

china and new left visions

*Political and
Cultural
Interventions*

EDITED BY

ban wang AND jie lu

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Edited by Ban Wang and Jie Lu

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Introduction: China and New Left Critique

Ban Wang and Jie Lu

China's economic reforms toward globalization have wrought fundamental economic and social transformations over the last three decades. For all its remarkable achievements, this rapid development has also given rise to social contradictions, economic injustice, and social polarization. If the economic reforms of the 1980s allowed wealth to be transferred from the state to society and the peasants, the 1990s, with deepening marketization and privatization, can be characterized by an increasing accumulation of wealth in private hands.¹ In the absence of a dominant middle class, China has been evolving toward a polarized society of extreme wealth and poverty. The Chinese state wields mighty economic power and promotes a developmental agenda and economic policy resulting in the exploitation of millions of industrial workers and rural laborers. Unemployment, poverty, and human suffering are becoming part of the daily routine. These disturbing phenomena capture the paradox of contemporary China's economic progress and represent historical incongruity and ambiguity in the transformation of Chinese society. Against these dire socioeconomic consequences of China's fast-paced development, a new intellectual force under the banner of "New Left" has come on the scene since the mid 1990s.

Contemporary China's New Left emerged from the intellectual debate that took place from the mid to late 1990s over the issue of balanced and sustainable development. Against the neoliberal advocates of a free market, Western liberal democracy, and political reform, New Left critics stepped forward and launched a critique of the current capitalist development in hopes of seeking an alternative to global capitalism. The name "New Left" was first used in an article in *Beijing Youth* on July 21, 1994, by Yang Ping,

responding to Cui Zhiyuan's article, "New Evolution Theory, Analytical Marxism, Critical Legal Studies, and Chinese Reality." Yang contends that New Left intellectuals' criticism of the unequal distribution of wealth in China is also a critique of the unjust and uneven global capitalist order. Although the term was controversial among the people it was being used to describe at the time,² it has been used since to refer to intellectuals who embrace different leftist theories, ideals, and traditions ranging from Marxism to socialism, the Frankfurt School, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and other schools of thought critical of liberalism. In spite of their different theoretical frameworks and approaches, New Leftists share an intellectual consensus based on their fundamental concerns with social inequality, justice, and China's neoliberal model of developmentalism. They take a critical stance against global capitalism and search for a Chinese model of development. The publication of "Reading Notes: On Liberalism" by Wang Binbin in *Frontier* probably marked the beginning of this turn-of-the-century debate, and Wang Hui's "Condition of Contemporary Chinese Thinking and the Issue of Modernity" represents the first landmark argument for New Left thinking.³

Since the 1990s, the continuing economic reform and transition to privatization and the market have made the Chinese state and society more complex. The coexistence of socialist practices and capitalist institutions calls for more nuanced approaches and solutions to political and economic problems beyond any clear-cut left or right, socialist or capitalist paradigm. This ambiguity of Chinese society had splintered the Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s who had been unified under the banner of Enlightenment. The split is characterized by different diagnoses of China's problems as well as different visions for China's future.⁴ This fin-de-siècle intellectual divide both reflected a historical reality and echoed the question of "whither China" that appeared at a moment of profound historical transformation.

The New Left–neoliberal debate includes a wide range of macro and micro political, economic, and social issues. These generally fall under four major themes: social justice, capital and power, democracy, and modernity.⁵ The New Left's stands on these issues are based on its interpretation of the nature of Chinese society. According to Wang Hui, the decades of economic reform have already formed a "market society" or "capitalized society"; the political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural processes are very much under the sway of market mechanisms. Moreover, economic reform has also integrated China into the world system, rendering China's problems an inseparable part of global capitalism.⁶ The overall New Leftist critique of contemporary Chinese reality thus focuses on global capitalism and its dire consequences. The neoliberals, however, are interested in reforming the current political system, as they contend with an imagined state socialism and a

discredited political ideology persisting in post-reform China. This fundamental point of departure between the two camps determines their views of and approaches to China's problems.

The issue of social justice constitutes the core of New Leftist thinking. The New Left sees worsening social inequality and injustice as resulting from capitalist practices and the unregulated market. Its critique targets the illusory efficiency and promise of the neoliberal model of development as ruinous to social justice and democracy. The New Leftist economic thinkers seek to eliminate social inequality by maintaining public ownership of the means of production and by advocating a greater role for the state in reining in the market and redistributing wealth. In contrast, the neoliberals, harping on the authoritarian state system, complain that far from offering private freedom in a Western-style market economy, China's market economy is still constrained by interventionist state power. The neoliberals thus recommend establishing a fully privatized market and related property system and reducing the political power of the state. While both sides regard economic development as key to achieving social justice, the New Left attaches more importance to justice and equality by critiquing the market-oriented freedom of rights. It calls for more equitable social distribution of wealth while neoliberals stress growth, privatization, and legal procedure. Both New Leftists and neoliberals have noticed a new collaboration between power and capital produced by marketization, but they have different interpretations. In the New Leftist view, political power has been capitalized by global capitalism (*ziben quanli*); in the neoliberal perspective, it is political power that controls capital (*quanli ziben*). Criticizing different aspects, both sides, however, see this collaboration as the cause of corruption and social injustice. To overcome the problems created by marketization and capitalism, the New Left advocates participatory democracy by calling for a repoliticization and mobilization of Chinese society, and sees hope for change in the emerging grassroots democratic activities in China.

One of the most important theoretical contributions of the New Left group is its rethinking and critique of modernity. Wang Hui was the first intellectual in the 1990s to reexamine modernity in the context of modern Chinese history, Chinese socialism, and Marxism. According to Wang, various Chinese efforts and experiences in searching for modernity are already embedded in an anti-modern tradition. This profound historical contradiction reflects tensions within modernity. For Wang, to critique modernity is to find an alternative to capitalist modernity and its attendant institutions and ideologies, that is, to search for a different path in making China modern, making "a modern society that can be produced in a way different from the historical form of capitalism, or a self-reflexive process of modernity."⁷ In his analysis of modernity in the contemporary context, Wang is critical of the return to state socialism and a blind acceptance of Western modernity. He proposes

drawing on the Chinese revolutionary and socialist legacies. His critique of global modernity and capitalism and advocacy for an alternative form of modernity represent the general theoretical framework of New Leftist intellectual projects.

The New Left makes interventions not only in the theoretical forum but also in its practical engagement with concrete issues and problems, addressing the loss of public assets, agricultural problems (*sannong wenti*), economic policy, and environmental degradation. The New Left has been closely identified with its intellectual debate with neoliberalism, which reached a climax in the late 1990s or the first years of the twenty-first century and started to lose momentum thereafter. In contrast to the Western New Left marked by vibrant social and political activism, China's New Left seems to favor intellectual and theoretical engagement. Yet looking beyond the theoretical, we witness in the past two decades the appearance of wide-ranging movements and activities alongside the intellectual debate. Students, social scientists, political activists, rural laborers, artists, and documentary filmmakers throw themselves into political and social efforts. These social and cultural endeavors, along with the online participation of college students in literary/critical debates, are New Left-spirited interventions. Creative works of fiction and poetry by rural laborers (*dagong wenxue*), activities of community organizations, local elections, and independent labor unions (different from the semiofficial All China Labor Union and its branches) reflect a bottom-up empowerment and activism in dealing with issues of economic injustice and environmental damage. Independent and spontaneous, these burgeoning grassroots initiatives and innovative cultural endeavors represent a widespread resistance to deepening exploitation and oppression inherent in the neoliberal developmental model of economic reform, thus embodying the New Left's vision of achieving a society of equality and justice. We propose that China's New Left should be defined and understood as a broad social movement that includes intellectuals, factory workers, migrant workers, peasants, volunteers, and artists. Alongside the intellectual forum, the grassroots initiatives persist and grow in search of a more sustainable and just world.

Seen in this way, China's New Left endeavors also share some major principles and features with contemporary Global New Left movements. Unlike the Old Left in the early decades of the twentieth century, engaged in armed class struggles, organized labor union actions, large-scale protests and demonstrations, and well-defined Marxist ideologies, the Global New Left is characterized by social movements and struggles that are loosely organized, local, regional, or issue-oriented. Lacking any clearly defined ideologies or, rather, informed by different ideologies, they all aim at ending the exploitation, oppression, exclusion, discrimination, and destruction of the lives of working people by global capitalism. It is a counterhegemonic globaliza-

tion—globalization from below.⁸ Resonating with a similar spirit, China's New Left critiques global capitalism as a continuation and intensification of historical exploitative, uneven developments between regions, countries, and classes. The New Left theoretical vision is being put into practice: China's burgeoning sociocultural praxis and increasing grassroots initiatives can be seen as part of global resistance via worldwide New Left endeavors.

We believe that this broad and inclusive view can expand our understanding of the significance of China's New Left beyond its theoretical forum and its debate with neoliberalism. More importantly, a broader view captures both New Leftist aspirations and concrete endeavors in the effort to create a society of equality and justice among a large number of people.

China's New Left in its practical dimension nevertheless makes it impossible to paint a panoramic picture. Rather than redefining China's New Left, this anthology will focus on left-leaning sociopolitical and sociocultural interventions in the intellectual, cultural, and literary fields. Our contributors seek not only to provide a glimpse into China's New Left but also to delineate how left intellectual and artistic resources and legacies continue to inspire. New Left activists and artists draw on Western Left legacies, Chinese socialist and revolutionary traditions, and other resources to reanimate and energize the debate and efforts to make changes in contemporary China. The eleven chapters are divided into three sections. Each chapter examines and reflects New Left thought from a different angle, or critiques literary/cultural manifestations from a New Leftist perspective. The anthology as a whole represents general perspectives, criticism, and evaluation of China's New Left from scholars outside China.

Part I focuses on geopolitics and New Leftist thoughts and perspectives. Arif Dirlik's "Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, Circa 1980" is a theoretical investigation of the contemporary Chinese model of socialism in the historical perspective of Mao's Chinese socialism. In contrast to the Maoist revolutionary interpretation of socialism, the current socialism, Dirlik points out, is based on an economic interpretation, emphasizing production as the determining factor in the political and ideological structure. In the model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," it is socialism that serves capitalism, not the other way around. Dirlik argues that this antirevolutionary socialism that no longer aims at achieving equality and universal political and economic emancipation only represents a negation of socialist vision.

Lisa Rofel's chapter, "The Geopolitics of the New Left in China," expands China's New Left intellectual movement beyond the nation's geographical boundaries. Her study of the important theoretical contributions by Giovanni Arrighi, Lin Chun, and Lu Xinyu takes a transnational approach to

China's New Left. The translational nature of China New Leftists' search for an alternative model of development also locates it within Global New Left endeavors.

Situating China's New Left in a broad context of neoliberal globalization, geopolitics, and the residual Cold War divide between the East and the West, Daniel Vukovich argues that the New Left arose in response to the iniquities and social problems of market reform as well as the threat to China's autonomy by global capital and geopolitical hegemony. The New Left intellectuals critique the Party-State for having been captured by neoliberalism and global capital. On the other hand, the intellectuals and activists draw symbolic and discursive inspiration from the revolutionary, socialist legacy in hopes of making the state more responsive to the needs of the population. Based in universities and institutions, left intellectuals seek to produce new knowledge and to energize politics, which has been depoliticized as economic and administrative processes.

Reviewing the influence of the New Left in the West on the interpretation of China's political reform and political theater, Ban Wang analyzes the limitations of performance perspective, a type of critical analysis derived from the legacy of the New Left movement and reflection on it in the 1960s. Exposing the limitations of the bodily and individualistic view of performance in political theater, Wang applies this critique to accounts of practices of political theater in China. He argues that by portraying political theater, such as the student movement in Tiananmen Square in 1989, in purely performative, ritualistic, and cultural terms, critics in the West fail to see the larger, fluid interaction and dialogue among forces and interests in society, civil associations, and the state. To present a much more cohesive, constitutive agency in political theater, Wang's article traces the vibrant discourse formation in the revolutionary past. The discourse community in Yan'an offers an example of combining theater and politics in the constitution of a community and a republic from the bottom up.

The four articles in part II focus on New Left-oriented literary writings, such as *diceng* literature and poetry of migrant workers and short-short fiction, as sociocultural interventions. In "*Internationale* as Specter: *Na'er*, 'Subaltern Literature,' and Contemporary China's 'Left Bank,'" Xueping Zhong argues, through her critical reading of Cao Zhenglu's "There," that the significance of *diceng* literature is its documentation of what the author defines as the "subalternization of the working class," a process of the changed and changing social relations in postsocialist and postrevolutionary China. Zhong further argues that *diceng* literature and the emergence of a community of thinkers under the Left Bank Culture Net constitute critical interventions in contemporary China.

In her critical reading of *diceng* literature represented by Cao Zhenglu's "There" and *Questioning Heaven*, Jie Lu focuses on the specific issue of formation of agency and self-empowerment for the *diceng*—people at the social bottom. Lu argues that the formation of agency should no longer be based on the false socialist ideology but be accomplished through the struggles of *diceng* people for their real rights and interests. Lu thus sees Cao Zhenglu's fiction as pointing to the possibility of constructing agency despite the hegemonic dominance of political power and capital.

In "Toward a New Leftist Ecocriticism in Postsocialist China: Reading the 'Poetry of Migrant Workers' as Ecopoetry," Haomin Gong examines the poetry of migrant workers from the perspective of New Leftist ecocriticism and argues that this genre represents an ecocritique of the postsocialist condition. In exploring the theoretical engagement of China's New Left with environmentalism, Gong helps to form a New Left theoretical consensus on environmental issues in contemporary China.

Short-short fiction, though not closely related to New Left-oriented literary writings, is a new phenomenon on the contemporary Chinese literary scene. In her critical study of the short-shorts, Aili Mu argues that their dominant subject matter shares New Leftist concerns with social equality and justice and China's future development by locating these stories' significance in the grassroots, the base and support of New Leftist positions. Reflecting the New Leftist spirit, the short-shorts offer bottom-up and indigenous perspectives on socioeconomic conditions in contemporary China.

The articles in Part III present New Leftist rethinking of socialism and market culture. Perhaps there is no better cultural production than *Road to Revival* to epitomize the mainstream political ideology. Xiaomei Chen, focusing her critical reading of the gaps and fissures in this "red classic" from a New Leftist perspective, argues that the work eulogizes and affirms the political status quo through its representation of working-class people and its gloss over socioeconomic problems resulting from the economic reforms under the grand narrative of socialism.

The television series *Forever Africa* and the travel documentary *A Passage to Africa* are two other cultural products that can be viewed as representing mainstream political ideology. Megan M. Ferry argues that in portraying China's new role in Africa, these two works reconstruct a grand narrative about China's unique place in the world. The soft power, the cultural influence, humanism, and the mutual respect between China and African countries, though redefining China's relationship with the continent, only reinforce China's seamless transition to global capitalism.

In "Redistribution of the Sensible in Neoliberal China: Real Estate, Cinema, and Aesthetics," Hai Ren examines Jia Zhangke's cinematic *24 City* to critique the real estate developer's use of the industrial history of socialist China as a strategy for self-promotion. Ren argues that the commercial pro-

motion is in fact an act of forgetting or erasure of the effects on workers' lives of China's transition from a socialist country to a neoliberal state, smoothing out the socioeconomic problems created by China's pro-capitalism development.

This anthology represents a preliminary attempt at connecting a global left perspective with Chinese social and cultural developments. The contributors may not agree on a definition of the New Left and of its ideological rivals, neoliberalism and global capitalism. But we all share a desire to understand recent developments in China as an emergent power and the direction it is taking in the global arena. Revolutionary and Mao's China have left a strong, enduring left legacy. The Chinese Revolution attempted to influence revolutions and social movements in other countries and had an impact on the New Left in the West. In turn, the Western New Left fuels contemporary Chinese intellectuals' critique of global capitalism and its consequences. New Left discourses and practices are thus engaged in a global exchange and mutual learning. Our aim is to sort out the conflicting motifs and shady areas on a spectrum between left and neoliberal. To do this we keep in mind the New Left's legacy bequeathed by its Chinese and Western predecessors and use it as a weapon to critique social, economic, and cultural damage caused by global capitalism.

NOTES

1. Sun Liping, *Rupture—The Chinese Society Since the 1990s of the 20th Century*, quoted in Gao Like, "How to Understand China in Transition," in *Self-Destruction of Enlightenment*, ed. Xu Jilin, Luo Gang, et al. (Changchun: Jilin Publishing Ltd., 2007), 194.

2. See Wu Guanjun, "The Discourse Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Thought," in *Self-Destruction of Enlightenment*, 280-324. The article also discusses the controversial debate on the naming of liberalism.

3. Wang Hui, "The Contemporary Chinese Ideological Condition and the Issue of Modernity," *Frontier (Tianya)* 8, no. 1 (2009): 15-29. *Twenty-first Century (Ershiyi shiji)* in Hong Kong and *Frontier (Tianya)* were the major journals that published the debate articles.

4. Gao Like, "How to Understand China in Transition," 195.

5. For the New Left–neoliberal debate, also see Gao Like, "How to Understand China in Transition"; Nominik Mierzejewski, "Not to Oppose but to Rethink—The New Left Discourse on the Chinese Reform," *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia* 8 (2009): 15-29; Gong Yang, ed., *Intellectual Trends: China's New Left and Its Influences* (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Science Press, 2003).

6. Wang Hui, "The Contemporary Chinese Ideological Condition and the Issue of Modernity."

7. Wang Hui, "The Contemporary Chinese Ideological Condition and the Issue of Modernity."

8. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The Rise of the Global Left—the World Social Forum and Beyond* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2006), 6.

I

Geopolitics and New Left Perspectives

Chapter One

Back to the Future: Contemporary China in the Perspective of Its Past, Circa 1980¹

Arif Dirlik

China's present leaders have turned their backs upon revolutionary solutions to the problems of socialism. Are they also prepared to abandon the quest for socialism? As revolutionary will surrenders to social necessity, the future loses its immanence in the present. We must ask once again if socialism can survive the extinction of the socialist vision and, if it does, what kind of society it is likely to produce. The Chinese themselves have no convincing answers to these questions. In an interview in 1980, Deng Xiaoping upheld socialism but refused to predict if it would prevail in the future.² His response is typical of the uncertainty over the future of socialism in China that permeates Chinese political thinking today.

These lines were written in 1981. In the nearly three decades that have elapsed since then, much has changed in China and the world. Interestingly, however, the "uncertainty" has refused to go away, and neither has the wishful thinking, pro- or antisocialist, that inevitably colors the evaluation of China's present and future both within and without the country.

It is the evaluation of this continued uncertainty that is the major task undertaken by this discussion. One way to do so is to place contemporary China against the past of which it is the product. Where socialism as practice and vision is concerned, it is useful to judge how far China has traveled by placing present-day commitments against that moment in the past when the Communist Party embarked upon the path captured by the slogan of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," at least as that moment appeared to this author at the time. The first part of the present essay is a reprint of an article published in 1982 that began with the introductory paragraph above.³ The

second part offers a commentary on that article from the vantage point of the present. Each part, I hope, reflects upon and illuminates the other. If the essay in the end refuses to answer the question with which it begins, it is because developments over the last three decades, however radical in some sense, have in another sense thrown up challenges, the resolution of which may depend on the ability of the party to draw upon the revolutionary legacy that has shown remarkable resiliency against its tacit renunciation—and for good reason, as the questions addressed by the century-long Chinese Revolution were not just the products of revolutionary whimsy but were responses to real problems of the real world of the capitalist world-system. Rather than render those questions irrelevant, the dramatic changes that have accompanied China's incorporation into global capitalism since the 1980s have instead dramatized their continued urgency, which may be why the revolutionary past refuses to stay in the "dustbin of history" to which it has been consigned by its detractors.

To continue where the epigraph left off . . .

Policies since 1976 have engendered both hopes and fears that the new leadership might renounce socialism. There are those in China who would like to see the retreat from the Cultural Revolution culminate in the creation of a capitalist society; contemporary writings refer frequently to those who hold that "socialism is not as good as capitalism." At the same time, even a superficial reading of publications from China reveals the anxiety felt by those who sense in the present policies a betrayal of the promise of socialism. These feelings are shared by foreign observers who, for economic or political reasons, have more than a passing interest in the course of Chinese politics. On the other hand, China's leaders and policy-makers continue to profess socialist commitments, proclaim that "only socialism can save China," and argue that their policies offer a better guarantee for the achievement of socialism than those of their disgraced predecessors. It would be naive to take their claims at face value, but neither can we dismiss them as spurious rationalizations. From all appearances, their policies are based on an analysis of Chinese society that takes better account of orthodox Marxist premises regarding the prerequisites of socialism than that of their predecessors. Secondly, the reasoning that underlies their policies has too long a standing in Chinese socialist thinking to be dismissed as a cover for cynical manipulation. Finally, while they have been critical of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution policies, they have been reluctant to reject his legacy. Selected ideas of Mao now serve to legitimize the new policies.

There is no compelling reason to judge the socialism of present-day Chinese leaders against the criteria established by the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution did not provide a viable means to achieve socialism, even if it raised illusory hopes about its imminence. There is no ignoring the sense of relief that has accompanied the termination of the Cultural Revolution.

tion. It is not possible to deny all validity to current charges that the leaders of the Cultural Revolution pursued oppressive policies, or even that their egalitarianism would only have guaranteed an “equality in poverty.”⁴ Their revolutionary fervor may even have set back the cause of socialism in China by the hostility it provoked. Any effort to create a new society must of necessity be experimental. Present-day China is engaged in another such experiment, albeit one more sensitive to the limitations imposed by material necessity and, therefore, different in strategy from the Cultural Revolution. Rather than reject the socialism of Chinese leaders because of their departures from Cultural Revolution policies, it is best to listen closely to what they say, and judge their goals and strategy on their own merits.

On the other hand, we cannot afford to accept uncritically the official interpretation, which portrays the two decades between 1956 and 1976 as an aberration in China’s march to socialism. It is fashionable nowadays to focus on the failures of Cultural Revolution policies and leadership, and ignore its basic message. The Cultural Revolution provided a new model of development to socialism that captured the imagination not of Chinese revolutionaries alone but of revolutionary socialists around the world. More importantly, it addressed a basic problem of socialism in power: that socialist societies are as vulnerable as any other to producing structures of power that attenuate the revolutionary vision of freedom and equality. It was not simply a mindless pursuit of revolution, but an effort to resolve the ossification of the socialist power-structure that underlay the Cultural Revolution, as well as the conviction that continued revolution was fundamental to achieving socialism.

What contemporary Chinese leaders have abandoned is not socialism but revolution. While they continue to uphold socialism, they have redefined it in such a way as to deprive it of its revolutionary content. The present “economic” interpretation of socialism has turned it into an ideology of economic modernization under the guidance of the Communist Party. “Economism,” to quote Ralph Milliband, is “the attribution of an exaggerated—almost an exclusive—importance to the economic sphere in the shaping of social and political relations, leading . . . to ‘economic determinism’; . . . it also involves a related underestimation of the importance of the ‘superstructural’ sphere.”⁵ Chinese leaders acknowledge the persistence of inequality in China, but attribute it to China’s economic backwardness, not to endemic features of the present political system—and certainly not to its “superstructure.” For the same reason, they believe that economic development will guarantee the achievement of socialist egalitarianism and, indeed, that it is the only way to achieve that end.

The question is not whether or not China should pursue rapid economic development—it obviously must—but whether a socialism defined exclusively in terms of economic development can remain faithful to its revolutionary goals. Socialism is revolutionary not because it brings socialists into

power but because it seeks to transform social relations and attitudes in order to abolish economic and political inequality. A developed economy is a condition for socialism; it is neither a substitute for egalitarian social and political relations, nor does it guarantee the achievement of such relations. The latter, however, is precisely what an economic definition of socialism implies. The economic view obviates the need for any significant systemic change once socialists have come into power—especially change in the realm of social relations, which in turn lie at the heart of political relations. Indeed, when the rate of economic development becomes the measure of the success of socialism, it is possible to condone—even to praise—inequality in the name of socialism, as the Chinese are doing at the present. If Chinese leaders are contemplating any changes in social relations, it is in the direction of greater, not less, inequality.

Chinese leaders tell the world that the social and political system that exists in China today (having come into being in 1956) is nothing short of a socialist system—except for the poverty of the country. Once the latter has been overcome, they claim, China will be truly socialist. Such a claim may move the faithful and those who benefit from the existing system, but it has little basis in fact or theory. China today is not a democratic or egalitarian but a hierarchical and increasingly elitist society with the Communist Party at its center. The dictatorship of the Communist Party, as Maurice Meisner has pointed out, is not the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat—and, I might add, a party dictatorship is a party dictatorship no matter whom the party claims to represent.⁶ A strong political leadership for China may be justifiable in terms of the need to prevent restoration of the status quo ante (a possibility that is presently minimized), but it does not in itself provide a basis for socialism. Economic development on its own is unlikely to terminate hierarchical bureaucratic rule. On the basis of available historical experience, the more plausible alternative is that economic development will serve to consolidate the power of the existing structure. This is the ultimate meaning of the claim that once a “socialist” system has been established, there is no further need for revolution—in other words, systemic change, violent or otherwise, is ruled out.

The distinction between socialism and revolution, which is the point of departure for the analysis below, is needed to understand not only contemporary politics but the role socialism has played in Chinese politics since around the turn of the century. The two have been interrelated historically: as socialism revolutionized politics, revolutionary moments increased receptivity to the socialist promise. But they are not identical. Socialism has served revolutionary as well as antirevolutionary purposes. Many socialists in China, including its first proponents, were attracted to socialism precisely because they saw in socialism a way to develop the country without creating social divisions that might lead to revolutionary upheaval. The advocates of

antirevolutionary socialism often combined their advocacy with the apologetics that there was no significant inequality in Chinese society. The revolution proved necessary to launch China on the road to socialism. What Chinese leaders today believe is that socialism can be achieved without further social transformation. On certain crucial points (such as the role of interest in society, the allocation of political power to different interest groups, relations between China and foreign capitalism, and even the idea of “using capitalism to develop socialism”), their views are reminiscent of the socialism of Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and his followers in the Guomindang left. Sun’s social program was also a source of inspiration to Mao Zedong in his formulation of the idea of “New Democracy.” Ironically, as Mao the Cultural Revolutionary has come under attack and been repudiated, Mao the proponent of New Democracy has gained greater prominence in Chinese consciousness.

If abandoning revolution does not necessarily mean abandoning socialism, neither is it without consequence for the future of socialism. As the experience of the Soviet Union first disclosed, to take revolution out of socialism it is necessary to depoliticize socialism. This is what the leaders of China have been doing for the past few years. As in the Soviet Union earlier, the problem of socialism in China appears more and more as an administrative and technical, rather than a political, problem. China’s leaders may be socialist in the sense that they do not want to be capitalist; what relationship their socialism bears to the socialist vision of political and economic equality is another matter.

The developmental strategy the new leadership intends to pursue was articulated during the period from the third plenary session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party (December 18–22, 1978) through the spring of 1979. The third plenary session has come to be viewed as a historic turning point in official policy. It terminated the two-year-old campaign to “criticize and expose” Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four,” and called upon the people to shift their attention to the achievement of the Four Modernizations. As the official communiqué put it, “The plenary session calls on the whole party, the whole army and the people of all nationalities to work with one heart and one mind, enhance political stability and unity, mobilize themselves immediately to go all out, pool their wisdom and efforts to carry out the new Long March to make ours a modern socialist country before the end of the century.”⁷ The underlying theme of this document was national unity in the cause of development. It described the development of the productive forces as the major challenge facing China. It pointed to the need to pay attention to “economic law and the law of value—which translates into the need to create a commodity economy and to remunerate labor according to work. Finally, it called for changes in social and political relations to meet the needs of production.

The most important—and problematic—shift in policy concerned the issue of class struggle. In accordance with its underlying theme of national unity, the communiqué proclaimed that, though class struggle would continue in China for some time to come, exploitation and, therefore, classes were things of the past. Over the next few months, the party continued to stress the importance of a united front to achieve socialism in China. In January 1979, Ulanfu, the head of the Central Committee United Front Work Department, announced the party's decision to rehabilitate the national bourgeoisie and to return to them their economic assets as well as to restore interest payments on confiscated property that had been suspended since 1966.⁸ Official spokesmen explained the new policy as one of “buying out” the bourgeoisie, which was the most efficient way of eliminating the bourgeoisie as a class while converting its members into loyal followers of socialism. One document described collaboration with the bourgeoisie as a unique characteristic of the Chinese revolution past and present—a policy that had the blessings of Mao Zedong.⁹ Hua Guofeng's speech to the second session of the Fifth National People's Congress in June 1979 clarified the reasoning underlying the new policy. Hua pointed out that exploiting classes had vanished in China as of 1956 with the socialist transformation of property ownership; capitalists themselves had been redeemed and “transformed into working people who earn their living in a socialist society.”¹⁰ These ideas were echoed by Deng Xiaoping in a speech to businessmen and industrialists during the same month.¹¹

The rehabilitation of the national bourgeoisie, as well as of landlords and rich peasants, may not in itself constitute proof that the revolution has been abandoned; after all, it is true that in a technical sense the former ruling classes are no longer ruling. However, the ideological justification given for the new policies reveals an outlook which, while still within the parameters of Marxism, is clearly antirevolutionary in character. The Marxist idea of class, reinterpreted in accordance with this outlook, now legitimizes not revolution but the restoration of privilege and inequality.

The authors of an article published in *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) in June 1980 observed that “those who regard Marx's theory on the development of socialist society as the process of uninterrupted revolution will never find any evidence in the works of Marx and Engels to support their arguments.”¹² This, I think, represents the underlying thrust of official ideology in China since the formulation of the new policies. The point of departure for all defenses of these policies is that the “principal contradiction” in Chinese society has changed from the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the contradiction between “the people's needs for rapid economic and cultural development” and “the current economic and cultural conditions which fail to satisfy the people's needs.” This transformation, the

current line holds, had occurred by 1956, but was distorted by the “ultraleftism” that prevailed for the following two decades. It was not recognized again until after the overthrow of the “Gang of Four.”

Mao’s analysis of contradictions, which is the basis of contemporary social analyses, requires that the nature of all contradictions in society change when the principal contradiction has been transformed. Since development rather than class struggle is now the basic contradiction, conflict between different social interests must take a form that serves the resolution of the problem of development. Accordingly, divergence of interest between different social groups in China has now been redefined as “contradictions among the people,” which means that persuasion and mediation rather than coercion and conflict must be employed to resolve them. Official policy holds that there is no “fundamental” divergence of interest between the proletariat and the national bourgeoisie, or between peasants and landlords or rich peasants, as long as all are committed to the “patriotic” effort to develop the nation. As Hua put it in his June 1979 speech, with the completion of the transformation of ownership in 1956, exploitation had come to an end, and “socialist workers, socialist peasants and socialist intellectuals and other patriots who support socialism” had become “masters of socialist society.”¹³

Still, the communiqué of the third plenum, as well as later pronouncements on the subject, maintained that while classes and exploitation had disappeared in China, class struggle must continue for a long time. This idea of “class struggle without an exploiting class” has caused a good deal of theoretical confusion. Why China’s leaders would deny the existence of classes is evident. The policies of the Cultural Revolution were based on the premise that classes continued to exist even under socialism. This basic premise has had to be rejected in order to deny validity to the “ultraleftism” of the Cultural Revolution. The obliteration of class distinctions has been carried to the point where one author could argue, without any hint of facetiousness, that the proletariat and the peasantry in the conventional sense had also disappeared, since in the absence of exploiting classes it was meaningless to speak of the exploited. In their place remained “socialist workers and socialist peasants”!¹⁴

More problematic was the insistence on the need for continued class struggle. This possibly reflected a compromise with those in the Communist Party (including its former chairman Hua Guofeng) who were reluctant to renounce the Cultural Revolution in its totality. On the other hand, even those who would reject class struggle must recognize the theoretical and political impasse created by such a position—at least so long as they uphold Marxism and the continued political supremacy of the Communist Party. According to Marxism, classes must continue to exist until communist society has been reached. So far, no one in China has claimed that China is anywhere close to the achievement of communism. On the contrary, current

policies are based on the premise that the country is very far from the communist ideal, and the exclusive emphasis on economic development is justified on the grounds that a mature economy is the prerequisite for communism. The same premise justifies the continuation of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and, therefore, the rule of the Communist Party: once communism has been achieved, the state must disappear along with all other organs of coercion in society. The Communist Party must exist only so long as there is need for class struggle.

The response to this dilemma created by the need for class struggle even after the exploiting classes have been abolished has been twofold. One has been to argue that, though classes have disappeared, vigilance must be maintained over remaining counterrevolutionaries. Hua’s speech referred to the need for struggle against counterrevolutionaries and enemy agents, criminals, and political degenerates, “remaining” elements of the “Gang of Four,” and “what remained of the old exploiting classes.” An important policy statement published about the same time in *Hong Qi* (Red flag) gave a concise reason for continuing the dictatorship of the proletariat: “Though large-scale tempestuous mass struggle in the country has basically been completed, class struggle has not ended. There are an extremely small number of counterrevolutionaries and criminal elements in society. New bourgeois elements may also be generated from among working personnel of state organs. The class struggle with them is unlike past struggle (they cannot possibly form an open and complete class), but remains class struggle of a special kind.”¹⁵

Theoretically more significant has been the redefinition of “class” as a category of analysis. While stressing the need for struggle against remnants of former exploiters and their ideology, Chinese leaders have had to make sure that the persistence of remnants was not taken to imply the persistence of classes. Underlying the policies of the Cultural Revolution was an equation of the persistence of bourgeois ideology with the persistence of the bourgeoisie, which meant a definition of class in terms of political and ideological attitudes. This definition legitimized continued revolution against landlords and the bourgeoisie, as well as against those in state organs and the Communist Party who held “bourgeois” ideas.

Since 1979, writings on the problem of classes have attacked the Cultural Revolution definition of class as a distortion of the Marxist concept of classes. They have, on the one hand, separated ideology from the class whose interests it articulated. In this view, though ideology is the product of a class, it can continue to lead an independent existence even after that class has disappeared. To identify class and ideology, one article noted, is to confound an object with its reflection.¹⁶ (The authors of this unfortunate metaphor did not seem to notice any problems in a reflection without a reflector!)

More important has been the depoliticization of the definition of class. Hua's conclusion that exploiting classes had ceased to exist, wrote a contributor to the *Renmin Ribao*, contained "a significant theoretical viewpoint!"—namely, that "classes fall in an economic category and not in an extensive 'social category'" (the latter referred to the ideological-political definition of classes).¹⁷ This new definition was informed by a statement of Lenin which defined class in terms of the place a social group occupied in the economic structure of society. Once the economic structure had been transformed, so was the nature of classes. A basic implication of this definition has been to reject political means (suppression of classes) in favor of economic means in the resolution of the problem of interest-conflict in society. What is required for the final abolition of classes, in this view, is not further political struggle but rather economic development to create a structure suitable to communism. Accordingly, politics is now defined simply as a function of the economy. An editorial in the *Renmin Ribao*, noting that all political work must serve the Four Modernizations, explained: "Producing more oil means politics on the petroleum front, producing more coal is the coal workers' politics, producing more grain is the peasants' politics, defending the border areas is the fighters' politics and studying hard is the students' politics."¹⁸

Implicit in the new definition of classes and politics is an interpretation of Marxist theory that differs radically from the Cultural Revolution interpretation. The minimization of the significance of class divisions in China is ultimately informed by a highly attenuated view of the role class conflict played in history.¹⁹ The view that prevails at present holds that it is not the relations but the forces of production that determine the social as well as the political-ideological structure. By the same token, it regards social change as a function of changes in the forces of production, which is measured in turn by the scientific-technological level of a given society. This "technological determinism" makes the relations of production a function of the forces of production, rather than a vital component of the organization of production itself. It therefore renders superfluous any attempt to transform the relations of production in order to advance production—which was a basic conviction of official ideology during the Cultural Revolution. On the contrary, present orthodoxy holds that relations must be brought into correspondence with the forces of production as they exist, because of the underlying premise that the relations of production hamper the development of the forces of production if they are either too backward or too advanced vis-à-vis the latter.²⁰ The priority given to the forces of production is evident in the following statement by Yu Guangyuan, a leading economic theoretician and vice president of the Academy of Social Sciences: "The basic Marxist approach to socialist ownership is: anything that can best promote the development of the productive

forces, yes, and it may count on the support of Marxists; anything that does not, no, and Marxists will not support it; anything that actually impedes the development of the productive forces will be firmly opposed.”²¹

What kind of society is likely to emerge from this antirevolutionary socialism? Compromises with capitalism reveal some ambivalence toward socialism, but it would be wrong to see in the new attitude a desire to restore capitalism. A sense of self-interest if nothing else ties the Chinese regime to the preservation of the socialist system. It would be equally wrong, however, to ignore the implications of the new policies for Chinese socialism. The abandonment of the revolutionary strategy of socialism does not mean merely a return to political relaxation and orderly development, as apologists for the new policies would have us believe. It also means indefinite postponement of the pursuit of universal political and economic emancipation, which is the fundamental promise of socialism as an idea.

China today pursues a path of development between socialism and capitalism. While the economic organization of the country is still not significantly different from what had existed earlier, Chinese leaders have chosen to promote, rather than to curtail, the capitalist elements in the economy. They believe that socialist planning and party leadership, combined with ideological education, can contain their concessions to capitalist methods of development—in other words, that capitalism can serve to achieve socialism and socialism to control capitalism. Can they succeed?

The idea of a third way of development between capitalism and socialism has a long pedigree in Chinese socialist thought. When Sun Zhongshan first incorporated “people’s livelihood” into the program of the Revolutionary Alliance in 1905, his aim was to lead China into socialism peacefully, avoiding the social revolution that he thought must be the fate of European society, torn asunder as it was by the ravages of the marketplace. Sun thought that a state-directed capitalism would serve to achieve this goal. Capitalism was necessary, he believed, because competition released the forces of development—as the experience of Europe demonstrated. State direction was necessary, on the other hand, to keep class interests in check so that no class oppressed others, creating the potential for social revolution. In the 1920s, Sun came to believe that his goal could be achieved by the Guomindang leading an alliance of all the progressive classes in the country’s development.

More importantly, it was this same idea that underlay Mao’s program for “New Democracy,” which guided Communist Party policy during the last decade of the revolution and in the early years of the People’s Republic. When he published his essay “On New Democracy” in early 1940, Mao consciously stressed the resemblance of his “Chinese way to socialism” to Sun Zhongshan’s Three People’s Principles. His idea, too, was to pursue a course of development between capitalism and socialism. The one important

difference was, of course, that it was now up to the Communist Party to lead the alliance of classes necessary for China's liberation and development. He also emphasized the need for the party to safeguard the interests of workers and peasants (the foundation of the alliance) so as to make sure that development would be in a socialist direction.

One Russian author has noted the essential similarity between current assumptions and the presuppositions of Mao's New Democracy.²² He has labeled these policies "Fascist," conveniently overlooking the fact that Chinese policies now are not very different from the policies the USSR has pursued since the 1960s—and that Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) was actually a source of inspiration for Mao's idea of New Democracy. (Sun Zhongshan earlier had seen the NEP as a vindication of his own ideas of development!) Chinese writers on New Democracy in the 1940s believed that the only distinction between New Democracy and Lenin's New Economic Policy was that the latter had been temporary, while New Democracy would last for a long time.²³

The similarity of current policies in China to those of the New Democracy program involves more than presuppositions. Current analyses take as their model the analyses of 1956, when transformation of ownership had been completed, rather than the period of New Democracy, when there were still clear class distinctions based on ownership of the means of production. Chinese leaders do not intend to resuscitate classes by going back to the period before 1956. On the other hand, they do stress the need to make room for divergent interests within an overall framework of national unity.²⁴ They believe that the mixture of capitalism and socialism they advocate will prevail for the foreseeable future. The mixed economic organization that they uphold is no different in outline than that envisaged in the New Democracy program.²⁵ These similarities are not very surprising. The architects of current economic policy are economists who first achieved prominence as spokesmen for New Democracy. Though they have had to make some adjustments in their thinking to take account of changes in Chinese society, their basic premises have not shifted.

Sun Zhongshan thought that the "third way" would transcend the deficiencies of both capitalism and socialism. Mao Zedong viewed it as an eclectic method necessitated by China's backwardness. Contemporary Chinese thought on development is in some ways closer to Sun's views than it is to Mao's. Recent suggestions in China that greater attention be paid to Sun's economic thought may be an indication of this tendency.²⁶ The problem with this third way of development is the difficulty of balancing the forces of capitalism against the demands of socialism. The choices Chinese leaders face today are reminiscent of the choice that faced Alice with regard to the caterpillar's mushroom in Wonderland: if she ate of one side, she would get taller; if she ate of the other, she would get shorter. And so it is with the effort

to pursue a course between socialism and capitalism. That may be why Chinese leaders have made an effort to match every bite into capitalism with a bite into socialism.

Especially problematic in this respect is the party's class policy. The Cultural Revolution leadership, in keeping with Mao's ideas, saw the party as the representative of the proletariat and the peasantry, which it identified with the national interest. Now the party sees itself as the representative of the national interest, which it identifies with the interests of all "patriotic" supporters of the socialist state—much in the spirit of Sun Zhongshan and later of Mao during the period of New Democracy. Rather than representing class interests of the working classes, therefore, it seeks to mediate among divergent interests so that all can serve the nation "with one heart and one mind."

Whether or not China has exploiting classes in a conventional sense, there are different interests competing for economic and political resources. The Cultural Revolution, in its haste to realize the egalitarian vision of revolutionary socialism, sought to suppress the pursuit of interest by any group in society. The new leadership believes that the pursuit of interest must be allowed in order to release the productive energy in society. Its intention, however, is not to give free play to the pursuit of interest—to establish a politics of the marketplace. Rather, the party seeks to serve as the broker of interests—to permit the pursuit of individual and group interests but keep them under control so that they do not undermine the general interest of the nation or lead to the revival of classes.²⁷ That is why party leaders have taken pains to distinguish "socialist democracy" from "bourgeois democracy," and have insisted on the subordination of partial interest to the interest of the whole and short-term to long-term interest. As Deng told his interviewers in 1980: "We cannot encourage individual freedom which is in conflict with the interests of the state and the majority of the people or with the freedom of the broad masses of the people."²⁸

The underlying assumption here is a corporatist one.²⁹ The corporatist ideal is to transcend the deficiencies of both capitalism and socialism. Its appeal lies in the promise of eradicating the chaos of the market without resorting to the stagnant order of a managerial bureaucracy. Unlike under socialist regimes—at least as they have existed so far—corporatism explicitly guarantees the organized articulation of interest to secure dynamic economic growth. And unlike within the capitalist market economy, it seeks to achieve general welfare and order through the administrative regulation of interest.

The problem with corporatism is basically the problem of balancing the forces of capitalism and socialism. While the corporatist promise is to transcend both socialism and capitalism, and to create a society that is both democratic and just, corporatist reality is an uneasy blend of the two systems:

a capitalist economic content within a socialist political form. With such a fundamental tension built into its very structure, the corporate state must rely heavily on organized consensus, as well as on the ability of its component organizations to control their constituencies. Inequality as a social condition is the underlying premise of corporatism, as it is of capitalism; ultimately, the corporate state only serves to render capitalism more efficient by keeping inequality within bounds. On the other hand, as with existing versions of socialism, it seeks to convert politics into administration—or at best restricts the role of politics through administration. Corporatist administration substitutes hierarchical organization for class, and the organized mediation of interest for market competition. The trade-off for the security and stability thus gained is the relinquishing of autonomy in the pursuit of individual or class interests. As a result, the corporatist order guarantees welfare only to institutionalize inequality, and offers order in exchange for democracy. Its political consequence is a hierarchical society ruled by an elite that represents different functions and interests as leaders of organizations.

