 2018.
- Kraus, Richard Curt. *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*. Studies of the East Asian Institute. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.
- . *The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture*. State and Society in East Asia. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Des Chinoises*. Paris: Éditions des Femmes, 1974.

- Kuo, Jason C. *Visual Culture in Shanghai 1850s-1930s*. Washington, D.C.: New Academia Pub., 2007. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.32156>.
- Laing, Ellen Johnston. *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- . *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Lampland, Martha. *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . *The Value of Labor: The Science of Commodification in Hungary, 1920-1956*. Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Lanza, Fabio. *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Lapidus, Gail Warshofsky. *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979.
- Laslett, Barbara, and Johanna Brenner. "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives." *Annual Review of Sociology* 15, no. 1 (August 1989): 381–404. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.15.080189.002121>.
- Latour, Bruno. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Lee, Ching Kwan. "From Organized Dependence to Disorganized Despotism: Changing Labour Regimes in Chinese Factories." *The China Quarterly* 157 (March 1999): 44–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000040200>.

- Lee, Haiyan. *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Lee, Hong Yung. *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Lee, Jennifer Dorothy. “The Aesthetics of Anxiety: Post-Mao Experimentalisms, 1976-1982.” PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2014.
- Leese, Daniel. “A Single Spark: The Origins and Spread of the Little Red Book in China.” In *Mao’s Little Red Book: A Global History*, edited by Alexander C. Cook, 23–42. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Levenson, Joseph. *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958.
- Li, Chun. “Mother and Daughter.” In *Not That Road and Other Stories*, 102–17. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962.
- Li, Chunfeng. “Historical Observations Regarding the Large-Scale Establishment of Rural Public Canteens in Hebei Province.” edited by Thomas David DuBois and Huaiyin Li, 115–32. Leiden: Brill, 2016.
- Li, Cunsong. “Shanghai Gongren Meishu Chuangzuo Huodong [Art Creation Activities by Shanghai Workers].” *Meishu*, no. 5 (1954): 38–39.
- Li, Fenglan. “Wei Geming Kulian Jibengong [Working Hard to Practice Basic Skills for the Revolution].” In *Hu Xian Nongmin Hua Xuanji [Selected Works by Hu Xian Peasant Painters]*, unnumbered. Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1974.
- Li, Jinzheng. “Nongmin Heyi Zhichi Yu Canjia Zhonggong Geming?” *Jindaishi Yanjiu* 4 (2012): 134–51.



- Li, Lan Angela. "The Edge of Expertise: Representing Barefoot Doctors in Cultural Revolution China." *Endeavor* 39 (2015): 160–67.
- Li, Qun. "Cong 'Tiancai' Tanqi [Taking 'Genius' as Point of Departure]." *Meishu*, no. 10 (1955): 39–40.
- . "Ruhe Kandai Gongnongbing Meishu Chuangzuo [How to Regard the Artistic Creations of the Worker, Peasant, and Soldier]." *Meishu*, no. 11 (1958): 8–9.
- Li, Rui. *Dayuejin Qinli Ji [A First-Hand Account of the Great Leap Forward]*. Vol. 2. Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong chubanshe, 1996.
- Li, Wenbin, and Xiangtian Zeng. "Pi Zai Du Wenjie de Shen Shang, Teng Zai Deng Xiaoping Xin Shang: Ping Caise Gushipian Chunmiao [Criticizing Du Wenjie and Hits Deng Xiaoping: A Critique of the Color Feature Film Chunmiao]." *Renmin Ribao*, April 27, 1976.
- Li, Wenhua. *Breaking with Old Ideas [Juelie]*. VHS. Voyager Press, 1986.
- . "Gan Ka Ding Feng Chuan [Dare to Sail into the Wind]." *Guangming Ribao*, February 15, 1976.
- . *Wang Shi Liu Ying: Li Wenhua de Dian Ying Ren Sheng*. Di 1 ban. Han Tang Yang Guang. Beijing Shi: Hua wen chu ban she, 2011.
- Li, Zhun. "A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang." In *Heroes of the Great Leap Forward: Two Stories*, edited by Richard King, translated by Robert Mackie, Johanna Hood, and Richard King. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.
- . *Li Shuangshuan Xiaozhuan*. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1977.
- . *Li Zhun Xiaoshuo Xuan [Li Zhun Short Story Selections]*. Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981.