Mediation among competing interests, if it is to operate without the use of outright coercion, requires a delicate tuning of the forces involved in its operation. There must be a balance of power among constituent social groups; otherwise there would be little reason for any of them to compromise with the others. The system must preserve the stability of power relations, even as it develops within a global context over which the system has no control. A high level of organization is essential to ensure that the gap between state and society is sufficiently narrow to make representation and control meaningful. There must be confidence on the part of the population at large—especially those placed strategically in the economy, such as workers—that the organizations responsible for articulating their interests are indeed doing so. Above all, the system must be capable of guaranteeing welfare and order, the major justifications for its existence.

Some students of European politics have observed that the de-revolutionized socialism of the social democratic parties in Europe has led to a corporatist resolution of the problems of capitalism.³⁰ Their analyses point to the conclusion that a sophisticated trade union movement (which presupposes an advanced economic base) is the precondition of corporatist politics. As Lenin also recognized (without approving of it), an organized trade union movement defuses revolutionary socialism by compelling the bourgeoisie to recognize the basic rights of the working class, while at the same time binding the working class to its own organizationally determined imperatives. The result is not socialism, but the corporatist welfare state.³¹

This precondition is obviously lacking in precapitalist societies or in societies in the initial stages of capitalist development—such as Russia or China before the revolution. The question as to whether revolution emerges as a political solution only when there is little or no organized articulation of

workers' interests is an intriguing one. In the case of China, there is no doubt that, before 1949, class-based organizations were too weak to perform the function of interest intermediation. It may very well be, therefore, that efforts to establish class alliances through party intermediation were frustrated in the past by China's political and economic backwardness. The Guomindang experience showed that class alliance in practice was essentially a recognition of the existing structure of power. The Communists discovered that they could not promote the interests of peasants and workers without undermining the class alliance they proposed. Mao resolved the contradiction by consistently returning to revolutionary solutions that favored the working classes. The present leadership has ruled out that solution in its reaction to the consequences of the Cultural Revolution. Its response to the strains created by the new policies has been to reaffirm the necessity for a "united front" in China's development. Even as China's leaders nibble on the socialist side of their mushroom, however, they return to take big mouthfuls on the other side.

This is readily evident in their attitudes toward the question of equality—which is central to the problem of socialism. Inequality is not only implicit in the new economic policies but has been widely advertised as a condition of socialism. Deng Xiaoping said in his 1980 interview that inequality would exist in China for a long time to come. Policy-makers do not explain inequality simply as a compromise with necessity; they actually glorify it. Xue Muqiao, quite contrary to Marx's intention, praises "bourgeois right" (broadly, remuneration according to contribution) as a "lofty" principle of Marxism.³² Xue, and other economists of like mind, are responsible for the idea that the regime should pay greater attention to the consumption needs of the populace on the grounds that socialism exists to serve the people. And yet it is not clear who benefits from increased consumption. While Coca-Cola and American tobacco make inroads into the Chinese market, economists such as Xue attack what he has popularized as the "iron bowl principle"—that is, the remuneration of workers regardless of productivity. Another author, more direct, described egalitarianism as the major enemy of progress—even of equality—and ascribed it to the persistence of "small producer mentality."³³ Those who complained about the extravagance of the bourgeoisie were warned by the *Gongren Ribao* not to "treat lightly" the regime's policy of rehabilitating the bourgeoisie.³⁴ At the same time, those who advocated improving living standards were told that "using available financial and material forces unwisely for improving the people's living standards would amount to killing the chicken to get the egg."³⁵

Unlike the Soviet Union, China went through a second revolution. Whatever else it was, the Cultural Revolution expressed the conviction that in order to keep alive the socialist vision, it is necessary to continue the revolution even after the establishment of a socialist regime. Its targets were not simply habits and practices left over from the past, but included the unequal-

ities and social divisions that had been generated by the socialist system itself. Mao believed that if division and inequality were not restrained, China would move away from, not toward, the socialist promise. The Cultural Revolution may best be remembered for its radical egalitarianism: the attack on hierarchy as well as on economic inequality. Its major achievement, however, was not in abolishing inequality and its institutional bases but in encouraging release from obedience to hierarchy. This achievement, however superficial, was not without consequence as long as the Cultural Revolution lasted. For a while, the people of China appeared to have overcome deeply ingrained habits of hierarchy and inequality to participate equally in the making of revolution. The attack on inequality discouraged expression of partial interest, licensed assertiveness on the part of the social underdog, and inspired the immersion of the self in the service of social goals. The vision of community seemed to be close at hand.

Close at hand, that is, if one overlooks the price paid for these accomplishments. It is evident in hindsight that, while the Cultural Revolution disclosed the problems of socialism, it could not resolve them: the socialist system, such as it was, could not transform the existing power structure without undermining its own foundation. As the revolutionary movement seemed to bring utopia close to hand, revolution itself was made into a utopia. The effort was bound to be a failure, if only for the fact that most people do not find ceaseless revolution to be a particularly utopian existence as the widespread response of the Chinese to the Cultural Revolution has shown. When the precarious nature of existence makes tenuous even the hopes for welfare and security, the promise of liberation from material and social necessity appears as an atavistic escape from reality. Now that the excitement generated by the Cultural Revolution has been dissipated, the image of atavism dominates our memories of it.

This image has been reinforced by the failure of the Cultural Revolutionaries to create lasting institutions to articulate their egalitarian aspirations. The “revolutionary committees” designed to ensure popular participation in politics, the only significant institutional products of the Cultural Revolution, lost their political significance as they were turned into administrative organs dominated by the military almost as soon as they had been established. In spite of their attacks on “bourgeois right,” the Cultural Revolutionaries were unable to devise any means of abolishing economic inequality. Even the attack on the entrenchment of party bureaucrats in power lost its significance as the attack on the bureaucracy degenerated into the glorification of the leader, accompanied by an effort to substitute for the old bureaucrats new ones who were more amenable to following new leaders. It will be some time before the strands that went into the making of the Cultural Revolution are unraveled; it would seem clear, however, that having failed to achieve their

professed goals, the leaders of the Cultural Revolution resorted to sordid factionalism in order to salvage for themselves what benefits they could of a revolution that had failed.

More seriously, in terms of the socialist promise of liberation, a revolution orchestrated by those in positions of absolute authority is a contradiction in terms, more likely to result in totalitarian manipulation of power than in political and economic liberation. Where the individual is denied autonomy, selfless service to society—as the Cultural Revolution demanded—readily degenerates into political slavery. Indeed Mao, as anarchist as any Bolshevik could be, himself turned against the Cultural Revolution when it assumed anarchist overtones.

There is little need in this context to belabor the point that the policies of the Cultural Revolutionaries (including Mao) betrayed the very ideals that they professed. The starting point of the Cultural Revolution was a critique of the power of the Communist Party bureaucracy as a potential obstacle to socialism. Unable to overcome the already entrenched power of the party and the military, or conceive of a viable alternative to party rule, the Cultural Revolutionaries merely converted the party into an arena of struggle. The result was not to curtail party rule but to enhance its arbitrariness.

The Cultural Revolution's critique of the role of the party in socialist society represented a radical break with a tradition in socialist thought that goes back to Lenin. The perversion of the attempt to resolve the problem of the party does not discredit the critique itself, nor negate its historical significance. Yet this is precisely what China's current leaders have set out to do: to use the failures of the Cultural Revolution, especially the individual failures of its leaders, to discredit the critique of party rule. In denouncing the Guomindang suppression of revolution in 1927, Song Qingling demanded that "for revolutionary mistakes, revolutionary solutions must be found." This might indeed have been the attitude of former party chairman Hua Guofeng and his followers, for which Hua has already paid the price. The leaders that are in power today seek not to salvage the revolution by correcting its mistakes, but to eradicate the very memory of the Cultural Revolutionary critique of party rule. While they speak of revolution in a vague sense, they are obviously more interested in preserving and strengthening the status quo than in either considering possible alternatives to the existing system, or encouraging political creativity that might breathe new life into the quest for socialism.

The case of China at present only confirms what the Russian experience first revealed: an antirevolutionary socialism promises little but institutionalized inequality and coercion, which is itself a negation of the socialist vision. Socialism, divorced from revolution, settles into the rut of its own assumptions, always moving away from the vision that once vitalized it. Whether Chinese leaders genuinely believe that their anti-egalitarian policies can

bring about the economic and political emancipation of the working classes is impossible to say. What is clear is that the achievement of equality is no longer on their political agenda. The socialist vision of equality that formerly revolutionized Chinese politics has been an inevitable casualty of the renunciation of revolution.

Equality is not the only casualty. It is impossible to abandon the egalitarian goals of socialism without also undermining the promise of community. Chinese leaders still profess loyalty to the socialist vision, but the vision no longer has relevance to present policy. On the contrary, their policies progressively subvert the ideal of community. It may well be that policies promoting the pursuit of interest will contribute to greater efficiency and faster development; but they are also destined to render impossible the creation of those bonds of social cohesion that are essential to the constitution of community. Mechanical organization, not organic community, is the promise of socialism in China today.

What is at issue here is not simply loyalty to a vision regardless of its practical costs. Chinese leaders themselves acknowledge readily that faith in the socialist promise provided the people with “common ideals” in the past—and is essential to the present effort to develop China “with one heart and one mind.” By their own logic, if the people lose their faith in socialism, so will they lose the motivation to work “with one heart and one mind.” This may be China’s most serious problem today.

The dominant impression to be gained from Chinese politics at the present is a pervasive feeling of uncertainty. In order to obviate the need for revolutionary solutions, Chinese leaders have relegated the socialist promise so far into the future that it has ceased to serve as a guide to the present. What remains is a faint hope that China will somehow stumble into a socialist future: “Socialist construction has its own objective governing law which cannot be understood beforehand. We can only learn socialist construction and step by step grasp the law of socialist construction in the practice of socialist construction.”³⁶ This attitude that socialism is something to be learned as one goes along is an idea that Mao, too, often voiced. The difference is that Mao was guided by a vision which turned him toward revolution whenever the future was in doubt: however far beyond reach, the vision was immanent in the present. What is missing today is this sense of immanence.

The gap between future promise and present reality is critical for any society informed by a sense of the future. As long as faith in the future is maintained, awareness of the gap is as much a source of creativity as it is of disillusionment. Chinese leaders’ ambivalence toward socialism threatens to extinguish the sparks of socialist faith that have survived past disappointments. This is evident in the crisis of confidence in socialism among Chinese, especially young Chinese. While they themselves display uncertainty about the future of socialism in China, Chinese leaders deplore the apparent

lack of purpose among the population—as if the one had nothing to do with the other.³⁷ They complain about the unwillingness of young people to study Marxism, but do not seem to notice any connection between that and their policies—much as Zhang Zhidong was puzzled by the unwillingness of an earlier generation to read Confucian classics once the examination system was abolished. They refuse to predict whether China will be socialist in the future, and yet they exhort the populace not to “lose faith in socialism” or the “future of socialism.” They are uncertain about the path they follow, but expect unflagging commitment to their policies.³⁸

“Only Socialism can save China.” The words ring with pathos when we confront the dilemma of socialism in China. In them, we hear not a confident assertion of socialist faith but a plea to overcome the loss of confidence in socialism. China’s problems are very real. Whether one agrees with the current policies or not, it is difficult (not to say arrogant) to begrudge Chinese leaders their decision to experiment with a new model of development to resolve those problems. But it is also necessary to recognize present-day socialism for what it is. Much of the current disillusionment with socialism in China arises out of the gap between socialist promise and socialist reality. The promise of socialism is used now to legitimize a social reality that is but a distorted shadow of the socialist promise—which only serves to enhance the disillusionment.

It is tempting to blame the fate of socialism in China upon incorrigible “capitalist-roaders” who have betrayed the promise of socialism. Unfortunately, that is no less simplistic an explanation than is the current official line which holds Lin Biao and the Gang of Four responsible for China’s problems. Easy explanations that blame individuals for systemic problems merely sidestep the accumulating evidence of history. The experience with socialism in China thrusts upon us a very basic question: is the socialist promise possible?

The question is not just China’s to answer. It is true that the socialist promise was not intended for precapitalist societies such as China—and all the other regimes that describe themselves as communist. But that only begs the question as to why the promise remains as remote as ever in societies for which it was intended. Levels of economic development may account for the different paths socialism has taken in history: revolutionary dictatorship versus social democracy. But neither path leads to the socialist promise. To the extent that socialists have been successful in economically advanced societies, they have achieved the corporatist organization of power, not egalitarian community. As I suggested above, it is possible that, with economic advance, revolutionary dictatorship will also assume a corporatist character, though the exact formulation of politics should differ according to the particular circumstances of each society.

As effort after effort to achieve socialism has led to the creation of political forms evidently at odds with the socialist promise, it is only at the risk of self-delusion that we may continue to view the historical development of socialism as an aberration that can be explained through the failure of individual socialists. And if the past is any guide to the future, the socialist promise of universal liberation is no more convincing than the capitalist promise of abundance and democracy for all. Though both Marx and Kropotkin attempted in their different ways to show that the possibility of egalitarian community was scientifically demonstrable, their analyses remain implausible because of the basic political and economic questions they ignore. As Stanley Moore has recently observed of Marx's views, the promise of socialism is based not on "scientific prediction" but on "moral prescription."³⁹ However attractive, the socialist promise is more political myth than political possibility.

Unless this is recognized, it is impossible to confront socialism as a historical or a political problem. Too much enthusiasm for the vision has made the practitioners of socialism forget on occasion that human beings do not exist so that socialism shall exist. It is the other way around. Socialism exists so that the human condition can be improved. Unless the socialist vision is tempered with a sense of humaneness, the vision itself becomes a source of oppression—as it did during the Cultural Revolution in China.

To recognize the socialist promise as political myth does not negate its value or detract from its power to shape political effort. What keeps the myth alive is not a revolutionary conspiracy but the deficiencies of human life. If the socialist promise is more "moral prescription" than "scientific prediction," it is all the more a reminder of the moral protest socialism voices against a social existence founded upon exploitation and oppression. It also provides us with a critical perspective from which to evaluate not just capitalism but claims to socialism as well. If the promise is to retain its power, socialists must match their criticism of capitalist society with equal resistance to efforts to confound socialism with its distorted shadows in history.

University of British Columbia, Canada, June 1981

The article from which this excerpt is derived was written in the winter of 1980–1981, shortly after the launching of the "Reform and Opening" (*gaige kaifang*) thirty years ago. Within and without the People's Republic of China, the world of 2011 is a vastly different world than that of 1978. What relevance might an essay written three decades ago have to the retrospective evaluation of a society that has undergone one of the most phenomenal transformations the world has ever seen during this period?

There are two reasons for retrospection. First, the very enormity of change over the last three decades makes it easy to forget the uneasy beginnings of the reforms and the difficult ideological and political terrain that the

Communist Party of China has negotiated to bring the country to where it is presently. Secondly, these difficulties are by no means over, as the new developments have brought with them new problems. And contrary to those who would wish away the memories of the revolution that has made China what it is today, the legacies of the revolution are an indelible part of the Chinese political consciousness and are available for recuperation in the face of new difficulties. The questions that guided the essay above have by no means gone away, even as some of the uncertainties that provoked them have been cleared away by subsequent developments.

In 1980–1981, most of the changes that have come to identify contemporary China still lay in the future. The redirection of development policies after 1978 was greeted enthusiastically or condemned heatedly, depending on one’s politics, as signaling the end of socialism and an imminent turn to capitalism, while others, mostly members of China Friendship Societies, who unquestioningly followed whatever Chinese leaders claimed, abandoned an earlier enthusiasm for Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution to hail Deng Xiaoping’s policies as the way to an even better, improved socialism. Signs of uncertainty among Chinese leaders and the population at large were easily dismissed as products of factional struggles rather than as the generalized uncertainties across factional divides of a society turning its back on more than half a century of revolution to accommodate the world of capitalism that the revolution had sought to challenge. It was these uncertainties that my original essay sought to capture by drawing a distinction between revolution and socialism, and arguing that the abandonment of one did not necessarily mean the abandonment of the other—not yet, anyway. The goal was to bring to existing discussions some measure of critical sobriety.

To be sure, certain things were quite clear by 1980 and seemed to be widely shared across factional divides. One was to leave behind as quickly as possible the radical upheaval of the two decades 1956–1976, and to overcome the political and social divisions it had exacerbated or created. This applied, most importantly, to issues of class and class struggle. The revolution, in other words, was over. Socialism was to be achieved through orderly and rapid development, as had been laid out already by the now deceased prime minister Zhou Enlai in 1975 in the call for “Four Modernizations” (industrial, agricultural, scientific/technological, and military). Translated into Marxist terms, this meant turning away from an emphasis on “the relations of production,” with class relations at their heart, the transformation of which had been the professed goal of the cultural revolutionaries, to an emphasis on the transformation of “the forces of production.” A corollary of the latter, with profound long-term implications, was to open up to the world outside to benefit from the technologies of advanced capitalist societies,

including technologies of management, and possibly to involve them in China's development. Shenzhen, the first "special economic zone" intended to achieve these goals, was established in 1980, and others quickly followed.

Equally certain was that the turnabout in socialism, to what would soon be dubbed "socialism with Chinese characteristics," was to take place under the direction and control of the Communist Party of China. As the prominent writer Han Shaogong suggests in a recent essay,⁴⁰ one of the ironic consequences of the Cultural Revolution was to foster a sense of political participation among mobilized youth, which would culminate in demands for democracy first against the Cultural Revolution leadership in April 1976 (on the occasion of Zhou Enlai's death), and subsequently in the enthusiasm engendered by the reform agenda of December 1978. The response of the party under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping was to proclaim "the four cardinal principles" in March 1979: maintaining the socialist road, upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat (the people's democratic dictatorship), following the leadership by the Communist Party, and continued loyalty to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. The calls for democracy in the late 1970s were not necessarily antisocialist but rather called for a different kind of socialism, a democratic socialism.⁴¹ The party's response, which has been reaffirmed repeatedly since then, was to make clear that it intended to preserve its monopoly not just over the political system but over the very definition of socialism.

Nevertheless, contradictions in party statements and policy kept alive uncertainties that would not be alleviated until the 1990s and have refused to go away completely even thirty years later, when Chinese society, to all appearances, has been integrated almost totally in global capitalism. Perhaps the most fundamental contradiction to appear with the reforms, as their premise, was the simultaneous affirmation of socialism, and of inequality as the means to realizing its fulfillment. Interestingly, in its repudiation of Cultural Revolution egalitarianism, the party decision seemed to be to return to the status quo ante before it could move forward again. While it might be far-fetched to suggest that reform policies sought to create (or re-create) a bourgeoisie, which would hardly be in the interest of the Communist Party, they nevertheless were intended to approximate a bourgeois society to develop the forces of production before any further moves could be undertaken toward progress to socialism. I suggested in the earlier essay that policies in the early 1980s were reminiscent of New Democracy, which the ideology of the Communist Party since the 1940s had substituted for the Old Democracy of the bourgeoisie to accomplish the developmental tasks of bourgeois society to prepare the ground for socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party leading an alliance of classes. Policies of New Democracy had brought the party to power in 1949 and guided development in the early years of the regime. It is probably more accurate, in hindsight, to suggest that the return

in 1978 was to the terminal stages of the New Democratic phase of the revolution, summarized in the Eighth National Party Congress of 1956, when the class problem had been declared solved and the primary contradiction in Chinese society had been identified as the contradiction between backward forces of production and an advanced socialist formation: a transitional phase between New Democracy and socialism, late New Democracy, or early socialism, depending on one's perspective. It was necessary in this phase to backtrack from the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution years and decollectivize the economy as required by the necessity of the development of the forces of production, but without re-creating a class society.

This strategy also enabled the Deng Xiaoping leadership to call on the legacy of Mao Zedong in the legitimization of its policies. What to do with Mao was a problem then, as it has been a problem in the years since. While the Cultural Revolution could be blamed on the "Gang of Four," it was clear to most people in and out of China—supporters as well as opponents of the Cultural Revolution—that the condemnation of the Cultural Revolution must implicate Mao directly or indirectly. On the other hand, given his unequalled status in the history of the revolution, Mao could not be repudiated without calling into question the legitimacy of the Communist Party itself. Besides, Mao still had his supporters in the party. An interesting document that became available after the above essay was published offers interesting insights into the kinds of negotiation that went into the evaluation of Mao, and probably the making of the new policies. This document, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party,"⁴² was published under Deng's name in 1981 and reveals how the leadership negotiated the evaluation of Mao. Top leaders offered their own amendments and commentaries in revisions to the draft; these were incorporated into the finished history, which presented the conventional numerology of the party: that Mao had been correct 70 percent of the time and wrong the remaining 30 percent. It was possible, then, to salvage Mao for the party and the revolution while repudiating his role in the Cultural Revolution. Remember that Deng himself drew on Mao in pushing the slogan Seeking Truth from Facts, which was to become a fundamental premise of the reforms. In the same manner, it was possible to repudiate the Mao of the Cultural Revolution to return to the Mao of New Democracy.

Nevertheless, New Democracy itself could serve only as a temporary solution, as it still suffered from structural contradictions that had led to its instabilities earlier in the 1950s. These contradictions led to inconsistencies that characterized policy statements of that period: that socialism had already eliminated classes, but socialism remained to be achieved with the advance of the forces of production; that China was already a classless society, but class struggle needed to continue for a long time; that socialism existed for the workers and peasants, but bourgeois right was essential to its realization;

that inequality had to be reestablished so that equality could be achieved; and so on. It is clear in hindsight, as it was not in 1980, that what distinguished the reform policies from policies under Mao Zedong was a commitment to deepening not revolution but New Democracy. New Democratic policies, based on assumptions of class alliance, were subject to destabilization if not ongoing contradictions. Under Mao, the response to the contradictions of New Democracy had been to reassert the priority of revolution, which had led inexorably to the revival of revolutionary class struggles in the 1960s. Under Mao's successors, the response took the opposite course: the contradictions generated by reform policies led to further loosening of the hold on the privatization of the economy as first the urban and then the rural economies were decollectivized in the course of the 1980s. The result socially was indeed the generation of a new bourgeoisie, or at the least the bourgeoisification of the party, while ever more repressive and exploitative policies were instituted to keep the working classes and rural population under control. If social divisions had persisted beneath the egalitarian rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, they became increasingly open under the reforms, with the party dedicated not to their abolition but to their perpetuation in the name of development.

These contradictions were visible in the unrest that seemed to be an endemic characteristic of the first decade of the reforms, culminating in the upheaval of 1989. The 1980s witnessed sharpening conflicts over the new policies and contradictory demands upon the party, from calls for the abolition of socialism to protests against inequality, from speeding and deepening the reforms to include greater democracy to the restoration of some measure of social justice. Moreover, given the progressive opening to the outside world, these conflicts now played out in the open, bringing outside forces, especially the forces of capital, into the debates over the future of the country. By 1987, Premier Zhao Ziyang was already advocating converting all of coastal China into a special economic zone. In spite of the initial suppression of the Democracy Movement, the "cries for democracy" did not cease. In the meantime, a culture of consumption was already becoming visible among Chinese youth, who became a force for change in their demands for the expansion of new career opportunities promised by the reforms. Arraigned against them were those within and without the party who remained suspicious of the reforms, as well as of the "bourgeois" influences that seemed to contaminate youth. The latter included, most importantly, the ranks of the People's Liberation Army.

The party's response to unrest created by the contradictions of the new policies was a mixture of repression and depoliticization. The Twelfth National Party Congress in 1982 deemed it necessary to add to reforms in the economy a call for "socialist spiritual civilization" to police and control the cultural accompaniments of the economic turn to capitalism. The following

year, the party launched a “Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month,” which sought to mobilize the population for mass behavioral improvement.⁴³ Trivial as this campaign seemed, it was quite significant as the first manifestation of the party’s efforts over the years to depoliticize the population, especially youth. Official explanations of the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month grounded that event in the campaign to promote the Five Stresses and the Four Beauties and, therefore, in the ideological mobilization that had been under way since 1982.⁴⁴ During the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month, “Learn from Lei Feng” and other public service activities were widely publicized. An issue of the *Beijing Review* reprinted an August 1981 speech by Hu Qiaomu to the Party Central Committee Propaganda Department. Hu warned against “defilement by foreign bourgeois ideology” and observed that “if we only engage in building a socialist material civilization and do not work hard to foster socialist spiritual civilization at the same time, people will be selfish, profit-seeking and lacking in lofty ideals.”⁴⁵ Even more threatening was an editorial in *Renmin Ribao* on March 15, 1982, which pointed out that the gravest danger facing China “at the present” was a belief in “peaceful evolution.” The editorial did not elaborate, but its message was clear: the official rejection of Cultural Revolution leftism did not mean endless toleration of dissent from party leadership and ideology.⁴⁶

If the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month is viewed within the framework of this overall ideological mobilization, it loses much of its apparent triviality. As the *Renmin Ribao* editorial of March 15 observed, the question of socialist education had become a matter of “life or death” for the party, since “in the ideological and cultural arenas and in social morality, the influence of decadent bourgeois ideas and feudal remnants and the phenomena of worshipping foreign things [had] grown on a scale rarely seen since the birth of New China.”

This campaign in 1982–1983 is best described as a political mobilization without politics. A historical precedent helps us better understand the political thrust of the campaign. In 1934, Chiang Kaishek, trying to cope with problems of Communist Revolution at home and Japanese aggression abroad, launched a spiritual mobilization campaign called the New Life movement.⁴⁷ The New Life movement was intended to create a new kind of Chinese through hygienic improvement and behavioral modification. Its goal was to mobilize in support of Guomindang policies a population, especially its youth, that had grown indifferent to the Guomindang out of repeated frustration.

There was much in the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month that is reminiscent of the New Life movement. Its behavioral stress is strikingly similar to the earlier campaign. So is its assumption of a connection between behavioral improvement and spiritual beautification. Both movements shared a faith in the possibility of achieving political ends through an apolitical, ad-

ministrative mobilization of the population. Finally, as in the case of the New Life movement, the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign sought to mobilize support for policies that were themselves responsible for popular frustration and indifference.

The New Life movement was clearly counterrevolutionary. It was designed to counteract Communist influence and to defend the existing social and economic hierarchy of power. Its spiritual mobilization was a march in place, intended to foster willing compliance with an exploitative and oppressive political system. Whether or not the policies of the early 1980s may be described as counterrevolutionary in the same sense, they were nevertheless also a response to the revolutionary upheavals of the previous two decades and addressed a similar dilemma: how to mobilize the population in support of the reforms without having the mobilization turn into calls for political change.⁴⁸

Like its predecessor, the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign carried the strains of a march in place. Whether in China or elsewhere, spiritual solutions to material problems have a way of ending up as parodies of their underlying intentions. The representation of material problems as spiritual ones accomplishes little more than mystification of the popular consciousness of those problems. Spiritual campaigns may suppress, or postpone, dissent over the resolution of social problems; they rarely resolve the problems themselves. The campaign of 1982–1983 did not resolve the contradictions of the new policies, as is clear in hindsight in the many minor disturbances of the decade, and in several major disturbances, which finally erupted in the student-worker-townspeople uprising of 1989 that had to be suppressed with bloody violence.

The Tiananmen tragedy was indeed a tragedy, not only because of what transpired the night of June 4, 1989, but also because it was the product of the seemingly inexorable sharpening of the contradictions in the course of the decade that the reforms had given rise to, culminating in the fateful events of that night.⁴⁹ It seemed like these contradictions controlled the party leadership as much as they controlled the progress of events. The party almost lost that control in May–June 1989, a tumultuous period in the global context, for 1989 marked the end not just of socialism as we had known it (“actually existing socialism,” as it had come to be called) but the era of revolutions in modern history. Whether or not the leadership in China perceived it in these historical terms is beside the point.

But the event that June 4 has come to symbolize was to prove every bit as profound in its consequences as the turn to reform ten years earlier. Sometime between 1989 and 1992, when Deng Xiaoping’s decade-long enthusiasm for global capital turned into condemnations that made him into a villain second only to Mao Zedong, the Communist Party leadership made a decision to put an end to the contradictions that had brought about June 1989,

not by any dialectical resolution that pointed to a higher socialist future but simply by abolishing the entrapment between socialism and capitalism by opting for capitalism as the choice for China's immediate future. Deng Xiaoping's visit to the south in 1992, described in imperial terms (*nanxun*, or "progress to the south"), was followed by a reaffirmation of what had been accomplished in Shenzhen, when he suggested that it was no longer necessary to worry about whether the path followed was socialist or capitalist, so long as it worked. The statement echoed his statement of the early 1960s, that "it did not matter whether a cat was black or white so long as it caught mice," which had gotten him into trouble for two decades as a "capitalist-roader." In 1992, his statement had the same electrifying effect, albeit in a politically antithetical direction, as Mao's simple statement back in late 1957 that "people's communes are good," which had led to the communalization of the country within months. This time around, the message was to jump into the sea of capitalism (*xiahai*, or "going to sea," as it was colorfully described), and many followed his advice. The party also made a conscious decision at this time that consumption might well serve as a substitute for politics, so that there would be no repetition of Tiananmen in the future. The "spiritual solutions to material problems" of a decade earlier were now to be replaced by material solutions, at least for those sectors of the population prone to demands for political participation, whose desire for political participation might well be replaced by desires for the good life. There was something of an important bargain here: so long as the party delivered the goods, there was no need to challenge its leadership. Freedom to consume against the "cries for democracy."

The turn to a culture of consumption was accompanied from the early 1990s by a revival of the "traditionalisms," symbolized by the term "Confucianism," that sort of completed the circle by bringing together modernity and tradition, which had been an aspiration going back to the origins of the Chinese Revolution—except that it was neither the modernity nor the tradition that the revolution had sought to achieve. Indeed, it was quite clear by the mid-1990s that Confucianism was subject to the same instrumentalization (and commodification) as socialism had come to be.⁵⁰ To be sure, the revival of traditions came as a relief to those who had mourned its passing all along. But official commentators were also quite explicit that the revival of the Confucian tradition was intended to supply values of order and ideological unity at a time when the population had lost faith in socialism or its promises. Confucianism also held the promise of orderly development, as had been promoted since the early 1980s by cheerleaders of the authoritarian developmentalist regimes of Eastern Asia. The late 1980s had witnessed, side by side with the calls for democracy and "civil society," the promotion by some of so-called "new authoritarianism," inspired by the likes of right-wing political scientists in the United States, such as Samuel Huntington. The Confucian

revival was entangled in these various efforts to find remedies to the contradictions created by efforts to articulate socialism to capitalism.⁵¹ In the end, however, it was the offer of consumerism (of commodities, socialism, Confucianism, or allowing the world in) in exchange for the abandonment of political democracy that mattered the most. By 1993, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, even Chairman Mao would become an object of consumption and the subject of many a karaoke tune!

The bargain worked. And the circumstances were auspicious. China's turn to full-scale incorporation in global capitalism coincided with the globalization of capital and the fall of socialism. The PRC would emerge by the end of the decade as one of the motors of globalization. A labor force, trained by a socialist revolution carried out in its name, was now rendered into a forcefully submissive force of production for a global capitalism, in the name of a socialism that was postponed further and further into the future. The oppression and exploitation were there, to be sure, but they could be pushed to the background as passing abnormalities to be alleviated in short order as the forces of production advanced and the country had a genuine basis for socialism. In the meantime, consumer goods were made widely available to a population starved for them by decades of revolutionary puritanism.

Deng Xiaoping was the architect of these policies in a very real sense, but he was also a product of the Chinese Revolution and, despite efforts to make him into a Chinese capitalist saint, retained not only a faithfulness to the goals of the revolution but Bolshevik tendencies toward state capitalism.⁵² His successor, Jiang Zemin, would complete the revolution commenced by Deng.⁵³ By the early part of the twenty-first century, under Jiang's leadership, China had come to claim a place for itself among the ranking powers of the world—not by virtue of ideological priority as a socialist state but as a country on which global capital had come to depend. It also had come to emulate other capitalist societies in the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and welfare between classes, genders, and urban-rural areas, as well as in its contribution to pollution that threatened not just its own future but that of the globe as a whole.⁵⁴ Jiang Zemin's "thought" of "Three Represents,"⁵⁵ something of a joke even among Communist Party circles, sought to make the Communist Party itself into an instrument of development—development that would serve the most "advanced" sectors of the country, which translates readily into the making of the party into a party of the urban economic ruling classes. More contradictions, not of socialism this time around but of successful incorporation in global capitalism. What makes the contradictions persist, however, is the refusal to go away, in spite of the neoliberal drift under Jiang Zemin, of memories of revolution, and what it promised to the people at large.

The contradictions of our day are not the contradictions of 1981, but they resonate with them in remarkable ways. In her recent history of socialism in the PRC, Lin Chun suggests a periodization of postrevolutionary China that more or less follows the three decades marked by three different kinds of leadership.⁵⁶ The Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao leadership since 2002 marks the third phase in the unfolding of socialism. This third phase is a phase of reflection and taking stock of the achievements as well as the failures of the previous decade. While policies under Deng and Jiang brought enormous benefits to the country, and to the population at large, they also brought with them tremendous difficulties and unprecedented problems, especially in the realms of the environment, urban-rural inequalities, and, most importantly, class divisions. The new leadership made a commitment to address these problems. Whether or not they can do so remains to be seen. The future of socialism in China depends on their ability to do so.

It is tempting to suggest that while in the first decade of the reforms capitalism was invited to resolve the contradictions created by Cultural Revolution socialism (which itself had been a response to the contradictions of New Democracy), socialism is now being invited back to resolve the problems created by successful incorporation in global capitalism. Lin Chun's analyses, and the hope she invests in the Hu/Wen leadership, are shared by many in the PRC, including the so-called New Left, which includes intellectuals in and out of the party. Speaking personally, I myself share in these hopes, without necessarily being too hopeful of the outcome, and believe that the efforts of the new leadership need to be supported, as they are important not just for China but also, considering the weight of China in the world economy, for global welfare as well. Still, such hopes are no reason for avoiding the contradictions that the leadership faces and the contradictions its own policies generate. The PRC is once again at a crossroads, and it remains to be seen whether or not the problems it faces can be overcome so as to move in a socialist rather than a capitalist direction, especially when socialism itself is in dire need of redefinition. This time, it seems, the crossroads of the PRC may well be the crossroads for us all.

While Chinese leaders still refer to the present as an early stage of socialism, and socialism (with "Chinese characteristics") remains the ultimate goal of development, there has been a proliferation of terms that reveals a more complicated and ambivalent understanding of socialism: *xiaokang shehui* (literally, "minor well-being society"), which invokes native utopian ideals of *datong* (literally, "Great Unity," translated on occasion as the "Great Commonwealth"); *hexie shehui* ("harmonious society"), which, as President Hu Jintao's innovation, is the current orthodoxy; and, most recently *shengtai wenming*, or an "ecological civilization."

The proliferation of names for socialism may be taken as a sign of the regime's recognition of the complex realities it faces, which may not be captured by the single term "socialism," which now reveals itself as a multifaceted project that involves not just social amelioration but also attentiveness to the ecological context of social life. In expressions of concern, if not always in deed, the Hu/Wen leadership has repeatedly drawn attention to problems of social inequality, uneven development (rural-urban as well as regional), and environmental degradation created by rapid development. Since 2004, the regime has moved toward action to resolve the "three agrarian issues" (*sannong wenti*), referring to the peasant, the village, and agriculture, with at least some success in areas of health and education.⁵⁷ The advocacy of "ecological civilization" is an indicator of the concern for the environment, although efforts to minimize the damage inflicted on the environment by rapid development are hampered both by a continued uncompromising commitment to development and the restricted ability of the center to impose its will on the localities. The same may be the case with efforts to move toward more democratic governance without undermining the authority and prestige of the existing power structure, what has been described by a prominent party political scientist as "incremental democracy."⁵⁸

These contradictions are visible in the outline for the "Scientific Outlook on Development" (*Kexue fazhan guan*), which, since the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2002, has been touted as the Hu Jintao leadership's contribution to further advancing "the thought on development of Marx-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the important thought of 'Three Represents.'"⁵⁹ The Scientific Outlook on Development (SOD) takes as its fundamental premise humans as the beginning and end of development. It calls for "comprehensive" (*quanmian*) development with economic development at its core. It underlines the necessity of "balanced" (*xietiao* or *pinghengde*) development, that is, the balancing of urban, rural, regional, economic, social, human, natural, and domestic development with an opening up to the world. Finally, it stipulates the necessity of "sustainable development," attentive to harmony between humans and nature, and between development and resources. These are the requisites of the "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) that the leadership seeks to create. Reform and Opening has achieved the first step of "small welfare society," and must now proceed to the second step of raising standards of welfare and achieving comprehensive and balanced development. The SOD is the ideological necessity of this second step in the country's advance and is crucial to achieving the third step of a modern country by the middle of the twenty-first century.⁶⁰

Discussions of SOD recognize that some of the current problems are products of Reform and Opening. The issues raised concerning "balanced development" are reminiscent of, and at times openly recall, Mao Zedong's

seminal 1956 discussion “On the Ten Great Relationships.” When pressed on the issue, party ideological workers are willing to acknowledge that the idea of a “harmonious society” may be open to conservative (covering up the fractures and disharmonies of the present) or radical (seeking to bring those fractures and disharmonies to the surface to deal with them) interpretations. There has also been some debate over how to interpret the status of “human” (*ren*) in the SOD: whether it includes everyone (as in the “Three Represents”) or is close in intent to “the people” (*renmin*) of more radical days with its class significations.⁶¹

What is missing from these discussions, nevertheless, is any acknowledgment that a change of course may be necessary if problems caused by the reforms are to be resolved. Instead, party documents insist on the necessity of adhering to the course set in 1978, which was deepened under the Jiang Zemin leadership in the 1990s, that reaffirms the priority of the forces of production in the development to socialism, makes economic development into the core task for the foreseeable future, and places a great deal of faith in technological fixes, most importantly, “innovation.”⁶² Since the late 1990s, “opening” has also come to be identified with “globalization.”⁶³ The practical necessities of political compromise with the legacy of Jiang Zemin in the party may be an important factor in this inability to go beyond the economism of Reform and Opening, but whatever the case, the current leadership has been unable to address deep-seated obstacles to socialist development in any meaningful sense created by the policies of the last three decades.⁶⁴ The current regime needs to be recognized for its efforts to bring socialism as an economic, political, social, and cultural project closer to the present than it had been under its immediate predecessors, to make it into more of a guiding principle of policy. But it is equally important to recognize that these very efforts are contradicted by its commitment to developmental policies that contribute further to social inequality, and a seemingly inexorable incorporation into global capitalism economically, politically, and culturally. These policies draw the enthusiastic approval of transnational capital, which has come to depend on Chinese labor and increasingly looks to the market potential of the country as it pulls out of poverty, without regard to its social and environmental consequences.⁶⁵ But the issue is no longer the global corporate push to drive the Chinese economy deeper into capitalism, as it might have been in the 1980s, in the early days of reform. Much more important as a force is the new Chinese elite, increasingly integrated into the structure of the Communist Party itself, that is the primary force behind a neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics of which it is the chief beneficiary. Against the cheerleaders of capitalism in China, we might be well advised to take note of the successive waves of social dislocation and environmental crisis that have become an integral aspect of China’s development, symbolized most recently (in late January 2008) by the severe winter storms that hit the country, leav-

ing millions stranded in railroad stations, and hundreds of millions without access to energy, while exposing the vulnerability of the society as a whole as it comes ever closer to depleting energy resources. What episodes such as this forcefully highlight is the need to consider the meaning and course of development itself, but that has yet to receive the attention that it deserves in the making of policy.

This issue of development has an international dimension as well, as development and developmental needs have brought the PRC more closely into world affairs. We need to avoid the China-bashing that characterizes the responses to Chinese global activity of right-wing U.S. policy-makers who rightly see in this activity a challenge to U.S. domination of the globe, which is not necessarily a bad thing, or of European powers who bemoan Chinese advances into their former colonies in Africa. Nevertheless, if the issue is socialism, and the search for a more humane world, these activities need to be viewed critically. The current leadership on occasion extends globally the idea of a “harmonious society” in speaking of a “harmonious world” (*hexie shijie*). This, too, can be radical or conservative in its implications, depending on whether “harmony” serves as a cover for reaffirming a global status quo of uneven development, inequality, and oppression, or a motivation for overcoming them in the creation of a genuinely just and harmonious world. Here, too, there is considerable ambivalence in Chinese policies. In their dealings with “Third World” societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Chinese leaders on occasion recall the common historical experience that China shares with them in having been subjected to racism, humiliation, and imperialism. On the other hand, Chinese leaders are programmatically anxious to be included among the first-rank powers globally and find it expedient more often than not to remain silent in the face of the resurgence of U.S. imperialism and the depredations of the Israeli government against the Palestinians, or of the Sudanese government against its people. Chinese leaders themselves are not above hiding behind slogans of “terrorism” during their own colonial activity against their internal ethnic minorities. Neither are Chinese transnational companies (such as mining or construction companies, mostly government connected) any less destructive in their activities at home or abroad than transnational corporations elsewhere.⁶⁶

It is with these contradictions in mind that we need to perceive some recent ideological activity initiated by the current leadership to rejuvenate Marxism. In early 2004, the leadership launched a “Marxist Theoretical Research and Development Project” (literally, “Basic Research and Construction,” *Makesi zhuyi jichu yanjiu he jianshe gongcheng*).⁶⁷ The goal of the project was to reexamine Marxism with a view to what Marxist classics had to say about socialist construction, rather than revolution, which had been the primary focus in the past. The project was also to be restricted to the works of Marx and Engels, and Lenin, to avoid the interpretations of later Marxists

and to overcome past dependence on Soviet Marxism in the understanding of the classics. When it was initiated, it was assigned five tasks: to strengthen study of the “sinicization of Marxism” in Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the “Three Represents”; to retranslate and explain Marxist classics; to establish a Marxist system appropriate to the times; to produce higher-education texts in political economy and philosophy, with Marxist characteristics, as well as texts on modern history, imbued with the spirit of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the “Three Represents”; and to create new institutions of Marxist research. The latter included the establishment of a new Marxism Research Institute in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The project itself involved, in addition to the Compilation and Translation Bureau and Marxist Research Institutes, university departments as well as party schools across the country. One aspect of the project was to cull from the works of Marx and Engels the meaning they had assigned to a selected list of eighteen terms and concepts that are worth listing here because they are revealing of current concerns: democracy and political civilization; capitalism, socialism, and communism; social development; agriculture and peasants; social development in economically and culturally backward societies; problems of globalization and “epoch” (*shidai*); ownership and distribution; political parties; war and peace; labor theory of value and surplus value; class, class struggle, proletarian revolution, and dictatorship; religion; nationality (*minzu*); ideology, progressive culture, and morality; human (*ren*); dialectical and historical materialism; principles of political economy; and military.

This project, personally supported by Hu Jintao, is revealing of the regime’s seriousness about questions of Marxist ideology, but it is not quite clear what purpose it might serve in the context of a society gripped by fevers of “getting rich” and consumerism, especially among youth. The party obviously seeks to establish a new Marxist orthodoxy that leaves behind the revolutionary past and provides justification for the course that has been followed for the last three decades—a task that has taken three decades to get around to. The project may be most important for bringing some ideological coherence to the party; whether or not it can resolve the contradictions between socialist goals (however they are defined) and capitalist immersion is another matter. The textbooks that the project aims to produce are obviously intended to take the new orthodoxy to the educated youth at large. What fate they might meet in that context is even less certain.

In the meantime, the regime has also sought to confront issues of culture and morality at the more popular level by launching an ethical and behavioral modification movement that is very much reminiscent of past movements discussed above, from the New Life movement under the Guomindang to the Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month campaign of 1982–1983. Like its predecessors, the *Barong bachi* (Eight Maxims of Honor and Disgrace) movement

sought to instill in youth, in particular, values of patriotism, service to the people, and respect for science, hard work, mutual aid, honesty, laws, and clean living, while dissuading an attitude of complete disregard for the motherland and a disdain for the people, and discouraging ignorance, laziness, self-seeking profiteering, the unprincipled search for gain, the violating of laws, and extravagant living. The movement this time around was in many ways reminiscent of the New Life movement of the 1930s in blending together socialist and “Chinese” values.⁶⁸ And by all available evidence, it has not been any more successful than the New Life movement, or its successor movements in the 1980s. Its injunctions sound more than anything like pedantic efforts to keep in check an everyday urban (if not just urban) culture shaped increasingly by the pursuit of commodities and capital, which ironically is the product of the regime’s own mobilization of the people in the pursuit of wealth and power at the political level.

Equally subversive of the socialist professions of the regime is the crude nationalism, both popular and official, that at the extreme carries fascist overtones. Socialism in China all along has been entangled in nationalism. The language of revolution during the Cultural Revolution consistently betrayed a militant nationalism. But whereas this earlier nationalism could be explained (or explained away) as a necessity of anti-imperialist struggle, it is more difficult to do so at a time when the PRC has become part of a global establishment of power. Since the 1980s, with the foregrounding of nationalist over socialist goals in the rewriting of revolutionary history, the leadership has promoted nationalism not as part of but as a substitute for socialism. If the glorification of the national past was earlier a response to imperialist humiliation, moreover, it presently draws its inspiration not from weakness but from newfound strength within global economic and political relations.

Most visible is the obscurantist mob nationalism in response to perceived slights to Chinese dignity and sovereignty that has found a new medium of expression in the Internet. But while Internet nationalism may be dismissed for the juvenile exuberance of its protagonists caught in the instantaneous provocations of a medium that seems to invite knee-jerk reaction, other, less visible expressions of nationalism spring from deeper sources of national pride mixed with heavy doses of nationalist chauvinism. The revolutionary search for national identity in the revolutionary process and its foundation in popular culture has been replaced in official and elite intellectual ideology by the revival of the authoritarian Confucian culture of the prerevolutionary imperial elite, which now also provides a resource for the projection of Chinese “soft power” globally. The deceptive manipulation of sound and sight in the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympics in the name of achieving “perfection” showed how far officials, and the celebrated director Zhang Yimou (who may have been inspired by a similar if lighthearted deception in the movie *Singin’ in the Rain*), were prepared to go in demeaning those they

are supposed to govern and represent. Zhang's own complicity in the deception came upon the heels of his movie *Hero*, which one critic has described as "fascist" for its anachronistic nationalist portrayal (and celebration) of the first emperor of Qin and the founding of imperial China.⁶⁹ But perhaps the most eloquent testimonial to fascist elements in contemporary nationalist thinking may be the popularity of the fictional memoir *Wolf Totem*, by Jiang Rong (pen name for Lu Jiamin), which was also the recipient of the first Man Asian Literary Prize. *Wolf Totem's* naturalization of Mongols may be read as an ecological defense of nomadic against agrarian society, but what is most remarkable about it is its glorification of a primitivist social ethos that celebrates the military virtues of wolves and humans in their natural state against the softening corruptions of "civilized" life. The "novel" offers a sustained critique of Han Chinese for being a nation of peasants who, by their sedentary agrarian way of life, have become destroyers not only of external nature but also of their own warlike natures, easily brought to their knees by one conqueror after another.⁷⁰

Jiang's celebration of the wolf-nature of nomads reverses the Confucian disdain of "barbarians" for the same reason, but his celebration of warlike militancy may nevertheless offer clues to militaristic strains in contemporary cultural revivalism, including the militarization of the philosophically very unwarlike Confucianism. Judging by popular media, Confucianism presently would seem to owe at least some of its popular appeal to its confounding with martial arts traditions. The militancy resonates with popular sentiments concerning ineradicable differences between "Chinese" and other cultures—especially "the West"—that, rather than disappear, have acquired a new significance with the economic and political integration into global capitalism. This concern with Chinese differences is paralleled at a more rarefied philosophical level with the attraction among some intellectuals to the ideas on politics of the German legal philosopher, and sometime Nazi, Carl Schmitt, to whom the "political distinction" between friend and enemy constituted the distinctive characteristic of "the political"—just as good/evil and beautiful/ugly characterized the moral and aesthetic spheres, respectively. This attraction has manifested itself in the shift of attention away from the social toward the state, and the resulting preoccupation with the sovereignty of the nation-state over both social problems and social relations across political boundaries, which have been the fundamental issues driving socialism—at least in theory.⁷¹

What could socialism in China mean under these circumstances, material as well as cultural and ideological, which would seem to be at odds with any serious conception of socialism? In the heyday of the Chinese Revolution in the 1960s, the People's Republic of China appeared as the harbinger of the future, which promised a revolutionary socialist society that could overcome the limitations both of capitalism and the seemingly defunct socialism of the

Soviet Union. In the 1980s, as the PRC left revolution behind to open up to the world, it was welcomed with great enthusiasm by many who long had harbored hopes for it as a market, who now viewed Deng Xiaoping as a success for capitalism. Presently, there is widespread speculation that, barring some natural or human catastrophe, China may well end up as the next stopping place for an evolving capitalist world-system.⁷²

It is also arguable, however, that dreams of a capitalist China have been as elusive as the revolutionary visions of an earlier day. The revolution is now a distant memory. While China has succeeded in capitalism beyond the wildest dreams of cheerleaders for capitalism, becoming a force of globalization first as the workshop for global capitalism and increasingly at the present as a market for capital, it has done this on its own terms, drawing strength not only from its long historical legacy but from the legacy of the socialist revolution as well. The insistence on “socialism with Chinese characteristics” often sounds quite vacuous, and yet it is a constant reminder of the Chinese resistance to dissolution into capitalism and the continued reaffirmation of one kind of socialist past in the search for another kind of socialist future. The will to difference still finds expression in the language of socialism in this postsocialist society that has confounded the meaning of socialism and yet has managed to keep it alive as a political myth. As I wrote in the earlier essay nearly thirty years ago, to describe socialism as a political myth is not to degrade it but to endow it with a different kind of power, the power of inspiration against the rigid blueprint of a utopian-ism that claims scientific validity. The myth in this case also manages to draw strength from a history that the leaders of the Communist Party have turned their backs on without quite abandoning it. A history, therefore, that can serve at once as a guide to the future and a burden that holds the society back. One might observe that this is what is at the crux of disagreements over China’s future presently, just as it was three decades ago.

That the question has refused to go away in spite of the momentous changes of the last thirty years is remarkable, but it is also a cause for some hope. China’s development through incorporation in global capitalism has brought enormous benefits as well as unprecedented problems. As a major player in the globalization of capital, the case of China may provide the most dramatic proof of the impossibility of sustaining capitalist development as we have known it for the last two centuries. The limits are no longer just social and political; they are terminally ecological. Socialism may serve as a reminder under the circumstances of the necessity of finding a different path into the future—not just socially, but in terms of redefining development itself.

Socialism, especially the Marxist variant of socialism, in the past has not done a very good job of discovering such alternatives because of its internalization of the developmentalist assumptions of capitalism. Chinese socialist

leaders, from Mao Zedong to the present leadership, have shared in these assumptions. This has been the case especially over the last three decades, when the idea of making capitalism serve socialism has often ended up with the reality of socialism serving capitalism, as the socialist state has found itself in alliance with global capital against the welfare of its own people in the pursuit of national wealth and power, not to mention class interests old and new.

The current leadership's recognition of this problem, as well as of the ecological limits on development, is therefore a hopeful sign. So far, however, the recognition of the problem has not been sufficient to force serious reconsideration of the developmental course that has led to these problems. The Scientific Outlook on Development, in its recognition of human welfare as the beginning and end of socialist policy, may yet produce such reconsideration, but only if it drops the "scientific" and puts in its place the "social," without which socialism itself has no meaning.

NOTES

1. Portions of this essay originally appeared as "Socialism without Revolution: The Case of Contemporary China," *Pacific Affairs* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1981–1982): 632–61, and are reprinted here with kind permission from *Pacific Affairs*.

2. Interview with Felix Greene, broadcast in Hong Kong, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (hereafter *FBIS*), January 11, 1980, 16.

3. Arif Dirlik, "Socialism without Revolution: The Case of Contemporary China," *Pacific Affairs* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1981–1982): 632–61.

4. Jin Wen, "Egalitarianism Is a Major Enemy of Distribution According to Work," *Guangming Ribao* (hereafter *GMRB*), June 16, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 29, 1979, L16).

5. Ralph Milliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 9.

6. Maurice Meisner, "Chinese Marxism and the Concept of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," unpublished paper presented at the Wilson Center Colloquium, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., June 26, 1981.

7. *FBIS*, December 26, 1978, E4–13.

8. *FBIS*, December 26, 1978, E4–13.

9. Research Office of the United Front Work Department, "Correctly Understand and Seriously Implement the Party's Policy toward the National Bourgeoisie," *Renmin Ribao* (hereafter *RMRB*), February 15, 1979 (*FBIS*, March 1, 1979, E1–7).

10. *Xinhua*, June 1, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 22, 1979, L5–7).

11. *Xinhua*, June 20, 1979 (*FBIS*, June 22, 1979, L9–11).

12. Xin Zhongqin and Xue Hanwei, "How Can One Interpret 'Socialism Means Declaration of Uninterrupted Revolution'?" *RMRB*, June 19, 1980 (*FBIS*, June 27, 1980, L10–11).

13. Wei Jianlin and Jia Chunfeng, "On the Transformation of the Principal Contradiction," *RMRB*, August 28, 1979 (*FBIS*, August 31, 1979, L12).

14. Qiu Tian, "How Should We Understand Socialist Working Class and Peasantry?" *GMRB*, November 14, 1979 (*FBIS*, December 4, 1979, L2).

15. Commentator, "Shixian sige xiandaihua bixu jianchi sixiang yuanze" [To achieve the Four Modernizations, it is necessary to uphold the Four Principles], *Hong Qi*, no. 5 (1979); also translated in *FBIS*, May 22, 1979, L1–6.

16. Li Xiulin and Zheng Hangsheng, "Are Classes Really a Broad Social Category?—Replying to Comrade Wang Zhengping," *RMRB*, January 24, 1980 (*FBIS*, February 8, 1980, L17–21).
17. Li Xiulin and Zheng Hangsheng, "Class Struggle without Exploiting Classes," *RMRB*, October 31, 1979 (*FBIS*, November 14, 1979, L3–5).
18. "Modernization Is the Most Important Political Issue," *RMRB*, April 11, 1979 (*FBIS*, April 13, 1979, L15).
19. See the discussion "What Is the Motive Force of Historical Development?" *Beijing Review*, no. 35, September 1, 1980.
20. Interview with Xue Muqiao, "More on Economic Reform," *Beijing Review*, no. 36, September 8, 1980.
21. Yu Guangyuan, "The Basic Approach to Socialist Ownership," *Beijing Review*, no. 49, December 8, 1980.
22. D. Smirnov, "The Maoist Concept of 'New Democracy': A Right-Wing Revisionist Variant of 'National' Socialism," *Far Eastern Affairs*, no. 1 (1980): 77–89. For Soviet ideas on economic change in the 1960s, see the discussions in Leonid Pekarsky, *Soviet Economic Reform* (Moscow: Novosti Press, 1968).
23. Xu Dixin, *Xin minzhu zhuyi yu Zhongguo jingji* [New Democracy and the Chinese economy] (n.p.: Xin minzhu zhuyi chubanshe, 1948), 11.
24. See Xu Dixin, *Xin minzhu zhuyi yu Zhongguo jingji*, for the New Democracy approach to this question.
25. Mao Zedong et al., *1950 nian Zhongguo jingji lunwen ji* [A collection of essays on the Chinese economy, 1950] (Beijing: n.p., 1950). See, especially, the essays by Chen Yun and Xue Muqiao.
26. Lo Yaojiu, "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Views on Accelerating the Development of the National Economy," *GMRB*, December 31, 1978 (*FBIS*, January 11, 1979); and Chen Koqing, "Shi lun Sun Zhongshan di jingji jianshe sixiang" [Discussions of Sun Yat-sen's thinking on economic construction], *Jingji Yanjiu*, no. 2 (1980): 45–51.
27. Heilongjiang Provincial Service (*FBIS*, February 1, 1980, S1).
28. Deng Xiaoping interview (see note 1 above). Also see Xinhua Commentator, "Keep to the Correct Orientation of Socialist Democracy" (*FBIS*, January 22, 1980, L5–13).
29. The remarks on corporatism that follow are based on the discussions in P. C. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979).
30. Schmitter and Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation*, 53–61, 185–212.
31. John Logue, "The Welfare State: Victim of Its Success," *Daedalus* 108, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 69–87, esp. 73–74.
32. Qiu Jian, "Xue Muqiao: Innovative Economist," *China Reconstructs* 29, no. 10 (October 1980): 23.
33. Jin, "Egalitarianism Is a Major Enemy of Distribution According to Work," L15.
34. Wang Chao, "To Pay Back Fixed Dividends to Capitalists Is to Implement the Party's Policy Toward Capitalists," *Gongren Ribao* [Workers' daily], July 31, 1979 (*FBIS*, August 14, 1979, L3).
35. Heilongjiang Provincial Service, "Take the Interests of the Whole into Account," *FBIS*, April 18, 1979, S1.
36. Wang Ruoshui, "On Condition," *RMRB*, June 27, 1979 (*FBIS*, July 11, 1979, L5–10). This article, reportedly written in 1961, was first published in *Zhexue Yanjiu*, no. 6 (1979), and reprinted in *RMRB*.
37. "Confidence Crisis over Marxism," *Wenhui Bao* (*FBIS*, January 30, 1980).
38. Special Guest Commentator, "Marching into the 1980's Full of Confidence," *Gongren Ribao*, January 19, 1980 (*FBIS*, February 4, 1980).
39. Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 87.
40. Han Shaogong, "Why Did the Cultural Revolution End?" *boundary* 2 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 93–106.

41. See the essays collected in *China: Crossroads Socialism*, ed. Chen Erjin, trans. Robin Munro (New York: Schocken Books, 1984).

42. Deng Xiaoping, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" (1981), in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1982–1994* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994).

43. This discussion draws on another essay published in 1982, Arif Dirlik, "Spiritual Solutions to Material Problems: The 'Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month' in China," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 359–75.

44. These referred to stressing civility, politeness, order, morality, and hygiene, and advocating the beauty of the spirit and of language, behavior, and environment. The Socialist Ethics and Courtesy Month added public activities such as sweeping the streets.

45. "Questions on the Ideological Front," *Beijing Review*, January 25, 1982, 15H8.

46. "Zuo chingxing di Makesi zhuyizhe" [Be sober-minded Marxists], *RMRB*, editorial, March 15, 1982.

47. Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34 (August 1975): 945–80; and Stephen Averill, "The New Life in Action: The Nationalist Government in South Jiangxi, 1934–37," *China Quarterly*, no. 88 (December 1981): 594–628.

48. I would like to add a personal note here. I was in the PRC during some of this campaign, from summer 1983 to the end of spring 1984. The winter of 1983 witnessed the intensification of the campaign for ideological correctness, one casualty of which was the flourishing interest in unorthodox currents in Marxism ("Western Marxism"). Works on or by authors such as Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, and Jean-Paul Sartre disappeared from bookstores during the winter of 1983–1984. Interestingly, at least on the campus of Nanjing University where I was, the campaign against "spiritual pollution" did not interfere with the new interest of college students in public forms of entertainment such as dancing. Nanjing University was also the site of a minor student upheaval in May 1984, which was provoked by the university's demotion in Ministry of Education rankings, creating anxieties among the students about their ability to compete in the new marketplace for jobs. The "upheaval," minor as it was, also created considerable anxieties among campus leaders, vigilant against any revival of "cultural revolution" activities; in other words, uncontrolled and spontaneous student politics. The students, in their turn, were quick to name their day-long protest "the May 28th movement" (*Wuerba yundong*)!

49. For further discussion, see Arif Dirlik and Roxann Prazniak, "Socialism Is Dead, so Why Must We Talk About It? Reflections on the 1989 Insurrection in China, Its Bloody Suppression, the End of Socialism and the End of History," *Asian Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (July 1990): 3–25.

50. Arif Dirlik, "Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism," *boundary 2* 22, no. 3 (November 1995): 229–73.

51. See the recent study of Confucian discussions in the contemporary mainland in John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

52. For these tendencies, see Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978–1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

53. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Harvey includes Deng Xiaoping among the leaders (others being Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Augusto Pinochet) who were responsible for the neoliberal turn. If Deng played a crucial part in turning the PRC toward a market economy, however, it would be more accurate to say that it was under Jiang Zemin that neoliberalism was consolidated in party ideology.

54. For a recent analysis, see Mingqi Li, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008).

55. The "Three Represents" refers to the necessity for the Communist Party to always represent "the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the

Chinese people.” The most important consequence of the “Three Represents” was the admission into the party of the new bourgeoisie and business people (along with intellectuals as representatives of culture).

56. Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

57. Wang Shaoguang, “The Great Transformation: The Double Movement in China,” *boundary 2* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 15–47.

58. Yu Keping, *Globalization and Changes in China's Governance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008).

59. Hong Ren et al., *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben: zhuantu jiangzuo* [Reader on the Scientific Outlook on Development: Discussions on special topics] (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 2006), 2. See also Theoretical Unit, Central Propaganda Bureau, *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben* [Reader on the Scientific Outlook on Development] (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 2006). This text was translated into English by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau.

60. Hong Ren et al., *Kexue fazhan guan xuexi duben*. See also Ku Guisheng and Yan Xiaofeng, eds., *Zai Kexue fazhanguande tonglingxia: Shilida yi lai dangde lilun yu shijian xin jinzhan* [Under the lead of the Scientific Outlook on Development: Party theory and practice since the Sixteenth National Congress] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006).

61. These observations are products of conversations with party ideological workers during the two months I spent as a visiting professor at the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (*Zhonggong zhongyang bianyi ju*) during the summer of 2006. I am grateful, in particular, to the vice-secretary of the bureau, Professor Yang Jinhai, for sharing some of these problems with me. Professor Yang has been a prominent figure in philosophical discussions on the concept of “human” (*ren*) and is the author of many published and unpublished papers on the subject. For one example, see “Cong ‘wei renmin fuwu’ dao ‘yiren wei ti’” [From “serve the people” to “make ‘human’ into the basis”], unpublished paper.

62. Wu Chunhe and Feng Bing, *Shengbu zhang tan kexue fazhan* [Government officials talk on scientific development] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 2005).

63. For a comprehensive review of Chinese discussions of globalization in English, see Nick Knight, *Imagining Globalisation in China: Debates on Ideology, Politics and Culture* (London: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2008).

64. See Ching Kwan Lee and Mark Selden, “China’s Durable Inequality: Legacies of Revolution and Pitfalls of Reform,” *Japan Focus*, http://japanfocus.org/-C_K_-Lee/2329. For an excellent discussion of the reluctance to deal with issues of class inequality, see Pun Ngai, “The Subsumption of Class Discourse in China,” *boundary 2* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 75–91.

65. See the responses of foreign business representatives to the decisions of the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party in October 2007, “Policy Moves Music to Business Leaders’ Ears,” *China Daily*, Friday, October 19, 2007, 5.

66. For further discussion, see Arif Dirlik, “‘Beijing gongshi’: Shei chengren shei? Mudi hezai?” [“Beijing consensus”: Who recognizes whom and to what end?], in *Zhongguo moshi yu “Beijing gongshi”*: *Chaoyue “Huashengdun gongshi”* [China model and the Beijing consensus], ed. Yu Keping, Huang Ping, Xie Shuguang, and Gao Jian (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2006): 99–112. An English version of this article is available in Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Press, 2007), chap. 9.

67. The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau is at the center of this project. The discussion here is based on materials that colleagues in the bureau were kind enough to share with me. Most important are Yang Jinhai, “Introduction to Marxism Research in China” (August 2006), unpublished paper; “Makeshi zhuyi gongcheng jiaocai meiben zhishao touru baiwan yuan” [Each volume of textbooks for the Marxism project will cost one million yuan]; “Youguan shishe Makeshi zhuyi lilun yanjiu he jianshe gongchengde duihua” [Dialogue (with Yang Jinhai) on the Marxism theoretical research and reconstruction project], *Henan ribao* [Henan daily], September 17, 2004.

68. See, for example, the illustrated parables collected in Shanghai Spiritual Civilization Reconstruction Committee, *Zhi Rongru, jiang wenming, shu xinfeng* [Know honor, stress civilization, establish new habits] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006).

69. Evans Chan, “Zhang Yimou’s *Hero*—the Temptations of Fascism,” *Film International*, no. 8 (2004): 1–31. It is difficult to say, without the director’s evidence, whether this celebration of the First Emperor had in mind Mao Zedong, as parallels were drawn between Mao and the First Emperor during the Cultural Revolution.

70. Jiang’s celebration of wolf-nature is disturbingly reminiscent of the Pan-Turkist Turkish author Nihal Atsız (1905–1975), who, in a series of novels written in the 1940s and 1950s (including *The Death of the Gray Wolves* and *The Resurrection of the Gray Wolves*), narrated the betrayal of nomads (in this case, Turks of the Gokturk Empire during the Tang) by wily “civilized” Chinese. Atsız had explicitly Nazi sympathies and believed that Turks, too, were a “master race.”

71. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26. Schmitt, criticizing liberal pluralism (as well as legal universalism), found in this distinction the key to a modern secular politics against religious fundamentalism or Enlightenment universalism. For a foremost Chinese proponent of Schmitt’s ideas, see Liu Xiaofeng, “Shimite lun zhengzhide zhengdangxing—cong ‘zhengzhide gainian’ dao ‘zhengzhide shenxue’” [Schmitt on the legitimacy of the political—from “the concept of the political” to “political mythology”], in *Shimite: zhengzhide shengyu jiazhi* [Schmitt: The surplus value of politics], ed. Liu Xiaofeng (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2002), 2–155, esp. 66–76, for the primacy of the state.

72. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007).

Chapter Two

The Geopolitics of the New Left in China

Lisa Rofel

What is the geopolitical range of the New Left in China? How do we characterize the various interlocutors of the New Left in diverse locations both within and beyond China? This essay argues that to appreciate the full import of leftist perspectives within China, one must take a transnational perspective. That is, a transnational dialogue has evolved about the direction of China's future and is a vital aspect of China's New Left. This dialogue highlights the importance of China's development not only for those who live within the country but also for the world economy. I use the term "New Left" broadly here to refer to those engaged in a politico-historical critique and genealogy of capitalism in post-Mao China, through which they have criticized the enormous social and economic inequalities that have arisen as a result of the specific ways a market economy has been implemented. I do not address the debates within China about who exactly accepts the label "New Left," or whether the label is misapplied by those who support the development of neoliberal capitalism. My concern is the critique of capitalism itself. I accept the term "New Left" to the extent that it means a critique of capitalism after Maoism, similar to the New Left in the West, so named after the rejection of Stalinism.

China, of course, has become quite prominent in the global economy, though its political positions have been rather muted—hence the term "soft power" to refer to China's international political involvements. Its prominence has led one after another scholar to write bold commentary, sometimes prognosticating the future, at other times holding out new promises as well as

warnings. China appears in the daily news around the world, as various countries from Latin America to Africa to Europe and the United States, as well as Asia, assess the import of China's role in the shifting world economy.

In this essay, I focus on analyses written from the perspective of those involved in critique. This transnational dialogue is comprised of: 1) those in the West and other parts of the world who have participated in the debates that define the New Left; 2) those who have been intellectually trained both in China and elsewhere and are currently writing from a location outside of China; and 3) those who write from within China. Their perspectives are based in their political positions, not their identities. These scholars emphasize neither their national identities nor their Chineseness or non-Chineseness as the basis for their analyses. Rather, they all locate themselves geopolitical-ly within a history of critiques of capitalism.¹

This is not the first time a transnational dialogue based in radical political critique has addressed China. The early twentieth century and the early years of socialism in China as well as the Cultural Revolution witnessed analogous political exchanges.² In other words, China is not "in" the world for the first time now, nor is it the object of global political passions for the first time. This post-Mao moment of China's positioning in the world is part of a *longue durée* interaction with various "worlds."³ But the current moment is distinct in the sense that it is the confluence of two phenomena: after the contradictions of Maoist socialism have exploded Maoism's heady dreams; and new struggles around the world to find alternatives to global capitalism have not yet picked up momentum. The political desires underlying these critiques indicate that China's future is meaningful for many both inside and outside the country.

The three scholars I focus on here are Giovanni Arrighi, Lin Chun, and Lu Xinyu. Giovanni Arrighi locates himself in both Europe and the United States and is well known for his world systems theories. Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century*⁴ analyzes the history of the world economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and China as a hopeful example of a market economy not based on capitalist exploitation. Lin Chun locates herself in both London and China. Lin's *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*⁵ traces the dialectical contradictions in the possibilities and dangers of China's recent socialist history. Finally, Lu Xinyu locates herself within China, from which vantage point she looks out at the rest of the world. Lu's essay "Nongye Zibenzhuyi yu Minzu Guojia de Xian-daihua Daolu," or "Agricultural Capitalism and a Path for Nationalist Modernization,"⁶ might appear to have nothing to do with China because it focuses on a history of the West. But Lu engages here in a debate with those in China who use the history of Western capitalism to support the development of neoliberal capitalism in China. Each of these writings reaffirms the impor-

tance of not drawing national boundaries around what can be thought of as the New Left or restricting the parameters of the relevant genealogy of political critique in China.

ADAM SMITH AND CHINA'S MARKET ECONOMY

Before the publication of *Adam Smith in Beijing*, Giovanni Arrighi was best known for his book *The Long Twentieth Century*, in which he argued that there are cyclical transformations in capitalism that have reappeared, though in somewhat changed form, with each new dominant world power since the thirteenth century. The emergence of a new hegemonic power, in turn, depends on its dominance of world finance. In *Adam Smith in Beijing*, Arrighi continues this argument in that he prognosticates that China will be the next hegemonic power in the twenty-first century, replacing the United States. He sees China as the leader of what he calls the East Asian economic renaissance, which he views as linked to the demise of the U.S. neoconservative project for a New American Century. For Arrighi, this is a good thing. That is, Arrighi has a passionate political desire for China to represent a particular kind of future.

Arrighi uses Adam Smith because he believes Adam Smith was not an advocate of free-market capitalism but rather had a theory of markets as instruments of rule that could lead to greater equality. This theory is relevant for Arrighi's argument about noncapitalist economies, as he interprets China's past before Western imperialism but also China's possible future. While he acknowledges the economic changes that have occurred since the end of Maoist socialism, Arrighi wants to take seriously the possibility for China of a noncapitalist market economy, what the Chinese government calls a "socialist market economy." Hence his engagement with Adam Smith. For it turns out that Smith, according to Arrighi, teaches us that there is a fundamental difference between market formation and processes of capitalist development. Certain market formations occur by exploiting hidden potentials in social and economic relations that do not change those relations in any fundamental way. By contrast, the other kind of market-based development destroys social frameworks and creates conditions for new social relations with new potentials for economic growth. This latter model Arrighi labels capitalist development. He also argues that contrary to popular assumptions, Adam Smith saw a role for the state in market economies. Governments are crucial for bringing about changes in laws and institutions that can help economic competition but also hinder abuses, and can respond to contradictions in the processes of economic development, which are social as well as economic.

Finally, Adam Smith interpreted China as exemplifying a natural path of development, meaning it first emphasized agriculture, then manufacture. The third and last step of any national economy's development, according to Arrighi's reading of Smith, should be foreign trade (which Smith saw China as having impeded). But Smith, according to Arrighi, also criticized Europe for taking an unnatural path to development, first depending on foreign trade and manufacture, utterly neglecting the crucial role of agriculture. This experience further led European countries to use military force to extract resources from other countries, whereas the first, more "natural" path of development presumably does not.

Arrighi's main interest is not why China lost so much ground to the West in the past but how and why it has managed to regain so much ground so quickly after more than a century of economic eclipse. Arrighi first insists that China's future cannot be predicated on the past experience of the Western system of global expansion, because that system has transformed its mode of operation (i.e., using war to create economic dominance), making much of its past experience irrelevant to an understanding of the present. As that system has declined in relevance, he argues that the history of an earlier China-centered system not based in military dominance has increased in relevance.

This history has two parts. The first part is about an East Asian family-based agricultural system. Arrighi takes this story from Kaoru Sugihara's depiction of what Sugihara calls the East Asian Industrious Revolution. Sugihara finds that from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the development of labor-absorbing institutions and labor-intensive technologies in response to the scarcity of land enabled East Asian states to experience an increase in population accompanied by an improvement in the standard of living. The main features of this industrious revolution included freeing the peasantry from servitude, family-based farming, hence a labor-absorbing institution centered on the household and the village; a strong work ethic; ability of family members to perform multiple tasks well rather than specialize in only one task; ability of family members to cooperate with one another; and flexibility in responding to the needs of the family farm, hence the ability of those laboring to also have managerial skills at the family level. This concept allows Sugihara—and Arrighi—to argue that East Asia experienced a market-based development that had no inherent tendency to generate a capital-intensive approach, as in England.

According to Arrighi, in the second half of the twentieth century, after World War II, this East Asian model came into its own, as a hybrid with the Western developmental path, because countries like Japan and later China could insert themselves into the new opportunities opened up in profitable labor-intensive industries as well as resource-saving capital-intensive indus-

tries. The United States and the Soviet Union, by contrast, focused on industries like the military-industrial complex that used up a great deal of capital and natural resources.

The second part of Arrighi's story about the relevance of China's past to its future is about China's tributary system. He argues this history stands in sharp contrast to the Western colonial system. The difference is due to the widespread recognition, historically, of China's primacy in the region. Arrighi claims that the Chinese tributary system consisted of multiple political jurisdictions that nonetheless all appealed to a common cultural heritage. Unlike the European system, Arrighi claims, this East Asian system was not characterized by incessant military competition or by efforts to build overseas empires in competition with one another. In conquering peripheral regions, moreover, the Chinese government did not extract resources from them but was more likely to invest in them in order to incorporate them into the empire. European states fought endless wars to establish exclusive control over sea lanes linking West to East. In contrast, China, according to Arrighi, was far more concerned with peaceful relations with neighboring states and the integration of their populous domains into an agriculturally based national economy.

In effect, Arrighi builds a model of economic history and development in China that relies on a certain notion of East Asian culture. This model allows him to create a future for China he passionately desires. Arrighi clearly wants a world peace that is not capitalist. In his story about China's future, he combines his model of the East Asian cultural and economic past with his story about contemporary China. Strikingly, the latter is as much about the United States as it is about China. Thus, he begins with the failures of U.S. hegemony. He argues that after 9/11 the neoconservatives in the United States took advantage of the situation to pursue U.S. control over the world economy and specifically over energy supplies. They planned to continue the old anticommunist strategy to "contain" China after they won in Iraq. But the invasion of Iraq bogged down and instead gave China an opportunity to consolidate and expand its economic and political power. Arrighi argues that China could well follow the same scenario as the United States did when it eclipsed Britain as the world hegemon by letting Britain exhaust itself financially, then supplying goods and credit at a late stage so as to dictate the future terms, in that case, of peace after World War II, and in the Chinese case, of the situation after the United States can no longer afford to borrow more money from China to fund its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Arrighi concludes that the United States still has no coherent strategy—or perhaps we could say desire—toward China, while as he puts it, the United States is addicted to Chinese dollar purchases and inexpensive Chinese products. He emphasizes a recognition that China does not want a military confrontation but has cooperative intentions, and that the United States should

cooperate with China in the pursuit of a stable international system. He notes in this regard President Hu Jintao's four "nos": no to hegemony, no to force, no to blocs, and no to the arms race. In other words, China's rise to be the next hegemonic power will be peaceful.

It is a terrible loss that Arrighi passed away before he could further develop the last, and most important, section of *Adam Smith in Beijing*. In fact, only in his very last chapter does he finally arrive at the 1980s, the key moment of transition in China after Maoist socialism. *Adam Smith in Beijing* therefore appears to place more emphasis on a shared cultural model of economic and political history in East Asia. For the contemporary period, Arrighi argues that the main attraction of the PRC for foreign capital has been not the low-priced reserves of labor but the high quality of those reserves—in terms of health, education, and capacity for self-management, in combination with the rapid expansion of demand for those reserves, which were created not by foreign capital, in his view, but by a process of development based on indigenous traditions. According to Arrighi, this whole process was facilitated by an alliance between the Chinese government and overseas Chinese business.

Thus Arrighi categorically rejects the idea that China's ascent is due to its adherence to a neoliberal agenda set out by Washington. He argues that China has always kept its national interest front and center. It did not embrace the shock therapy Washington gave the Soviet Union but instead refused to give up gradualism, and also emphasized social stability by maintaining job creation and a very slow and selective deregulation and privatization. The key reform in China, Arrighi argues, has been not privatization but exposure of state-owned enterprises to competition with one another and with foreign corporations. The Chinese government has been able to combine export-oriented industrialization with the advantages of a self-centered national economy "informally protected by language, customs, institutions and networks accessible to outsiders only through local intermediaries."⁷ In all of this, the role of the government has never subsided but has produced the development of new industries and the establishment of export-processing zones. The Chinese government, Arrighi argues, has invested in knowledge-intensive industries without abandoning labor-intensive industries and has thus expanded the educational system on an unprecedented scale.

Arrighi concludes that far from becoming the servant of foreign capital or Chinese diaspora capital, the Chinese state has maintained the upper hand. Moreover, and here is the third main spoke in the wheel of his argument, China has not privatized the land. This issue is central to his argument about an Adam Smithian noncapitalist market economy because access to land that is still public enables the majority of the population to make a living not dependent on entering capitalist labor markets. Moreover, it supports his emphasis on an East Asian cultural tradition based in family-centered land-

holdings. So long as the principle of equal access to land is recognized and effectively implemented, in Arrighi's view it is not too late for a noncapitalist path of development in China. In other words, Arrighi insists that while perhaps socialism has already lost in China, capitalism has not yet won.

To summarize, Arrighi inspires us to imagine that China has the potential to pursue a peaceful path of economic development that is not capitalist for the following reasons: China still retains its cultural history of development that has been resource saving rather than resource exploiting; China's relations with other countries presumably did not lead to warfare because its tributary system was dedicated to fostering relationships of exchange; and finally, China's contemporary situation still involves widespread access to land because land has not been legally privatized.

It is not my intention here to point out discrepancies in Arrighi's understanding of Chinese history or of the contemporary situation in China.⁸ It is a pity that he did not have time to trace the vociferous debates occurring about the privatization of land in China. Nor did he live to see China's investments worldwide as it searches not only for energy resources but also for access to land elsewhere in order to stabilize food prices at home. Rather, I would like to highlight his political investments in a desire for a future world economy in which China leads us down the path of noncapitalist, nonmilitaristic development. Arrighi's political critique certainly places him squarely within the transnational dialogue of the New Left because of his commitments to a noncapitalist future as developed through China. This dream is a worthy one, and it might be a worthy goal to encourage the Chinese state to stand for such a future. Indeed, the Chinese government has made pronouncements to the effect that they seek nonmilitaristic relationships with the numerous countries around the world in which they seek resources.⁹ Whether these pronouncements can be viewed as ideology or as an actual description of their activities depends on how one analyzes contradictions and inequalities in China's post-Mao social, economic, and political life.

In this regard, it is striking that Arrighi leaves out the politics of economic restructuring in China. His world systems approach allows us to appreciate the inextricable worlds created by capitalism, but it also leads us to ignore the contradictions and paradoxes produced in the way the market economy in China has unfolded. The social inequalities under socialism and in the post-Mao era remain unexamined in an argument whose emphasis on culture, while illuminating, leaves aside the politics of history and the history of politics in China. Still, Arrighi does not allow us to forget that developments within China have long been intertwined in China's relations with various historical worlds.

THE DIALECTICS OF SOCIALISM

Lin Chun picks up where Arrighi leaves off. A political science scholar currently located in London, she also has passionate desires for China's future. She makes clear throughout *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* that against all odds she still hopes for a socialist future for China—a true socialist future, which would mean socialist democracy, social justice, and an end to exploitation and poverty. Lin Chun positions herself in a hybrid place as both inside and outside of China and inside and outside of the West. She is also resolutely antiromantic. Her commitments as a Marxist scholar are to the glimmers of possibility for a socialist future in China, but she has no illusions about the difficulties and constraints in pursuing that dream. Lin Chun is more of a dialectical thinker than Arrighi. She sees contradictions everywhere in China. In her dense and challenging book, she picks her way through these contradictions with a passionate desire to find the pieces of hope for socialism and resurrect them before they become utterly buried by contemporary global capitalism.

Lin Chun insists that Chinese socialism is both unique and universal. In contrast to Arrighi, she is resolutely anticulturalist. Thus, Chinese socialism is unique not because of a cultural Chinese model—which she vehemently rejects—but because of China's historical experiences first with Western imperialism, then with anticommunist containment efforts by the United States, and finally with Soviet communism. But Chinese socialism is also universal, because it partakes from the very beginning of the Enlightenment universals of freedom, democracy, and autonomy. She applauds those values and thus rejects postcolonial critiques of Enlightenment that would have us abandon them. She also believes that only socialism can truly implement those values because capitalism is never interested in universal democracy and justice: its form of economic exploitation precludes it from reaching those goals.

Lin Chun does not posit a pristine time of socialism under Mao that has since been degraded by globalization. Much less does she posit a Chinese tradition of noncapitalist exploitation. She directly criticizes this approach as one of cultural romanticization, especially the view of Confucian values as leading to a kinder, gentler capitalism, even as she acknowledges some specificities to Chinese tradition. Instead, she traces a history in which capitalism never could develop very far in China due to Western imperialism.¹⁰ Thus, according to Lin Chun, China had a weak national bourgeoisie that could not bring about the kind of revolution that the bourgeoisie had brought about in Europe. Instead, those who wanted to overthrow Western imperialism necessarily had to rely on the working classes and peasants to make the revolution happen. This revolution was nationalist as much as socialist. Lin Chun has no

trouble stating that fact. She does not feel the need to defend Chinese socialism against a charge that it was merely nationalist.¹¹ Nor does she want to argue that its modernist bent was a problem. To the contrary, she insists that China should follow a path of modern development, but she argues, somewhat echoing Arrighi, that there is a path to modernity that is not capitalist, and that is the path that China has been uniquely pioneering.

To repeat, Lin Chun does not romanticize Maoist socialism; she finds contradictions from the very moment of the socialist revolution. But she also finds evidence of true socialist justice and democracy. Her goal is to tease out the threads of the latter and insist they can still be picked up and developed. She argues that from the beginning the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established land reform campaigns that redistributed land and economic policies for development that were meant to lead people gradually toward collective sharing of economic resources. The CCP also established informal modes of democratic participation in which peasants and workers truly could have a voice in politics—in local decisions about how to redistribute wealth and, later, about how to challenge corruption and the emergence of new privileges. These modes were not legalized but, she argues, were in practice quite democratic. But Lin Chun is no blind Maoist. She vehemently criticizes the other, nondemocratic aspects of Maoist socialism and the true failures in economic policies over the years. These include the political campaigns that closed down democracy, the fixed division between the rural and the urban that exploited the countryside to feed rapid industrial development in the cities, the continuous campaigns that wrongly targeted various citizens, and the disastrous policies like the Great Leap Forward with its horrendous consequences. Yet she argues that while there is no justification for the way the Chinese state carried out these policies, these actions were themselves realistic responses to the continuing anticommunist actions of the United States and, later, the break in relations with the Soviet Union. Even with these evident disastrous mistakes, Lin Chun still discerns threads of hope—in the Constitution that the PRC laid down in the 1950s, in the need of the CCP to adhere to its own ideology and respond to pressures from peasants and workers, and in its nationalist goals for a China that does not bow down to the West.

Lin Chun finds the best moments in China not in the Maoist period but in the period right after the Cultural Revolution, known as economic reform, in the early 1980s. This might seem surprising, given her ardent desires for socialism. But unlike most scholars of China's economic reform, Lin Chun has a more nuanced understanding of the different moments of reform. She describes three: the initial years, from the mid-1980s up to the early 1990s; the early 1990s to China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001; and then 2001 to the present. For Lin Chun, the earliest period was truly an effort to reform socialism, not a move to abandon it. The early 1980s

witnessed an effort to break down the vast inequalities between urban and rural residents. The state addressed rural poverty by decentralizing power, allowing private plots and a market economy to flourish, and raising the price the state paid to peasants for grain. The initial results were impressive. And they were still based on the idea that all citizens of China should enjoy the national wealth equally and the state should be involved in redistribution of the economic fruits of development.¹² Moreover, it seemed as if the state was going to open up more democratic opportunities for citizens to participate in politics.

But these results of the early years of reform were quickly overshadowed by what followed. In dialectical fashion, Lin Chun shows us how history moves through thesis and then antithesis. With decentralization of power came corruption. Corruption also stemmed from the unfair advantages of cadres in their ability to become wealthy. Social inequalities worsened. The gains that peasants had made in the countryside in the early years of reform were submerged in the rising cost of living and the rising costs of producing grain. Then the state began to court foreign capital. Here, Lin Chun both castigates the Chinese state for adhering to some of the tenets of globalization while at the same time holding out the idea that it had not bowed to foreigners, and maintains that it had the nationalist goal of making a strong, autonomous China with a strong economy. This ideal is what she hopes will continue to spark socialism, along with the CCP's ideological commitment to a socialist market economy.

Similar to Arrighi, Lin Chun does not reject the idea of a socialist market economy as mere window dressing over an essentially neoliberal, capitalist system. She too believes passionately that socialism has not yet lost. But unlike Arrighi, she perceives endless contradictions. Thus, she has no trouble listing the deprivations that have followed in the wake of China's suture into the global economy: massive exploitation of workers and an enormous gap between the wealthy and the poor, degradation of the environment, and the continued unwillingness of the government to establish democracy.

But again, Lin Chun finds hope: most important, the massive number of protests by peasants and workers about their living conditions as well as protests by students about freedom of press and democracy. She interprets these protests as not counter to socialism but actually reflective of the historical experiences and memories that Chinese citizens have of socialism's promises. The state, in her view, is forced to respond to these protests in light of its own ideological commitments.

The most recent period, since China's entry into the WTO, has witnessed the new leaders turning once again to the countryside to redress some of the worst inequities. This is why Lin Chun's book ends on a positive note. She sees these leaders as possibly turning around some of the most egregious pursuits of wealth in the 1990s, but this remains to be seen.

Thus, Lin Chun, like Arrighi, refuses a simplistic denunciation of the history of socialism in China. Moreover, they both refuse simple dichotomies to describe China's post-Mao era. Both acknowledge capitalist developments in China since the beginning of economic reform, and both deny that capitalism has the ability to utterly destroy all traces of history. For Lin Chun, the relevant past begins with nationalist struggles against imperialism and goes through the accomplishments of Chinese socialism and the early moments of economic reform still focused on improving socialism rather than abandoning it. For Arrighi, the historical past includes a cultural tradition of resource-saving agricultural households that has lasted until the present. Lin Chun emphasizes historical contradiction while Arrighi emphasizes a somewhat ahistorical culture. Lin Chun emphasizes political ideals as motivating historical action while Arrighi emphasizes sedimented cultural-economic practices; he implicitly reminds us that culture is always intertwined with history, politics, and economics, though he does not follow through on that insight explicitly and therefore does not highlight the class and gender inequalities rife in China's past agricultural system. Lin Chun always highlights inequalities except when she invokes nationalism, a cultural-political practice whose underside of danger in its undeniable power she downplays. For Arrighi, culture at times appears to be symptomatic of regional character rather than a historical or social phenomenon. In his book, dwelling on differences between "China and the West" appears to mute differences between past and present, class/elites and nonelites, men and women, and state and citizen.