- . *Li Zhun Zhuanji [Collected Works of Li Zhun]*. Edited by Zhongkang Bu. Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1982.
- . “Liang Dai Ren [Two Generations].” *Renmin Wenxue*, no. 10 (1959): 51–57.
- . *Not That Road and Other Stories*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth. *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995.
- Lin, Chun. *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Lin, Shu, ed. *Ru Ying Sui Xing: Li Wenhua de Dianying Shijie [Like the Shape of Shadows: The Film World of Li Wenhua]*. Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2012.
- Lin, Yang. “Countryside: Barefoot Doctors Now ‘Wear Shoes’.” *Peking Review*, June 1980.
- Lindtner, Silvia. “Hackerspaces and the Internet of Things in China: How Makers Are Reinventing Industrial Production, Innovation, and the Self.” *China Information* 28, no. 2 (July 2014): 145–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X14529881>.
- Lippit, Victor D. *Land Reform and Economic Development in China: A Study of Institutional Change and Development Finance*. White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974.
- Liu, Bannong. *Bannong Tan Ying*. Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 2000.
- Liu, Lydia He, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds. *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Liu, Shaoqi. “Liu Shaoqi Tongzhi Zai Beijing Gejie Qingzhu Shiyue Shehuizhuyi Geming Sishi Zhounian Dahui Shang de Jianghua [Remarks by Comrade Liu Shaoqi at the All-Inclusive Fortieth Anniversary Celebration of the Socialist October Revolution in Beijing].” In *Lun Youhong Youzhuan [On Being Red and Expert]*, 3–4. Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958.

- Liu Shu. *Ru ying sui xing: Li Wenhua de dianying shijie [Shaped like a shadow: the film world of Li Wenhua]*. Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2014.
- Liu, Xiao. "Information Fantasies: Culture and Media in the Post-Mao 'New Era.'" PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2013.
- Liu, Xilin. *Zhongguo Meishu Nianjian 1949-1989 [Annual of Chinese Art 1949-1989]*. Nanning: Guangxi Fine Art Publishing House, 1993.
- Liu, Ye. *Higher Education, Meritocracy and Inequality in China*. New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2016.
- Liu, Zhuo. "Wengongtuan and the Rural Literary Popularization Movement in Yan'an." *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 6, no. 1 (2012): 39–55.
- Loercher, Diana. "China's Peasant Art: Political, but More." *The Christian Science Monitor*, January 9, 1978.
- Lü, Peng. *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*. Milano: Charta, 2010.
- Lü, Peng and Yi Dan. *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi: 1979-1989 [A history of modern Chinese art, 1979-1989]*. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1992.
- Lu, Xing. *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication*. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.
- Lun You Hong You Zhuan [On Being Red and Expert]*. Beijing: Beijing qingnian chubanshe, 1958.
- Luo, Meng Sha, and Ernest Wing Tak Chui. "Gender Division of Household Labor in China: Cohort Analysis in Life Course Patterns." *Journal of Family Issues* 39, no. 12 (August 2018): 3153–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18776457>.
- Ma, William Hsingyo. "Pedagogy, Display, and Sympathy at the French Jesuit Orphanage Workshops of Tushanwan in Early-Twentieth Century Shanghai." PhD dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2016.

- MacFarquhar, Roderick. *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*. New York: Octagon Books, 1974.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick, and Michael Schoenhals. *Mao's Last Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Magiciens de La Terre*. Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1989.
- Man-Cheong, Iona. *The Class of 1761: Examinations, State, and Elites in Eighteenth-Century China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Mao, Tse-tung. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol. 9. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967.
- Mao, Tze-tung. "Report on Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan." In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, 1:23–59. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967.
- Mao, Zedong. "Guanyu Jiaoyu Gongzuo [Directive on Education Work]." In *Mao Zedong Ji [Collected Works of Mao Zedong]*, 4:29–31. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983.
- . "Letter to Comrades: Communist Labor University of Jiangxi Province, July 30, 1961." *Peking Review*, August 12, 1977.
- . *Mao Zedong Sixiang Wansui [Long Live Mao Zedong Thought]*. Wuhan: Neibu xuexi [Internal study materials], 1968.
- . *Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978.
- McDougall, Bonnie S., and Paul Clark, eds. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Studies on China 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Medical Workers Serving the People Wholeheartedly*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1971.
- Meisner, Maurice J. *Mao's China and after: A History of the People's Republic*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 1999.