WESTERN HISTORY IN CHINA

Lu Xinyu creates a third position of critique between Arrighi and Lin Chun. She picks up where Arrighi left off on the issue of land privatization. Like Lin Chun, Lu Xinyu addresses structural inequalities, but perhaps unexpectedly, her entrance into the debates about land privatization in China takes her to a critique of Western history. Lu Xinyu is a professor of media and Director of the Broadcasting and Television Department at Fudan University. As part of the New Left in China, she, along with others, has navigated many difficult waters to stake out positions that are neither wholly that of the state nor wholly that of those who oppose the state, who often use the example of the United States as their standard bearer from which to criticize the Chinese state. Lu Xinyu has written extensively on such topics as documentary film in China and its role in addressing social inequality.

Her essay that I address here, however, enters into debates about whether to privatize land in the countryside. Land in China is still held by the state. Under Maoist socialism, land was farmed collectively, and the crops were

divided up among households according to complicated—and locally differentiated—ways of deciding how much labor each household had contributed to farming. Beginning with economic reform, these collectives were demolished and the land redistributed to individual households. But land was not privatized. Instead, households can lease land from the government for a number of years but do not own it outright as private property and cannot sell it, although they can rent it out to others. Any common village land is still held in the name of the collective of village households. Local officials are supposed to administer all land in the village according to these principles. But a vast majority of these officials have engaged in rent-seeking behavior by leasing land for commercial development—not just the remaining communal lands but also land they acquire by evicting farmers from the property they have leased for farming. These local government officials rarely share the profits with the evicted farmers. Local officials are under pressure from the central government to meet quotas to attract commercial investment, but they nonetheless have engaged in activities that a majority of rural residents consider to be a clear case of corruption. This situation has led to a large and pressing debate about how to empower local rural residents to control what happens to their lands, in which we can see so many people's desires for what China should represent in the future.

Lu Xinyu enters this debate in her essay “Nongye Zibenzhuyi yu Minzu Guojiade Xiandaihua Daolu,” or “Agricultural Capitalism and the Path to Nation-State Modernization.” She takes aim at Qin Hui, a professor at China's renowned Qinghua University in Beijing. Qin Hui is perhaps the most distinguished public spokesperson for the position that all land in China should be privatized. He has spelled out his views in many fora, but the one most accessible to English speakers is his interview in *New Left Review* entitled “Dividing the Big Family Assets.”¹³ There he argues that democracy requires that land be privatized as the only way to halt the corrupt, authoritarian power of government officials. He makes this argument by reviewing Lenin's analysis of the American and Prussian paths to capitalism. According to Qin Hui's reading, Lenin saw the American path to capitalism as a democratic one in which the common people divided up the land among themselves, whereas the Prussian path was an authoritarian one in which oligarchs expropriated land from the peasantry. As Qin Hui states in this interview: “The real question facing us is which of the two possible paths, Prussian or American, rural China should take: the expropriation of the peasantry from above, by big landlords or companies, as in nineteenth-century Prussia, or the emergence of independent small-to-medium modern farmers from below, as in the nineteenth-century U.S. Lenin always attacked the first, and defended the second.”¹⁴

Qin Hui disagrees with those who oppose privatization of land because they think it will unleash annexation and peasant war. He also opposes those who believe the optimal distribution of agricultural resources will occur through the market. He argues that neither position is accurate. The main reason to encourage privatization, in his view, is not economic but political: to prevent “abuse of existing peasant rights to land by political authorities. . . . As a disadvantaged social group vulnerable to abuse, peasants should enjoy greater rights to land as a line of defence against the state. If officials can take away peasants’ land at will, what other civic rights would be left to them?”¹⁵ Thus he views privatization and democratization as mutually reinforcing.

Qin Hui’s views have received serious attention in China. He is not a simple trumpeter of neoliberalism nor a naive believer in “the market” as a hidden hand that will solve all problems. He is most concerned with challenging the autocratic governance and corruption of state officials. The New Left in China shares this concern. Moreover, Qin Hui sees himself as allied with some New Left positions, though he disagrees with what he views as the New Left’s reliance on the state to resolve social inequality. Hence Lu Xinyu’s felt need to address Qin Hui’s positions.

Lu Xinyu contests Qin Hui’s arguments first by disagreeing with his views on Lenin’s comparison of the American and Prussian paths to capitalist agriculture. She argues that Lenin praised the United States in the context of arguing against the populists in Russia who, he felt, did not realize that the United States was successful in developing its agriculture only because actually the state intervened to ensure that capitalism would win out. That is, he praised the United States to the extent that it had nationalized land in order to avoid a system of serf agriculture. Moreover, Lenin, according to Lu Xinyu, saw that small farmer holdings would not lead to modern economic development in Russia. She argues that China’s small farmer lease holdings are currently replicating this problem, hence the difficulties of modernizing agriculture in China at present. Qin Hui, she argues, downplays the issue of nationalization that is emphasized in Lenin’s views. Lenin, in Lu Xinyu’s opinion, emphasized that violence is an inextricable and unavoidable aspect of how capitalism develops. Qin Hui hopes that by privatizing the land, the violence of the state can be avoided. According to Lu Xinyu, Qin Hui thus ignores the historical conditions in the United States that enabled small farmers to become independent, capitalist farm owners.

Lu Xinyu then delves into the history of the United States to highlight these historical conditions. She argues that first, the American path to success depended on primitive accumulation. That is to say, the U.S. government stole land from Native Americans. This stealing of land necessarily involved the state. In fact, the state declared the land to be state-owned, or public. Only after this phase of primitive accumulation did the state sell the

land to white farmers, but in such a way that benefited financiers. The goal was not to democratize access to land but to commercialize it. Commercial land companies made a profit by buying up the large public landholdings from the government and turning around to sell small pieces of that land, often the least fertile parts, to individual households.

Second, the United States' path to success depended on slave labor. In fact, from the very beginning, she argues, agriculture in the American South was tied into a world market, or more specifically, England's market. Hence it was not an autonomous national agriculture, but one that necessarily responded to England's own needs to feed its industrial development. African Americans' slave labor was the basis for American agricultural successes even after the Civil War, as these ex-slaves were then forced off the land and into cities once the mechanization of agriculture got under way.

Third, the success of the American path depended on subsidies to farmers, which is true even today. These subsidies not only define the prosperity of U.S. agriculture but also, of course, define the inability to succeed on the part of farmers in third world countries, because the subsidies allow American farmers to dominate global markets.

Lu Xinyu thus concludes that the United States does not, in fact, represent free markets and full privatization. Although it says it believes in free market ideology, its practices represent something else. Finally, in implicit agreement with Arrighi, Lu Xinyu argues that U.S. agriculture represents capital-intensive and energy-intensive farming, whereas third world countries have a different kind of farming, which is labor-intensive but actually saves on energy resources. Lu Xinyu concludes that following the U.S. path will not benefit farmers in third world countries, only capitalists who can profit from investing in large agribusinesses.

What I find most striking about this essay is that except for the first paragraph, in which Lu Xinyu introduces Qin Hui's argument for privatizing land in China, the rest of this rather long essay does not discuss China. That is, it does not discuss China directly. This is not because Lu Xinyu is being cautious. In many of her other works, she engages with descriptions of Chinese social life in her discussion of various media representations of Chinese society.

Here, Lu Xinyu does something else—she takes us on a tour of Western history as a way to think about China. She captures one key aspect of desires about China's future that is not limited to the New Left: as so many Westerners do, many scholars in China imagine possibilities for China through their discussions about—in a post-Mao world—Western (and often U.S.) history. For some time now, many in China have used the United States as its mirror other. For some it is a fantasy about freedom, wealth, and the good life. This is true even as many readily criticize the United States for its imperialist adventures.

Thus, Lu Xinyu is in fact directly addressing China when she discusses Russian and U.S. history. She addresses a central feature of all political desires and also the recognition that China—and all countries—are thoroughly imbricated in world history. Yet she also insists that we do not all have to walk down the same path to the same future, not least because the history of capitalism and its imperialist desires both foreclose certain paths and make illusory the possibility of benefiting humanity by following its mirage of wealth and freedom.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of capitalism in China is occurring on a global stage. The stark inequalities within China are intimately linked not only to domestic privatization and profit seeking but also to a global economy of foreign investments in China, the favorable conditions of which the Chinese state has actively created, and China's search for resources around the world. Following the contours of these developments, the passionate debates about capitalism in China are necessarily transnational. These debates speak to one another both directly and indirectly. Arrighi, Lin Chun, and Lu Xinyu are equally part of a transnational critique of capitalism as it develops in and beyond China. Arrighi's deep scholarship in the history of world systems leads him to view developments in relation to China in the light of that history, even as he hopes that China might represent a turn away from the Western history of capitalist market economies due to its cultural legacy of labor-intensive rather than capital-intensive agriculture and its continued socialist legacy of state ownership of land. Lin Chun's detailed engagement with the contradictions of socialism in China highlight a more recent history, the declaration of whose passing is premature, in her view. She envisions the possibility of engaging with and pressing on the continued commitment, however faint, to socialism. Lu Xinyu echoes the other two scholars in her emphasis on the worlding of capitalism—both the ways it forges intimate and inextricable relations among far-flung parts of the world and the new worlds it violently creates. All three recognize that an effective critique of capitalism within China must have its transnational dimension. All three create the analytical conditions of possibility to hope for a noncapitalist and socially just future. Whether or not we want to label them the New Left, we can recognize their shared understanding of the global import of the dangers and possibilities in China's new era.

NOTES

1. I distinguish this approach from Tu Weiming's well-known and influential cultural China approach that emphasizes cultural identity and geographical location while muting political positions. See Tu Weiming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991), Special Issue: *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*: 1-32.

2. See Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (New York: Verso, 2005); Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

3. See Lisa Rofel, "Between Tianxia and Postsocialism: Contemporary Chinese Cosmopolitanism," in *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, ed. Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge Press, forthcoming).

4. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Verso, 2007).

5. Lin Chun, *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

6. Lu Xinyu, "Nongye Zibenzhuyi yu Minzu Guojia de Xiandaihua Daolu: Bo Qin Hui Xiansheng Dui 'Meiguoshi Daolu' he 'Pulushi Daolu' de chanshu" (Agricultural Capitalism and a Path for Nationalist Modernization: A Refutation of Mr. Qin Hui's Exposition of the "American Path" and the "Prussian Path"), *Shijie* (The World) 13 (2006): 143-215.

7. Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, 356.

8. One could do so on several issues, namely warfare (see Peter C. Perdue, "A Frontier View of Chineseness," in *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50-Year Perspectives*, ed. Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden [New York: Routledge, 2003], 51-77); class differences in access to land in presocialist China (Philip Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985], and Kathy le Mons Walker, *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path: Semicolonialism in the Northern Yangzi Delta* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999]); gender differences in access to land in China under socialism (Norma Diamond, "Collectivization, Kinship and the Status of Women in Rural China," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 1975, and Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011]), and including the present; and the debates about privatization of land—see my discussion of Lu Xinyu below.

9. For two contrasting analyses of China's activities in Africa, compare Ching Kwan Lee, "Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves," *China Quarterly* 199, no. 1 (2009): 647-666; and Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa," *African Studies Review* 50, no. 3 (2007): 75-114.

10. For the classic statement on the debate about the effects of imperialism on Chinese economic development, see Joseph Esherick, "Harvard on China: the Apologetics of Imperialism," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 4 (1972). For a retrospective view on those debates, see Arif Dirlik, "Reversals, Ironies, Hegemonies: Notes on the Contemporary Historiography of Modern China," *Modern China* 22, no. 3 (1996): 243-284.

11. For the classic statement of the view that the main defining feature of the Chinese socialist revolution was its nationalism, see Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

12. In this, China now resembled what were called the newly industrializing economies (NICs). But Lin Chun sees a difference—in those economies, while the state was involved in economic development, it was not interested in redistribution of wealth, except to some extent in Taiwan.

13. Qin Hui, “Dividing the Family Assets,” *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 83-110; <http://www.newleftreview.org/A2441> (accessed July 7, 2011).

14. *Ibid.*, 97.

15. *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

The Battle for Chinese Discourse and the Rise of the Chinese New Left: Toward a Postcolonial Politics of Knowledge

Daniel Vukovich

It has become customary to begin discussion of the Chinese New Left (CNL) with a rather large, even potentially devastating caveat—some of its leading voices refuse the label altogether, and it is in fact a highly diverse, contentious, and inchoate *intellectual* movement. In what sense can we speak of it as a political movement, or even a common project? As Zhang Xudong has noted in his analysis of the Chinese intellectual and cultural scene of the 1990s, this label stems from various liberal and neoliberal attacks on others' (the leftists') interrogations of China's spiraling engagement with global capitalism and of the appallingly unequal and uneven development it has brought forth.¹ It was meant as an insult, an attempt to immediately dismiss critiques of "the reform" and of liberal universalism. It clearly drew on the received, Cold War or "rightist" wisdom that leftism—i.e., Chinese Maoism or state socialism from 1949 to 1979—was a horror and a colossal mistake. The label has since passed into common usage within standard China-watching media. It includes not only overseas Chinese scholars but also many more "native" ones across the conventional social sciences and the more theoretical or heterodox humanities. The label therefore includes as well a range of explicit and implicit political orientations within the work of various intellectuals, from Marxism and/or Maoism to neo-Confucianism, old-fashioned social democracy, and "third way" left liberalism, as well as the less formalized populisms, nationalisms, and anti-imperialisms and even feminisms. I emphasize the "intellectual" qualifier above because one of the standard criti-

cisms of the movement from various sectarian (usually Western) Web sites and screeds is that these scholars are, after all, scholars and not real, on-the-ground revolutionaries, activists, or “dissidents” who threaten the party-state—mere social democrats at best, not internationalist enough (too nationalist or perhaps too Chinese?), and/or “Stalinist.”² This is in fact the flip side of a standard, fully implicit liberal criticism: the CNL does not oppose the party-state but is only concerned with economic inequalities and an allegedly trivial threat of imperialism.

This last critique, like the charge of “social democracy,” is significantly true except for the “mere,” “only,” and “trivial” parts. The CNL is unthinkable except as a response to the iniquities and social problems of capitalist reform as well as the threat to China’s autonomy and “difference” posed by its transformation by global capital and geopolitical competition. So too it is worth recalling the traditional Marxist and socialist designation of left versus right: it was about one’s position on capitalism and the market, particularly in terms of production, and on the comparative importance of the economic and social class. This stood opposed to classical liberal and conservative thought that either ignored the economic and social class issues altogether, or focused merely on consumption/distribution (the market) and not production. The CNL clearly fits this lineage and makes a similar intervention. With roots, however distant, in a more classically Marxist (even Leninist-Maoist) tradition, it deliberately deemphasizes or even drops standard categories like “the individual” and typical liberal focuses on the formal, institutional-legal dimensions of society. Or more simply: the liberal voices in China (and outside of it) see the party or party-state as the clear and simple, overwhelming “main enemy,” and the CNL does not. For them this strongly Cold War–inflected view is too simple and, as Wang Hui, among others, has argued, it is probably more accurate to see the party-state as having been captured by neoliberalism and global capital than as either Nietzsche’s State (the “coldest of all cold monsters”) or an all-powerful despotism fueling libertarian nightmares the world over.³ This makes the CNL post-Tiananmen (the high point of Western “cultural fever” and faith in the market and Western-style “democracy”) and rooted in the 1990s context of China’s seemingly continual rise and rapidly growing inequalities. The CNL is indeed highly diverse and not against, say, “liberty” so much as neoliberalism and liberal universalism. This is in addition to and somehow more controversial than its opposition to the class and economic/social power inequalities that are so abundantly in evidence across China today. It is not simply directly political, in other words, but intellectual and academic.⁴ So too, the CNL can be differentiated into various streams of political thought and positions, more or less distant from the so-called “Old Left” and/or more self-professedly Maoist public intellectuals and citizens (or “netizens”) represented most famously by the Utopia bookstore, salon, and Web site in Beijing.⁵

But notwithstanding these caveats and Zhang's apt analysis of CNL diversity, it is still, in my view, a bona fide and cohesive phenomenon that is not going away anytime soon. This is even in part due to its having become something of a global and not just Chinese media event; it has entered the lexicon. But its roots in the revolutionary past and its discourse—in China's ongoing rapid, unequal growth/development, and even in the U.S./West's increasingly desperate attempts to maintain hegemony politically and intellectually—suggest a much longer shelf life than mere intellectual fashion. But the larger reason we can refer to the CNL as having “arrived” and achieved some weight in Chinese and global intellectual political culture lies in its institutional and material basis. Many of the participants are well-established professors and teachers housed in major as well as “minor” or lower-tier universities in China and abroad. Far from being a state-managed or even state-sanctioned plot to propagandize China's rise, or some result of nationalist fever, the existence and weight of the CNL movement has to do with the academic and professional achievements of the people involved (some of whom are remarkably prolific authors and researchers). It also has to do with the development and expansion of higher education and research in China. This material basis behind the rise of the CNL is also something that many of the pure or adamant liberal voices lack, perhaps due to their being more “dissident” than their ideological “enemies” of the CNL camp. But then they are also outside *all* the major streams of thought as well as mainstream Chinese political and intellectual culture. In short, the paradox of contemporary Chinese liberalism is that it lacks a material basis compared to other “schools” (fewer Ph.D.s, researchers, and teachers) but also has an inordinate amount of presence, if not power within the English-language media sphere. One need think only of Liu Xiaobo (of whom, more below), or even the performance artist Ai Weiwei. The CNL scholarship and discourse is less well known outside of China in comparison. But since it is about producing knowledge in a more substantive and scholarly way, it is more likely to make an impact on or contribute to the development of “social justice” most grandly, or more humbly to the production of “really useful knowledge” about and for China and the world.⁶

OUTFLANKING SINOLOGICAL ORIENTALISM

Paradoxically, then, the criticism that the CNL is *merely* an academic and intellectual phenomenon leads us to its global significance. The rise of the Chinese New Left is an important, discursive reaction against the waves of depoliticization sweeping China and the world and for restoring and recovering some of the political and other complexities of the People's Republic of

China (PRC) that have been erased by the turn to the market and global capital. And, it must be said, by the Chinese state's own developmental trajectory from 1949 to the present. That is obviously an enormous collective project that is just beginning. It would take years to adequately substantiate and would require an expansion of higher education and interdisciplinary humanistic research in China, none of which is by any means guaranteed. In this essay I want to nonetheless make a case for the significance of the CNL in terms of the challenge it presents to depoliticization and to global understandings of China, particularly in terms of Chinese politics and the much-demonized Mao or revolutionary era. Taken as a whole, the CNL phenomenon returns us to and in part reactivates not Maoism per se (as a formal politics or guerrilla strategy) but "Maoist" or more simply, revolutionary Chinese discourse. What this "return" to taking the Chinese revolution seriously further entails, as a necessary part of this discursive battle, is simultaneously a "writing back" on the part of some Chinese intellectuals against decades of a Cold War, colonial discourse that may be called sinological orientalism.⁷ In this important sense, the rise of the antioccidental CNL already represents Chinese intellectuals "writing back" and seizing and enacting the permission to narrate on a global level.

This form of orientalism that they are implicitly battling is a way of understanding and framing China discursively that follows a logic of the PRC becoming the same as the normative and universal U.S./West: China is already becoming (or should be) modern and free like "us," save for the last, awful remnant from the 1949 revolution (or from classical oriental despotism), the party-state. This is clearly a different type of orientalism than what Edward Said originally theorized in the late 1970s, which went on to greatly influence and in part produce postcolonial studies. For Said, orientalism turned on a Rudyard Kiplingesque logic of essential and ahistorical difference, "Oh, East is East, West is West, and never the twain shall meet." But in the case of China through the Cold War and up to the present, the logic dovetailed more with the logics of capital and modernization: sameness, homogeneity, and teleology. It is also a chiefly liberal style of thought: the norm that the PRC fails to meet is political liberalism, including an emphasis on "independent" individuals and civil society as well as the essentialist universalism that subtends basic humanism. Yet fundamentally, sinological orientalism represents the same problematic as dealt with by Said and others within postcolonial studies broadly defined: the pressures and limits of colonial or imperial discourse upon what people are able to think, and the struggle for "permission to narrate" on the part of the colonially oppressed and denigrated. With China's undeniable rise, that "permission"—like the state's attempts to deploy so-called "soft power"—is inevitable. Inevitable, but contentious and without guarantee as to what will be narrated and by whom. My contention then is that the CNL represents one such attempt to narrate, and to

counter an orientalist and modernizationist logic of sameness with one that seeks to assert China's specificity and difference from universalizing "Western" and liberal ways of understanding the PRC.

The CNL therefore is a project that engages the politics of knowledge in China *and* abroad. It cannot be otherwise. These two social fields of forces are forever linked and can only be separated heuristically. While it often focuses on very specific inquiries into, for example, particular episodes of the Cultural Revolution, rural collectivization, the political economy of the Mao and contemporary periods, land reform novels from the "17 years literature" (1949-66), Mao's writings on art, tributary relationships under the late Qing dynasty, and so on, the CNL "movement" is also as a whole involved in a battle for Chinese and global discourse about the Chinese Revolution and its fate today. In the face of the demonization of that long and tortuous revolution—which is really to say the denigration of the PRC as such, up to the present—it is "merely," but in reality quite significantly, taking the recent Chinese revolutionary and modern past seriously. That includes its pursuit of a socially just, alternative order of things that can "fit" China better than the liberal, "democratic" universalism of Western theory *and* the hypercapitalist and equally depoliticizing efforts of the post-Mao Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In short, what is going on in China with the CNL and its confrontations with liberalism and state efforts at depoliticization is nothing less than what Stuart Hall argued has been the fundamental mode of politics since the 1980s: the hegemonic struggle over the legitimation or delegitimation of discourse.⁸ *This last is the real meaning of the rise of the Chinese New Left movement: the battle for China's past and its present at the level of knowledge production.* It therefore behooves us to examine the "postcolonial" and other political implications of the CNL phenomenon in itself at the level of discourse. My focus, in other words, is less on the work of a specific CNL theorist or critic than on what the phenomenon as a whole can tell us about the global politics of knowledge.

MAOIST DISCOURSE: AFTERLIVES AND REARTICULATION

To understand the CNL phenomenon we have to start not with the post-Tiananmen 1990s and a China obsessed with global legitimacy as a Big Power and Big Nation, but with a past era's foundational discourse or rational-practical framework for interpreting China and the world: the highly, even extremely politicized or revolutionary discourse of the Mao era. The "thought" or dominant, governing discourse of that long era (from the mid-1930s through the late 1970s) is not typically seen as a discourse in the complex, productive Foucaultian sense at all. It is usually seen as a dark age

that followed China's previous, semicolonial age of openness before Mao.⁹ It is, in short, either dismissed or demonized as a period of brainwashing, vulgar dogma, uniformity, death, silence, and so forth—an assault upon independent rationality, individualism, political liberalism, and capitalist democracy. One can easily index an exposé-style popular book like Jung Chang and John Halliday's *Mao: The Untold Story* in this regard.¹⁰ But here is how one noted China expert and political scientist sums up the entire collective era:

[The CCP] built a system that tied the peasants to the land, kept consumption to a minimum, fixed each person permanently in place in a work unit dominated by a single party secretary against whom there was no appeal, classified each individual as a member of a good or bad class, and called on each citizen to show that he or she was progressive by demonstrating enthusiasm for disciplining himself and persecuting others.¹¹

This totalitarianism produced a sense of “unworthiness” among the Chinese, and according to another area studies scholar, made a “fundamentalist” China fall behind its East Asian neighbors for decades.¹² There is much to mine in this framing of revolutionary China and Chinese citizens as dupes and passive victims. It depoliticizes the entire period, evacuating the clashes and struggles between classes, social forces, and competing ideologies as well as nation-states (hot and cold wars), offering instead a veiled notion of oriental-communist despotism and the road not taken (liberal capitalist democracy). But what I want to do here is contrast such a Cold War colonial discourse with a brief account of Maoist discourse as it has recently been theorized by a number of people working on the historiography of the Mao era. Again, we need to recall this past discourse to understand how the CNL movement can be seen as not a return to Maoism *per se* (despite the fear-mongering in some news media to this effect¹³) but a rethinking of China's radical, leftist past and what it might mean today.

Briefly put, to see the Chinese Revolution not as totalitarianism, an assault upon liberalism and human rights, we need to put it back into context as a powerfully affective *and* rational way of thinking, acting, and being-in-the-world. This requires a basic notion of Maoist discourse. The first step, therefore, to restore some of the complexity and specificity of modern Chinese politics is to recover analytically the complex discursive formation of the radical era: not simply Maoist ideology but, as Gao Mobo puts it, the “common-sense knowledge and socially shared values, beliefs, practices, administrative measures, disciplinary technology, education, and so on” that “provided a framework and standard for the Chinese to relate to in their thinking and behaviour and to make sense of their lives.”¹⁴ (It is worth noting that Gao is a former Red Guard who, although residing abroad, also works and publishes in China.) To amend Lenin on Marxism, Maoist discourse was all powerful because it was true. It was the regime of truth that powerfully held

sway from Yan'an until the great reversal after the Cultural Revolution. What we need, then, is a more positive, Foucaultian notion of discourse and power as well as revolutionary governmentality. We need more specifically to attend to three crucial dimensions of the power/knowledge nexus: the nondiscursive apparatuses of Maoist governance beyond liberal, state-phobic notions of an all-powerful despotism; the self-understanding of Mao-era subjects; and the knowledge, "statements," or content that Maoist discourse offered. Implicit in this is the classic, dual notion of knowledge in Foucault's French: first, *savoir* or "the process by which the subject undergoes a modification of the very things that one knows"—this is also what I mean to signify by using the more anthropological category of a subject's self-understanding;¹⁵ and second, *connaissance*, the things that one knows, discursive statements or knowledge in the more conventional sense (about how markets work, for example). So too we need to see the rise of the CNL as an emergent and in-process discourse that reacts against the depoliticizing reform era and occidental-liberal discourses stemming from the 1980s. It is doing this in part through reflecting on and rewriting the Chinese past, including the revolutionary era, and also engaging or reactivating Maoist or Chinese leftist discourse.

The essential point about self-understanding under Maoist discourse is that it is at odds with current stories of victimization and human rights abuses, as well as with the typical totalitarian coding noted above. Allow me to quote feminist historian Wang Zheng here, looking back analytically on her time as a "revolutionary youth":

Everyone who was talking [by the late 1980s], including the once victimizing Red Guards, was a victim scarred by the Maoist dictatorship. But I could not think of any example in my life to present myself as a victim or a victimizer. I did not know how to feel about my many happy memories and cherished experiences of a time that most vocal people now called the dark age.¹⁶

My point is not that Wang's "self-understanding" here is representative of *all* former Cultural Revolution participants, but rather one made by Gao Mobo: that liberal notions of human rights and the sacrosanct individual were simply not in circulation during the highly politicized and revolutionary context of the recent Chinese past. Hence, it is at best an anachronism to deploy them to sum up the entire Cultural Revolution era, and at worst it can be part of an orientalist production of knowledge about a despotic "modern" China. So too the limits and nonuniversality of liberal individualism have long been exposed by the emphases on collective or communal belonging and responsibilities in traditional Chinese culture (or "Confucianism") and by the collectivist politics of the long Chinese Revolution (i.e., even before the rise of Mao and the Chinese Communist Party [CCP]).

Let me follow up on this positive perspective by again quoting Wang Zheng on past, “statist” schemes to produce “gender neutrality” within Chinese subjects and society. This concept signified the nonimportance of gender in terms of social and political roles and aimed a dagger at the heart of traditional, Confucian notions about the nature of women. Like the goal of women’s liberation, it was incorporated into the party and movement during the 1920s. As Wang notes, the pull of femininity still existed outside of official discourse and the public sphere; patriarchy could not just be abolished by decree. But the state’s attempts to revolutionize the culture, in part in the name of “gender neutrality,” were not mere rhetoric but institutionalized during the Cultural Revolution. The experiences of going down to the countryside and working side by side with other men, women, and peasants; the various forms of activism and political participation available to women; and the “exchanges of revolutionary experience” were notable even beyond their important class egalitarianism. The aim was:

to situate citizens in new kinds of social relationships, to pull both women and men out of the web of Confucian kinship obligations and to redirect their ethical duties from their kin to the party and the nation. Scholars may call this statist scheme manipulation or domination, but few have noticed that the enforcement of this scheme disrupted conventional gender norms and created new discursive spaces that allowed a cohort of young women to grow up without being always conscious of their gender.¹⁷

Rather than have us dismiss the enforcement of gender and other egalitarianisms as an assault on liberalism, Wang asks us to see the achievement and complexity of such state-feminist schemes. Of course, in the current intellectual political climate a positive or nuanced understanding of the state is alien indeed. This is the case in liberal intellectual circles within China, as it is in the aftermath of the “French” poststructuralist theory explosion. But it is just such an understanding of the state—as something that any substantively democratic and social justice advocate cannot *not* want—that is at stake in Wang Zheng’s work as well as within the CNL more broadly. At stake too is the understanding of the radical heritage. With Wang and others, the radical past and Maoist discourse become something that is at the very least fully rational and positive—positive in some of their effects and in the sense of having a certain weight and seriousness, as something to be taken seriously and reexamined anew, not merely “debunked” or dismissed as a nightmare or fake.

The rationality and positivity of the revolutionary past is of course a fundamental theme of various CNL writings. This is one of the running subtexts of Wang Hui’s work, in his call for a “new understanding” of the revolution and “socialist legacy” that rethinks not only its failures and tragedies but also its “achievements” and its relevance today as an attempt to both

modernize and, like Mao's own sinified Marxism, simultaneously be *anti-modern* in the sense of being anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, and localized or sinified.¹⁸ But perhaps the most well-known and originally "scandalous" of these claims for the rationality of China's socialist revolution is Gan Yang's argument that Maoism or the red era is still one of China's big three traditions, one of its three sources of political culture and history. (This is in addition to Confucianism and May Fourth enlightenment, where the latter is also connected economically to the reform/market era.) This is different than a mere national-patriotic reference to Mao as founding father, Great Man, and so on. Gan defines this Maoist legacy as "a striving for equality and justice" that flows out of the previous thousands of years of Chinese civilization and is not only an ethic but also a praxis or political and economic strategy.¹⁹ This practical dimension is crucial because it is substantial and a riskier, if still necessarily abstract, defense of the actual politics and practice of Chinese socialism under Mao. Part of that Maoist legacy was of course the critique of markets and capitalism and the development of cooperative economics and national self-reliance, in part through state-owned enterprises. The political economist Han Deqiang often signifies this past in his critiques of globalization and neoliberalism within China and the dominance of neo-classical theory within the field. He is also capable of taking a depoliticized, even empty patriotic symbol like China's manned spacecraft of 2003 and using it as an argument for the success of a planned economy and state/public ownership in meeting the needs of the common people, as opposed to those who benefit from the WTO and foreign direct investment (FDI).²⁰ Similarly, following the SARS crisis, Wang Shaoguang argued for China's past, proud legacy of people's health (one of the Mao era's most noted achievements) to be returned to. He argues further that this is already under way in a national, on-the-ground *countermovement* away from thirty years of an allegedly self-regulating free market in medical care.²¹ This too is a Marxian/Polanyian argument that is of a piece with past leftist discourse in China against liberal/neoclassical economics and the myth of the self-regulating market.

A still stronger economic example of returns to Maoist economic practice and discourse can be found in the dogged existence and success of Nanjiecun village in southern Henan. Nanjiecun is famous/infamous for being the most "Maoist," or more accurately, neo-Maoist collective and space left in China, with a strong "iron rice bowl" of welfare benefits, free housing, free food coupons, and so on in addition to use of avowedly revolutionary and "serve-the-people" slogans, statues, and public culture. Its center square contains large paintings not just of Marx, Engels, and Mao but even Lenin and Stalin. Although it does employ migrant workers, the wage and benefit differences between them and regular worker-residents are small, and quite unheard of for the other millions of migrant (and regular) laborers in the country.²² The village recollectivized of its own accord after it was forced to disband in the

mid-1980s, and by the mid-1990s it became an object of national attention, including an academic study published by Tsinghua professor Cui Zhiyuan as well as Deng Yingtao and Miao Zhuang.²³ Cui is perhaps most famous for his initial theorizations of “liberal socialism” and his call for a second, socialistic “liberation of thought” following the high tide of free market liberalism and occidentalism in the 1980s. The book on Nanjiecun is less about political theory than hard-core economic analysis. A history of the village is offered, including its propaganda efforts and ideological struggles aimed at “destroying the private and constructing the public”—a concerted effort launched against the reform dogma from above but also directly in line with Cultural Revolution—era politics and ideology. “Fight self, combat revisionism” would be a comparable older slogan.

But the heart of the study is an analysis of how Nanjiecun has overcome one of the great obstacles of a cooperative economy—the free-rider problem, or how in a collective economy “loafers” get the same benefits as hard workers. This is also the famous incentive problem supposedly endemic to state socialism (as opposed to the profit-motive/greed/self-interest problem of a liberal market system). Not surprisingly, the antidote turns out to be the cultivation of nonprofit/immaterial incentives: instilling an ethic of teamwork, common will, and cooperation (including whole-team “punishments” for failing to complete a task). Collective success also depends on having very capable team leaders and cadres within the village who can create and sustain the appropriate culture and adapt and innovate while also working with regular capital and FDI from Japan and other places. What we have then are the leadership and culture problems that Maoism was always and appropriately obsessed with. Indeed, it is the lack of such leadership, the lack of continuity with and experience of Mao-era production within the party and populace, that makes the Nanjiecun experiment so difficult to reproduce across China. Students of Maoism will recognize these problems of incentive and leadership and can see them discussed in numerous texts from the Mao years, such as the famous “Shanghai textbook” dating from the late Cultural Revolution, originally entitled *Fundamentals of Political Economy*.²⁴ What is interesting to me here is precisely this continuity. The tone of the rhetoric and analysis is of course quite different (the Maoist text being radically impassioned and polemical about capitalist roaders and new eras of human history; the latter volume by Cui et al. being more properly academic). But these are classic, perennial problems of both theoretical and real-world analysis in China. The rationality and even the possibility and existence of planned, cooperative economy is right there on the table as a matter of debate and investigation. It can all be, and in these cases is, taken seriously. Nanjiecun is thus *not* a throwback or nostalgic hangover but an actually existing part of China, just as the older discourse of cooperative agriculture, people’s welfare and health, the selfishness of the private, and so on are parts of

Chinese political culture. They are also frequently at odds with both liberalism and the party as well as, still more consistently, at odds with Western media accounts of Chinese politics. Maoist economic strategy, as well as its historical record prior to the last thirty years of reform, are seen very differently within the PRC and among the CNL writers in particular. This generally positive perspective is also increasingly shared by a range of economics scholars outside of China, from Chris Bramall's work on Maoist planning to more conservative/conventional economics scholars like Y. Y. Kueh.²⁵ This counters the dominant, highly negative, Western and liberal knowledge of the Chinese economy during the Mao period.²⁶ Far from being a failure, and with all due allowances for a more mixed rural record, the Mao-era economy was remarkably successful in industrial and more broadly developmental and "human capital" terms; much of the post-Mao "miracle" is unthinkable without it.

Another aspect of Maoist/revolutionary discourse sticks out like a sore thumb in the current climate and agitates many observers: the friend/enemy understanding of domestic and geopolitics that subtended revolutionary Chinese discourse for much of the last century. This still exists in modified form even within some of the academic work of the CNL, and more broadly in Chinese society since the 1990s. It is a strongly residual, if not resurgent aspect of political culture today and part of what makes Chinese politics so compelling. Let's recall the relevant definition of politics via Carl Schmitt, for whom the friend/enemy distinction is constitutive of the political as such. The essential belief—like gender neutrality, institutionalized or hard-wired into the PRC—is that this basic either/or, friend/enemy distinction is a foundational political binarism that lies at the heart of the Chinese Revolution. From Mao's early texts to the responses to the Guomindang's annihilation campaigns to the later heat of the Cold War, the revolution understood politics as a politics of commitment that turned upon Mao Zedong's early question from 1926, one shared exactly by Schmitt: "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution."²⁷ This question then guided the postliberation era until the economic reform of the 1980s. Before that high tide of depoliticization, the friend/enemy distinction was mapped onto the class question (worker/capitalist, revolutionary/revisionist). Class became extraeconomic and turned on social factors, family backgrounds, ideological leanings, and subjective passions. This was a very reductive division; it was also an enormously productive, affective one. As Dutton notes, "the new Maoist revolutionary state was little more than a condensation of the friend/enemy distinction as it was applied both to the question of government and to the onto-political question of life."²⁸ It produced a uniquely Maoist form of governmentality and a China that was "a state of commitment politics lived on the knife-edge of a binary

division. It produced a life both extremely dangerous but also utterly life-affirming. It gave purpose to one's existence and offered a sense of belonging that would fill one's soul."²⁹

For our purposes, the key aspect of the friend/enemy template relates to how it took the form of both a binary class struggle and the famous/infamous "two-line struggle" over political orientation and ideology. While those "lines" could and did overlap among constituencies, they were always dyadic and intense or, to use the typical liberal coding of radical political culture, line struggle and the leftist position within it were always "extreme" (e.g., revolutionary/revisionist, communist/capitalist, and so on). The rejection of markets and free enterprise was another key Maoist or leftist plank, but so were the politics of anti-imperialism. This also, in turn, clearly still fuels nationalism in China, from state-level propaganda (which must avoid being too critical of Western/global capital and "opening up") to what Zhang Xudong has called the great variety of both official and unofficial nationalisms that have prevailed in China since the later 1990s.³⁰

The imperialist/anti-imperialist dyad also however lives on in another substantial way: the general insistence on modern Chinese or PRC "difference" from at least some major, if not most Western knowledge templates or theories about politics, history, and development. There is currently a good deal of debate about and questioning of Chinese alternatives and "the" China model of development, political legitimacy, international relations, social progress, and so on. These are sweeping questions and can take a number of forms and political orientations. Perhaps because of the dyadic and intensely political form of the inquiry—Chinese versus universal history and experience—it can provoke knee-jerk reactions of various types, not least from traditional liberal and traditional Marxist thought.³¹ But there is something deep here and analogous to the postcolonial critiques of universal historiography launched first by the early subaltern studies group of Indian historians and later by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe*. The question is not one of an exportable Chinese model but, as invoked above, one of alternative modernity in the Maoist or Chinese revolutionary sense: a history of modernization that refused capitalism and imperialism (because China was dominated by both) and that not only sought revolution and sinification but refused the pax Americana and Soviet-style Stalinism. So, too, its past Marxism stands in sharp contrast to the more "bourgeois" socialism of, say, post-liberation Nehruvian India. This all challenges the Cold War coding of the PRC as a larger and worse form of Stalinism and/or oriental despotism or yet another failed attempt at modernization in the former third world. It further assumes that the revolutionary attempt was profoundly rational and deliberate and not "merely" egalitarian and utopian in the pejorative sense—ultimately a failure in its radical Maoist mode, but an inspired and noble failure that remains an important part of Chinese political culture.

Wang Hui has pursued this epistemological question (about China's difference) still more broadly, going back two millennia and up to the present in his multivolume study *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. We lack the space to survey this adequately. But as Zhang Yongle notes, what is crucial and consistent in Wang's project is his search for alternative intellectual sources and historical traditions for Chinese modernity and Chinese socialism in the present.³² Wang is trying to map this rise and in so doing outflank and counter two powerful ideological and discursive opponents. The first is neoliberalism and the influential work of Friedrich von Hayek—adopted wholesale by many liberal and conservative thinkers in China for its antistate and anticommunist, libertarian armor. This is of course another way the Cold War lives on: through Hayek's self-professed war against planning and socialism, which he coded as the product of a primitive mentality that misunderstood science and the spontaneous order of the market society.³³ Hayek was also baldly universalist in an almost prephilosophical way, and part of the larger force that Wang is trying to circumvent: Eurocentrism, and the ways that China has been written in world history. As Ban Wang notes, of particular importance are Wang Hui's attempts to move us beyond thinking in terms of the binary—also a hierarchy—between empire and nation-state.³⁴ For my purposes here, what is crucial is Wang's critique of the "China responds to the West" model whereby China can only adopt, albeit with difficulty and ineffectively to date, the forms and trappings of the modern nation-state that—so the theory goes—originated in the advanced West.³⁵ (A purely indigenous or Chinese-exceptionalist approach is also ruled out.) Perhaps the most controversial plank within this anti-Eurocentric historiography is Wang Hui's argument, developed more fully now in a later volume, that Western fascination with Tibet and its independence as a free and "normal" nation-state is a product of orientalism, British colonialism, and especially Cold War politics.³⁶ The complex suzerain and tributary relations of the past relationship between Tibet and China, as between and among other states and empires within inter-Asian history, are worth recovering, as are Zhou Enlai's original plan for relative but real local autonomy for Tibet and other "national minority" areas. This is not because the final Qing boundaries must be kept on principle, nor even because colonial discourse resolutely sets up China as the inferior, infantilized subject that must learn the correct ways and models. The point rather is that the modern nation-state, especially in its Western-developmental form, is precisely the problem and will make, and has only made, things worse (this includes the PRC state, especially in its post-Mao mode).

Thus, even these difficult and dense scholarly questions about China in/and world history bear the imprint of the imperialist/anti-imperialist dyad within Maoist or Chinese revolutionary discourse. Wang's and others' efforts to insist in their scholarly work on China's own complex histories and differ-

ences from Western universal templates does not, then, stem from the bogeys of nationalism or cultural chauvinism. It is an intellectual commitment with no doubt many origins, but part of it is also the past but still present and residual radical discourse that took the epistemological critique of imperialism and Western normativity seriously.

But we need also to move beyond the cool and measured tones of Wang Hui's work. Also crucial is the question of intensity, affect, and "extremity" that still stems from this discursive formation. Perhaps the most remarkable part for anyone familiar with Chinese and other radical politics and writing is how much it bothers typical liberal voices. The literature professor and public intellectual Han Yuhai, for example, has been referred to by Geremie Barmé as "splenetic" and "extremist" for expressing sharp criticisms of liberalism and market fetishism within China and for arguing that Chinese history, including the party purges of the 1950s, be rewritten from a leftist perspective.³⁷ Here is Han in one such instance: "liberalism has enjoyed ascendancy because it proffers a theoretical framework that allows right-wing politics to overcome its legitimacy crisis" (cited in Barmé 304). Han is here objecting to professed liberal commitments to the market and social stability in the name of continued economic growth; in one type of liberal, modernizationist argument—shared by the discourse of sinological orientalism, as noted above—this will eventually lead to societal transformation and democratization. Free the market and the mind, and the polity will follow. Han indeed sees this type of liberalism as an apologia for the status quo and, as Barmé notes, argues further that this only entrenches the elite and discourages political participation. And yet it is hard to say what is "extreme" about this, as Barmé also suggests.

In another instance of Han's alleged "virulence," he writes: "On the path to slavery, the liberalisation of capital reinforces the privileges of the class that is already privileged, allowing slavery to grow and not democracy."³⁸ This is only virulent if one has never been exposed to Marxist or other anticapitalist literature. I would submit that the liberal reaction to such a critique of markets and class domination in China—for Han, even in the name of mass democracy—is the most telling here. This political position is "Maoist" in some sense, particularly in the Chinese context and in the passion expressed in diction like "slavery" and in equating liberalism to the "right wing." But it could be as easily placed on a continuum that includes Lu Xun, the Frankfurt School, Rousseau, and so on. What has shifted, in other words, is the liberal/Western/global political spectrum and intellectual culture, certainly to the right but also toward depoliticization. The CNL has resisted this by holding on to a Marxian politics of commitment and to core socialist values like socioeconomic equality, as well as to an intense, dyadic understanding of politics and geopolitics. Although "merely" academics/in-

tellecuals and sometimes disparaged as nationalists, agents of the party-state, and so on, they are in fact far more political than most of their critics and far more involved in the politics of discourse.

REPOLITICIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Depoliticization is the key issue here, and it bears an intimate relationship with the eclipse of Maoist discourse as a political and intellectual force in China and elsewhere. To be sure, this is also in part the result of the Cultural Revolution itself, or rather the failure of the old left and Maoists to institutionalize their gains in mass democracy and egalitarianism.³⁹ Nonetheless, the fact that Chinese Maoism is so demonized outside China and to a lesser, though still large extent among Chinese liberals and most officials does not reflect the truth of the era having been discovered and revealed. What it reflects is a historical and political shift, including within the discourse available to people, which in part produces and sets limits to what they are able to think and how they orient themselves to social reality. As Gao, Wang Zheng, and others have argued, this shift also represents the problem of elite historiography: the victory of one class or group of victims of the Cultural Revolution—most notably the Deng-era intellectuals and officials—over and against those who either benefited from the Maoist egalitarianism or simply do not fit the anti-Maoist or liberal narratives. This shift in history and discourse includes de-Maoification and the delegitimation of the revolution and everything after the “New Democracy” Mao era, especially the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁰

But for that hegemonic struggle over discourse to succeed required as well the rise—the return with a vengeance—of liberalism and occidentalism as well as what I have termed sinological orientalism, the new regime of knowledge/power about China as described at the beginning of this essay. These are all global forces having to do with the production of knowledge and discourse on a worldwide scale. The key period, particularly the late 1970s and 1980s, can be characterized by the “reform and opening up” within China but also—and crucially—by what until fairly recently was called “the end of history” after the fall of the Soviet empire and historical communism. Rumors of that “end” turn out to have been greatly exaggerated, and may never have had much purchase on the PRC. What is more, the reactivation, as I have termed it, of Maoist discourse and the Chinese leftist perspective may dispel that rumor once and for all in China and the world.

The connection to liberalism is worth pausing on here. David Harvey’s important work on the political economy and class politics of neoliberalism, as a type of massive value transfer to the super-rich at the expense of Keyne-

sianism's middle and working classes, is certainly a major part of the story of the last three decades.⁴¹ He wisely and carefully connects this to the Dengist 1980s and 1990s. But it is also liberal discourse or thought that has been resurgent and at the heart of depoliticization in China and elsewhere. This has yet to be adequately explored within work on neoliberalism by Harvey or others. In practice, liberalism and democracy are actually two separate and arguably opposed entities. For Schmitt, liberalism neutralizes the political, i.e., those inherently agonistic and binary dynamics of political and public life. It seeks to replace politics—and democratic politics in particular—with ethics and the smooth, autonomous running of the economy. Promulgating legal or merely formal equality as well as (atomized) individualism; transforming enemies into debating adversaries or economic competitors; reducing the political sphere to that of economics (“management” or the process of “freeing markets”) and the juridical or the ethical: this is how liberalism depoliticizes.⁴²

Or we might better say: this is how liberalism offers a politicized valorization of depoliticization. It would not be difficult to connect this type of logic to the cultural/occidental fever of the 1980s' *He Shang* documentary series or to the contemporary “human rights” and “democracy” document, Charter 08. These can also form two convenient bookends for the rise and not the fall, but perhaps more accurately the desperate rearticulation of Chinese-located liberalism. Part of both phenomena has been a consistent anti-Maoist and anticommunist position that also argues for the removal of the state from the economy: an end to state-owned enterprises (the former bastions of the iron rice bowl and of the best jobs in China for the working class) and to party/state involvement in favor of the market and entrepreneurs, individual consumers, and so on.⁴³ *He Shang* pathologizes peasants (and by implication Mao) as well as old or “yellow” China (virtually all of its traditions) for exhibiting a feudal mentality and cultural backwardness.⁴⁴ The charter draws specifically on neoclassical economic ideology and argues emphatically for privatization of land and establishing and protecting the natural right to private property. Both texts also betray the strong presence of China experts and/or Western sinology. *He Shang* draws on, among other things, retrograde notions of the “Asiatic mode of production” and “oriental despotism.” It combines the hoariest, old-fashioned orientalism (old China's essential, negative difference) with what I described earlier as the newer, sinological and modernizationist one: it is becoming normal and the same due to its “blue,” open, entrepreneurial, “capitalist,” or free-market zones like the formerly colonized Shanghai. The charter simply assumes all this as a backdrop about the Old China and its still present despotism. It insists on formal equality, rule of law (by which it means liberal capitalist law), the category of the individual, and so on; and above all else it insists on the universality of these “freedoms.” China is not the same as the U.S./West, but it should be. The

charter's principal author, Liu Xiaobo, has also notoriously insisted that the mainland lacks enough Western colonization and really could use a three-hundred-year period of that to catch up to Hong Kong.⁴⁵

Liu has a right to his views, as do all of China's intellectuals. My point is that these two influential and emblematic texts of Chinese liberalism also show the influence of orientalist thinking about China, both in the deep past and in the Maoist or post-Mao present: the pressures of universalism, the coding of China as despotic, the faith in becoming normal, becoming free through markets and privatization; the nightmare or enormous void of the revolution. What we have seen, as if in direct response, is a return to and resignification of Maoist or leftist Chinese discourse. It does not always take on such orientalist knowledge directly and frame it as such (with the exception of Wang Hui in the above). It more often proceeds on its own terrain and conducts its own investigations into the Chinese economy, the political intellectual culture, and so on, including its skirmishes with liberal and occidental discourse within China. But it is nonetheless writing back, against not only "reform"-based iniquities but also the Western/global/sinological coding. It is too soon to tell if such a reactivation of critique and scholarship will change the combined and uneven development and distribution of knowledge in the world. But it is already clear that not only goods are being produced within China but also new and reactivated knowledges.

NOTES

1. See *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

2. For examples of this type of "ultra" and paternalistic response, see Lance Carter, "A Chinese Alternative? Interpreting the Chinese New Left Politically," *Insurgent Notes* 1, no. 1 (2010), <http://insurgentnotes.com/past-issues/issue-1/>; and Au-Loong Yu, "How Socialist Is the Chinese Party State?" *New Politics* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2011), <http://newpol.org/node/471> (accessed July 21, 2011).

3. See Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, trans. Theodore Hutners and Rebecca Karl (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

4. I lack the space to explore this further but want to claim that the influence of "Western" theory in this regard, both right and left, is usually overstated. Both new leftist and occidentalist/liberal discourse are local and global, though I find the former to be more immersed in Chinese history and particularities. This may or may not make the CNL more authentic—it probably does, but it is more useful regardless.

5. See <http://www.wyzxss.com> (accessed September 28, 2011). The Web site, though not the bookstore, has at times been shut down by Chinese Internet authorities because it does on occasion publish sensitive materials and strong critiques of the post-Mao party.

6. See Richard Johnson for this last phrase, the point of which is the notion of knowledge as everyday and practical but also critical and challenging, directed toward working-class or otherwise egalitarian ends. "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848," in *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 75–102.

7. In this section I am rehearsing in brief my central thesis in *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (Routledge, 2011). Orientalism, in my view, should be understood as a question of knowledge production and not simply bias, semiotic othering, and whatnot. But the postcolonial question more broadly is a burgeoning one for East Asian studies. For other approaches and pre-PRC China, see Adrian Chan, *Orientalism in Sinology* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Academica Press, 2009); James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003); and Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

8. See Hall, at his most Gramscian: "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

9. See Frank Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China before Mao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

10. For a range of critical responses to this best-seller, see Gregor Benton and Lin Chun, *Was Mao Really a Monster?: The Academic Response to Chang and Halliday's Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

11. Andrew Nathan, "Epilogue," in *Children of the Dragon: The Story of Tiananmen Square*, ed. Andrew Nathan, Orville Schell, and Human Rights in China (New York: Collier Books, 1990), 215.

12. The "unworthy" point belongs to Nathan, "Epilogue," and the latter point about China's backwardness to Edward Freidman, "The Flaws and Failures of Mao Zedong's Communist Fundamentalism," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 18 (July 1987): 147-154.

13. See for example John Garnault, "Show Them the Money, Old China," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/show-them-the-money-old-china-20110325-1ca3f.html>.

14. "Maoist Discourse and a Critique of Present Assessments of the Cultural Revolution," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 26, no. 3 (1994): 13-31.

15. See Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, Vol. III., *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 2000), 256.

16. Wang Zheng, "Call Me Qingnian But Not Funu: A Maoist Youth in Retrospect," in *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*, ed. Zhong Xueping, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 35.

17. Wang Zheng, "Call Me Qingnian," 52.

18. See Wang's *China's New Order*, 110. See too the discussion of Wang in Gloria Davies, *Worrying About China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

19. Gan's essay has been republished in various forms but can be found partly translated into English as "The Grand Three Traditions in the New Era" in Mark Leonard, *What Does China Think?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008). See as well the brief discussions of Gan's position in Timothy Cheek, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and by Daniel Bell in *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008). Gan's original version was published in *Dushu* (2007): 1-6.

20. See Han, "How to Make Shenzhou No. 5 an Engine for National Prosperity and Security," <http://chinastudygroup.net/2003/12/how-to-make-shenshou-no-5-an-engine-for-national-prosperity-and-security/> (accessed September 5, 2011) and "The Social Costs of Neoliberalism in China: Interview with Stephen Phillion," *Dollars and Sense* (July/August 2007): 22-34.

21. See his "China's Double-Movement in Health Care," in *Morbid Symptoms: Health Under Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009).

22. There are about twice as many migrant workers as resident workers. The former are eligible to apply to become official residents and to change their *hukou*/residency permit, but this can take years. On a research trip in 2007 I was told it took five. It is easy to tear down or to romanticize Nanjiecun, but its significance will always lie in the middle. True, its dominant Maoist message in propaganda and so forth is "serve the people." Perhaps this is insufficiently

radical for some observers, but the place is composed of 12,000 or more “actually existing” residents who are much better off than most of their working-class compatriots across the country.

23. Zhiyuan Cui, Deng Yingtao, and Miao Zhuang, *Nanjie Village* (Beijing: Modern China Press, 1996). See also Cui’s “Liberal Socialism and the Future of China: A Petty Bourgeoisie Manifesto,” in *The Chinese Model of Modern Development*, ed. Tian Yu Cao (New York: Routledge, 2005).

24. This has been published in English as *Maoist Economics and the Revolutionary Road to Communism*, ed. Raymond Lotta (Chicago: Banner Press, 1994).

25. See Bramall, *In Praise of Maoist Economic Planning: Living Standards and Economic Development in Sichuan Since 1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and Kueh, *China’s New Industrialization Strategy: Was Chairman Mao Really Necessary?* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2008).

26. On the Chinese economy, see also see Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1986); Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1880s to 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and the sources discussed in Gao, *The Battle for China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008). Current economic work on this period is closer to what was said by the U.S. government and World Bank toward the end of the Mao period. See U.S. Congress, *The Chinese Economy Post-Mao: A Compendium of Papers*, Joint Economic Committee, 95th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978).

27. *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1, “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society.” Michael Dutton notes that this line expresses the “quintessence of politics”: “If you want to understand the concept of the political, turn to the first line of the first page of the first volume of Mao Zedong’s *Selected Works*,” *Policing Chinese Politics: A History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

28. “Passionately Governmental: Maoism and the Structured Intensities of Revolutionary Governmentality,” *Postcolonial Studies* 11, no. 1 (2008): 103.

29. Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics*, 313.

30. See this discussion in the first part of Zhang, *Postsocialism*. Nationalism has gotten a bad rap in recent academic studies, including within standard postcolonial studies, and not entirely without reason. But it varies greatly by context and remains too complex to dismiss as false consciousness.

31. In addition to Carter and Au, see Perry Anderson, “Sinomania,” *London Review of Books* 32, no. 2 (January 2010), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n02/perry-anderson/sinomania>.

32. Yongle Zhang, “The Future of the Past: On Wang Hui’s *Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*,” *New Left Review* 62 (2010): 47-83.

33. See the early *Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). But the evolutionary liberalism in his entire work is quite consistent.

34. Ban Wang, “Discovering Enlightenment in Chinese History: *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, by Wang Hui,” *boundary2* (Summer 2007): 217-238.

35. Perhaps the best critique of the supposedly “Western” and diffusionist form of nationalism belongs to Partha Chatterjee, in chapter 1 of *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

36. See *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

37. Barmé, “The Revolution of Resistance,” in *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, ed. Mark Selden and Elizabeth Perry, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 304-305. The Han Yuhai piece in question was published as “Zai ‘Ziyoushuoyi’ zitaide beihou,” *Tianya* (1998).

38. As cited in Chen Lichuan, para. 15 in the online edition, “The Debate between Liberalism and Neo-Leftism at the Turn of the Century,” *China Perspectives* 55 (2004), <http://china-perspectives.revues.org/417> (accessed August 21, 2010). Han’s piece, “Ziben dengyu ziyouhua ma?” (Does capital equal liberalization?), was published in *Kexue shibao*, January 3, 1999.

39. I owe this argument to Han Dongping in particular, through personal conversation and a draft of his ms. on rural discontent. Wang Hui’s argument in “Depoliticized Politics” is opposite, in *New Left Review* 41 (September 2006): 29-45.

40. By “de-Maoification” I mean institutional changes, from decollectivization and smashing the iron rice bowl to the reestablishment of the college exam system, party purges, rehabilitation of former “victims” of the Cultural Revolution, celebrating “Western” culture (movies, literature, Hayek), and so on. It is not merely “ideological.” Even today the space for research and publication on the Cultural Revolution, from the left or far right, is quite limited.

41. See his *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

42. See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, especially the appendix (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

43. The full text of the charter has been translated by China studies professor Perry Link and is available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/chinas-charter-08>, among many other places.

44. See in particular parts 4 and 6 of the series and screenplay by Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, *Deathsong of the River: A Reader's Guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang*, trans. Richard W. Bodman and Pin P. Wan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

45. For a detailed rehearsal of this aspect of Liu's thinking, as well as the politics of his Nobel Prize, see Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, “The ‘Right Dissident’: Liu Xiaobo and the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize,” *positions* 19, no. 2 (2011): 581-613.

Chapter Four

What Is Political Theater?: A Critique of Performance Studies

Ban Wang

The New Left arose in China in the 1990s as a critical force against social and economic consequences of China's embrace of global modernity. As a neoliberal agenda became the order of the day, left-leaning critics drew on resources from Marxism, Maoism, and the socialist legacy to critique a political economy that has increasingly aggravated the gap between rich and poor, the city and the countryside, and the power elites and the disadvantaged. While left critiques of political economy have had a strong platform and gained some ground during the recent global financial crisis, the critical voices in the realm of culture and art do not seem as penetrating and compelling. Increasingly absorbed into market mechanisms and sponsored by big capital, the philosophy and practice of art seem to be losing their political, pedagogical edge and becoming socially irrelevant.

One symptom of the depoliticization of art may be seen in the use of the concept of performance in understanding Chinese theater, and more importantly in assessing political efficacy in social movements that the left in the West and China envisions. Critics of contemporary Chinese culture have used the notions of performance and political theater to describe and analyze mass events and public protests. In the last two decades, inspired by the Tiananmen student movement in the spring of 1989, there has sprung up a large body of works addressing political unrest and demonstrations as performance and theater.¹ This approach to events and activism is in part indebted to the growing body of theoretical elaboration and textual analysis under the rubric of performance studies in American academia. In this essay I will first examine the political limits of performance studies. Then I will look into the performance-centered approach to the Tiananmen demonstration and China's

political movements in order to broach larger problems of individual agency and collective empowerment. My contention is that performance studies, preoccupied with the gestural body and obsessed with individuals' dissent against a supposedly monolithic government, overlooks vibrant sociohistorical contexts, the ongoing dynamics among individuals, society, and the state. One of the New Left tenets in China insists on a fluid, constant interaction among all three components as fuel for democratic politics. The performance as dissent and liberated libido, however, suppresses the collective politics of mobilization and change. Believing that the bodily is political, the performance view elides the political potential of social and mass movements. With a tunnel vision focused on self-performance for identity in a showy act, the larger social and historical context that informs mass or group activities tends to be obscured.

LIMITATIONS OF PERFORMANCE AS LEFT CRITIQUE

The performance-driven view about China can be traced back to theoretical roots in the West. Performance studies started in the heyday of political activism, which was part of New Left culture in the West. Performance politics has its own context and history, its emergent moment of political vibrancy and subsequent atrophy. Yet its recent use and popularity in many academic disciplines against a backdrop of shrinking political space is cause for concern. Turning political activity into mere colorful body movement and provocative gesticulation in the name of deconstruction and subversion leaves precious little that may work toward political agency and solidarity. What seems political on the surface takes the teeth out of genuine political activism.

The critical concept of performance and performance-related activities stemmed from the high moments of political activism, social movements, and protests in the 1960s in North America and Europe. In expressing discontent with the bureaucratic structure and technocratic rationality, and in protests against the expansive power of the military-industrial complex during the Cold War, left-leaning, socially engaged artists, writers, and activists discovered the transformative, revolutionary potential of performance. Performative activities broke out from the sanctified bourgeois preserve of theater and performing arts, expressing dissent and discontent in a wide array of political, progressive activities. The history of the New Left witnessed populist stirrings, street protests, consciousness-raising speech acts, demonstrations, mass entertainments, and reenactments of the folklore of marginalized people, forgotten rituals, and religious ceremonies. The focus on the moving and creative body, breaking away from the prescribed regimen in the social-

ized personality and disciplinary compartments, sported and projected a fluid, multidimensional subject. This free, multilayered subject was later regarded as a signature of postmodernism. The dismantling of the central consciousness went arm in arm with the revolt against the Enlightenment image of the Cartesian *cogito*, which was equated with bourgeois individualism, consumerism, conformism to the state machinery, social atrophy, and the bureaucratic rubber stamp.

The progressive, left moment in this vibrant notion of the performing body was not about hedonism and the self-fulfillment of the individual's needs and desires, but projected an impulse to recover a lost moral agent. Encapsulated in the Foucaultian "docile body," the individual is prey to the alienating technologies of domination and violence. The body is under the normalizing influence of the omnipresent power complex as well as the routinized consumerist lifestyle, yielding to a daily onslaught of images and imperatives. To enact a different performance in this administered uniformity is to search for ethical orientations by locating a space of action within the entrenched setting of prescribed behavior sanctioned by capitalist production and consumption. It is also to revolt against the standard bodily requirements dictated by the state ideological apparatus. In the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse's wildly popular book *Eros and Civilization* marked a theoretical summation of this somatic revolt. Marcuse portrayed a performance principle as conformist and one-dimensional, enmeshed in the network of administration and production. The body's performance is thus tied to the all-controlling reality principle. Marcuse projected a revamped, revolutionary principle of performance—of romantic creativity, political activism, and social freedom. And this would be based on the pleasure principle.²

Does the currently fashionable concept of performance live up to this rigorous demand of action and praxis in social movements? The answer has to resort to how the body relates to power. The current notion of the relation of performance to power, rather than articulating the possibility of empowerment of an autonomous subject, actually sinks the bodily agent into the hopelessly entrapped status of perpetual victimhood. Judith Butler, a "left" Foucaultian theorist, has done much to portray such a subject. Her analysis of the subject's vulnerability to language shows the corporeal and cognitive vulnerability in an all-pervasive network of discourse and power. Comparing J. L. Austin's view with that of Louis Althusser, Butler notes that illocutionary speech, the utterance that is at the same time acting on the addressee, is conditioned by the preexisting ritual form that exceeds or has already shaped the speaking subject. Her analysis thus echoes the ideological interpellation by the power apparatuses that Althusser dramatizes into a ritual theater. For Althusser, ideology is inscribed in and carried out by the body through a rule-bound performance. Adopting Pascal's expression, he says, "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe."³ For Butler, Althusser and

Austin privilege the sovereign power of language and discourse over the subject because the subject's utterance cannot be singular and creative; it only "invokes a formula . . . and this may be done with no or little reflection on the conventional character of what is being said. . . . The ritual dimension of convention implies that the moment of utterance is informed by the prior and, indeed, future moments that are occluded by the moment itself."⁴

In other words, the subject comes about through necessary dependence on the Other—external agency and social convention. There is no way, for Butler, "to protect against that primary vulnerability and susceptibility to the call of recognition that solicits existence, to that primary dependency on a language we never made in order to acquire tentative ontological status."⁵ Even the traumatic injury of the subject, inflicted by hateful speech, can hardly be warded off, because the articulation of pain affords some form of language-mediated existence. Thus the performative utterance seems to tend toward a possibility of agency and creativity, only to foreclose its radical autonomy and turn illusory, swallowed up by a more powerful network of prescribed meanings and imperatives. In his influential work that has inspired many to search for a richly productive and self-reliant subject, Michel de Certeau, a Sixties radical himself, entertained a similar view on the relationship of the performing body to state power. Although the Foucaultian grid of discipline is so extensive as to penetrate the body and consciousness, he notes, it is urgent to articulate how the subject resists subjugation. De Certeau looks to mundane bodily operations and practices, the memory-laden customs of old times, and small acts of deviation, guerrilla tactics in everyday life. These performances articulate a very limited measure of moral autonomy embodied by a mobile and flexible subject.⁶

In strategically deploying a grab bag of tactics and ruses, a subject somehow emerges. Subjugated to disciplinary power, it will rise up at a moment's notice. The new profile of the subject is a sovereign agent capable of self-creating "autogenesis," to which Butler draws attention.⁷ This inner-directed subject is savvy enough to set its own agenda, independently of conventional discourse and power, by picking and choosing whatever is available, from cultural memory or everyday customs, to maneuver and push for its own interests and survival. This familiar subject, we should recall, may be suspiciously close to the image of subjectivity articulated by rational choice theory, atomistic individualism, and the neoliberal vision of *homo economicus*. It actually amounts to a shopping mall enactment of the Cartesian subject called into question by current critical thinking but undergoing rehab in unsuspected quarters, not least in performance studies. Here this subject of self-redirected choice rears its head in many kinds of cultural politics based on liberal individualism. Politically, this subject is presented in a scenario of David against Goliath, in which the individual as a sovereign intentional being always confronts or bangs on the stone wall of a sovereign power

apparatus of the state. Contemporary politics becomes a perpetual war between state power and individuals' forever frustrated will to self-empowerment. Culture becomes an individual, bodily self-creation *ex nihilo*, which either comes under the sway of corporate, ideological imagery and the strong man's charisma or withdraws into the narcissistic closet of self-indulgence. In the rubble of public interests and in the absence of common concerns, culture is free-falling in the bottomless abyss of nihilism or being reinvented piecemeal from minute to forgotten minute, as an arbitrary positing of values—my values and my preferences, alien to others. The alternative seems to be the outburst of defiance, rebellion, protest, and demonstration. On the one hand there is a morally unassailable, unchangeable state power; on the other hand there are morally righteous revolts, resistance, and protests, complete with shrill yelling, MS mutilation, fundamentalism, nationalism, suicide, subversion, withdrawal, evasion, dropouts, or even extreme acts of terror. The more therapeutic tactic would be the “cultivate your own garden” kind of self-fashioning or “shape up your own body” kind of self-styling through yoga or small group healing and bonding.⁸

While she raises the question of the subject's vulnerability to the shaping power of language and social norms, Judith Butler also suggests a way out of this dilemma. To articulate the potential of the performative, one would need to offer an account not only of how the subject gets constituted through the calling of discourse and power but also of how it becomes capable of addressing others, not the Other. When a subject is addressing others as an equal participant in a dialogue, it is “neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is purely complicit with prior operations of power.”⁹ Rather than being constituted totally by the pre-given language, the subject defines itself, generates meaning, and puts forth a strategic identity by engaging in ongoing interaction and mutual understanding with others. If this dialogic mode engages the power apparatus, power is recast as a participant and interlocutor in conversation, not as a Bastille to knock down. Indeed, the democratic, representative state, if true to its principles, is reminded of the constitutional, democratic foundations whereon it is to be a performative partner in an ongoing, fluid interaction between state and society. The state is no longer a faceless, arbitrary complex but a speaker and listener in civic deliberation in the public sphere.

Rosy as this picture may be, the forgotten link between state and society, power and resistance, government and public, encapsulated in the notions of solidarity, citizenship, and participation, is more relevant than ever. Its lack is glaring in the contemporary political and cultural understanding of power and politics. This forgetfulness is partly due to the ideology of the end of history, in which the established power of the state or corporations is either all encompassing or self-regulatory through impersonal laws and due processes. There is simply no room for social groups to intervene and no space

for collectives to effect real change. Collective attempts at social change are narrative-based temporal actions that used to come under the name of history—history as conscious human activity in making change and shaping human destiny. History, on the end-of-history view, is cleansed of human action and struggle and becomes a self-running, techno-administrative process. In recalling a democratic notion of interactive performance, however, the asymmetrical relations between state power and individuals, between constitutive language and the unique self-creation of speech acts appear less constraining. The focus shifts from the irresolvable confrontation between a supposedly arbitrary power and the equally arbitrary individual will to a sharing of power by all citizens on the basis of discussion about public goods. Moving away from the lopsided relations of power that polarize and antagonize state, society, and community seems to create room, or for us critics a thinking space, for performative interaction among multiple participants of modern society and a possibility of engaging in a language of values, norms, justice—staples of democratic public life.

THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATION ON TIANANMEN: A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE?

As a principle for maintaining public life and democratic processes, performative communicative interaction between society and state may be too romantic to capture contemporary global realities. But as an inspirational principle rather than a descriptive language, it has a heuristic function in the analysis of the political efficacy of performative acts in mass movements. Political analysis of performance compels us to recover Hannah Arendt's insight into the inseparability of speech and action in the making of a political community. Her performative strain of political thought offers a corrective to the individualistic notion of performance. For Arendt, action and speech together make up a "web of human relationships" that is the most vital dimension of the human community. In building and maintaining communities, speech simultaneously acts and generates meaning. Speech is the crucial way humans identify themselves as actors on the political stage, announcing what they do, have done, and intend to do. Speech is also the public arena in which people answer, respond, and measure up to what happens and what others do in the polity and society. Speech and action address the phenomenal world, an objective referent, but the to-and-fro game of deeds and words continues to disclose a flexible and unique human "who," the moral agent, rather a "what," the reified conventional role. In speech and

action, intersubjective resonance is constantly enacted, by which meaning is revealed and tensions are resolved or intensified. It is in the making of this common, public world—the polis—that humans are authentically political.¹⁰

Although Arendt's theory is by no means of the left tradition, her idea of democratic, interactive politics resonates with the New Left attempt to revitalize a politics of mobilization. The frequent rallies and street protests in the age of globalization may be hailed as a sign of pressing concern about the crises of the public world, but they also imply the breakdown of the political process, the blocking of communication between social interest groups and the state, the shutdown of public debate, and the curtailing of civic liberties. These signal the dysfunction of civil society and the autocratic concentration of corporate power in alliance with the state. In the following I will remark on a prominent form of street performance in China in terms of political theater. I contend that without a notion of communicative interaction between society and state, the potential political power of mass demonstration will be reduced to mere shows and spectacle.

Scholars in Chinese studies have used the idea of political theater as a prism to view political and social change in China. In the last decade or so, the Tiananmen democracy movement has inspired a number of works on political unrest and demonstration as performative political theater.¹¹ Theater and politics in China have been deeply intertwined since ancient times, but with modern developments in political culture, their relationship has been significantly reconfigured. A number of aspects of the evolution of political theater in modern China raise the question of the political efficacy of performance.

Since the late 1980s, activities of political theater have been associated with a renewed awareness of civil society and the public sphere through the examples of Eastern European countries after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Inspired by these democratic experiments and Habermas's theory of the bourgeois public sphere, public discourse in China carried on a lively debate among grassroots associational groups and institutions resembling civil society in the West. Readings of popular protest and activism closely parallel an emergent historiography that attempts to recover a Chinese tradition of civil society. This interest in a civil, open society independent of state power may signal a new direction of political change in China. Motivated by market forces and a growing awareness of individual freedom and rights, Chinese society is said to have an emergent, progressive middle class independent of the party-state and cut loose from the dominant ideology. In the past, Chinese civil associations cohered more on spontaneous, communal, economic, civic, and regional foundations. In the age of globalization, the performative dimension of political theater in street demonstration is understood as a sign of the vital emergence of civil society and interpreted in terms of its critical and advisory stance in relation to the state.

The student movement in the spring of 1989 has also been understood along the lines of the public sphere and civil society. For two and a half months, Chinese students in Beijing engaged in a mass demonstration against government corruption and acute social problems, demanding a guarantee of political freedom. Numerous dramatic and performative features marked this event as grand theater. Broadcast live by multinational media, the protests were thrust into the spotlight and watched by viewers around the world. The image of the confrontation between a lonely demonstrator and a row of advancing tanks went down in the history of the twentieth century as a flash point. The erection of a Chinese Goddess of Democracy statue seemed to affirm for many the advent of American-style democracy. Speech making and meetings were accompanied by libido-suffused carnivals and dances, and marriage ceremonies on Tiananmen Square were coupled with subsequent press interviews, linking everyday pleasures to weighty public issues. The crackdown abruptly ended the demonstration.

The event's dazzling dramatic features and media exposure prompted observers to shift from hard politics to a culturalist, performative account. They have paid much attention to "the language, symbolism, and ritual of both resistance and repression."¹² Treating the event as a recycling of traditional ritual, some critics interpret the students' acts as a repetition of the ancient remonstrance ritual and as political consultation in the sense of restored behavior. The long tradition of remonstrance in the Confucian political order allowed the educated official-scholars to criticize and give advice regarding the governance of the imperial state. This reading is applied to an incident in Tiananmen, when three student representatives attempted to present a petition. In line with the official ritual, they demanded an explanation for the ouster of the previous premier, Zhao Ziyang, a reform-minded top official, by requesting a meeting with the leaders. Denied entrance to the Great Hall of the People, they fell to their knees and started to kowtow. This performance apparently reenacted a traditional behavior pattern and appeared offensive to the sensibility of Western observers. Affronted by this submissive act, Perry Link sees it as void of political impact, commenting on the students' performance as "a Beijing Opera Stage" suffused with the "morally charged Beijing Opera sense." This "obsequious demeanor" only means two things: "We have shown up" and "We have presented ourselves in this drama."¹³

In the extant literature on this topic, the Tiananmen demonstration had been variously interpreted as a power struggle within the ruling elite, as a quest for American-style democracy, and as anarchistic chaos reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴ The analysis of the performative certainly provides a much more interesting and upbeat account, but due to its focus on the individual's body and gestures, this perspective pays attention again and again to the restored behavior, the ritualized protocol of protest actions,

harking back to the premodern Chinese tradition. Through the lens of the performative, critics reconstructed an aesthetic theater that floats apart from actual public protestations about the urgent issues of the day. Political theater is considered as a symbolic, theatrical act that aims only to move a specific audience and for media effect.

Portraying this incident in a dramatic, ritualistic light, as a repetition of an established convention, may obscure the critical potential in the broader interaction among students, social groups, and the state. Esherick and Wasserstrom give a more nuanced picture of this ritualized political theater, but do not go beyond the strictly aesthetic terms that cast the demonstration as a performance drained of real political potency.¹⁵ From the perspective of civil disobedience, they note that political theater emerged repeatedly in student protests and street demonstrations in modern Chinese history. This was due to the lack of viable infrastructure of civil society providing institutionalized space for dissent and dialogue between the populace and the government. Esherick and Wasserstrom identify a tradition of realistic theater in early republican China as a forerunner of the recent occurrences—the beginning of a paradigm that has shaped political theater in China. The first public gatherings in the early modern time occurred in urban spaces and locations designed for both public events and opera-theater performances. Guild halls, temples, and auditoriums were places for both theatrical performance and social drama, an extension of theater into public life. Theatrical performance went hand in hand with the emergence of civic sectors, business communities and spontaneous associations, staging critiques and protests against imperial and state oppression. In the early era of imperialist invasion, colonialism, and capital expansion, students and citizens organized demonstrations against foreign-financed railways and boycotted U.S. goods because of the U.S. restriction on Chinese immigration. They wrote big-character posters, made speeches on street corners, and carried out large-scale demonstrations. These kinds of civil activities and protests also harked back to a different version of assertive social organizations that revitalized the traditional community. As Rankin and Rowe have shown, a strong civil society grew out of premodern networks of politically ambitious landed gentry, local municipalities, and merchant guilds as well as religious and charitable associations. These groups worked to set agendas for local political affairs. The mixture of modern and traditional elements suggests that the native past as well as Western culture provided rich sources for the configuration of a workable civil society.¹⁶

In their reading of the Tiananmen demonstration, however, Esherick and Wasserstrom highlight its pure performative dimension rather than looking into substantive communication and political gains. They rightly define political theater as one that “expresses beliefs about the proper distribution and disposition of power” (43). But to be an effective communicative action, a

demonstration cannot simply remain in expressive and aesthetic modes. Performance in these terms may be appropriate in the context of a centralized state power steeped in ritual and ceremony. In such a centralized state, a performance, no matter how political in intention, is unable to make a real difference in an orchestrated communication between the rival parties. But the 1989 student demonstration was part of a wider social movement driven by new democratic and economic aspirations. In its broad social mobilization, it was far from a planned event and its development far from ritualized. It was already plugged into a global and domestic context in which multiple social groups, economic interests, and rivalries inside and outside the state were coming onto the political stage for confrontation and deliberation. So assuming a repetitive *mise-en-scène* of the old ritualized ceremony obscures the democratic demands for social justice, equality, and the redistribution of economic resources: demands that cut across multilayered sectors of Chinese society. The performance view overlooks the political desire and effectiveness of demonstrators and protesters.

My point is that the use of performance terms in the interpretation of such a complex event is merely aesthetic and hence apolitical. It is true that this interpretation acknowledges political theater as a disruptive and creative act that departs from the inherited repertoire of rituals and set patterns. The performative act of protest is contrasted with the static, prescriptive status of the ancient political ritual. Following Clifford Geertz's work, Esherick and Wasserstrom define rituals as "traditionally prescribed cultural performances that serve as models *of* and models *for* what people believe." The Confucian *li*, a body of moral rules and aesthetically formalized performance of music and ceremony, serves to sustain and legitimate the existing structure of power relations, "bringing order to a community, affirming the distinctions and bonds connecting its individual members, and generally giving people a shared sense of how to behave correctly in a wide range of circumstances" (41-42).

By contrast, the modern political theater of civic association gives a volatile play to the inherited ritual structure. It temporarily overturns the rigid model of belief and moves toward a dynamic performance of ritual. Since traditional rituals only offer limited space for novelty and creativity, a performance by artists or political innovators will temporally undermine the prescribed process. In the dichotomy between doing and things done in Elin Diamond's elegant formulation,¹⁷ between present and past, political theater seems to focus on the task at present (42).

In this performance things done are left behind as *passé*. The past, embodied in cultural memory and accumulated social contexts, can be transcended, almost by sheer will power, by the performer. The lead of faith in performing a ritualized gesture loses its power if we ask, What is its political goal? In performative analysis, we move from the politically integral force of ritual to

a subversive or diffuse counterhegemonic force of protest. This counterforce, however, is not derived from anything like an informed understanding of sociopolitical circumstances and driven by the desire to change them, but originates in an intentional and subjunctive theatricality, further derived from a sheer subjective will to power and to publicity. A genuine political theater encompasses performance as well as substance, both rhetoric and serious engagement with real issues of public concern. A genuine democratic campaign is both political theater and real public conversation. While Esherick and Wasserstrom acknowledge this, the democratic dimension of political theater seems to belong to a liberal democracy like the United States and to have been lacking in Tiananmen Square. The theatricality there fell short of democratic standards and was no more than aesthetic theater—the sheer make-believe of staged drama—because it was cut off from the real business of governance, the forging of social consensus, and social change. Theatricality became another name for performance, but a kind geared solely toward making an emotional appeal for publicity to the audience. “Language and symbols are used not primarily to convey truths but to produce effects” (43). Remarking on a spectrum of political activities—hunger strike, gestures of suicide, and the erecting of the liberty statue—the critics find that the protests’ agency derived “almost exclusively from their potency as performances that could symbolically undermine the regime’s legitimacy and move members of larger and economically more vital classes to action” (36).

The problematic point here is the separation of performative acts from any consideration of truth value. It presumes that the symbolic import of protestations makes more sense in political theater as mere theater. The consideration of truth value regarding the current political and social reality seems relevant. But isn’t putting the issues on the table what started up the protest in the first place?

Clearly, this problem is what plagues the performance and speech act theories briefly sketched in the opening paragraphs of this essay. The central dilemma of speech act theory is the tension between the meaning of language and its uses. To fix the uses of language lest they spill out in myriad random directions as unintelligible gibberish, the researcher has to tie the range of intelligibility and communication to a certain background of contextualized meaning. The question is how to square the established meaning with its flexible uses. If infinite uses of language mean the impossible Tower of Babel, communication in speech presupposes a space of shared and commonly recognized meanings. Utterances that stray out of the controlled ranges of context will fall into the inferior category of “unreal,” imaginary, or theatrical. In political terms, performance utterances without an evaluative consideration of reality and a mutual understanding of issues of public concern, that is, a common knowledge and communication regarding what is at stake, amount to fakery and Reaganesque theatrical manipulation of public

opinion. In the post–September 11 American political landscape, especially in matters of intelligence and justification concerning the invasion of Iraq, the separation of political theater from any consideration of truth value is leading to the collapse of democratic politics and to an intensified form of simulacrum of theatrical politics, which is in fact depoliticized spectacle and sound bites. The performative dimension of politics is so overblown that the genuine public politics of liberal democracy is reduced to a matter of performative virtuosity of speech acts and the exhibitionist logic of “might is right.”

Overstressing the performative nature of political theater risks taking democratic politics out of performance. Recognizing this danger, critics try to qualify their position. It is not their intention to suggest that the movement was merely playacting, “all fakery: artificial props, carefully staged events, all medium and no substantive message” (44). But without a notion of communicative interaction concerning the truth value of public concern, it is hard to see the protest as anything other than a symbolic, theatrical gesture.

POLITICAL THEATER AS SOCIAL DRAMA

The interplay between popular politics and theater has indeed a history in modern China. By highlighting a number of past trends, I trace forgotten democratic impulses and political efficacy in mass demonstrations and movements. In the earlier days of the republic, Chinese students and urban populations, in the context of fledging civil society, developed reformist associations and clubs. A politics of speech making, public meeting, and demonstration was much in the air. Mass campaigns borrowed from Western public performance genres and English oratory and missionary schools’ speech making. Mass rallies also drew on techniques and performative repertoires from Chinese theater (Esherick and Wassertrom 51). Demonstrations often took place in guild halls and temples, which were equipped with theaters for operative performances.

The blending of political activity into performance found an authentic expression in the New Spoken Drama movement and its later developments. This new genre borrowed dramatic features from both Western and Chinese traditional dramas, and the plays were performed in the streets and urban public places rather than in enclosed theaters. But the real change came when the New Spoken Drama became more than a theater genre: it participated directly in social movements and protests. This social drama was involved in campaigns for constitutional politics and in demonstrations against imperial and colonial rule. It could be deployed for mobilizing popular energy and criticism against government policies. The basic tenor of the New Spoken

Drama was didactic, and it is not far-fetched to call it a morality play. As social and cultural movements aimed at dismantling traditional values and systems, the New Spoken Drama held up the new, exemplary conduct and projections of the future and served as a place for moral enlightenment and political debate.

The close tie between theater and politics underscores the way performative activity can be genuinely revolutionary and capable of making changes. This close tie compels us to rethink the relation of the state, society, and individuals as active agents in dialogue and confrontation. If the state is a monolith towering over the living social strata, if state power is a panoptic structure censoring all individuals, there will be no elbow room for citizens who are endowed with rights to political and economic equality. The political imagination will be reduced to narrowly bodily dimensions. If individuals are mere administered bodies and ID codes, performance in political theater will remain an innocuous show of protest in symbolic gesture. It will be stripped of the potential for probing and altering not just the temporary policy of the state, but the very ethical constitution of state power. If Foucault's notion of power as an all-encompassing whole, as Weber's iron cage closing in on individual bodies, is accepted, the only alternative in performance seems to be an act of wily confrontation, defiance, subversion, or mere survival. There is little political purchase when one performance exposes the government's faults or corruption and the government stages another performance of "So what?" But if we look at how political theater, the performance of the participants in the social drama, can contribute to the process of rebuilding a community, to strengthening political solidarity in the interest of the majority, we will be able to see that in China's revolutionary movement performance has a positive transformative potential.

POLITICAL THEATER AND COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF YAN'AN

Yan'an, a small rural town in Shanxi province in north China, was the base for building the new political community in the Chinese Revolution. In this historical case, art and politics, utopia and action, theater and social movements are all rolled into one. Since the Cold War and in an intellectual atmosphere touting the end of history, the temptation is strong to sneer at such a fledgling populist, revolutionary movement whose goals were social justice, economic equality, and national emancipation. The Manichean divide between liberal democracy and communist authoritarianism, between East and West, still has a hold on our political imagination. The wholesale repudiation of socialism blinds us to the emergent democratic stirrings in the

Chinese Revolution. Against this refutation of collective political activism, Yan'an remains a rich source of lessons for local, marginalized groups struggling against state power and global imperialist forces. As an antisystemic movement, the Yan'an experience meshed politics with theater, rendering artistic performance indistinguishable from sociopolitical drama. As a revolutionary movement, Yan'an succeeded in challenging and changing the established state power from the bottom up, transforming itself from a small rural community to the takeover of state power. Starting from an obscure and marginal place in the Shan-Gan-Ning border areas, the revolutionaries launched a populist campaign against the nationalist government, which allied with the imperialist powers in keeping the order of oppression and domination. In short, Yan'an was a protest movement writ large. In Apter and Saich's account, it was not only a military base that harbored an incendiary force but also a discourse community. In addition to armed struggle and politics, Yan'an had an extensive educational program, many art and theater groups, a university system for training cadres and experts of all kinds, an art academy, a film crew, and a flourishing public sphere. Its vision for the Chinese people told an ongoing narrative of tragic suffering and redemptive rebirth. As an emancipatory project, Yan'an was an extended performance act that was both aesthetic and political. The power of Yan'an stemmed from the buildup of a symbolic capital composed of a fund of ideas, imaginary projections, political yearnings, and a clear-headed understanding of the truth of the crisis-ridden reality.¹⁸ So members of the community were linked by the common project of forming a discourse, expressing political desire, and sharing grievances and joy. It was a discursive and emotional bonding, manifest in theatrical activity, indistinguishable from the notion of social and political drama.

Due to its discourse-forming nature, Yan'an had at its core a political theater. In addition to the institutional network of schools and universities, there were lively programs of theater, arts, music, and literary production (Apter and Saich 245). At one time, there was also filmmaking that attempted to capture and represent the lived experience of the community. This theatrical setting was not just soldiers, intellectuals, artists, and cadres poring over texts and discussing them in groups and forums, "expressing themselves in public utterances that bound addresser and addressee" (224). It was a theater in which the audience was unified as protagonist and storyteller, listener and performer, altering consciousness while unfolding a narrative. In this discourse-forming community, language uses were as much performative acts as the forming of a new linguistic style; the power structure was not an ossified establishment—it was as much regulative as reconstructive; hegemony was not hegemonic in the repressive sense, because through ideological and ethical mobilization, the people, rallied to the general will, were able to empower themselves.

Interviews with a few Yan'an survivors show that members of the discourse community did not engage in apparently religious activity but performed a secular politics of self-salvation, with a strong utopian overtone. The Yan'an experience was firmly rooted in the bodily experience and everyday customs of ordinary people. By participating in the common, public events of production of food, study, festival conviviality, and the reconstruction of everyday life, the people experienced these events not only as their own but also as something larger than themselves. They enjoyed their own community as if they were enjoying themselves. Yan'an was a good story that people told themselves while they lived it. It provided an uncommonly interesting example of beliefs becoming so powerful that they changed the way people acted, thought of themselves, and responded to others (9). In biographical events of the life cycle—death and its rituals, funerals, parades—the body serves “as a point of visceral departure for a larger and more theatrical frame, politics of spectacle” (5).