- . *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.
- . “Utopian Goals and Ascetic Values in Maoist Ideology.” In *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism*, 118–31. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.
- Meng, Yue. “Female Images and National Myth.” In *Gender Politics in Modern China*, edited by Tani E. Barlow, 118–36. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Milanović, Branko. *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System That Rules the World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Molnar, Alex. *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*. Positions : Education, Politics, and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Mu, Ting. “‘Yinmou dianying’ qianxi [A rough analysis of ‘conspiracy films’].” *Jiyi [Remembrance]* 65, no. 23 (December 30, 2010).
- Naughton, Barry. *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007.
- Nongmin Meishu Shouce [A Guide to Fine Art for Peasants]*. Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1975.
- Noth, Juliane. “‘Make the Past Serve the Present:’ Reading *Cultural Relicis Excavated During the Cultural Revolution*.” In *Cultural Heritage as Civilising Mission: From Decay to Recovery*, edited by Michael Falser, 181–99. Berlin: Springer, 2015.
- Pang, Laikwan. *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production during China’s Cultural Revolution*. London New York: Verso, 2017.
- Parish, William L., and Martin King Whyte. *Village and Family in Contemporary China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

- People's Communes in China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958.
- Pepper, Suzanne. *Radicalism and Education Reform in 20th-Century China: The Search for an Ideal Development Model*. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Peterson, Glen. *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95*. Contemporary Chinese Studies. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.
- Plakans, Andrejs. "Seigneurial Authority and Peasant Family Life: The Baltic Area in the Eighteenth Century." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1975): 629–52.
- Pleynet, Marcelin. *Le Voyage En Chine*. Paris: Hachette, 1980.
- Postone, Moishe. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY , USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Qi, Wang. "State-Society Relations and Women's Political Participation." In *Women of China: Economic and Social Transformation*, edited by Jackie West, Minghua Zhang, Xiangqun Chang, and Yuan Cheng, 19–44. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999.
- Qi, Zhi. *Wenge Dianying, 1966-1976: Yi Ge Zhidu Yu Guannian de Lishi, Di Er Ji [A History of Institutions and Ideas: Cultural Revolution Films, Vol. 2]*. Austin, TX: Meiguo huayi chubanshe [Remembering Publishing], n.d.
- . "Yinmou Dianying Wu Ti [The Five Conspiracy Films]." *Dianying Yishu* 4 (2002): 117.
- Qian, Jiang. *Ping Pong Waijiao Muhou [Behind Ping Pong Diplomacy]*. Beijing: Dongfang, 1997.
- Qiu, Jack Linchuan. "China's Digital Working Class and Circuits of Labor." *Communication and the Public* 3, no. 1 (March 2018): 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047318755529>.
- Renmin weisheng chubanshe. *Chijiao Yisheng Xianjin Shi Ji Hui Bian*. Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1974.
- Richard, Paul. "The Happy Peasant Paintings of Huhsien." *The Washington Post*, October 9, 1978.

- Rifkin, Adrian. "The Chinese Exhibition at the Warehouse Gallery." *Artscribe*, February 1977.
- Robbins, Paul. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- Roberts, Rosemary A. *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*. Leiden Netherlands; Boston: Brill, 2010.  
<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10439102>.
- Roberts, Rosemary A., and Li Li, eds. *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics": Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017.
- Robertson Wojcik, Pamela. *Movie Acting, the Film Reader*. New York, N.Y.; London: Routledge, 2004.
- Robinson, Thomas W., and Richard Baum. *The Cultural Revolution in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Rojas, Carlos, and Ralph A. Litzinger, eds. *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Ru, Zhijuan. "Chun Nuan Shijie." *Renmin Wenxue* 7 (1959): 64–71.
- . "Jiawu Shi [Housework]." In *Caoyuan Shang de Xiao Lu [The Path in the Prairie]*, 147–57. Tianjin: Baihe wenyi chubanshe, 1982.
- . "Jingjing de Chanyuanli [The Quiet Maternity Ward]." *Renmin Wenxue* 6 (1960): 12–22.
- . "Jingjing de Chanyuanli [The Quiet Maternity Ward]." *Renmin Wenxue*, no. 6 (1960).
- Ryu, Youngju. *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee's Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.
- Saich, Tony. "Introduction: The Chinese Community Party and the Anti-Japanese Base Areas." *The China Quarterly* 140 (1994): 1000–1006.