This discourse community “included events experienced and interpreted through a created, even artificial language, a symbolic system capable of endowing people and situations with a particular density, time transformed into space” (21). “Artificial” here does not mean fabricated, but made in the authentic political sense of making a world as theorized by Hannah Arendt. We do need to be on guard against a strong element of indoctrination and brainwashing in this vast political theater. But since the political conditions were not those of formed hierarchies and reified state power, the cultural situation was far from the dominant mainstream. And since both politics and culture were emerging to act out the practical script and to reach the goal of an imagined and real community, the experience was one of emotional and aesthetic education. Interviewees described “a quickening of intelligence, a sense of self worth and accomplishment, something like oceanic maternal embrace and immersion or Barthes’s *jouissance*” (22).

In this performative act aimed at building an inspired community, mental entities, such as truth, convictions, and meaning, were not divorced from bodily performance but were combined in a forward-moving act, forming a creative, open-ended temporality, revealing the symbiotic relationship between ideas and action, structure and events, thought and practice. From the accounts of the survivors, Yan'an was a vast stage, “in which their roles and many parts were played in ways increasingly choreographed.” Yet even when they resisted the choreography, they shared a sense of the drama, in which everyone was “touched with the exceptional. Being in theater for the participants was an exceptional moment in which they, as individuals, performed exceptionally” (22). This picture of political theater certainly can be questioned for its excessive romanticization of collectivization and mobilization. But this is not a zero-sum game in which a collective rises at the expense of the individual; rather, it is a mutually enriching process, in which

protagonists' self-making drama "intensifies their individualism" while appearing to give it up. "It was this particular quality of appearing to gain in individuality while at the same time losing it, a kind of collective individualism, which makes Yan'an so relevant today" (23). This model of political theater was concerned less with the rational choice of individual wants and needs than with projections made on the basis of discursive definitions of historical reality. It worked powerfully, as it allowed people to express their private narratives and personal interpretations in a large narrative of community.

Yan'an presents an organic image of creative theater merged with social dramas of national salvation. Fast-forward to the 1989 student movement in Tiananmen Square, which was much more fragmented and diverse in its political organization, but no less theatrical. Yet Tiananmen was theatrical in terms of confrontation and communication about real, pressing issues of the day. Far from a David-against-Goliath game, it encompassed multiple sectors of the population and political forces inside and outside the state apparatus. To see this movement merely in a market framework, as liberal-style individual freedom battling a centralized communist state, is to miss the momentum of social changes initiated in unison by the government, civil society, and the grassroots population. It is to overlook the dire consequences of the unchecked market forces that splintered the nation and the population into rivals contesting for power and resources.¹⁹ The principal claims of the protest were for social security and living standards that had been sustainable during the premarket period yet were eroding as privatization and marketization deepened. Moreover, to cast students as performing a stylized, rock 'n' roll-type resistance as outsiders, or as insiders ready to remonstrate with state officials as in the ancient ritual, is to miss the democratic, participatory drive that made speech partners both insiders and outsiders of a polity—a polity that everybody claims to have a share in constituting. The theatrical style was not one of ethical unity and discursive mobilization in the merger of art and politics, as in Yan'an, but one of interactive performance, of contestation and conversation. The crackdown on and partial success of the demonstration are to be judged not for performative flourishes and media-suffused international publicity, but for their impact on changing and debating the course of Chinese society.

NOTES

1. See *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994); Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

2. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

3. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 114.

4. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 25.

5. *Ibid.*, 26.

6. Michele de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xiv.

7. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 27.

8. Alasdair MacIntyre has characterized this arbitrariness among individuals and political entities as “emotivism.” Emotionalism refers to rampant archaic individualism when each is out to manipulate the other for self-interest and unrationalizable preferences, unregulated by any kind of normative communication. In political emotivism, one arbitrary faith confronts another. The self has no given continuities, save those of the body, so the bodily, creaturely pleasures and thrills become the ultimate measure of what is politically desirable. The emotive picture is a veritable jungle of the postmodern political landscape. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 33.

9. *Ibid.*, 26.

10. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, intro. by Margaret Canovan, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

11. See Wasserstrom and Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*; Chen, *Acting the Right Part*.

12. Wasserstrom and Perry, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, 6.

13. *Ibid.*, 77.

14. For a good account of various interpretations, see Zhao Dingxin, *The Power of Tiananmen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), introduction.

15. Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China,” in Zhao Dingxin, *The Power of Tiananmen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 32-69. Further reference to this article given in the text with page numbers.

16. Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); William Rowe, *Hankow: Community and Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

17. I use Elin Diamond’s phrase here. See Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1986), 1.

18. David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-30. Further references to this book will appear in the text with page numbers.

19. For a detailed discussion of the social and economic changes that led to the political theater of Tiananmen, see Wang Hui, *China’s New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 46-77.

II

New Left Literature in China

Chapter Five

Internationale as Specter: *Na'er*, “Subaltern Literature,” and Contemporary China’s “Left Bank”

Xueping Zhong

In 2004, *Contemporary* (Dangdai) magazine published a novella titled *There* (*Na'er*) by Cao Zhenglü.¹ When asked about it, an editor at the magazine explained that its original title was *Ying te na xiong na er*, a play of sound with the actual Chinese transliteration of *Internationale* (*Ying te na xiong nai er*), but when the novella was published, the title was shortened to simply *na er*, which means “there.”²

This seemingly humorous play with the word *internationale*, also according to the editor, was the result of the editors not wanting the original title to appear too obviously a play on *ying te na xiong nai er*. Without knowing what is behind the decision, one nevertheless finds that the title *Na'er* corresponds quite well with the story’s comic-tragic tone, which suggests that, among other things, even though twisted and cut short, (the mangled) name *Internationale* is still echoed in contemporary Chinese literature like a specter evoking memories of a not-too-distant past and provoking much-needed debate about the present. The novella’s tale of how a state-owned enterprise (SOE) comes undone due to a “loser’s” attempts to prevent it from being privatized won immediate attention when left-leaning critics hailed it as the first representative work of China’s twenty-first-century *diceng wenxue* or subaltern literature. Such naming, which stimulated debate both in the print media and online, is another important example of ideological struggles resurfacing in contemporary Chinese literature and literary criticism.³

In this study, I start with a discussion of *Na'er*, first foregrounding the ways the story portrays the protagonist Zhu Weiguo and narrates his tragic tale via its seemingly cynical first-person narrator. I explore the extent to

which, via the disjuncture between the narrator's ironic tone and Zhu Weiguo's failed resistance, the novella sharpens a powerful sense of tragedy that nevertheless transcends the level of an individual; its narrator's ironic voice effectively reveals the human costs—both social and individual—of the betrayal experienced, in this case, by the workers of a formerly state-owned factory. I then turn to the larger critical responses this novella generated, mainly on two fronts: first, on the “left-bank culture net” (*zuo'an wenhua wang*) Web site; second, in debates about *diceng wenxue* or subaltern literature, the genre in which critics have classified works like *Na'er*. Placing this novella (and other creative works that followed) in conjunction with literary critics' and scholars' responses to them, we find a collective of writers and literary critics and scholars actively initiating and participating in the critical rethinking in today's China about the nature of the economic reforms and social transformation, about the relationship between ideology and the direction of the social changes, and about the massive social problems facing China thirty years after the start of reform. To further foreground the significance of this creative-critical rethinking of the postsocialist economic reform era, I highlight the debates on the notion of *diceng* or the subaltern in the naming of “subaltern literature” (*diceng wenxue*). I argue that the significance of this twenty-first-century Chinese *diceng wenxue* lies in its documentation of what I refer to as the “subalternization” of the working class. In this sense, we can better understand the significance of *diceng wenxue* and the symbolic and critical implications of the “*Internationale* cut short” represented by *Na'er*.

I

Na'er is mainly about the narrator's uncle Zhu Weiguo's unsuccessful, and fatal, attempts to stop the state-owned factory where he has worked for decades from being sold. While there are quite a few textual characteristics worth noting and analyzing, given the limited scope of this study, I will highlight a few aspects and examine their implications in relation to the novella's unique place in the development of so-called subaltern literature in twenty-first-century China.

The novella begins with female character Du Yuemei's “fateful” encounter with Rorty, the dog owned by Yueyue, the narrator's cousin and daughter of Zhu Weiguo, the protagonist of the story. Du Yuemei is a worker whose life, since the death of her husband and the “bankruptcy” of the factory where she and Zhu worked, has deteriorated so much that she has to resort to occasional prostitution in order to save enough money for her daughter's much-needed medical operation. To be sure, this poor-woman-turned-“bad”

theme is a familiar melodramatic trope, reminiscent of women characters found in the left-wing literature and film of the 1920s and '30s. But in *Na'er*, the trope is rendered ironic by the first-person narrator in his seemingly nonchalant tone of voice. The narrator jokingly refers to her as a “sentinel under neon lights” (*yihongdeng xia de shaobing*), using the title of a well-known film made in 1964 (which is now used to refer to prostitutes).⁴ The ironic use of the film’s title here is worth noting. The film is about what happens to a battalion of soldiers newly arrived in Shanghai (shortly after the founding of the PRC) and given the job of guarding its central commercial district. Part of the story is about the material temptation facing the soldiers and the “successful” overcoming of such temptation. During the post-Cultural Revolution 1980s, however, together with all the other films made during the Mao era, this one was considered too propagandistic to be aesthetically valuable. The film’s central theme—resisting bourgeois commercial temptations—especially came to be viewed as a mere manifestation of revolutionary dogma and therefore simplistic. Since the reform, with the return of prostitution (along with the attitude of *xiao pin bu xiao chang*, or contempt toward the poor rather than toward prostitution), the film’s title, which refers to soldiers walking Nanjing Road under neon lights as sentinels, was “naturally” appropriated to refer to women walking the streets at night for customers. Cao Zhenglu’s parodying of this parody via the first-person narrator, however, foregrounds the postsocialist “subalternization” of working women like Du Yuemei. (I will return to “subalternization” later.)

From the opening, the novella’s adoption of a “cool” stance that characterizes the contemporary “depoliticized” young generation (typically identified in Chinese as *ba ling hou* or the born-after-the-1980s generation) proves narratively and symbolically effective. Narratively, it rather efficiently connects Du Yuemei, Zhu Weiguo, their dilapidated factory, and the deteriorating community of former factory workers with the younger generation from this community who do not seem to readily share the same history or concerns. At the same time, the coexisting differences and disjuncture within all of this manifest layered and complex ideological implications and struggles. From the very beginning, the story foregrounds a rather profound social and ideological dissonance masked jokingly by seemingly nonchalant contemporary youths.

As the story unfolds—to further note its narrative features—we realize that the accidental encounter between Du Yuemei and Rorty, in addition to introducing Zhu Weiguo, the main character, elicits a series of memories on Zhu’s part about his decades of working at the factory as well as the “logic” that informs the actions he is about to take. Both narratively and symbolically, the encounter between Du Yuemei and Rorty is quickly transferred to that between Zhu Weiguo and Rorty, although with a twist: Zhu’s first reaction (to Rorty scaring Du Yuemei silly on her way home late at night) is to punish

Rorty by having a truck driver friend of his send the dog to a place hundreds of miles away, but in a stubborn way Rorty eventually finds his way back and then kills himself when being sent away again. This “doggedness” metaphorically symbolizes Zhu Weiguo’s own efforts at trying to stop the factory from being liquidated. Despite his petitioning (*shangfang*) the superiors about what he believes to be the wrong happening to his factory, however, Zhu Weiguo fails. In despair, he commits suicide by lying under and turning on the old machine that he used to work on, which is now in disuse and soon to be completely dismantled. Even though the parallel between Rorty’s and Zhu Weiguo’s suicides may seem a bit too convenient and sentimental, the ironic overtone maintained by the first-person narrator and the weighty reality that looms large, regarding the fate of SOEs in general and of millions who used to work for them, manage to prevent this obvious parallel from being overly dramatic or, in a flipped way, mere postmodern kitsch.

Indeed, narrated from this young man’s point of view, typical of many contemporary youths, the story skillfully mixes different perspectives while at the same time relentlessly focusing on a process in which, despite its former Workers’ Union leader’s stubborn and single-minded efforts, a large state-owned factory comes undone and the interests of more than three thousand workers are betrayed. It features the simultaneous or overlapping coexistence of the socialist legacy, the reversal of that legacy in postsocialist economic reforms that have led to the dismantling of most state-owned enterprises and to sacrifices suffered by the workers in such enterprises, the ideological conflict between what Zhu Weiguo still takes to be correct and what has been rapidly destroyed in the name of reform, and, above all, the derevolutionization of everyday life that has accompanied the growing-up of a rather cynical generation. In short, by way of someone from a generally considered “depoliticized” generation, this story showcases the author’s skillful ability to interweave several narrative threads that simultaneously document 1) the materiality and the human/psychological impact of the deterioration of a community of workers and their livelihood, which was once built around the state-owned factory (during the socialist era); 2) a postsocialist process of blatant *huagong weisi* (making what is publicly owned privately owned) in the name of reform; and 3) a narrative voice that is simultaneously cynical and ironic, mixed with a profound sense of tragedy and critical awareness. Let me elaborate further on these points.

In representing Zhu Weiguo’s attempts to prevent the factory from being sold, the narrator notes how his uncle is a misfit in the present day and age (*bu he shiyi*): who in today’s world does not know that state-owned enterprises are blamed for economic inefficiency and considered major obstacles to developing a market economy? Who in their “right” mind would not believe that Zhu Weiguo’s resistance is due to his ignorance, or, worse yet, his being stuck in the “bad old” socialist mode of thinking? Who, worst of

all, would believe that Zhu Weiguo's counterefforts are not meant for his own benefit? If he does not act according to the logic that informs these by-now normalized assumptions, he has to be a misfit. Indeed, the significance of the story of this seemingly out-of-touch uncle lies precisely in the temporal "misfit" or "lag" between what informs Zhu Weiguo's behavior and what makes him appear outdated.

By foregrounding this seeming temporal lag, the story further unfolds a tragic tale in which, with the mantra "move with time" (*yu shi ju jin*) of the 1990s looming large in the background and people and the world around him rapidly changing to catch up with time, Zhu Weiguo stubbornly holds onto the mantra from a different era that stipulates no one has the right to *huagong weisi* or turn public assets into privately owned ones. He seriously refuses to believe that what is happening to the factory and to his fellow workers is based on directives from the central government. Most of all, he also refuses to believe that he and thousands of his fellow workers in the factory have essentially been sacrificed in the reshuffling of the economic order. As a result, he refuses to "shut up." Armed with nothing except his disbelief and a sense of duty (informed by a different era), Zhu Weiguo embarks on petitioning trips, first to the provincial capital and then to Beijing, hoping to reverse what he thinks are the wrong decisions made by the factory's officials.

Thus narratively arranged, the seemingly ironic voice of the first-person narrator sharply contrasts with the seemingly out-of-touch nature of the main protagonist, Zhu Weiguo, and his inability to "move forward with time." It is this "temporal lagging," however, that allows the story to unfold a process in which Zhu's ostensibly outdated ideals come in direct confrontation with what is in essence a blatant plundering of public wealth/properties, all being carried out in the name of reform.

Na'er foregrounds the time gap by skillfully narrating a series of failures on the part of Zhu Weiguo, but more interesting, of course, is the simultaneous narration of how Zhu Weiguo's conviction in his belief is eroded by his repeated but failed attempts to stop the factory from being sold, and how, among the flashbacks and other narrative details, Zhu's petition trips also become a process of his gradual "awakening" to, and eventual despair at, what is actually happening to the factory and to his fellow workers.

One related narrative detail is worth elaboration. If, after his first "disappearance" when he goes to the provincial capital to report on the conditions at his factory, Zhu remains hopeful, as times goes on, circumstances become increasingly cruelly ironic and beyond his control. One of the cruelest ironies in the narration of Zhu's seemingly borderline crazy behavior occurs toward the end of the story. After his last petition trip, Zhu Weiguo unexpectedly finds himself in the position of (supposedly) owning 3 percent of the factory's stocks. It turns out that, under the policy of *guoqi gaige* or reforming the state-owned enterprises, the factory's officials have come up with a plan to

turn themselves into shareholders of the factory. Being the former Workers' Union leader and yet also someone who has constantly made such "reform" schemes difficult to realize, Zhu is put in the same position as other officials able to enjoy the shares that are divided among themselves, which essentially places him on the opposite side of the workers whom he wants to help.

The cruelty of this irony, as the story relates, is multilayered. While Zhu does not fight to save the factory from being sold for his own gain, he does have to make compromises along the way, from first trying to convince the leadership to change the factory's products to meet the changed market demands, to questioning the policy of ownership reform (*gai zhi*) of state-owned enterprises, to finally trying to help turn his fellow workers into owners (as shareholders) of their factory. In this last effort to save the factory from being sold to (what he is told are) outside investors, Zhu manages, with much difficulty, to persuade the workers to buy out the factory themselves. The workers, of course, have no financial means to do so except with the deeds of their apartments (which were sold to them at a low price when the state began to change housing policies in the 1990s). But in the end, when he is unable to stop the factory from being sold and is publicly announced to own 3 percent of the factory's stock, he is also told that the workers will not get their housing deeds back because he told the authorities that the workers "voluntarily" contributed the deeds. For his fellow workers, then, his hard work in persuading them to buy out the factory with their housing deeds appears to have been nothing more than a scheme for his own personal gain. Beyond this, no one, whether the officials against whom he "struggles" or the workers whom he really wants to help, can see the meaning of his efforts as he intended it to be. Appearance, in this case, has indeed become reality: for the two opposing sides, Zhu Weiguo can only be doing all of this for his own benefit. For Zhu, therefore, the cruelest irony of all is that the workers feel completely betrayed by him personally. In despair, as the story goes, Zhu Weiguo commits suicide by placing himself under a machine he used to work on.

After his suicide, the narrator offers a suture, of sorts, by suggesting that his uncle's ultimate sacrifice results in a reversal of decisions: workers receive their deeds back, the sale of the factory is stopped, and a few corrupt officials are arrested. The suture, of course, cannot really prevent the ultimate unraveling of China's industrial structure as people once knew it. More important, it cannot stitch together the changed social relations represented by a process in which workers like Zhu Weiguo and Du Yuemei are "subalternized." This is where the "mangled" title of the story is more relevant.

Early in the story, the reader realizes where the title *Na'er* comes from: it is related, as I have mentioned, to the Chinese transliteration of the song "Internationale" (*ying-te-na-xiong-nai-er*), which Zhu's mother would sometimes sing. Zhu Weiguo's mother suffers from dementia and responds to

anything put to her with “Good, good” (*hao, hao*). The narrator adds that his grandmother—Zhu’s mother—at times likes to sing “Internationale” but has trouble pronouncing the Chinese transliteration. So when she sings, “*ying-te-na-xiong-nai-er*” becomes “*ying-te-na-xiong-na-er*.” When she is told that it should be *nai-er*, not *na’er*, she simply responds by saying, “*Na’er hao*,” “*Na’er hao*” (there is good). Here we also recall the explanation by an editor at *Contemporary* magazine that originally the title of the story was to be *Ying-te-na-xiong-na-er* but when it was published, it became *Na’er*. This, I think, turns out to be a better choice. It allows a moment of realization on the part of the reader, but more important, it helps shed light on two conflicting visions manifested in the tragic story of Zhu Weiguo—that of “international” communism (in the form of a historical socialism) and that of “global” capitalism—utopia turned dystopia—while leaving the special designation of *na’er*/there (as a place) open-ended. The temporal-spatial implications thus bring to the fore the tensions between the revolutionary ideals and postrevolutionary dystopia centered on the question of where Zhu Weiguo’s conviction comes from and its importance to someone like him, and how to understand its seemingly misplaced nature today.

On one level, given the way the story is told, the rather humorous mutation and butchering of the word *internationale* seem to suggest that *na’er* is not so much a misplaced hope as a hope that is betrayed. The factory where Zhu and Du used to work is the very locale that symbolizes this *na’er* that is sacrificed by the policies informed by the mantras *yu guoji jiegui* and *yushi jujin*, which are themselves informed by what Žižek terms the “economic utopia of global market capitalism.”⁵ The betrayal, one can further argue, has turned the here and now into a dystopia for Zhu Weiguo and his fellow workers. Zhu, “lagging behind” and then committing suicide, is turned “ghostly” together with the dilapidated factory he fails to defend. In more than one way, then, as a tale about someone who refuses to “move with time” or *yushi jujin*, Zhu Weiguo’s story reminds us of the extent to which the market reform (and the “miracles” it has produced) is accompanied by devastating sacrifices and betrayal of ordinary workers.

Zhu Weiguo’s “temporal lag,” to elaborate further, makes visible “overlapping temporalities” that coexist in today’s China. On the one hand, the story demonstrates the role that the reform era’s developmentalist and marketist ideology has played in not only stripping workers of the rewards they deserve based on their contribution to the “socialist construction” of China before the start of the reform, but also, and more crucially, stripping them of their sense of agency, and perhaps more importantly a sense of dignity, that they once felt. (I will return to this point later.)⁶ On the other hand, Zhu Weiguo’s refusal to “move with time” continues to allow history to “flare up” like a specter, to be reconsidered when a refusal like his makes complete forgetting impossible. The skillful combination of the ironic first-person nar-

rative voice, the narrative structure, the tragic fate of its protagonist, and a profound sense of betrayal makes the publication of *Na'er* significant because it foregrounds the social consequences of the economic restructuring by selling the SOEs and the ideology that informed and legitimized such selling, as well as the relationship between the tragic fate of the former workers and the death of once-held ideals.

To sum up, the success of this novella is, first, due to the author's effective use of irony, which indicates that a degree of postmodern aesthetics has quietly but surely come to dominate cultural sentiments in China. It also demonstrates that the "temporal lag" is not only with Zhu Weiguo, who resists in despair by committing suicide. It is also caught up by the narrator's coming to a level of consciousness that is manifested in the ironic twists in the narrative voice and the critical implications to which that voice gives rise; what appears to be humorous and ironic does not shy away from what is historical and ultimately tragic. In this sense, narratively, the story makes the seeming difference, or contrast, between what the narrator takes to be normal and what Zhu Weiguo refuses to accept indicate an inner connectedness between the cynical voice of the narrator and the tragic fate of his uncle. If irony may reflect a postmodern amnesia that has become a dominant sentiment in today's China, it can also be shown to have the potential to reawaken in the twenty-first century a critical subject voice/position that questions the changed and increasingly unequal social relations. The combination helps explain why *Na'er* could have generated much critical attention shortly after its publication, an issue to which I now turn.

II

Since 2004, Cao Zhenglu has published other stories, novellas, and a novel, writing about issues regarding the lower classes along with such writers as Wang Xiangfu, Hu Xuewen, Chen Yingsong, Liu Jiming, and Luo Weizhang.⁷ As mentioned earlier, this literary development has been identified as *diceng wenxue* or subaltern literature, and its central sentiment has been echoed by a parallel development of communities of social-cultural critics whose voices are found, among other places, on the Internet. The dialogue between the writers and critics constitutes part of a left-leaning critical rethinking in China that emerged quite earnestly during the first decade of the twenty-first century. For this reason, it is imperative to broaden the discussion, and I do so by focusing on the term *diceng*, as in *diceng wenxue*, which connects the creative and critical endeavors in their foregrounding of the

need to recognize ideological struggles in reform-era China. First, a brief description of a particular critical community that has promoted this notion is in order.

The one community worth noting is the “left-bank culture net” Web site (*zuo'an wenhua wang*), which was established in 2003.⁸ It had originally been conceived as an online forum (BBS) by a group of like-minded literature scholars—mostly graduate students and young faculty members—at Beijing University. It then evolved into a Web site so named and has since developed a dozen specific pages, about half of which are devoted to contemporary Chinese literature. The literature-related pages include “fiction” (*xiaoshuo*), “prose” (*sanwen*), “poetry” (*shige*), “links to literature magazines” (*qikan pindao*), and “reviews of literature magazines by Beijing University scholars” (*beida pingkan*). Via these pages, one can access the latest issues (and back issues) of such well-known literature magazines as *People's Literature* (*Renmin wenxue*), *Contemporary* (*Dangdai*), and *Monthly Fiction* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao*). By way of *beida pingkan*, in particular, one can have a quick read of reviews, by a few faculty and graduate students from Beijing University, of the most recent literary works published in these and other leading literature magazines. The rest of the pages on the site are devoted to literary and cultural criticism in which active (re)thinking takes place about the issues mentioned above in the discussion of *Na'er*. These pages include “columns by members of *zuo'an*” (*zuo'an ren*), “featured articles” (*tegao*), “points of view” (*shidian*), “commentaries on cultural issues” (*wenhua pingtan*), “latest reviews” (*zuixin pinglun*), and “views from netizens” (*wangyou fapian*). The writings are a combination of those originally printed in such journals and magazines as *Reading* (*Du shu*), *Frontier* (*Tianya*), *Review of Contemporary Writers* (*Dangdai zuojia pinglun*), *Literary Reviews* (*Wenxue pinglun*), *Literary Theory and Criticism* (*Wenyi lilun yu piping*), and others and those written for the Web site. By posting articles originally published in these print outlets, *zuo'an* offers these writings a second life, as it were, by making them available to more readers. More important, pulling these writings together on the site helps create a community of thinkers whose ideas, views, and arguments essentially constitute part of the current discursive struggles in China.

Together with creative writings, lectures, interviews, and translated articles, the Web site makes available thought-provoking and controversial views expressed and argued by both well-known and lesser-known contemporary Chinese writers, critics, and scholars in the humanities. *Zuo'an* also posts links to at least seventy other sites, most of which are devoted to contemporary social and economic problems including, for example, the so-called *san nong wenti* about peasants (*nongmin*), rural regions (*nongcun*), and agriculture (*nongye*). Since its inception, to sum up, *zuo'an* has evolved into an important intellectual Web site combining a focus on contemporary

Chinese literature with left-leaning intellectuals' critical thinking on social, economic, political, and historical issues within the contexts of modern and contemporary Chinese history.

I list these details mainly to indicate, and emphasize, the existence of a collection of writers, critics, and ordinary Web users whose voices constitute the growing debates in China about the social consequences and ideological struggles of the last three decades of economic reforms. Indeed, within this larger context, the establishment and development of this site echoes the social and ideological concerns that informed the creation of works like *Na'er*.

The meaning of *zuo'an* or left bank, according to Li Yunlei (one of the founders, who currently manages the site and is a literary critic with a doctoral degree from Beijing University, working as an editor at *Wenxue Piping yu Lilun*), hinges upon the Web site's two central foci: issues regarding "*di-ceng*" and issues regarding how to reevaluate China's revolutionary and postrevolutionary histories and experiences; how to recognize and understand China's current social, economic, and political reality; and how to search for *zhongguo de daolu*, or China's path to, for lack of a better word, "modernity."⁹ A personal note by Li Yunlei posted on the "*zuo'an-ers*" (*zuo'an ren*) page of the site (a note that functions as a preface to some of his own writings posted there) can help us understand the context in which these two central foci have coalesced and motivate critical rethinking on China's "left bank":

When I came to the Chinese Department of Beijing University as an undergraduate, I planned to study how to write fiction. Ironically, however, I've written less and less [fiction] ever since. . . . Come to think of it, 2002 was a turning point when life and my thinking went through much change. Now it is 2004. I suddenly realized that I'll have to say good-bye to many things; some people I'll never see again; and the life that has been familiar to me will also quietly disappear. But what lies ahead?

If I have written a few creative pieces at all, they function mainly as an indication of a person who is lost and in search of his way. The homeland that we once had now lies in ruins; the road ahead is unmarked. Struggling to make a living in the real world is deeply intertwined with conflicting feelings inside me. How should we move forward? What should we do? What shouldn't we do? No one can tell us. We can only probe as we move forward. And yet, as time constantly passes, what once appeared infinitely possible has now become something fated as the only possible path on which we have traveled farther and farther, but at the same time the path appears to have become narrower and narrower.¹⁰

In this quote, two temporal moments are identified as significant for Li: the years 2002 and 2004, respectively, seemingly for personal reasons. In the larger context, these may well have been more than personal. As we know,

2002 was the year after China had “officially” joined the WTO (in 2001) and had won the bid to host the 2008 Olympics, both of which happened amid much hype and fanfare. One decade later, interestingly enough, in most scholarly mentions of the temporally significant historical moments in modern and contemporary Chinese history, 2001 is rarely cited as a pivotal or fateful time. Inside China, for example, after the state and mainstream media touted the entry as a major step for China to take toward *quanqiu hua*, or globalization, and *yu guoji jiegui*, or joining the international (read: capitalist) track, “WTO” has virtually disappeared from the official discourse. Outside of China, other than in trade disputes, one also hears little mention of China and the WTO; China has become part of it and will be held responsible for what China signed on to, and that is that.

In contrast, these temporal markers in Li’s musing are explicitly associated with uncertainties and deeply felt questions they provoke. They indicate that during the last decade, when the rest of the world took notice of China’s roaring economic development, the economic “miracle” nevertheless began to give rise to deep doubts and questions in the minds of intellectuals. Indeed, by marking the year 2002 as a personal “turning point” and linking the year 2004 with a “farewell,” of sorts, to things and people that once were familiar to him, Li Yunlei’s sentiment in effect echoes some of the existing and growing criticisms that question and critique the direction of (what is euphemistically identified as) China’s rapid social and economic transformations.¹¹

Before concluding this description, I must add that on *zuo’an* there exists a range of such questioning voices. Han Shaogong, who established his name as a “roots-seeking literature” (*xungen wenxue*) and “avant-garde” (*xianfeng wenxue*) writer in the 1980s, for example, was among a small group of writer-intellectuals who had begun even earlier (than Li) to rethink the cultural and ideological logic and the social reality of the market reforms (most notably, for instance, in his instrumental role in establishing and publishing *Frontier* since 1996).¹² In some of his recent lectures, such as “After the Cold War: New Context for Literary Writing” (Lengzhan hou: wenxue xie-zuo xin de chujing) and “Literature: Sleepwalking and Awakening” (Wexue: mengyou yu suxing, which was posted on *zuo’an*), Han also re-foregrounded the question of the relationship between ideology and literature.¹³ In the title of his second lecture, for instance, he metaphorically marks the contemporary historical moment in China as one in which literature can either continue to participate in ensuring a collective “sleepwalk” (presumably under the spell of the existing dominant ideology of *fazhan*, or development and *xian-daihua*, or modernization) or help “awaken” itself and those already under the spell. There, we hear both a twenty-first-century revocation of Lu Xun and an echo of the questions put forward by Li Yunlei mentioned above; we also recall the complex implications of “awakening” manifested in *Na’er*.¹⁴

These contemporary writers' sentiments (and that of Lu Xun) echo a point made by Wang Hui in his paper on Lu Xun's "On Destroying Evil Voice" (Po e'sheng lun), differ from the "New Enlightenment" (*xin qimeng*) of the 1980s in that the more contemporary intellectuals are first and foremost interested not so much in arguing for the elite to *huanxing* or awaken the "less enlightened" as in pointing out the need for intellectuals themselves to *suxing* or wake up (along with ordinary people).¹⁵ The active rethinking that has been taking place on *zuo'an* can be seen as an indication of this kind of *suxing* or waking up.

Among the issues that these critics have "awakened" to, as represented in *Na'er*, are precisely the changing and changed social relations and what such changes mean in the last three decades of economic reforms. Today, as already mentioned, critics like Li Yunlei mark the publication of *Na'er* as the beginning of "subaltern literature" (*diceng wenxue*).¹⁶ Even though debates are ongoing about what *diceng wenxue* is, how important it is, and what its problems may be, the term has nevertheless been borrowed to identify an early twenty-first-century literary phenomenon in China in which some writers turn their attention to issues of class and social tensions and write about the lives of the poor and the downtrodden and the complexities therein, against the backdrop of the last thirty years of economic reforms.

Li Yunlei defines *diceng wenxue* as literature about the downtrodden, the lower classes, and their struggles in the changed and changing society. From the discussions found on *zuo'an*, the term also indicates a stance that many critics active on the site have come to uphold in opposition to the ideological dominance of "pure literature" (*chun wenxue*), which has been held as the "proper" definition of and aesthetic standard for "good" literature.¹⁷ *Diceng wenxue* is thus named both as a new literary "oppositional move" and as a designation of a new literary phenomenon. The naming and the name not only help revive debates about the role of literature in social criticism but also, and more related to the present discussion, offer a good opportunity for exploring and debating the notion of *diceng* and its political-economic implications.

III

The naming of *diceng wenxue* has generated debates among critics in China about its definition and what such literature does.¹⁸ Explicit and implicit in these discussions is the rather troubling notion of the very word *diceng* or subaltern itself. Even though *diceng* has always existed in Chinese—referring to those at the bottom of a social hierarchy—its usage today inevitably evokes the concept of subaltern associated with postcolonial theory. One of

the criticisms leveled at the naming of *diceng wenxue* is thus a familiar one—Who can represent *diceng* or the subalterns?—reminiscent of Spivak’s famous question and her own efforts at trying to answer it—“Can the subaltern speak?” While critics have offered studies and discussions that argue against or question her negative conclusion, the last three decades have almost muted such debates when, argued either way, they have proven politically inconsequential in the face of the power of global capitalism. It is in this sense that one wonders about the significance of the term itself. Why employ *diceng* in discussing the literary phenomenon represented by *Na’er*? Does it mean the same thing as is understood in postcolonial theory? If not, how is it defined and to be understood in today’s China?

In a conversation between Xue Yi and Liu Xu titled “Questions and Answers About Subalterns” (Youguan *diceng* de wenda), Liu begins by mentioning Gramsci’s use of the term and its revolutionary connotations, but points out that the notion has over time become mainly an academic one.¹⁹ Xue Yi further contends that *diceng* has become an abstract term with no specific historical references and is therefore toothless. I share Xue Yi’s contention, but if we add the word *hua* after *diceng* to turn the word “subaltern” into “subalternization,” there is a possibility for historicization. Indeed, works like *Na’er* are more about the subalternization of China’s working class than simply about (Chinese) “subalterns” or, for that matter, about who can speak on their behalf. That is, *diceng* is only effective when it is paired with the word *hua*, as in *diceng hua*, to refer to a process of changes—in this case the changed and changing social relations within the context of China’s postsocialist economic reform and social transformation. *Diceng hua* echoes the questions raised by Xue Yi: “Why have the subalterns become subalterns? Why has the working class been lowered to the position of the ‘stinking ninth’ (*chou laojiu*) while the former ‘stinking ninth’ have now risen to the position of the ‘flagrant third?’”²⁰ Whether or not one agrees with Xue’s use of certain terms, one cannot miss the historical references in his questions.

The historical references, incidentally, exist in an essay mentioned in the same Xue–Liu conversation. Titled “Subalterns” (*Diceng*) and written by Cai Xiang, this essay, according to Xue Yi, was the first piece in which a contemporary Chinese critic explicitly focused on the notion of *diceng*.²¹ Let me divert a bit here to mention a central point in Cai’s essay for the purpose of further complicating this idea within the Chinese context. Published in 1995, the essay expresses an intellectual’s remembrance of a past—the Mao era—during which, despite being poor (which Cai equates with being subaltern), his parents, his family members, and the members of the working-class communities in which he grew up were dignified people who did not feel downtrodden. While Cai is ambivalent about being poor, he nevertheless affirms the self-respect people who were not financially well off once truly felt.

People seemed to really believe that they were the new country's *zhuren-gong*, or masters. He then laments the fact that today, while the poor have seen their material possessions increase, they have nevertheless lost that sense of *zhuren-gong* and the corresponding dignity they once felt as a group. Central in Cai's musing is how to understand the relationship between material well-being or the lack thereof and a dignified psychological sense of well-being or the lack thereof, as they were and are experienced by the poor. The complexities implied in his essay connect the notion of *diceng* with different historical contexts and conditions, thereby raising interesting and significant questions. At the same time and in a typical intellectual manner, however, Cai also lumps his own sense of a past in which being poor but dignified was possible into *shenhua* or myth, essentially downplaying the significance of the "people character" as well as its potential vis-à-vis the still poor working-class people, and dehistoricizing *diceng* by highlighting the seemingly unchangeable nature of being subaltern regardless of different historical conditions.

Still, the central theme of the essay points to a history-and-change-related question: the material improvement many at the bottom used and continue to desire has been accompanied by the deterioration of a collective sense of who they are, not to mention a loss of the sense of being the masters of the country. While Cai Xiang's question is in essence about intellectuals like himself—what is to be done when both the "revolutionary myth" and the "modernization myth" (in the form of material improvements) no longer hold—*Na'er*, as is shown above, is more about a worker who refuses to give up his belief without a fight. Zhu Weiguo believes that he should have the right to speak because, being a worker and the head of a workers' union, he *can* speak on his own and their behalf.

What Cai Xiang refers to as one myth being replaced by another and what Zhu Weiguo is shown refusing to give up are reminiscent of a derevolutionizing process in which such revolutionary terms as *laodong renmin*, *laodong dazong*, or simply *gongren nongmin* were rendered outdated. Meanwhile, the disuse of this group of words coincided with the emergence and adoption of *diceng*. This transformation of terms raises questions about conflating China's revolutionary discourse and socialist culture with the West-originated postcolonial theory, especially allowing the latter's theoretical framework to overshadow a set of very different social, cultural, and political conditions and practices, including the postrevolutionary marginalization of some of the ideologically essential and socially important revolutionary categories (no matter how problematic they are deemed to be by certain intellectual circles and in the mainstream discourse).²²

Now when we return to *Na'er*, whose publication in 2004 is considered the inauguration of (contemporary) Chinese subaltern literature, we further recognize its implications on two fronts: the *diceng hua* or subalternization

of working-class people or the “laboring people” (*laodong renmin*) and, by extension, the rupture of representation (to borrow Wang Hui’s term, *daibi-aoxing duanlie*) of the working class.²³ Both themes run through *Na’er* in that, beyond telling of Zhu’s failed attempts to “save” his factory, it also tells of the changing status of the workers both socially and subjectively or psychologically and a severance of the relationship between the workers and those who, in the revolutionary discourse, were supposed to serve as “people’s servants.” Symbolized by Rorty the dog in that both refuse to be “sent away,” Zhu’s refusal, tragically, only manifests a resistance to being thus rendered, even though in reality his position as the head of the factory workers’ union is useless when there is no actual (or active) collective of bodies—actual workers—to represent. Zhu Weiguo’s story symbolizes precisely a subalternization process of not only the ordinary workers but also their *gonghui zhuxi*, who had risen to that position as one of them.

The failure of Zhu’s petitioning both his superiors and his (former) fellow workers adds a further layer of complexity regarding a simultaneous “rupture of representation” on the one hand and subalternization on the other. That is, while both are happening at the same time, they go in opposite directions. As we recall, Zhu Weiguo is offered a small portion of “property ownership,” which indicates that he is in a position to either benefit materially as the (empty) head of the (empty) workers’ union or insist on representing the workers by refusing that benefit. Zhu chooses the latter. This narrative detail also hints at the birth of a “middle class,” part of which is to consist of former factory officials who, when the workers are being subalternized, are trying different means to, precisely, *huagong weisi* (turn publicly owned properties to privately owned) and thereby escape the fate of becoming sacrificed or subalternized. Zhu’s refusal to accept such a change foreshadows his tragic end, and the story utilizes his seeming “craziness” to enhance the nature of this “transformation” and the extent to which the changing “fortunes” between the workers and the factory officials essentially symbolize fundamental changes in social relations as well as the economic order and the ideology of developmentalism that legitimizes such changes.

With such drastic transformations, what is left is the singularity of the body—in Du Yuemei’s case, it becomes “her choice” to walk the street, while in Zhu Weiguo’s, his choice is to sacrifice his health during his petition trips, his familial relationships, and finally his own life. The novella manages to connect Zhu’s seeming “craziness” with his own agency; the former factory Workers’ Union leader (*gonghui zhuxi*) ultimately chooses to sacrifice his own body—life—as a gesture of resisting the postsocialist “subalternization” of workers and a way to assert his subjectivity, whose construction is still in part informed by his several decades as a worker in a state-owned factory where he once mattered. Without recognizing “subalternization” in postsocialist China as a process that robs the workers of a profound sense of

dignity, the by-now common acceptance of the word *diceng* (and, for that matter, *diceng wenxue*) cannot quite capture what is essentially a failed resistance to subalternization represented by the novella. This inadequacy of the term *diceng* is symptomatic of how much China has changed, economically, culturally, ideologically, and politically, to the detriment of the social position of the working people when *diceng* becomes the most sympathetic term to identify them. Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, the Mao era's commonly used terms, such as "workers, peasants, soldiers" (*gongnongbing*), "laboring masses" (*laodong dazhong*), "working class" (*gongren jieji*), "laboring people" (*laodong renmin*), and the "proletariat" (*wuchan jieji*) are no longer circulated in political and academic discourses because they have ceased to "sound right."

It is for this reason that, while critics like Li Yunlei argue that one should not confuse *diceng* with "socially disadvantaged/weak groups" (*ruoshi qunti*) because the latter conjures up the notion of the weakness of the disadvantaged (and their condition being defined as such by the social and economic elite), I am not altogether sure that, as it stands, the term *diceng* is capable of absorbing and assuming a sense of agency implied in those (no longer used/unused) revolutionary categories.

This "agency-mute or muted" term, therefore, poses a challenge to the current "New Left critical thinking" in its promotion of *diceng wenxue*.²⁴ The "unnaturalness" of such terms as *laodong renmin*, *laodong dazhong*, and *gongren nongmin* in today's Chinese political and elite discourse is by far most emblematic of the nature of China's social transformations. Given its association with the term "subaltern," the fact that *diceng* entered the public and scholarly vocabulary in postrevolutionary China by way of postcolonial theory is symptomatic of the postrevolutionary nature of the term. One cannot but wonder whether the "social transformation" from socialism to postsocialism in the direction of globalizing capitalism may indeed be complete, if the terms that used to refer to ordinary "laboring people" (with an implication of agency) no longer make sense even to New Left thinkers. If critics are not careful, the *diceng* identification may have difficulty breaking out of precisely the "subaltern" nature of *diceng* (classes) and the circular question that has preoccupied many critics: whether or not the "subalterns" can speak.

At the same time, however, it is also against the backdrop of the thoroughgoing ideological and subsequent discursive transformations that we understand why Li Yunlei and other critics found on *zuo'an* (and elsewhere) have had to resort to the term *diceng* for renewed theorization: it helps make visible the social polarization and social tensions, and it challenges the current ideologically and discursively transformed mainstream discourses. Constructed as a new social term with historical specificities, *diceng* can help open up an alternative discursive space for renewed critical exploration, in this case, for re-foregrounding ideology in literature (and, by extension, in

other forms of cultural production of meaning). When we add the suffix *hua* to the term, as in *dicenghua*, our understanding of the twenty-first-century *diceng wenxue* acquires a multitude of historical references that can help us better understand the ideological struggles this literary phenomenon is re-foregrounding.

To conclude, therefore, I would like to emphasize the historicity of the *diceng wenxue* phenomenon and of the critical attention to it: they constitute a much-needed critical intervention in today's China. Within the last two decades, when China's capitalist transformations were made possible when a majority of SOEs chose "bankruptcy" and laid off most of their workers, to be replaced by "joint ventures" and foreign direct-investment ventures in which migrant workers from the countryside are exploited, *diceng wenxue* like *Na'er* and *dagong wenxue* by migrant workers themselves, combined, can be understood as *laodong-renmin*-turned-downtrodden speaking up and trying to assert their agency.²⁵ Words like *diceng* and *dagongzhe* are specific to the postsocialist and postrevolutionary (capitalistic) social transformations and the social, cultural, and spiritual consequences when the "laboring people" as a social class with collective agency are no more; the critical rethinking found on *zuo'an* is a timely intervention to carve out a discursive space—indeed, to re-foreground a critical literary discourse—for reimagining social agency in the face of the unrelenting globalizing capitalist forces. The question, of course, remains whether and in what ways the much-mangled specter of *Internationale* will be able to offer new meanings and agency for *diceng* and *dagongzhe* to counter the ongoing assaults against them, socially, culturally, economically, and politically.