- . “Writing or Rewriting History? The Construction of the Maoist Revolution on History.” In *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, edited by Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven, 299–338. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.
- Saltman, Kenneth J. *The Edison Schools: Corporate Schooling and the Assault on Public Education*. Positions. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Sarris, Andrew. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968*. New York: Octagon Books, 1982.
- Schmalzer, Sigrid. “Labor Created Humanity: Cultural Revolution Science on Its Own Terms.” In *The Chinese Revolution as History*, edited by Paul Pickowicz and Andrew Walder, 185–210. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- . “On the Appropriate Use of Rose-Colored Glasses: Reflections on Science in Socialist China.” *Isis* 98, no. 3 (September 2007): 571–83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/521159>.
- . “Red and Expert.” In *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, edited by Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere, 215–20. Canberra and New York: Australian National University and Verso Books, 2019.
- . *Red Revolution, Green Revolution: Scientific Farming in Socialist China*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- . *The People’s Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Schwarcz, Vera. *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Selden, Mark. *China in Revolution: The Yen’an Way Revisited*. Socialism and Social Movements. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.



- . *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*. Harvard East Asian Series 62. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Semsel, George S., Xihe Chen, and Hong Xia, eds. *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1993.
- Shanghai dianying zhipianchang da pipanzu [Great criticism group of the Shanghai Film Studio]. “Zhe Bi Zhang Yiding Yao Qingsuan: Cong Fandang Yingpian ‘Chunmiao’ de Chulong Kan ‘Sirenbang’ Suandang Duoquan de Zui’e Yinmou [The Account Must Be Cleared: The Gang of Four’s Evil Conspiracy to Usurp Party Control as Seen in the Anti-Party Film ‘Chunmiao’].” *Renmin Ribao*, June 25, 1977.
- Shanghai shi diaocha baogao. “Cong ‘Chijiao Yisheng’ de Chengzhang Kan Yixue Jiaoyu Geming de Fangxiang [Examining the Direction of the Revolution in Medical Education from the Development of ‘Barefoot Doctors’].” *Renmin Ribao*, September 14, 1968.
- Shanxisheng Xiyang xian Dazhai gongshe Nannao dadui pinxiazhongnong [Lower-middle peasants of the Southern Mound Brigade, Dazhai Commune, Xiyang County, Shanxi Province]. “Zanmen Ye Yao He Deng Xiaoping Suansuanzhang [We Too Need to Settle Accounts with Deng Xiaoping].” *Renmin Ribao*, May 19, 1976.
- Shen, Raphael. *China’s Economic Reform: An Experiment in Pragmatic Socialism*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2000.
- Shu, Xincheng. *Jindai Zhongguo Jiaoyu Shi Ziliao [Source Materials on the History of Modern Chinese Education]*. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1961.
- Shue, Vivienne. *Peasant China in Transition: The Dynamics of Development toward Socialism, 1949-1956*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

- Sidel, Ruth. "New Roles for Women in Health Care Delivery: Conditions in the People's Republic of China." In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Women in Health, June 16-18, 1975, Washington D.C.*, 106. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1976.
- Sidel, Victor. "The Barefoot Doctors of the People's Republic of China." *New England Journal of Medicine* 286 (June 15, 1972): 1294–95.
- Slobodian, Quinn. *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, 2020.
- Smith, Karen. *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-Garde Art in New China*. Updated ed. Beijing and Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008.
- Snow, Edgar. *Red Star over China*. New York: Bantam Books, 1978.
- Solinger, Dorothy J. *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market*. Studies of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Song, Yongyi, ed. *Zhongguo Fanyou Yundong Shukuju, 1957-1958 [Database of China's Anti-Rightist Movement]*. Hong Kong: Universities Service Center, 2010.
- Song, Yongyi, and Shu Ding, eds. *Dayuejin da jihuang: Lishi he bijiao shiye xia de shishi he sibian [Great Leap Forward, Great Famine: Truth and Analysis Under Historical and Comparative Perspectives]*. Jiulong: Tian yuan shu wu, 2009.
- <http://books.google.com/books?id=k0IjAQAAMAAJ>.
- Song, Zhenguo. *Cha Shan Chun [Spring Comes to the Tea Mountains]*. Wuhu: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1976.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Picador USA, 2001.
- "Spring Shoot: A Film." *Peking Review*, June 11, 1976.

- Stacey, Judith. *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Stavis, Benedict. *Making Green Revolution: The Politics of Agricultural Development in China*. Ithaca, NY: Rural Development Committee, Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1974.
- . *People's Communes and Rural Development in China*. Ithaca, NY: Rural Development Committee, Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1974.
- Stites, Richard. *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Strong, Anna Louise. *The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes-- and Six Years After*. Beijing: New World Press, 1964.
- Sullivan, Michael. *Modern Chinese Artists: A Biographical Dictionary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Tang, Xiaobing. *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- . *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Teiwes, Frederick C. *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950-1965*. 2nd ed. Studies on Contemporary China. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.
- “Tentative Regulations (Draft) of the Sputnik People's Commune.” In *People's Communes in China*, 14. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958.
- The Exhibition of the Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China*. Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 1974.

- The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes, and Six Years After*. Beijing: New World Press, 1964.
- Tian, Youru. *Zhongguo Kangri Genjudi Fazhanshi*. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1995.
- Tinari, Philip. "Between Palimpsest and Teleology: The Problem of 'Chinese Contemporary Art.'" In *Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World*, edited by Alexandra Munroe, Philip Tinari, and Hanru Hou, 51–67. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017.
- Tisdall, Caroline. "Record of Achievement." *The Guardian*. November 17, 1976.
- Turner, Stephen. "What Is the Problem with Experts?" *Social Studies of Science* 31, no. 1 (February 2001): 123–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030631201031001007>.
- Unger, Jonathan. *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Van Dyke, Paul Arthur, and Maria Kar-Wing Mok. *Images of the Canton Factories 1760-1822: Reading History in Art*. Hong Kong: HKU Press, Hong Kong University Press, 2015.
- Van Fleit, Krista. *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period 1949-1966*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Van Slyke, Lyman. "The Chinese Communist Movement during the Sino-Japanese War 1937–1945." In *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, 1st ed., 609–722. Cambridge University Press, 1986. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521243384.013>.
- Veg, Sebastian. "Testimony, History and Ethics: From the Memory of Jiabiangou Prison Camp to a Reappraisal of the Anti-Rightist Movement in Present-Day China." *The China Quarterly* 218 (June 2014): 514–39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741014000368>.
- Vogel, Ezra F., and Xiaoping Deng. *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.

- Volland, Nicolai. *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945-1965*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- . “Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC.” *Twentieth-Century China* 33, no. 2 (April 2008): 51–72.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/tcc.2008.33.2.51>.
- Vukovich, Daniel F. *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the P.R.C.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Walder, Andrew G. *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Wang, Ban, ed. *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011.
- Wang, Lei. *Jianhe Lang [Waves on the Jian River]*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974.
- Wang, Lu, and Keith Lewin. *Two Decades of Basic Education in Rural China: Transitions and Challenges for Development*, 2016.
- Wang, Shaoguang. *Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan*. Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Wang, Shimei. *Tie Xuanfeng [Mighty Whirlwind]*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1975.
- Wang, Xiaoyang. *Hong Yan*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975.
- Wang, Zheng. *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1964*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017.
- Wang, Zhuoyi. *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