NOTES

1. Cao Zhenglu, *Na'er* (There), *Contemporary* (Dangdai) 5 (2004).
2. See the interview with the author in *Literary Theory and Criticism* (Wenyi Lilun yu Piping) 2 (2005): 17; Wu Xuan, "Cao Zhenglu and 'There'" (Cao Zhenglu he "Na'er"), *Red Beans* (Hongdou) 1 (2008): 15.
3. A better known example is the debates ignited by Wang Hui's 1997 article "Dangdai zhongguo sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti," *Frontier* 5 (1997).
4. *Sentinels under Neon Lights* (Nihongdeng xia de shaobing), dir. Wang Ping (Shanghai: Tianma Film Studio, 1964).
5. Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 5.
6. An extensive discussion of the politics of dignity or *zunyan zhengzhi* can be found in Cai Xiang's new book, *Revolution/Narratives: Chinese Socialist Literature and Cultural Imagination* (Geming/Xushu: Zhongguo shehuizhuyi wenxue—wenhua xiangxiang) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2010).
7. There is said to be a difference between the writers mentioned here and those identified as *dagong zuojia* or migrant worker-writers. The latter's work is collectively known as *dagong wenxue* or literature by migrant workers. Debates are ongoing about the difference between the two and how to critically interpret the writings and their implications.

8. Information about this Web site is based on my interview conducted in July 2009 with one of the founders, Li Yunlei.

9. Interview with Li Yunlei, 2009.

10. Li Yunlei, "A Road on Which We Have Traveled Farther and Farther" (Yi tiao lu yue zou yue yuan) (translation mine unless otherwise noted), <http://www.eduww.com/zar/liyunlei.htm>.

11. Much of the criticism can be found in such print outlets as *Frontier* (Tianya) (which was started in the mid-1990s), *Reading* (Dushu) (especially during the ten years between 1997 and 2007 under the editorship of Wang Hui and Huang Ping), and others. Though latecomers, the Web sites such as *zuo'an* and *wuyou zhixiang* help intensify the criticism and debates by making it possible for more voices to be heard.

12. Han Shaogong was the director of *Frontier* (located in Hainan) when it was first published in 1996.

13. Han Shaogong, *Reviews of Contemporary Writers* (Dangdai zuojia pinglun) 3 (2003): 26-39.

14. Han Shaogong, "Literature: Sleepwalking and Waking Up" (Wenxue: mengyou yu suxing), <http://www.eduww.com/Article/ShowClass.asp?ClassID=1014&page=14>.

15. Wang Hui, "What Is Enlightenment? Rereading Lu Xun" (Sheng zhi shan'e: shenme shi qimeng?—chongdu Lu Xun), *Open Times* (Kaifang shidai) 10 (2010).

16. Li Yunlei, "Subaltern Literature: Practice and Theory, 2004-2009" (Diceng wenxue: shijian yu lilun, 2004-2009), an essay that collects several of Li's writings on *diceng wenxue* that have appeared on *zuoan wenhua wang*. Included in a collection of essays in Chinese, *Wenhua yu Shehui Zhuaxing: Lilun Kuangjia yu Zhongguo Yujing* (Culture and social transformation: theoretical framework and Chinese context), ed. Cao Tianyu, Zhong Xueping, and Liao Kebin (forthcoming).

17. In his discussions on *diceng wenxue*, Li Yunlei identifies three major types of literature that have dominated the contemporary Chinese literary scene: *chun wenxue* or "pure/true literature," *zhuliu wenxue* or mainstream (which means "officially" acceptable) literature, and *shangye wenxue* or commercial literature. Among them, *chun wenxue* (pure/true literature) has been most dominant, in culturally hierarchical terms, the genre against which all other types of literature are judged. Anyone familiar with contemporary Chinese literature can trace the genealogy of *chun wenxue* to the second half of the 1980s, when the so-called avant-garde literature or *xianfeng wenxue* emerged. Critics quickly identified and promoted it as "oppositional" literature in that, more than on the content level, it went after and against the so-called "Mao weni" or the Maoist discourse on a stylistic level. Labeled alternately as *xianfeng* (avant-garde), *shiyao* (experimental), or *xiantai pai* (modernist), the late twentieth-century Chinese "avant-garde" literature quickly gained ascendance; being "modernist," it came to be deemed better than "realist" style and, with the word *chun* or pure, was upheld as "true" literature. The ideological implications of this aesthetic transformation met with sporadic questioning and did not prompt serious rethinking until more recently, when a different kind of creative writing appeared to critically engage the much changed society and the human condition within. I am unable to go into the specifics of the critique of *chun wenxue* except to point out that, while recognizing the role avant-garde literature played in deconstructing the moralistic and linguistic rigidity of the reified Maoist discourse and in dislodging creative possibilities, some critical essays on *zuo'an* examine the ideology and conceptual genealogy (*zhishi puxi*) of the *xianfeng wenxue*, explore the extent to which *xianfeng xiaoshuo* has helped "mythify" (*shenmi hua*) the history of (the postrevolutionary) reform, and raise questions about the role of "pure literature" in the changed social reality in today's China.

18. On *zuo'an* culture net alone, one can find more than a dozen articles focused on "subaltern literature": <http://www.eduww.com/Article/Search.asp?Field=Title&ClassID=&keyword=%B5%D7%B2%E3%CE%C4%D1%A7&Submit=+%CB%D1%CB%F7+>.

19. Xue Yi and Liu Xu, "Questions and Answers on the Concept of Subaltern" (Youguan diceng de wenda), *Frontier* 1 (2005): 28-39.

20. *Ibid.*, 29. "Stinking Ninth" or *chou laojiu* was a term used during the Cultural Revolution to refer to intellectuals. The "flagrant third" is a new coinage from the reform era, referring to the groups that "have made it."

21. Cai Xiang, “Subalterns” (Diceng) (1995), <http://www.cul-studies.com/community/caixiang/200412/330.html> (accessed 6/21/2011).

22. I noticed the same argument made by Chen Yingzhen as is mentioned by Xue Yi in his dialogue with Liu Xu. I did not read this conversation until after I had written the first draft of this essay, in which I had raised a similar point.

23. Wang Hui, “Representation Ruptured” (Daibiaoxing duanlie), <http://www.wyzxsx.com/Article/Class17/201101/207102.html> (accessed 6/15/2011).

24. For Li’s point on the difference between *diceng* and *ruoshi*, see note 16.

25. As mentioned in note 7, akin to *diceng wenxue* is the phenomenon known as *dagong wenxue*, or literature *by* migrant workers. I will not be able to expand on this literary phenomenon here except to say that *dagong wenxue*—often written in the form of poetry (in addition to fiction)—has generated both excitement and anxiety in critics. The anxiety stems from the fact that, on the one hand, this time the “subalterns” appear to be speaking, and without relying too much on the help of the elite; on the other hand, some critics worry that *dagong wenxue* does not necessarily entail a strong sense of social agency.

Chapter Six

Constructing Agency: Challenges and Possibilities in Chinese New Left Literature

Jie Lu¹

Critics now accept an emerging literature that represents unemployed or semiemployed workers, poor peasants, migrant rural workers, and the urban poor as part of the mainstream in contemporary China. Some see these works as a return to realism after a long absence; others interpret them as harbingers of a New Left literature. For example, Cao Zhenglu's novella *There* (Na'er),² published in *Contemporary* (Dangdai), was almost immediately recognized as one of the most important publications of 2004 and hailed as a quintessential text of a contemporary New Left. Cao's novella has stimulated heated discussions of Chinese New Left literature and its possibilities in the historical milieu of the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The leftist traditions of social engagement, social criticism, and social intervention are typically engaged by the recognition of social ills and injustice created by procapitalism economic reform. The miserable fates, deplorable living conditions, and unjust social treatment of the dispossessed and underprivileged people from the social bottom (*diceng*) have long been the focus of left intellectuals of all varieties. Literary critics agree that the appearance of an exposé literature at this time helps to validate the arguments of China's New Left. Intellectuals in this camp have emphasized the theoretical significance of the political, economic, and social problems created by privatization, marketization, developmentalism, and globalization. Their focus also encompasses concerns for social injustice, inequality, social stratification, exploitation, agricultural problems, the loss of state assets, the lack of political participation, the widening divide between the city and countryside, and environmental issues. The range of New Left theories, approaches, anal-

ysis, and prescriptions is wide; some even overlap the ideas of neoliberalism, their reputed intellectual opponent. However, what unifies the New Left is the goal of an alternative political, social, and economic model that responds to the Chinese aspiration for equality and justice. The emerging socially engaged literature mirrors the diversity and the unity of New Left intellectual thinking. Nevertheless, in attempting to grasp existential and complex reality, this literature is more ambivalent and ambiguous than other manifestations of New Left thought, maneuvering between the imperative of an oppositional tradition of leftist culture and the ideological constraints of postsocialist China.

This paper examines the challenges facing New Left literature as it navigates the use of realistic forms, leftist literary traditions, and complex contemporary political and socioeconomic conditions. An investigation of Cao Zhenglu's two fictions, *There* and *Asking Heaven and Earth* (Wen cang-mang),³ highlights three central New Left themes: the possibilities of resistance, the construction of autonomous agency, and the social changes emerging in procapitalist, postsocialist, and postrevolutionary China. I conclude that the construction of agency and subjectivity, a core issue in the leftist tradition, is both the most important contribution and the most difficult task of the current New Left literary odyssey.

I

He Yanhong, one of the leading advocates for New Left literature, believes that it already constitutes the Chinese literary mainstream of the twenty-first century, that it embodies New Left spirit and thinking. According to He, this spirit is a “fighting spirit” that Chinese intellectuals conjure to confront reality and their times.⁴ Most critics, including He Yanhong, find that New Left literature has returned to the realistic tradition of social engagement and social criticism. Others find a more radical tendency and link these writings with proletarian revolutionary literature. According to Liu Jiming, this tradition includes “left literature,” “socialist literature,” and “people’s literature” and focuses on social equality, as well as fighting against class exploitation and oppression.⁵ In linking New Left and proletarian revolutionary literature, such critics strategically place the New Left in binary opposition to other “nonrevolutionary” literary and intellectual trends. Thus New Left literature is critical not only of social ills but also of previous Chinese intellectual and literary developments.

Zhu Dongli asserts, “Our generation has been under the shadow of previous generations throughout the 1980s: criticizing Chinese history, rejecting modern Chinese revolution including the leftist tradition of anti-imperialism

and anti-feudalism, questioning state, nation, collective identity, aspiring to western politics, economic mode, science, language, culture and academic thinking. The intellectual paradigm, values and aesthetics of the 1980s, to be frank, are, to quite some extent, shamelessly anti-people and colonized by the west.”⁶ In commenting on Mo Yan’s, Yu Hua’s, and Yan Geling’s recent works (“Labor of Life and Death,” “Brothers,” and “The Ninth Widow”),⁷ Liu Jiming criticizes them as following the patterns of “scar literature” and defining the Chinese socialist practices achieved by several generations as “preposterously good-and-evil sentimental tragedy.” These authors hope to demonstrate the surprising intellectual and imaginative poverty of Chinese writers and lack of independence of Chinese intellectuals.⁸ Kuang Xinnian sees a “philosophy of ignoble existence” promoted by the neorealist fiction of the 1990s as represented by Yu Hua, Liu Zhengyun, Chi Li, and Liu Heng.⁹ In their militant discourse, their total denial of all previous literary achievements, and their lack of dialogic thinking, they fail to contextualize past literary trends and to see important continuities and discontinuities between New Left literature and revolutionary literature of socialist and critical realisms, neorealism, and modernism.

The rise of new literary schools or trends is always a reaction to the previous intellectual/literary paradigms and views of social reality. The literary/historical *raison d’être* and significance of each school or trend should not be decontextualized. The “literature of the wounded” and the “literature of reflection” of the early 1980s were in reaction to Maoist Marxism, to the radical practices of the Cultural Revolution and Maoist authoritarianism, and especially to the ideological, intellectual, and physical persecution of intellectuals. However, those melodramas were sad but not tragic, for they were embedded in a grand narrative of what was believed to be the true Marxist historical movement. In other words, they pictured the Cultural Revolution as a deviation that would be eventually overcome by a teleological history. The main protagonists of the “wounded” were the intellectuals, yet writing of their sufferings also allowed them to assume the role of the spokesmen of the people and of the age. In this literature, the workers and peasants were not true protagonists, as they were regarded as the leading classes of Mao’s period.

As China’s economic reform deepened in the mid-1980s, and as intellectual/cultural/literary fields became more open, modernist and experimental writings expressed a demand for aesthetic/formal independence and freedom. Aesthetic/literary forms were no longer naïvely understood as “trappings” but seen to be ideologically and politically significant. The seemingly apolitical occupation with formal innovations and experimentations was not justified as purely aesthetic praxis. Indeed, if cultural forms are not political and ideological, why would the cultural/literary authority of Mao’s socialist China have kept them under strict control?

The appearance of neorealist writings in the 1990s then represented another reaction to traditional socialist realism. Everyday life had been banished from socialist realism as representing private space and bourgeois interiors that would contaminate the revolutionary spirit and affect the drive toward the revolutionary goal. Neorealism, then, elevated such space to the position of the real. This literature rejected the preconceived and predefined reality of earlier socialist realism. The teeming, banal, and antiallegorical details and trivia of the everyday, in fact, recognized a different conception of reality that somehow mirrored that of the depoliticized 1990s. The recognition of and respect for the quotidian, as well as for physically and mentally private spaces, mark an important departure from the collective nature of reality defined by traditional socialist realism.

As this brief excursion into recent literary history indicates, each new trend evokes opposition, response, and new construction. Thus each new literature reacts to a new social reality by partly negating or redefining the previous literary tradition as well as constructing a new conception of reality. It is not surprising then that this pattern has reemerged with New Leftist literalism. Moreover, to promote New Left literature as part of the mainstream, as has been done by the literary critics aforementioned, is, ironically, to suppress its critical cutting edge. Left-wing literature, at any historical moment or in any sociocultural context, must maintain opposition to mainstream (read bourgeois) literature. Its claim to be in the political/critical vanguard is based on its strategic marginality as an oppositional literature. It derives its meaning from the critique of the political and socioeconomic status quo and mainstream culture.

Moreover, critics who promote New Left literature risk establishing standards of political correctness, or at least reducing literary plurality to the dominance of a single school. This can also obscure the multifaceted layers of reality or the perceptions of people from multiple social levels. Looking at the past from current ideological and political perspectives imposes closure on a literary movement, neglecting its historical complexities. This critical perspective may blind observers to a dialogical reading of New Left literature. The following questions might better orient the approach to these works: How are they different from socialist realism? How are they influenced by neorealism? How do they represent social agency in the complex reality marked by socialist system and capitalist practices, and what is their contribution to the Chinese leftist tradition?

According to He Hongyan, New Left literature includes *diceng* literature—the literature of the people from the social bottom that traces revolutionary history and expresses the revolutionary spirit, such as Zhang Guangtian's plays, *Che Guevara* and *Mr. Lu Xun*, and New Left literary criticism.¹⁰ *Diceng* literature constitutes the bulk of New Left literature and is also the focus of this essay.

In its critical engagement with social reality, *diceng* literature brings the people from the social bottom to wide attention and constructs a socioeconomic identity for them. The existence of the *diceng* is no longer rejected as a political taboo but recognized as a socioeconomic reality created by the Chinese economic reform of the past three decades. In writing of their sufferings and unjust treatment, *diceng* literature exposes and criticizes the unjust social mechanisms, capitalist exploitation and oppression, political corruption, and moral degeneration of current Chinese society. This literature both reflects and constructs the socioeconomic and sociocultural reality of *diceng*, as other works of Chinese fiction have constructed the new middle class and the new urbanites, two demographics created by the same economic reform mechanism. Through social critique and moral indignation, *diceng* literature forms a relatively coherent moral and critical discourse of modernization and economic reforms. From exploration of urban ghettos to urban gray and shady areas, from derelict factories to dangerous mines, from poverty-stricken countryside to remote and marginal mountainous areas, *diceng* literature presents a dystopian picture of modernization and economic reform in contemporary China. The material and metaphysical marginality of people in the lowest strata of society as well as their physical experiences of hunger, unemployment, and exploitation are narrated to lay bare unsettling truths about modernization and marketization. These authors explore contemporary China beneath the glamorous façade, exposing its inherent contradictions and the disjunction between an economic miracle and the inhuman monstrosity of exploitation. Stories of suffering and misery show the effects of the relentless forces of economic exploitation. Thus these texts attempt to complete the meaning of modernization and development by presenting its dystopian complement. In Chinese, *diceng* means the lower level; its negative connotation as base and irrational can conceal its spatial meaning, which includes reference to the foundation upon which something is built. Thus *diceng* people bear a double disadvantage. They carry the responsibility of being the main workforce and basic constitutive process of contemporary Chinese industrialization, and the burden of the victimization that accompanies modernization.

Though it follows the critical realist tradition by exposing social problems, *diceng* literature has also developed its own tendencies. While presenting a bleak picture of the social failure of economic reform, most stories have refused to lyricize the sufferings or poeticize oppression so as to make the reader “see,” “feel,” and experience its “iron heel.” They force the reader to confront the cumulative effects of oppressive working conditions and the hopeless fate of the *diceng* people. However, there is a strong tendency to spectacularize poverty with detailed, dense, and often naturalistic descriptions of cruelty, and to foreground what I call social/poverty sensationalism, which draws on the style of earlier political and sexual sensationalism in Chinese literature. The emotional effect of these stories is developed not just

by adopting a sensational plot such as one involving murders and violent crimes but also by imitating sensational descriptions in the popular sensationalist writings.

The focus on the everyday of *diceng* life—dense details of the micro worlds of workplaces and private spaces—provides concrete feelings and experiences of poverty and misery. There is little description of the macro events such as economic reforms, but an emphasis on their effects on the *diceng* people. Nor are there any large-scale protests. Instead, resistance takes the form of what is called “weapons of the weak”: loafing on the job, feigning ignorance, deserting, pretending obedience, stealing, playing the fool, slandering, arson, and slowing down work.¹¹ This focus assumes the pattern of *diceng* life lacks collective potential and possibility. The *diceng* are locked in a static, hopeless, and overwhelming social order.

Liu Wei detects a narrative pattern—experiment/adventure to excitement to destruction—that underlies many *diceng* stories, including *There*, “Neon Light” (Nihong), “Mother” (Muqin), and “The Bloody Murder in Masi Mountain” (Masiling xuean).¹² This pattern leading to social destruction is echoed in a parallel narrative focusing on the physical body of *diceng* characters. This “body” narrative follows the pattern, articulated by He Mang, from a description of a beautiful/healthy body to the pressure on/exploitation of the body to the body’s destruction.

The main character in *There*, Zhu Weiguo, undergoes such a transformation. At first, he has a handsome body, tall, fair, proportional with strong muscles. He is admired even by art students. The strength and power of his body allowed him to win athletic competitions and to gain fame and status. However, the narrative describes how his body has undergone exploitation, pressures, and conflicts. At the end when Zhu Weiguo commits suicide, the body is broken into pieces. The heroine in “Life of Beautiful Clothes and Delicious Food” (Yijin yushi de shenghuo) has suffered greatly in her life. She believes that wearing a beautiful cloth at death can lead to an afterlife of abundance. She makes a beautiful *qipao* with all her savings as preparation to commit suicide. Then, just after she leaves her home, she is hit by a car and dies. Her beautiful cloth is destroyed by blood and dirt. For burial, her body is wrapped in an oversized gray cloth.¹³ As He Mang points out, the bodies of both Zhu Weiguo and the heroine of “Life of Beautiful Clothes and Delicious Food” are passive, subservient, completely subject to outside forces, and incapable of resisting, fighting, and exercising human agency.¹⁴

In exposing the condition of *diceng* people, these stories also bring out the profound alienation caused by the rupture between their exploited lives and their dreams, which have been shaped by a materialist worldview promoted by the mass media. Displaced from their familiar rural surroundings and living in an urban culture, migrants struggle to live up to their new aspirations born out of contact with the mainstream culture. These aspirations are

constantly thwarted by the harsh reality of the city. Moreover, since their dreams for a better life are founded on materialism, they are constrained by their poverty: “Everything is stimulating and telling the peasants: field ridges, farmhouses, cowsheds, pigsty are nothing . . . they are crude and backward, and bound to be eliminated by the modern world! Only the city, the town, the county, the provincial capital, Shanghai, and America are the modern world! High buildings, cars, air-conditioned offices, and neon-lighted big hotels . . . that is the ideal life.”¹⁵ The tension between the immediate reality of their social situation and materialistic life dreams further deprives them of a sense of agency. Added to the exploitation and poverty they are suffering, this feeling of ineffectualness results in disempowerment.

Here *diceng* literature departs from both the Chinese socialist realistic tradition and from the neorealism of the 1990s. First, the identity of *diceng* people as established by the New Left literary/cultural discourse differs from a more traditional understanding of class. Although based on economic status, the concept of class stresses political and ideological identity. In contrast, *diceng* identity is mainly associated with socioeconomic reality. The concept of class in Chinese Communist orthodoxy includes class struggle, the class consciousness, and social revolution. As the leaders in the communist revolution, the working class of proletariats and (poor) peasants carry forward the mission of establishing and building their own society. The working class is equivalent to the People (*renmin*), a signifier of the revolutionary force that pushes history forward. It is collective, transcending, and allegorical; it is the collective subject of revolution. Its identity encompasses all the noble and moral traits of the working class. In socialist realist literature, the People is revealed through narratives of big events such as war, revolution, land reforms, and class struggles. Real people and their individual, existential hardships, as well as the horrors and drabness of their daily lives, are filtered, if not completely erased. This larger-than-life concept of the People implies, in addition to a historical mission, the obligation, duty, and sacrifice necessary to achieve it. The double identity of the People—as the master of the country and as the bearer of a necessary sacrifice—continued to predominate till the 1990s: “Until the mid-1980s, the problem of *diceng* did not show up; workers and peasants at the actual social bottom were treated as the masters of the state; thus all problems were either viewed in terms of ‘the interests of the country’ or to be solved in the distant future; or the *diceng* should sacrifice their personal interests for the country. In short, a noble and transcending concern was placed above the real needs of the *diceng* people, above even their basic existence.”¹⁶ These remarks capture the change in the concept of the People and its impact on the way intellectuals imagine those at the social bottom. The *diceng* identity as established by the contemporary *diceng* litera-

ture sidesteps the revolutionary spirit promoted by the previous realistic tradition. The spatial meaning of the word *diceng* already implies the erasure of its vanguard position.

Second, while the spatial term *diceng*, consciously or unconsciously, deconstructs the grand political and ideological meaning of the People, it simultaneously highlights the economic and social aspects of this class—the poverty and suffering of *diceng* people. The existence of poverty is not the issue here; the difference between these interpretations rests on how poverty is perceived and represented. The Maoist socialist vision turns poverty into a positive revolutionary force and motivation; the existential aspect of the Other is incorporated into or erased by the revolutionary discourse. In contrast, the dominant theme of *diceng* literature is the pain, sufferings, and poverty generated by an overwhelming oppressive reality. The poverty and sufferings have shed their former allegorical meaning and dialectic force; they are treated as concrete, physical, and tangible. The *diceng* people in this literature do not want to be sacrificed as the Other to the metaphysical in the binary construction of the body and spirit. Nor do they want to be transcended allegorically. A writer-character in *There*, when asked by the first-person narrator to write about the pains and sufferings of the workers, laughs, finding the narrator to be overly realistic and immediate (*dangxia*). He comments: “The sufferings we are talking about are the ahistorical sufferings and abstract sufferings of mankind. How do you not understand this? How can you write pure literature then? Besides, at your uncle’s age, is he still capable sexually? How can suffering be transcended without sexual ecstasy? How can suffering incapable of transcendence be called suffering?”¹⁷ This is a sarcastic commentary on the allegorical representation of suffering in both “pure literature” and socialist realist literature. *There* is asserting the antiallegorical real, the real that is about the workers’ life that cannot go on. The real is based on concrete, everyday experiences and shares in many ways the conception of the real in neorealist literature. However, it differs from the latter in its political consciousness and social engagement focused on criticizing social ills and problems.

The refusal to contemplate transcendence on the part of these New Left authors implies that *diceng* people are lacking in some respect: they seem incapable of an elevated sense of collectivity and agency. Submerged in existential hardships and struggles, they become a self-involved subgroup, alienated from the rest of society. The stories of individual sufferings, private pains, and personal struggle have established the collective identity of *diceng* as a disadvantaged and dispossessed group. However, a narrative resolution embedded in the pattern of destruction, as discussed earlier, deprives these people of any form of revolutionary agency. If the *diceng* only enter sociocultural discourse as a social problem produced by China’s economic reforms, then their plight seems to reflect problems of the economic system

that the state alone can correct, without any reference to the *diceng* people themselves. In other words, being a symptom and index of social problems, *diceng* people are deprived of a subject position and social agency. However, it could be argued that real agency is not only lacking for this group in postsocialist and postrevolutionary China. Rather, such agency was also absent in socialist China; it only existed in the ideological discourse on the working class. The left tradition as an oppositional literature has long focused on the construction of agency as crucial to social changes. The significance of *diceng* literature should be understood as a prerequisite to the construction of social agency of *diceng* people, a precondition for social change. Although these authors may not solve the problem, they describe the context out of which a solution would emerge. Among *diceng* literature, *There* and *Asking Heaven and Earth* stand out in engaging this most sensitive and difficult issue. Writing about the working class in postsocialist China, the former highlights traditional industrial workers, the latter the rural workers who came into being in the past twenty years. *There*, in focusing on a failure of agency as exercised by a worker-protagonist in postsocialist China, underscores the social and ideological constraints and difficulties in constructing agency for *diceng* people. *Asking Heaven and Earth*, in contrast, points to the possibility that *diceng* people can construct subjectivity and a locale for resistance even in the overwhelming reality of postrevolutionary China.

II

There is about the failure of a union leader's repeated efforts to prevent a state-owned factory from collapsing and the loss of the state's assets in the process of privatization. Zhu Weiguo goes through enormous hardships in his attempt to save his factory and the jobs of his fellow workers. As the union leader, he takes upon himself the task of defending the workers' interests. His petition receives the polite cold shoulder from the state officials, and his efforts find no support among his fellow workers. So the narrator, Zhu Weiguo's nephew, tells us, "the situation turned out to be not the way the little uncle had imaged: when he raised his arm to summon, the people would respond in a crowd, and joined together, with the same hatred toward the enemy, to protect the factory. He was mistaken; he just forgot what kind of age he was in as well as his status."¹⁸ Zhu cannot understand "why the working-class people were so cold and indifferent, so selfish, so timid."¹⁹ What is worse, his efforts are misunderstood by his fellow workers to be for his personal gain. He is forced to realize that he is not speaking for all workers; he is only representing himself. With the failure of his last petition,

Zhu is given a 3 percent share of the factory's ownership. This unexpected result only proves to others the "selfish" motive behind his efforts. In an attempt to express his sincerity and his disillusionment, Zhu commits suicide.

In trying to understand Zhu's death, the narrator frames Zhu's suicide in the revolutionary mode of heroism: "At the last moment, did he think about his grandfather . . . ? I guess he did, for that person in the sketch had been the hero in his mind. Like the little girl who sold matches, he saw that hero in the light of fire. He aspired to that kind of life. That person, with iron bars on his shoulders, several bullet wounds on his body, shouted to let his fellow prisoners to run out. Charge, charge, for tomorrow, for the next generation, for . . . charge, charge!"²⁰ The figure of the grandfather as the embodiment of the revolutionary spirit of self-sacrifice for the communist cause is no longer current; Zhu's death is now interpreted at best as individual heroism, not the manifestation of a collective spirit. More important, his tragic end as a lonely hero points to the difficulty of engaging the collectivity and unified class action in the contemporary age. The workers' solidarity is fractured by their immediate interests; they are no longer working for the grand cause of socialism. Thus, the collapse of collective actions threatens the grand narrative of the historical mission of the working class to achieve communism represented by "*Internationale*," the song of world proletariats.

Tragic heroism, on one level, can be understood as the loss of the meaning of the socialist discourse in the postsocialist and postrevolutionary condition. The grand narrative of teleological history toward communism and the leadership of the industrial working class can no longer describe and explain the current sociopolitical reality. In other words, Zhu Weiguo wants to act out the heroism of the 1950s and 1960s, as constructed by the discourse of the working class and the call to sacrifice for socialism. However, in a postmodern age, all ideological and political discourses are deconstructed, and the working class is reduced to social marginality.

At a deeper level, we might ask whether the Chinese working class ever had leadership in terms of political subjectivity and social agency in socialist China. In the first chapter, *There* presents a decaying image of the working class: Zhu Weiguo's mother suffers from Alzheimer's disease and can sing "*Internationale*" occasionally when her mind is clear. In the second chapter the story turns to the historical perspective and traces the growth of Zhu Weiguo as a worker-hero. He was naughty and did not like to study as a child, but grew up to become a talented and well-known technician praised by his factory, respected by foreigners, and extolled by the media. Subsequently, he was chosen as the provincial model worker. The oil painting *Back Muscle*, modeled on his body and collectively painted by the students of the art institute, became an image of the working class during Mao's era. His growth foregrounds his simple philosophy of life—he makes a living by his labor and craft, and his virtue lies in his commitment to obey the party.

Missing, however, are his voice, his subjectivity, and his agency as a representative of this leading social class. To put it differently, his story highlights revolutionary virtues, but not revolutionary leadership. In examining the hero discourse of Mao's age, we find that if transforming society from semifeudal and semicolonial to socialist/communist underwrites the communist war hero, then serving and working for socialist construction underscores the hero discourse in the socialist period. Socialist heroism thus represents in general the complete self-sacrifice and commitment to the party and to socialism required of a soldier or a builder.

The significance of Zhu Weiguo's lack of voice in the modern setting is highlighted in his inability to express himself as well as his mother's dementia. As the story describes, Zhu is inarticulate, poor in reading and writing, and with a low level of education. He himself admits, "I am too slow; it doesn't work without education."²¹ It is always the narrator, an intellectual, who speaks for Zhu Weiguo. There is never any "dialogue" between Zhu and the so-called "system"—the officials or people above. Moreover, the text is filled with different discourses, of opportunism, of cynicism, of small urbanites, of religion, all of which further silence him.²² Thus the real issue is not that Zhu has lost his voice as a result of the loss of political/social status of the industrial working class in postsocialist China. The problem is that the industrial working class never had a voice/subjectivity in the first place. Thus the political/social status of voice in Mao's period was nominal, given and supported by the CCP and the state nominally; the workers did not possess real subjectivity and agency.

Zhu acts on only a false consciousness and ideological myth. When he wants to assert real agency in challenging the capitalist practices of the state and protect the interests of the workers, he simply fails. This is not just because he is no longer the "master" (*zhuren*) of the country but only a laborer in the labor market in postsocialist China. In fact, he and his fellows have never been "masters" in the true sense of the word. The nominal leadership of the working class and socialist heroism is in actuality no more than a master-slave discourse. Thus the death of Zhu Weiguo marks not just the end of an age but also the collapse of an ideological myth.

There as a story is full of ambiguities and obscurities at all levels,²³ which reflect the complexities of Chinese society. The fundamental challenge posed by these political, economic, and social complexities to Cao Zhenglu as well as to other left-minded writers is, as pointed out by Han Yuhai, that literary efforts are unable to "define" the world of "there," referring to the future of communism.²⁴ However, the absence of a grand narrative in most *diceng* literature does not mean the erasure of communist idealism. Creating a just and equal society is the guiding spirit of the New Left. Rather, these ambiguities and ambivalences raise the crucial issue of how to achieve a just and equal society under China's overwhelming and relentless marketization, cap-

italization, and globalization. To be specific, when the myth of the leadership of the working class has vanished, how can workers and *diceng* people establish their subjectivity and agency? How can they become more than silent builders and laborers who should sacrifice their interests to “share hardships” (*fexiang jiannan*) in a context where a socialist/communist ideology serves the procapitalist reality?

III

Asking Heaven and Earth (Wen cangmang), Cai Zhenglu’s other critically acclaimed work, also focuses on contemporary Chinese economic reform. This ambitious novel presents a panoramic socioeconomic picture of industrialization in contemporary China. It depicts the factory life of rural workers in a Taiwanese-owned foreign enterprise located in a village of Shengzhen. It highlights their protests and struggles to protect their interests by portraying characters from different social sectors such as factory owners and managers, a Communist Party secretary, the village administrators, a professor turned consultant, the city’s labor department officials, and rural workers. In presenting the concrete reality of the working conditions, the horror and drabness of the workers’ life, the lure and manipulation of mass culture, the kindling and betrayal of their urban dreams, and their limited choices, the novel lays bare the process of economic exploitation. The complex interplay of forces represented by these people is distilled into a key result, the exploitation of rural workers in order to increase profits. As “analyzed” by Ma Mingyang, a capitalist-management savvy manager in this factory, the only advantage in most of the high-tech factories in Shengzhen is the cheap labor. These factories do not possess key technology. As observed by Chang Lailin, the factory’s party secretary, the way to profit in this factory is to lower the cost by paying the workers wages offered during their initial probation period. The factory fires the worker after the six-month probation to keep wages lower than those demanded by a regular worker. As the factory does not require much skill, a new worker can get on the production line without training. Thus Tang Yuan, a rural laborer turned social activist, summarizes the secret to Shangzhen’s success: “It is very simple: to pocket the labor of the majority by the minority lawfully and legitimately. It was called exploitation in the past, but is now called reform. Only exploitation can produce profit.”²⁵ Thus economic reform and political power adopt capitalist practices. In turning the antagonism between workers and capitalists into so-called internal contradictions within the socialist system, in order to create “a harmonious society,” the collaboration of capital and political power strategically deprives rural workers of both agency and self-empowerment.

Unlike the story *There*, which is set in an old state-owned factory in northern China, *Asking Heaven and Earth* is set in Shengzhen, a newly industrialized zone created during the era of economic reform. It was developed from a small rural village close to Hong Kong into a special economic zone for attracting foreign investment and capital. Shengzhen is different from older industrial bases in interior China. Instead of traditional industrial workers, the labor force is mainly rural workers from different parts of China. They have built the city from scratch and have become an integral part of contemporary Chinese industrialization and urbanization. However, as an emerging labor force, they have encountered, in addition to exploitation and oppression, barriers to forming an identity as part of the industrial working class. Thus Tang Yuan in the story ponders the social status of rural workers: "When there were not many workers in the past, when the whole country had no more than two million workers, we every day talked about the working class, the sacred labor force, and the power of the workers! But now just Guangdong province alone has tens of millions of workers; how come we have never heard the four characters of the working class? Who are we? Laborers (*dagong zai*), rural workers, labor service people from other places, the Shengzhen builders? We are just not called workers!"²⁶ No one can answer this profound question, not even a professor-consultant. However, in his explanation of "labor law," Mr. Zhao, the professor-consultant, points out the commodity relationship between the employers and employees as its basis. He then continues, "The subject position of the working class stipulated by the Constitution is gone; the worker is merely a laborer, and his relationship with the employer is only that of buying and selling, and of employing and being employed. If he is not happy, he can leave, but he cannot make trouble, because the labor law is the law to manage the laborers, not the law to protect them."²⁷ Thus, his explanation reduces the current social status of the Chinese working class to that of a commodity in the labor market.

As concluded above, the subject position of workers in the socialist period was in essence a false consciousness based on an ideological myth constructed and nurtured by Mao's political discourse and movements. Yet as a collective memory and a political history, this socialist heritage can still provide the traditional industrial working class with cultural capital and a theoretical framework for their collective activities.²⁸ In contrast, when the rural workers of the new labor force came onto the scene, Chinese reality was already depoliticized and marketized. As a result, "the political party is (thus) changing its class basis," and "political divisions between labor and capital, left and right have been made to disappear."²⁹ The disappearance of "class" from the current political and ideological discourse helps neutralize the existence of class conflicts and soften serious social stratification.

Individualism, specialization, professionalism, and equal opportunities dominant in mainstream discourse then turn the issue of social class into an issue of individual quality and personal achievement. Internalized by rural workers, this discourse then invites them to attempt to change. In the light of this discourse, their agency lies in improving themselves instead of in changing the society.³⁰ Although rural workers were acknowledged as “newcomers and an important part of Chinese working class” at the fourteenth congress of the All China Labor Union in 2003, after they were called “rural influx” (*mangliu*), “migrant workers” (*wailai gong*), “working people” (*dagong zu*), and “disadvantaged groups” (*ruoshi qunti*), they cannot avoid being seen as an isolated and ahistorical “Other” by other social groups.³¹

Liu Yeye, one of the main characters in *Asking Heaven and Earth*, leaves her poor village in a mountainous area of Guizhou province to become a rural worker in Shengzhen. Once there, she grows from a simple-minded rural worker, a female laborer, and an outsider to a social worker with a strong sense of agency. However, she confronts a reality in which workers are reduced to the status of a commodity in an age dominated by capital. Unlike most *diceng* literature, which focuses on the sufferings of the *diceng* people, *Asking Heaven and Earth* also explores the possibilities of agency and self-empowerment of rural workers. Critics have noticed the pattern of a *bildungsroman* in the characterization of Liu Yeye. They associate her growth with that of Lin Daojing in *Song of Youth*.³²

Indeed, her growth as a rural worker is accompanied by much suffering, as well as aspirations. To get a chance to leave her poor hometown to work in Shengzhen, she is ready to sacrifice her virginity. Once she is working in the factory, she becomes numbed by the infinite boredom and repetition of the production line: “when a person gets on the production line, she feels in a trance, as if plugged to an electric power source. You are no longer yourself; your hand, feet, eyes, ears, even head have all fled from you, and beyond your control. All these things are only part of tens of people, part of the conveyer belt, part of the company, part of the global market. You can only act with other people, in the same rhythm, doing the same thing; you don’t know when you can wake up.”³³ She gradually realizes that her life on the production line has nothing to do with the glamorous urban life of Shengzhen.

Liu Yeye’s growth is also influenced by Chang Lailin, the party secretary of the company. To Liu Yeye, Chang represents an ideological interpellation crucial to her development. Unlike Zhu Weiguo in *There*, Liu does not possess any sociopolitical awareness of the working class inherited from the socialist period. Although this heritage may be only a memory of a false consciousness, it can still function as a base for political consciousness. Here Chang Lailin represents the role of political power in China’s capitalist practice and the betrayal of the working class by this power. Ironically, he is

invited by the owner of the foreign company to work as the factory's party secretary. As experienced by a Japanese company owner, one party secretary is cheaper and manages workers better than several security people. Indeed, Chang is very experienced at "ideological work" on the workers. To break up a strike, he uses socialist moral education appealing to the workers' conscience. He asks that they share hardships with the owner. To push the workers to catch up with the orders, he relies on nationalist discourse and patriotic sentiment. To save the company owner's brother, he mobilizes workers to donate blood to cultivate an "enterprise culture." He uses the socialist moral ideology, which justified working for the country and loving the factory as part of good citizenship, to create obedient employees as required by the capitalist system.

For many workers, including Liu Yeye, Chang Lailin seems to be on their side: "he knows our difficulties; he understands our sufferings."³⁴ Attracted by his personal charisma, his cordial manner, and his eloquent speech, Liu Yeye almost falls in love with him. Chang Lailin encourages young rural workers to learn more, and go to an open university or an evening university: "In Shengzhen, anyone can become a sun as long as he works hard."³⁵ Liu Yeye hopes to stay in Shengzhen, get a white-collar job, and enjoy the urban life. Inspired by Chang's words, she enrolls in an evening school and eventually receives a diploma equivalent to a three-year college degree. However, Chang's ambivalent way of dealing with the death of Liu Yeye's best friend in a fire changes her opinion of Chang. She now believes he was never on the workers' side. She sees his socialist moral persuasion and enterprise culture as serving the capitalists. Her ideological separation from Chang Lailin is a rejection of mainstream ideological interpellation and the dominant political culture, which aim at disciplining rural workers for industrialization. Chang's theory echoes the "Song of Rural Workers" sung on the Chinese New Year's eve of 2008 by Wang Baoqiang, the famous rural worker turned actor. The song, as well as Chang's theory, promises a better tomorrow filled with utopian imagery for rural workers, but covers over the real conditions of economic exploitation and social oppression.³⁶

Her break with the dominant ideology is only a first step for Liu Yeye toward an independent identity and subjectivity. Her subsequent struggles against capitalists on behalf of the workers' interests allow her to gain a true sense of agency and self-empowerment. After the factory is closed, she joins a small organization that works for workers' benefits as a social worker. She is sent to a factory to investigate its working conditions. Through her efforts and the use of the labor laws, she not only receives the wages she deserves but also works with other mid-level managers to send the owner a proposal for reform that includes Sunday as a day off and extra-shift pay. Finally, through a strike and the intervention of the Labor Office, the owner compromises and agrees to terms. The event leads to the possible establishment of a

labor union in the factory. These activities and the struggle for rights allow Liu Yeye to develop a sense of her potential and an understanding of the social system. The factory workers too, like Liu Yeye originally powerless and simple-minded, have developed a sense of collectivity and agency in protecting their rights and interests (*weiquan yishi*) through participation in strikes. They come to understand how to use the labor laws for self-protection. In this, the novel identifies an important locale of self-empowerment for *diceng* people. In fact, NGO and labor unions are emerging and spreading in many industrial areas in contemporary China.

The significance of this seemingly formulaic New Left story lies in the possibilities it illustrates for the construction of agency in a hegemony created by the collaboration of political power and capital, through the story's ideological transcendence of the imminence of the everyday. Liu as well as other workers and *diceng* people encounter both existential and ideological barriers. The overwhelming reality of capitalist exploitation and oppression has reduced their lives to hardships and struggles, leaving them engaged in quotidian and immediate existential problems. Because of the bonds of the socialist ideology, however, they are not able to fight openly against this "socialist" system, as it is claimed that this would disturb the "harmonious society" as defined by the government.

Although Liu Yeye and Tang Yuan may appear to write in a simple and idealistic way, their stories point to both the necessity and the possibility of constructing agency and self-empowerment for *diceng* people, no longer based on the false socialist ideology but through the struggle for real interests and rights—the key to social transformation. While this ending may still track a "happy closure" (*guangming de weiba*) of socialist realistic writing, the closure no longer refers to the grand narrative of socialism and communism.

In sum, this analysis suggests that New Left literature, though not the result of an alliance between literary and intellectual fields or of a conscious or unified literary movement, is the product of spontaneous social concerns and moral indignity of socially engaged writers. Their attempts at representing the social reality of *diceng* people and the possible construction of agency and empowerment should be understood as an important engagement with Chinese modernity. The search for possibilities for social change constitutes a major theme within the emergence of China's New Leftist works.