- Weeks, Kathi. *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723>.
- Wei, Nancy Chunjuan. "Barefoot Doctors: The Legacy of Chairman Mao's Healthcare." In *Mr. Science and Chairman Mao's Revolution*, edited by Darryl E. Brock and Nancy Chunjuan Wei, 251–80. New York: Lexington Books, 2012.
- Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Susanne. "Party Historiography." In *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1993
- Wemheuer, Felix. "Sites of Horror: Mao's Great Famine." *The China Journal* 66 (July 2011): 155–64.
- Wemheuer, Felix, and Kimberley Ens Manning, eds. *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*. Contemporary Chinese Studies. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.
- White, Lynn T. *Unstately Power*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.
- Whyte, Martin King. *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China*. Berkeley.: University of California Press, 1974.
- Wilcox, Emily. *Revolutionary Bodies: Chinese Dance and the Socialist Legacy*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.
- Willems, D. "Susan's Breathlessness: The Construction of Professionals and Laypersons." In *The Social Construction of Illness: Illness and Medical Knowledge in Past and Present*, edited by J. Lachmund and G. Stollberg, 105–14. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992.
- Williams, Emily. "Exporting the Communist Image: The 1976 Chinese Peasant Painting Exhibition in Britain." *New Global Studies* 8, no. 3 (January 1, 2014). <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2014-0030>.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Winant, Gabriel. "Professional-Managerial Chasm." n + 1, October 10, 2019.

<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/professional-managerial-chasm/>.

Wolf, Margery. *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Wong, John. *Land Reform in the People's Republic of China: Institutional Transformation in Agriculture*. New York and London: Praeger, 1973.

Wu, Di, Zhongguo dian ying yi shu yan jiu zhong xin, and Zhongguo dian ying zi liao guan, eds. *Zhongguo Dian Ying Yan Jiu Zi Liao, 1949-1979*. Di 1 ban. Beijing: Wen hua yi shu chu ban she, 2006.

Wu Hung. *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History, 1970s-2000s*. London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

———. "Introduction." In *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Wu, Qiwen. "Wo Zai 'Chu Lan' Xie Wenzhang [I Was Wrote as 'Chu Lan']." *Yanhuang Chunqiu* 6 (n.d.): 2011.

Wu, Yiching. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Wu, Zhala. "'Chunmiao' dujie [A reading of 'Spring shoots']." *Jiyi [Remembrance]* 65, no. 23 (December 30, 2010).

Wu, Zhipu. "Cong Nongye Shengchan Hezuo She Dao Renmin Gongshe [From Agricultural Producers' Co-Operatives to People's Communes]." *Hongqi* 8 (1958): 5–11.

———. "From Agricultural Producers' Co-Operatives to People's Communes." In *People's Communes in China*, 37. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1958.

- Xie, Fengsong. "Yingpian Juelie Shi Shenme Huose? [What Kind of Trash Is the Film Juelie?]." *Renmin Ribao*, January 10, 1979.
- Xiong, Haiyi. "Wuxian Zhongyu Mao Zhuxi, Yongyuan Zhagen Zai Nongcun [Limitless Loyalty to Chairman Mao Forever Takes Root in the Countryside]." *Guangming Ribao*, June 28, 1968.
- Xu, Pinxiang. "Women Xuyao Zhuanjia de Bangzhu [We Need the Help of Professionals]." *Meishu*, no. 12 (1958): 41.
- Xu, Xiaohong. "The Great Separation: How the Cultural Revolution Shaped China and Its Relationship with Global Capitalism." Chapter workshop, University of Michigan, February 2020.
- Xu, Xiaoqun. *Chinese Professionals and the Republican State: The Rise of Professional Associations in Shanghai, 1912-1937*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Xu, Zhun. *From Commune to Capitalism: How China's Peasants Lost Collective Farming and Gained Urban Poverty*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018.
- "Xuexiao Jian Shao." Accessed February 25, 2020. <http://www.jxau.edu.cn/4/list.htm>.
- Yan, Geng. *Mao's Images*. New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018.
- Yan, Hairong. *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Yan, Jiaqi, Kao Kao, and D. W. Y. Kwok. *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.
- Yang, Ch'ing-k'un. *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution*. Reprint. Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1972.
- Yang, Jisheng, Edward Friedman, Jian Guo, and Stacy Mosher. *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.



- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Public Sphere in China." In *A Space of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 35–67. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Yang, Yuanying, ed. *Bei Ying Ji Shi*. Di 1 ban. Beijing: Zhongguo dian ying chu ban she, 2011.
- Yanhe zai zhauhuan xiezu zu [The writing group of The Yan River is Beckoning]. *Yanhe Zai Zhaohuan [The Yan River Is Beckoning]*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976.
- Yao, Yusheng. "National Salvation through Education: Tao Xingzhi's Educational Radicalism." PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999.
- Yi, G. "The 'Peasant Problem' and Time in Contemporary Chinese Art." *Representations* 136, no. 1 (November 1, 2016): 54–76. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2016.136.1.54>.
- Yu, Hao. "Social Mobility Under Three Regimes, China, 1645-2012." PhD Dissertation, UC Davis, 2013.
- Yun, Qidong. *China's Publishing Industry: From Mao to the Market*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2019. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1145030>.
- "Zai Mao Zhuxi de Wuchan Jieji Geming Weisheng Luxian Zhiyin Xia Shanghai Jiaoku 'chijiao Yisheng' Duiwu Jinyibu Chengzhang Zhuangda." *Renmin Ribao*. n.d.
- Zhai, Jiannong. *Hong se wang shi: 1966-1976 nian de zhong guo dian ying*. Di 1 ban. Bei jing: Tai hai chu ban she, 2001.
- Zhang, Changgong. *Qingchun [Youth]*. Hulanhaote: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 1973.
- Zhang, Haiyun. "Dianying Chunmiao de Yuanxing Wang Guizhen [Wang Guizhen, the Original Model for Chunmiao]." *Wenhua Jinghua* 3 (1995): 27–29.

- Zhang, Jianguo. *Xia Man Longwan [Pink Clouds Envelop Dragon Bend]*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976.
- Zhang, Joshua, and James D. Wright. *Violence, Periodization and Definition of the Cultural Revolution: A Case Study of Two Deaths by the Red Guards*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018.
- Zhang, Junxiang. “Dai Chanshu [Director’s Commentary].” Beijing, China Film Archive, July 1, 1963.
- Zhang, Junxiang, and Jiao Ding. “Qingsuan ‘sirenbang’ Gao Yinmou Dianyng de Zhengzhi Yinmou.” *Renmin Dianyng* 8 (1978): 1–5.
- Zhang, Kangkang. *Fenjie Xian [Demarcation]*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975.
- Zhang, Tiesheng. “Yi Fen Fa Ren Shengsheng de Dajuan [A Thought-Provoking Answer Sheet].” *Renmin Ribao*, August 10, 1973.
- Zhang, Xia. “One Life for Sale: Youth Culture, Labor Politics, and New Idealism in China.” *Positions* 23, no. 3 (August 2015): 515–43. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-3125875>.
- Zhang, Xiruo. “Muqian Guomin Jiaoyu Fangmian de Qingkuang He Wenti [The Present Situation and Problems in National Education].” *Renmin Ribao*, June 21, 1956.
- Zhang, Yingjin. *Chinese National Cinema*. 1st ed. National Cinemas. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Zhang, Zuoguang. “Dianyng ‘Chunmiao’ Bixu Pipan [The Film Chunmiao Must Be Criticized].” *Renmin Dianyng*, no. 2–3 (1977): 32–35.
- Zhao, Anting. “‘Chunmiao’ Shi Yike Daducao [Chunmiao’ Is a Poisonous Weed].” *Renmin Ribao*, June 25, 1977.
- Zheng, Jane. “Private Tutorial Art Schools in the Shanghai Market Economy: The Shanghai Art School, 1913-1919.” *Modern China* 35, no. 3 (May 2009): 313–43.

- . *The Modernization of Chinese Art: The Shanghai Art College, 1913-1937*. Leuven (Belgium): Leuven University Press, 2016.
- Zhongshan yixue yuan. *Changyong Yaowu Shouce*. Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1971.
- Zhou, Jiajun. *Shanfeng [Mountain Wine]*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1975.
- Zimmermann, Patricia Rodden. *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*. Arts and Politics of the Everyday. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Zizek, Slavoj, ed. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses [Notes Toward an Investigation].” In *Mapping Ideology*, 100–140. New York: Verso, 1994.
- Zou, Shencheng. “Liang Wei Nongmin Huajia [Two Peasant Artists].” *Meishu*, no. 6 (1958): 20.
- Zuo, Hong. “‘Baijuan’ Yu ‘Hongjuan’ [‘White Exams’ and ‘Red Exams’].” *Guangming Ribao*, January 7, 1976.
- Zweig, David. *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-1981*. Harvard East Asian Series 102. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989.