NOTES

1. The author would like to thank Robert Benedetti for his invaluable comments and suggestions as well as editing of this paper.
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6. Zhu Dongli, "The Intellectual Complications of Our Generation," quoted in Liu Jiming and Kuang Xinnian, "New Left Literature and Contemporary Thought," 124.
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17. Cao Zhenglu, *There* (Na'er), 207.
18. Cao Zhenglu, *There* (Na'er), 201.
19. Cao Zhenglu, *There* (Na'er), 201.
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22. Wu Zhifeng, "The Suppressed Discourse of the Working Class," *Critical Comments on Contemporary Writers* (Dangdai zhuojia pinglun) 6 (2006): 96-97.
23. For a detailed discussion, see Zheng Peng, "The Solemnity of Class and Obscurity of 'There,'" *Journal of Hainan Normal University* (Hainan shifan xueyuan xuebao) 1 (2006): 66-69.
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26. Cao Zhenglu, *Asking Heaven and Earth*, 33.
27. Cao Zhenglu, *Asking Heaven and Earth*, 6.
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35. Cao Zhenglu, *Asking Heaven and Earth*, 43.
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Chapter Seven

Toward a New Leftist Ecocriticism in Postsocialist China: Reading the “Poetry of Migrant Workers” as Ecopoetry

Haomin Gong

In his recent English book, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, Wang Hui, perhaps the most important New Left thinker in China today, devotes an entire chapter to the memory of Xiao Liangzhong, a young anthropologist who dedicated his life to the environmental protection of the Jinsha River, one of the Yangtze’s most important tributaries.¹ Wang recollects Xiao’s persistent effort to fight the state plan of building two hydroelectric dams at Tiger Leaping Gorge (*Hutiao xia*), one of the deepest gorges in China, located about twenty miles downstream of the magnificent bend of the Jinsha River known as the “First Bend of the Yangtze” (*Changjiang diyi wan*). Together with Shangri-La and the ancient Lijiang City, the gorge and the bend form an area known to the world for its gorgeous natural scenery, rich ecological diversity, and colorful ethnic cultures. Thanks to the concerted efforts of many environmental protectionists, the Chinese government finally gave up the plan. Wang’s remembrance of Xiao’s wholehearted involvement and his leading role in the anti-Tiger Leaping Gorge Dam movement in the last few years of his life signifies a concern on the part of the New Left with grave ecological problems in China.

However, despite sporadic displays of such ecological concern, the New Left does not seem to have very strong ties with the burgeoning environmentalism represented by activists such as Liang Congjie, Yang Dongping, and Zheng Yefu. The relationship between the two parties in contemporary China is, at best, lukewarm. In his brief survey of the Chinese Left today, Wang

Sirui implies that environmentalism can be loosely classified as a branch of the New Left defined in a broad sense. But while both denounce developmentalism and consumerism, he continues, the environmentalists differ from the New Leftists in their support for liberalism and pluralism.² Wang Sirui brings into view the tenuousness of the link between these two important critical discourses and points up the importance of exploring in a more nuanced manner their relationship.

As two of the most dynamic critical discourses in contemporary China, the New Left and ecocriticism³ can, in my view, engage with each other much more closely. In this essay, I examine the sociohistorical conditions under which a more rigorous engagement may emerge and explore the ways it may constructively take place. Through an investigation of the poetry of migrant workers (*dagong shige*) as a type of literature where “lower literature” (*diceng wenxue*) and ecopoetry intersect, I argue that, with its unremitting critique of global capitalism as well as bureaucratic socialism, widely seen as two of the main institutional causes of the ecological crisis in postsocialist China, the New Left can lend its critical edge to ecocriticism and thereby help to effect significant social change.

SOCIOHISTORICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW LEFTIST ECOCRITICISM

The left’s engagement with ecological problems began in the West, as both a critical discourse and a social movement, in the 1970s. The most influential and systematic strand of this engagement is, arguably, ecosocialism, an ideology that can be generally summarized as this: the cause of contemporary environmental crises is the expansion of the world capitalist system, mostly manifested in imperialism and globalization; the remedy is the replacement of capitalism with socialism.⁴ Merging aspects of socialism and environmentalism, ecosocialism finds its philosophical ground in Marxism—three works by Marx and Engels, among others, are of special interest: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Capital*.⁵ Through debates with other forms of green politics such as green economics, deep ecology, bioregionalism, ecofeminism, and social ecology, ecosocialism contributes to the theoretical development of ecocriticism. It also seeks to realize its philosophical ideals through social movements—for instance, one can find ecosocialist influences on current green and socialist movements such as the forming of Green Parties around the world (in the Netherlands, England and Wales, Canada, Germany, etc.). The launching of the

Ecosocialist International Network (EIN) in Paris in 2007 was also an important moment in the ecosocialists' efforts to gain international support for the green cause.⁶

China's involvement in this "red green politics" is, at this point, limited in scope yet increasing in degree. On the one hand, ecosocialism as a social movement on the international front has a minor influence on China—the EIN is still seeking to incorporate members from China. On the other hand, China has been promoting to the international arena its efforts to protect the environment. For instance, Pan Yue, Deputy Director of China's State Environmental Protection Administration, was nominated as the "Person of the Year 2007" by the British weekly the *New Statesman*.⁷ Pan became popular in China in the late 2000s for his iron-handed environmental protection policies—known as the "Evaluation of Impacts on Environment"—which virtually brought to a halt industrial projects with the investment of unprecedented tens of billions of dollars in total. In an interview mainly aimed at Western readers, Pan showed his knowledge, as well as his critique, of ecosocialism in the West. But the Chinese approach that he represents is nevertheless indebted to Western ecosocialism.⁸ This nomination by *New Statesman* indicates an acknowledgment from the West of China's "ecosocialist" development.

On the domestic level, ecology has become increasingly a concern of both the state and the masses since the 1990s. The anti-Tiger Leaping Gorge Dam movement mentioned above and the newly issued warning by the State Council about some "urgent problems" (mainly ecological problems) in the Three Gorges Dam project, for instance, demonstrate a manifest ecological awareness on the part of both the administration and Chinese citizens.

A number of systematic theoretical studies of Marxian interventions into ecological issues have also been carried out in China in recent years. Since the late 1990s, numerous articles have been published to introduce the Chinese to the main ideas and the key texts of Western ecosocialism, including James O'Connor's "Socialism and Ecology," André Gorz's *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, David Pepper's *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*, John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, and Joel Kovel's *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*⁹ Chinese scholars have also striven to dig out domestic resources and to apply indigenous wisdom for the construction of ecosocialism (perhaps with "Chinese characteristics"),¹⁰ as well as to internationalize their efforts: one recent such event was the conference "Marxism and Ecological Civilization," sponsored by the Fudan University School of Philosophy and Center for Contemporary Marxism in Foreign Countries on November 16-19, 2010. Among those who attended were many renowned Western ecosocialist scholars, including Joel Kovel, who gave the keynote speech, "On Marx and Ecology." Kovel mentioned an article on ecosocialism written

by the Tsinghua University Professor Han Lixin, which was included in the anthology *Eco-Socialism as Politics: Rebuilding the Basis of Our Modern Civilisation*, edited by Beijing University Professor Huan Qingzhi and published in English in the West.¹¹ Such participation on the part of Chinese intellectuals in international discussions, of course, helps get their Chinese voices heard and contributes to the development of ecosocialism worldwide.

There is sometimes a misunderstanding, however, in discussing these Chinese “ecosocialist” incidents: Chinese and Western intellectuals alike tend to conveniently assume that any effort in China to protect its massively endangered environment is socialist or Marxist by nature. But many environmental movements in China, while indeed confronting ecological problems, do not necessarily see capitalist expansion as the cause of the problems and therefore are more often inclined to search for technological fixes than to advocate systemic change. This is understandable because China is still, according to its official ideology, a socialist regime. But this ideology is itself politically ambivalent, and many “ecosocialist” events, in fact, simply echo the state ideology without really engaging socialist ideals. In a recent essay on Marxism and ecology, which manifestly aimed to promote the mainstream ideology, Chen Xueming, a professor from Fudan University, interestingly leaves room for the development of capitalism in China after a survey of some foundational ecosocialist problems: “When our goal of eliminating ecological crises and constructing an ecological civilization urges us to depart from capitalist logic, our other goals may still demand that we employ this capitalist logic further.” While he acknowledges that it is of the utmost importance that a Marxist ecological ideal be realized through critiques of capitalism, Chen claims that such critiques should be carried out in a “scientific” manner.¹² Obviously, he echoes here the Chinese Communist Party’s recent credo of the “concepts of scientific development,” raised by President Hu Jintao. Yet more importantly, Chen’s ambivalent view of capitalism speaks of the ambivalence embedded in the state ideology. And this ideological ambivalence, so characteristic of the postsocialist condition in China, shapes the ecology of Chinese engagement with ecological issues.

The New Left in China, under this postsocialist condition, may have a more constructive form of engagement to offer. As an important critical discourse in contemporary China with a rich socialist heritage and a strong theoretical influence from the West, the New Left, in its ecological stand, shares a perspective with ecosocialists around the world. Anticapitalist indeed, it departs from capitalism in its dynamic judgment of the specific features of contemporary Chinese society. The New Left came to the foreground of the intellectual arena in its debate with liberals in the 1990s, when China, going beyond its idealism in the 1980s, embarked at full speed on the global capitalist bandwagon, while (at least nominally) maintaining its socialist political system.¹³ This “socialism with Chinese characteristics” creat-

ed an ideological ambiguity that virtually renders many traditional dichotomies by which critics used to perceive modern society, such as socialism versus capitalism, irrelevant in discussing postsocialist problems in China. In this regard, ecosocialism may sometimes appear less effective in addressing ecological problems in China.

The New Left in China, however, takes on ecological problems by incorporating them into its specific investigation of the postsocialist condition. For instance, Wang Hui explicitly criticizes the rural industries (or the “village and township enterprises” [*xiangzhen qiye*]), an experimental form of enterprise that once mushroomed all over China and was lauded as a successful new model of economic development, for their destructive effect on nature.¹⁴ This criticism is built into his studies of the historical and intellectual conditions of the 1980s and the early 1990s. For Wang Hui, understanding the cause of ecological problems in contemporary China necessarily hinges on understanding the political situation of the period—a nebulous situation in which neoconservatism, neoauthoritarianism, classical liberalism, market extremism, and various forms of nationalism as well as discourses of modernization interplay. All of these discursive narratives, in Wang’s opinion, “had close relationships of one sort or another with the constitution of neoliberalism.”¹⁵

Wang Hui’s view that contemporary China is a neoliberal society is based on his differentiation between two conceptions of socialism: “one is the ‘socialism’ of the old state ideology, characterized by a system of state monopoly; the other is the movement for social security that developed out of that system of state monopoly and the expansion of the market system, characterized by its opposition to monopoly and its demands for social democracy.”¹⁶ Wang calls the former *depoliticized* socialism and latter *political* socialism.¹⁷ Depoliticized socialism ossifies into a bureaucratic and repressive form and thus loses its critical edges, but political socialism, as a critical discourse, maintains socialist ideals, such as political activism and socialist democracy, that are especially relevant in the almost all-encompassing global market. This differentiation between the two socialisms is accompanied by the differentiation between the market and what Wang calls the “market society,” a society mainly governed by the logic of the market. Wang and many other New Left thinkers (such as Cui Zhiyuan and Hu Angang) acknowledge, in their debates with the liberals, the role of the market in liberating China from bureaucratic, depoliticized socialism, but are cautious of the equally depoliticized market society that China is now.

Given this ideological ambiguity and complexity of the postsocialist condition, the approach of ecosocialism to ecological problems in China may seem, in Pan Yue’s words, “too idealistic and lack[ing] ways of solving actual problems.”¹⁸ The New Left contributes a specific, instead of an abstract, understanding of the social condition and the historical context of

postsocialist China, and this understanding—what the New Left calls a rethinking of the “China question”—is meant to transcend the dichotomy of socialism versus capitalism (which is becoming increasingly irrelevant) and incorporate the discussion of different forms of socialism into the question of modernity. Only under the paradigm of modernity, the New Left argues, can one productively understand China’s socialist attempt to build a modern state, which is indeed a practice of but at the same time a counterdiscourse of modernity. In this regard, the New Left’s approach to ecological problems in China cannot be simply labeled “socialist”; it takes on the concrete social condition in postsocialism and seeks to maintain its inherently socialist critical edge against the destructive force of global capitalist modernity.

One primary target of the New Left, which is also closely related to environmentalism, is the prevalent discourse of developmentalism, a discourse of modernity that is inherently uneven in nature. Ecosocialists have turned to early Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg (*The Accumulation of Capital*, 1913) and investigated how the uneven features of capitalist development posed severe challenges to nature. In the view of these Marxists, capital could never reach equilibrium and its constant expansion, constrained by limited natural resources, would inevitably upset the ecological balance.¹⁹ Elsewhere, combing through the theories of Karl Marx, Ernest Mandel, Louise Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, and Neil Smith, I have myself also discussed the unevenness of capitalist development and explored the ways postsocialist China is structured by an uneven developmentalism.²⁰ The New Left has been acutely aware of this. In an important essay on the historical and intellectual conditions of the 1990s, Wang Hui writes:

In the preface to my collection of essays entitled *Rekindling Dead Ashes*, I maintained that the focus of the contention over neoliberalism lay in the questions of social equality and justice. These entailed questions of national and international equality, economic equality, and other social relations (such as gender relations, national relations, political relations, relations between city and country, and *between humans and nature*). This is why the discussion of such issues as feminism, nationalism, postcolonialism, Asia, *ecology*, and development can all be regarded as far-ranging critiques of neoliberalism.²¹

In Wang Hui’s view, the questions of social equality and justice, the key questions that urgently need to be addressed in Chinese postsocialism, are not merely relevant in social fields but also important to the relationship between humans and nature. Although this relationship is incorporated into the New Left’s broader consideration of neoliberalism, it nevertheless constitutes an important critique of the latter. The lack of social equality and justice, in fact, generates a mechanism by which developmentalism in postsocialist China garners its dynamics. In other words, it is precisely by creating or enlarging various kinds of unevenness, such as the unevenness be-

tween geographic areas, industrial sections, cities and the countryside, and different classes, that (economic) development in contemporary China gains momentum.²² As a pro-party writer confesses, “the only political secret of the primary stage of socialism is a rational renunciation of the socialist rule of equality.”²³ (Obviously, the current postsocialist stage still belongs to the officially designated “primary stage of socialism,” which covers the entire stage before “socialist” China turns into a developed country.) Giving up (partly) social equality as a necessary move to unleash incentives for stimulating productivity, a key topic in the debate between the New Left and the liberals in the 1990s,²⁴ inevitably translates into disrespectful or even destructive treatment of nature, a social “other” that can be necessarily taken advantage of or sacrificed for the sake of development. The New Left engages with environmentalism with a special understanding of the postsocialist condition, by extending the socialist ideal of social equality and justice, one of the most needed ideals in China today, to the relationship of humans and nature.

The New Left’s engagement with nature is inherently political and always addresses ecological issues in combination with the alienation of humans in the modern era. Wang Sirui and He Jiadong once questioned the validity of the New Left’s political approach, particularly its employment of class analysis, to ecological issues.²⁵ Environmental problems in contemporary China are more than an ethical issue; they always involve political investments in one way or another.²⁶ This manifestly political feature determines that the New Left’s engagement with environmentalism, unlike the “deep ecology” of ecocriticism, is inherently human-oriented. As Pepper remarks: “Marxism offers a dialectical view of the society-nature relationship, which is not like that of ecocentrics or technocentrics, and challenges both of them. It has a historical materialist approach to social change which ought to inform green strategy. And it is committed to socialism.”²⁷ In this view, socialist engagement with nature is homocentric or anthropocentric, not ecocentric. Kovel also claims that Marxism’s ecopolitical approach is “quite distinct from standard environmental practice, as its prime point is not directly environmental at all but the transformation of the human element in the ecosystem through the empowerment of the associated producers and the overcoming of their alienation.”²⁸

Marcuse even goes as far as to argue, based on the observation of the interactive relationships between the social structure and the individual psyche, that ecological crisis in our modern time is not only a political issue but also a psychological one. Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, Marcuse views the externalized, destructive death drive, which is also socially institutionalized, as an existential cause of humans’ violation of nature. Therefore, he calls for a change in the “radical character structure” that is both psychosomatic and social, to solve the ecological problems in modernity.²⁹ While it

is debatable whether the individual psychosomatic structure constitutes an existential cause of the modern ecological crisis, the alienation of humans in modernity, the departure point of Marcuse's criticism, is closely connected to this crisis.

Likewise, the alienation of humans has also been a central concern of the Chinese New Left, and the New Left's critique of this is especially relevant to its engagement with environmentalism. This is not only because, as Marcuse argues, the violation of nature will ultimately find its roots in the destructive instinct of humans, but also because the New Left sees a parallel between humans' violation of nature and the violation of human nature. To be more specific, humans' treatment of the natural world, in the New Left's view, is related to how they see they are treated in social institutions. The relation between these two aspects can be described on both physical and metaphorical levels: the destruction of nature is a result of the developmentalist production prevalent in contemporary, neoliberal China, and it is also signified in the *denaturing* of human beings under such a condition—in other words, human nature is not to be spared but equally distorted when nature is violated.

Investigating the post-totalitarian system that is governed by the planetary power of technology, Václav Havel remarks that “the only social, or rather political, attempt to do something about it that contains the necessary element of universality (responsibility to and for the whole) is the desperate and, given the turmoil the world is in, fading voice of the ecological movement.”³⁰ Havel sees the ecological movement as the only social/political resolution to the problem of the technologized society because, as I interpret his view, this technologized society signifies an automatism in which both nature and human nature are denatured, and the ecological movement is turned to as a means to restore those violated natures.

The automatism in Havel's conception characterizes not only an authoritarian society but also a consumerist society. Postsocialist China is not a post-totalitarian society as described in Havel's essay, but in terms of its authoritarian *and* consumerist features, Havel's conception is still relevant. For instance, in discussing how to establish a real democratic system in the neoliberal context of China, Wang Hui offers two main directions: “building a market-related democratic system as a means to curtail the destruction of people's daily lives caused by the flux of capital on the one hand, and building the framework of a democratic social system as a means to prevent antimarket forces from turning into nation-state centrism, statism, or authoritarianism on the other.”³¹ These two directions—anticonsumerist and antiauthoritarian—manifestly parallel Havel's conception. In fact, in the New Left's view, rampant commercialization backed by an authoritarian state

constitutes an automatist machine that engulfs contemporary China, a postsocialist, neoliberal condition that has not only degenerated nature but also distorted human nature.

Through what Marcuse calls the mechanisms of “introjection” and “compensatory satisfaction,” this society succeeds in incorporating people into its system and maintains its stability. Therefore, only through changes in the “radical character structure,” or “existential revolts,” Marcuse argues, can we effect any real change of reality. Marcuse’s “existential revolts” echoes what Havel calls the “existential revolution,” an apolitical, or what he calls a “pre-political,” movement aimed at fundamentally resolving the crises in an automatist social system.³² Marcuse’s existential revolts begin with a psychosomatic change—an ascendancy of the life instinct over the death instinct, in his view—but are political in nature. Havel’s existential revolution, though allegedly more philosophical and individual than political, nonetheless takes the post-totalitarian social system as its target and therefore is inevitably political.

Faced with concrete ecological and social problems in China, the Chinese New Left pays more attention to political resolutions of the alienation of people under the technologized, automatist society. They seek to combat repressive forces that denature people and to establish a liberal-democratic system in which social justice and equality are hopefully realized to the fullest degree. This will lead to an emancipation of citizens from state power in combination with the prison of commercialization, and thus re-natured, people will establish a more productive relationship with nature.

In what follows, I will read the poetry of migrant workers through the paradigm of the New Left’s engagement with environmentalism, and investigate the ways this form of “New Left-Wing” literature, as some critics would label it, can constitute an ecocritique of the postsocialist condition.

READING THE POETRY OF MIGRANT WORKERS AS ECOPOETRY: IDENTITY, INSTITUTIONS, AND COMMUNITY

The poetry of migrant workers is a form of “lower literature,” which emerged and soon attracted critical attention in the early 2000s. Largely because of its special concern with the lives of people in the lower strata of society, lower literature is considered a contemporary manifestation of the left-wing literary tradition in China. Many critics believe that, with the publication of a series of works in recent years refocusing on this group of people, the literary field in China is experiencing a revival of left-wing literature. In a contemporary context, as a critic remarks, this literature “pays attention to the happiness and sadness of the people living at the bottom of the society in an intimate

manner like ‘flesh-and-bone’; it observes the social reality and the inequalities in it with a critical spirit; and it calls for the ideals of social equality and justice with a clear class stand.”³³ It is notable in this description that, besides special concern for social underdogs, left-wing literature, more importantly, demonstrates a clear class consciousness in depicting the destinies of these people, analyzing the social conditions that generate problems in their lives, and finding ways to solve those problems.³⁴

The poetry of migrant workers, in terms of both its subjects and the targets of its critiques, is indeed a form of new left-wing literature.³⁵ Generally defined, it is a kind of poetry that is about the lives of migrant workers, a special group of people that gained visibility as a result of China’s increasing involvement with global capitalism beginning in the late 1980s. Implied in this definition, among other things, is the politics of identity: the Chinese term for this kind of poetry, *dagong*, means “a party working for another through employment,” which simply indicates a contractual work relationship; but “*dagong* poetry” as a literary term is used specifically to refer to poetry about the hardships of migrant workers’ lives in cities. In other words, this kind of poetry, as I have discussed elsewhere, is identified first by the identity of its subject.³⁶

This sense of identity shapes the ways the poets conceive their relationship with nature. To be more specific, besides bearing witness to the pollution and the destruction of nature in the unchecked process of industrialization and urbanization, these poets, disoriented in an urban environment, usually see their own experience in parallel with a nature disturbed by human interventions. For instance, plants uprooted from the earth is an image that appears repeatedly. In Zheng Xiaoqiong’s poems, the poet demonstrates a complex feeling toward litchi trees, a key image that figures large in her works. In many cases, she tries hard to merge herself into the place where she is working by identifying with litchi trees, native in the south, but she usually finds herself frustrated by this unwelcoming place, which she can hardly call home:

This coastal village in the south that I know,
I’ve been walking on its body for many years.
I see under the litchi trees houses, buildings, plants.

.....

I call them Huangmaling. I see myself
growing in its body, my roots stuck in
its body, covered by cement. On its body I
write down my poems, youth, or a mediocre love.

.....

For many years, I’ve seen so many of them [female migrant workers].
Coming and going, just like the leaves of litchi trees,
Aging, falling . . .

("A Village" [Cunzhuang])³⁷

The poet imagines herself as a (litchi) tree, trying hard to grow in an inclement environment (in ground "covered by cement"). She witnesses her fellow workers, who used to be "like the new leaves of litchi trees" ("Girls" [Shaonü]), aging and falling like the leaves of the litchi trees that fail to adapt to the increasingly polluted environment.³⁸ More tragically, her failed identification is intensified by the destructive process of industrialization and urbanization, in which acres of litchi forest are felled—a process in which she is simultaneously a participant and a victim.³⁹

Chen Zhongcun expresses a similar sense of uprootedness by comparing himself to a grown tree transplanted to the city:

In the city, transplanted grown trees;
I don't know how long they'll live,
whether they are, like me, migrating and still missing their hometowns.
("Transplanting Grown Trees" [Dashu yizhi])⁴⁰

These trees were intended to be used to build "a new house for my marriage," "a set of first-class furniture for my sister's marriage," and "a first-class coffin for my grandfather"—that is to say, they would have been integrated into the natural cycle of human lives, had they not been transplanted to the city. But now they only serve as decorations for high-rise buildings, separated from their natural environment. This contrast between integration into nature and separation from nature is a prominent feature of Chen's poetry. As Yang Binhua points out, Chen constantly observes the city he is living in through measurements such as length, height, velocity, and temperature.⁴¹ In other words, the urban environment around him is viewed in cold numbers mindlessly vying to be higher and faster in measurement, while images of the warmth of nature appear only in his nostalgic dreams. (Similar poems include Zhao Dahai's "A Seed Returning to the Countryside to Rehabilitate"⁴² and Li Qiong's "Farm Crops Living in the City."⁴³)

This sense of disorientation and uprootedness is accompanied by the poets' frustration with and critique of the institutions in which they are trapped. These institutions usually appear in the image of the machine because the machine, in the eyes of migrant workers, is the thing that most immediately shapes their mechanical lives on a daily basis. For instance, in many of her poems, Zheng Xiaoqiong laments the fact that every individual, once placed on a production line, is turned into a nameless work code: "my name is hidden in a work card / my hands have become a part of production lines, and my body is signed to / a contract."⁴⁴ Zhang Shougang echoes this sense of dehumanization in his poem, "Records of Things Taking Place in Tanzhou" (Tanzhou jishi): "I usually walked the dull days / into a long, long

production line.”⁴⁵ Similarly, in his poem, “My Days in Southern Towns,”⁴⁶ Pang Qingming describes how his work suppresses his emotions and virtually turns his life mechanical: “All of my passion and curiosity have turned into / a grand symphony of machines, mechanical issues, and mechanical hearts.” Fang Zhou more directly compares migrant workers to machines, only these machines are capable of being nostalgic, a human feeling that is so characteristic of migrant workers, who, constantly migrating, find home neither in cities nor back in their countryside hometowns:⁴⁷

The nostalgia of machines
 appears in a huge building
 in a homeless age of lyricism
 in the destiny of intensive labor
 touching different kinds of pain
 —“The Nostalgia of Machines”⁴⁸

In these poems, the humanity of migrant workers, their individuality, passion, and curiosity, is eliminated in the age of mechanical mass production, and the workers’ nostalgia, the only human expression left in them, only intensifies their overall sense of deprivation. In his last talk, “Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society,” Marcuse warns about the abuse of “machine power” in modernity, a power that “inevitably equalizes individuals on the surface” and turns people into one-dimensional men: “their introjected needs and aspirations are universalized; they become general, common throughout the society.” This “universalization” of people, that is, alienation of humans, is a result of capitalist production, which transforms human beings into instruments in capital’s aggression against nature. Therefore, in Marcuse’s vision, change “presupposes a disintegration of this universality.”⁴⁹

Further, as I have discussed above, the machine power is also metaphorical of the character of authoritarian and consumerist institutions in the post-socialist condition, which not only endanger the environment directly in their developmentalist drive but also distort human nature and thus denature human relations with nature. The power of these institutions is rooted in the prevailing global capitalist production, of which migrant workers, knowingly or not, are an active part. Zheng Xiaoqiong’s poem “Industrial Age” (Gongye shidai) interestingly describes this power:

A Japanese machine board in an American company is processing the iron ore coming from a Brazilian mine; a lathe from Germany is reshaping the coastal lines of France; Korean storage racks are packed with Italian standard components; Belgium is waiting for sale at the corner; Spain and Singapore are performing inspection; Russia is moved into storage by movers; black Africa

is standing as raw materials on open ground; a Chilean order is as long as
 the narrow shape of the country. My Sichuan dialect is a little conservative; the
 Western Hunan dialect
 is harder to understand; the Minnan dialect in Fujian is talking with
 Taiwanese;
 Cantonese Hong Kong is only a temporary stop. If I wish, I can
 put India, Arabian Afghanistan, and Pakistan
 next to Australia; make Iraq adjacent to the United States;
 move Israel to the center of the Caribbean countries;
 let the UK shake hands with Argentina, Japan, and Mexico
 In this industrial age, I work hectically
 in order to put the entire world in order in a single plant.⁵⁰

In this poem, we see, rather ironically, how a tiny coastal plant in China “arranges” the whole world in its business management. This playful rearrangement, however, demonstrates the power of capital: it transcends the traditional borders of nation-states and determines international geopolitics. The rearrangement also exhibits the ecoimperialist and ecocolonial nature of capital: as a result of its aggression, controlled by a handful of developed countries, underdeveloped places are usually turned into providers of raw materials and dumping grounds for industrial waste; in other words, for the sake of sheer profit-seeking, capital, if left unchecked, flows to and exploits every corner of the world, heedless of any ecological or humanistic threat. Migrant worker poets record, from various angles, how this monstrous machine called global capitalism engulfs their body and soul, and the natural environment around them.

This dire situation reminds us of what Marx writes in his monumental *Capital* about the capitalist means of production: “they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labor by turning it into a torment; they alienate [*entfremden*] from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power.”⁵¹ Perhaps what can be added here, as a result of this denaturing of humanity, is the inevitable destruction of nature. In this sense we may better understand why, as Havel has it, an essential revolt against repressive social institutions, authoritarian or consumerist, should be “ecological.” Put in another way, a critical intervention into ecological crisis, as the New Left claims, must be effectively associated with a critique of the global capitalist system that governs almost every aspect of our lives.

The strong sense of community implied in the poetry of migrant workers may serve as an effective means of New Leftist intervention. In the specific field of ecocriticism, if one way that the capitalist system silences the people amid ecological crisis, as Kovel remarks, is to “cut [them] off from a vital community,”⁵² then migrant worker poets’ effort to build up a community of

migrant workers is, in effect, an effort to rekindle a group consciousness of this crisis, among many others. This sense of community, if not class consciousness in a conventional sense, plays an important role in an effective challenge to the neoliberal condition. As Marcuse has it, even though a change in human nature is essential for a rebellion against modern ecological conditions, “the mass organizations of political parties, trade unions, and so on” still constitute an effective political praxis required for this rebellion.⁵³

In the case of the poetry of migrant workers, this sense of community has been strong, mainly due to the similar experiences of most of the workers, such as migrating from the countryside to city, working under machine-driven conditions, and suffering from the aggression of the authorities. Sun Heng’s widely popular song, “Migrant Workers of the World Are a Family” (*Tianxia dagong shi yijia*), whose lyrics are included in an anthology of the poetry of migrant workers,⁵⁴ touches the common emotions of migrant workers and speaks volumes of their sense of togetherness. Xu Qiang’s poem, “The Age of Migrant Workers” (*Dagong shidai*), is typical of these poets’ urge to speak *of* and *for* all the migrant workers:

My body is flowing with tens of millions of people’s blood; my mouth is
connected with
tens of millions of people’s hearts; their longings are
just my longings; their sweat is
just my sweat; their helplessness is
just my helplessness.⁵⁵

In fact, this community of migrant workers formed in poetry writing is extended to a broader readership. Bernard W. Quetchanbach explains how ecopoetry reconsolidates the relationships among writer, subject, and audience, and, as a result, forms a reading community:

The implications of the development of current identity poetics for environmental poetry are significant and far-reaching. The “ecopoet,” like the prose nature writer, is a kind of missionary, motivated by a fierce devotion to a subject matter that is endangered and absolutely crucial to the poet’s well being and, as even the largest circle of the general public is increasingly aware, to the world at large. Because it seeks to establish a community of readers whose common experience is assumed to be prior to and essential to the poetry, current identity poetics is well suited to real connections between individuals and communities.⁵⁶

This community is especially important for ecopoetry because, as Nick Kaldis points out in another context, it inevitably carries with it practical social responsibilities, which can eventually effect social change.⁵⁷ This intervention and communal nature of ecopoetry fits the New Left’s agenda of an

effective ecocritical engagement. The poetry of migrant workers, read as ecopoetry, may well serve as an excellent example of the New Left's intervention in the ecological crisis in postsocialist China.

CONCLUSION

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels state that the bourgeois class has “put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.”⁵⁸ Taken on a literal level, this observation insightfully envisions, among other things, the ecological crisis that capitalism would bring to the modern world. Although postsocialist China is not a capitalist regime in a traditional Marxian sense, its increasing involvement in global capitalism and the market logic that prevails in Chinese society make a socialist approach to a great many social problems in contemporary China highly relevant. Particularly in environmental crises resulting from the capitalist means of production, which not only pollutes the environment and destroys the ecological balance in the rather irrational pursuit of profits but also denatures humans and institutionalizes its logic, a New Leftist intervention appears urgent.

Basing its political agenda on its understanding of the specific characteristics of the postsocialist condition, the New Left sees the ecological problems in this technologized society as more institutional than technological, and the suppressive institutions as not simply capitalist or bureaucratic socialist but rather a neoliberal system that is simultaneously authoritarian and consumerist. Further, under these conditions, the destruction of nature is always linked with the denaturing of humans. Therefore, a New Leftist engagement with environmental problems is both political and psychological.

Admittedly, the Chinese New Left has not yet had a specific agenda in addressing environmental issues—their concerns with ecological problems are usually incorporated into their more general projects. However, as its exploration of the postsocialist condition broadens and deepens, we are hopeful that a New Leftist intervention will prove to be one of the most effective approaches.

NOTES

1. Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

2. Wang Sirui, “Shixi jinri Zhongguo de zuopai guangpu” (An analysis of leftists in China today), in *Jinri Zhongguo zhengzhi sichao pingxi* (Reviews of political thoughts in China today), coauthored by Wang Sirui and He Jiadong (Beijing: Beijing dangdai hanyu yanjiusuo, 2001), 203-28.

3. Generally, I use “environmentalism” and “ecocriticism” interchangeably in this essay. Still, the connotations of the two terms register nuanced differences: “environmentalism” refers to more to social movements that take environmental protection as their goal; “ecocriticism” refers to the critical discourse, mainly in the fields of art, literature, and culture, that addresses ecological problems.

4. Joel Kovel and Michael Lowy, “An Ecosocialist Manifesto,” http://www.iefd.org/manifestos/ecosocialist_manifesto.php. Accessed May 2011.

5. For debates on the relationship between Marxism and nature, see Ted Benton, “Marxism and Natural Limits: An Ecological Critique and Reconstruction,” *New Left Review* 178 (1989); “Ecology, Socialism and the Mastery of Nature: A Reply to Reiner Grundmann,” *New Left Review* 194 (1992); Reiner Grundmann, “The Ecological Challenge to Marxism,” *New Left Review* 187 (1991).

6. In the discourse of ecosocialism, capitalism is regarded as the ultimate cause of ecological problems in modernity. However, the socialist pursuit of modernity can be equally destructive to nature: for example, the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s in China, a mass movement that Mao promoted in order to expedite the industrialization of the new republic, actually brought about mindless waste of natural resources and enormous pollution of the environment. Although the socialist period in China is beyond my scope here, I am aware of the historical context of ecosocialism in regard to its critique of capitalism, and its limit when this theory is extended to the postsocialist condition of China. In fact, as I will explain in what follows, this divide between capitalism and socialism in addressing ecological issues, which can sometimes be problematic, is one of the areas where the Chinese New Left engages with ecosocialism and asserts its stand based on an understanding of the specific social conditions of contemporary China.

7. Sholto Byrnes, “Person of the Year: The Man Making China Green,” *New Statesman*, <http://www.newstatesman.com/200612180028>. Accessed May 2011.

8. Pan Yue and Jigang Zhou, “The Rich Consume and the Poor Suffer the Pollution,” *chinadialogue*, October 27, 2006, <http://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/493--The-rich-consume-and-the-poor-suffer-the-pollution->. Accessed May 2011.

9. See, for example, Zeng Wenting, “Shengtaixue Makeshuyi tanwei” (A probe into ecological Marxism), *Fujian luntan (renwen shehui kexue ban)* (Fujian tribune [a literature, history and philosophy bimonthly]) 7 (2004): 50-53. James O’Connor, “Socialism and Ecology,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 2, no. 3 (1991); André Gorz, *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1994); Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007); David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000). Foster’s book was translated into Chinese by Liu Rensheng and others and published by the Higher Education Press in Beijing in 2006.

10. See, for example, Liu Fuchu, “Jinnianlai shengtaishihuizhuyi yanjiu zongshu” (A survey of the studies of ecosocialism in recent years), *Qiushi* (Truth seeking) 9 (2008): 78-80; Wang Huan, “Jinnianlai guonei shengtaishihuizhuyi sichao yanjiu shuping” (A review of the studies of ecosocialism in China in recent years), *Renli ziyuan guanli* (Human resource management) 4 (2010): 267-68.

11. Joel Kovel, “On Marx and Ecology,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 22, no. 1 (2011); Qingzhi Huan, ed., *Eco-Socialism as Politics: Rebuilding the Basis of Our Modern Civilisation* (Dordrecht and New York: Springer, 2010).

12. Chen Xueming, “Makeshuyi yu shengtai wenming jianshe” (Marxism and the construction of an ecological civilization), *Wenhui bao* (Wenhui news), February 22, 2010.

13. For discussions of this debate, see Gloria Davies, *Worrying about China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), especially chapter 2: “Divided over China”; Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Chaohua Wang, ed., *One China, Many Paths* (London and New York: Verso, 2003); Xu Youyu, “The Debates between Liberalism and the New Left in China since the 1990s,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 34, no. 3 (2003).

14. Wang Hui writes, “those regions where rural industries are the most successful have not put in place any measures for the protection of the environment. The result has been severe environmental degradation.... [O]bscured by the productivity and the prosperous lifestyle were serious instances of environmental pollution, the degradation of the environment around production sites, and serious illegalities.” Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, ed. Theodore Huters (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 218n20. The title of this essay is “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity” (*Dangdai Zhongguo sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti*).

15. *Ibid.*, 44. Wang Hui's view that contemporary China is a neoliberal society is influential: referring quite extensively to Wang's studies, David Harvey devotes a whole chapter to neoliberalism in China in his widely popular book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. For a criticism of Wang Hui's view, see Wang Sirui and He Jiadong's article, “The Historical Origin of the Neo-Authoritarianism and the New Left: A Critique of Wang Hui's ‘The Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China and Its Critique.’” Wang and He argue that the dominant discourse in the 1990s and since, unlike what Wang Hui claims, is neoauthoritarianism instead of neoliberalism. Liberal discourses in China should be respected, not denounced, in a concerted effort to replace the current authoritarian regime with a “liberal-democratic” state. In my opinion, there are not too many differences between the two parties; in fact, they address the same cultural-political condition, only with different emphases. Wang Hui is more critical of what he calls the “market society,” while Wang and He see the authoritarian regime as the main issue. But the postsocialist reality is none other than a market society backed by the authoritarian state, a neoliberal state *par excellence*. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, England, and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Wang Sirui and He Jiadong, “Xinweiquanzhuyi yu xinzuopai de lishi genyuan: ping Wang Hui ‘xinziyouzhuyi de lishi genyuan yu pipan’” (The historical origin of neoauthoritarianism and the New Left: a critique of Wang Hui's “The historical roots of ‘neoliberalism’ in China and its critique”), *Taiwan shehui yanjiu* (Taiwan: a radical quarterly in social studies) 45 (March 2002): 209-46.

16. Wang, *China's New Order*, 47.

17. Wang, *The End of the Revolution*, esp. chapter 1, “Depoliticized Politics: From East to West.”

18. Pan Yue and Jigang Zhou, “The Rich Consume and the Poor Suffer the Pollution.”

19. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951). See Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature*, especially chapter 9, “Refiguration.”

20. Haomin Gong, *Uneven Modernity: Literature, Film, and Intellectual Discourse in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012).

21. Wang, *China's New Order*, 112. The title of this essay is “The 1989 Social Movement and the Historical Roots of China's Neoliberalism” (1989 *shehui yundong yu Zhongguo ‘xin ziyouzhuyi’ de lishi genyuan*). Emphases are mine.

22. See Gong, *Uneven Modernity*.

23. Luoyininggeer, *Di san zhi yanjing kan Zhongguo* (Looking at China through a third eye), trans. Wang Shan (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), quoted from Liu Zhifeng, ed., *Jieshi Zhongguo: Di san zhi yanjing kan Zhongguo pipan* (Explaining China: a critique of *Looking at China through a third eye*) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), 54. According to Liu Zhifeng, the real author of the “Luoyininggeer” book, which was passed off as the translation of a book by a German sinologist, was Wang Shan, who disguised himself as the translator. The renowned exiled essayist Liu Binyan shares Liu Zhifeng's view. See Liu Binyan, “Ping *Di san zhi yanjing kan Zhongguo*” (A review of *Looking at China through a third eye*), *Beijing zhi chun* (Spring in Beijing) 10 (1994): 23-32.

24. In fact, this debate on “equality vs. efficiency,” which translates into the question of “democracy vs. liberalism,” proves to be moot because under neoliberalism where the “liberal” force of the market is backed by an authoritarian state power, building a liberal-democratic polity, both the New Left and the liberals agree, is the goal in China today. See Qin Hui, “Wo de ‘di san tiao daolu’” (My “third way”), *Tianya* (Frontiers) 2 (2000): 46-50.

25. See Wang Sirui and He Jiadong, “The Historical Origin of Neo-Authoritarianism and the New Left: A Critique of Wang Hui’s ‘The Historical Roots of Neoliberalism in China and Its Critique.’”

26. One of the recent such examples is the debate on the Three Gorges Dam. Many of the detractors of this megaproject, such as the dissident Dai Qing, reveal the political tension involved in the decision making in this project. For a recent report on the controversy, see Peter Lee, “Three Gorges Dam Crisis in Slow Motion,” *Asia Times*, June 11, 2011.

27. Pepper, *Eco-Socialism*, 3.

28. Kovel, “On Marx and Ecology,” 8.

29. Herbert Marcuse, “Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 3, no. 3 (1992).

30. Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), 90.

31. Wang Hui, “Zhongguo ‘xinziyouzhuyi’ de lishi genyuan: zailun dangdai Zhongguo dalu de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti” (The historical roots of ‘neoliberalism’ in China: the second analysis of the intellectual conditions of contemporary China and the problem of modernity), in Wang Hui, *Qu zhengzhijia de zhengzhi: duan ershi shiji de zhongjie yu jiushi niandai* (Depoliticized politics: the end of the short twentieth century and the 1990s) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008), 138.

32. Marcuse, “Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society,” 37; Havel, “The Power of the Powerless,” 90.

33. Ji Yaya, “‘Zuoyi wenxue’ chuantong de fusu he ta de liliang: ping Cao Zhenglu de xiaoshuo *Na’er*” (The revival of the left-wing literary tradition and its power: a review of Cao Zhenglu’s novel *There*), *Wenyi lilun yu piping* (Theory and criticism of literature and art) 1 (2005): 50.

34. Critics have shown concerns about “declassing” trends in depicting social underdogs. For instance, Kuang Xinnian points out two such trends: first, an ethicalization on the part of the social establishment, elites, and the mass media of the poor; and second, an aestheticization of pain and harshness. See Kuang Xinnian, “‘Xin zuoyi wenxue’ yu lishi de keneng xing” (New left-wing literature and its historical possibilities), *Wenyi lilun yu piping* (Theory and criticism of literature and art) 6 (2008). For further discussions of “lower literature,” see Jie Lu’s chapter in this volume.

35. Of course, reading the poetry of migrant workers as left-wing literature is not to deduce the complexity of the poetry. As Yang Xiaobin points out, this type of poetry should be more rigorously explored on the *formal* and *aesthetic* fronts rather than simply at the *subject* and *identity* levels, as current criticisms tend to do. Yang Xiaobin, “Cong heiyeye yishi dao xin hongyan xiezuo: dangdai dalu nüxing shige” (From a consciousness of the dark night to a new feminine writing: on contemporary women’s poetry in mainland China), a talk delivered at Tamkang University on May 5, 2011.

36. Haomin Gong, “What Does It Mean to Be Eco-poetic in Postsocialist China: The Case of the Poetry of Migrant Workers and Zheng Xiaoqiong,” presentation given at the 42nd Annual Convention of the Northeast Modern Languages Association (NeMLA), Rutgers University, April 7-10, 2011.

37. Zheng Xiaoqiong, *Zheng Xiaoqiong shixuan* (Selected poems of Zheng Xiaoqiong) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2008), 66.

38. Zheng Xiaoqiong, *Sanluo zai jitai shang de shi* (Poems scattered on machine platforms) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2009), 38.

39. See my essay, “What Does It Mean to Be Eco-poetic in Postsocialist China,” for a detailed discussion of the image of litchi trees in Zheng Xiaoqiong’s poetry.

40. Chen Zhongcun, *Chengshi de zanjuzhe: yi wei shige shengtu de wendu* (A temporary city resident: the temperature of a sacred poetic disciple) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2007), 41.

41. Yang Binhua, "Xu er: youzou yu chengshi yu xiangcun jian de shihun" (Introduction II: a poetic spirit traveling between city and the countryside), in Chen Zhongcun, *Chengshi de zanjuzhe: yi wei shige shengtu de wendu* (A temporary city resident: the temperature of a sacred poetic disciple) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 2007), 5.
42. Yi li zhongzi fanhui xiangxia liaoshang; Xu et al. 2007: 318.
43. Jicheng de zhuangjia; Xu et al. 2009: 227.
44. "Life" [Shenghuo]; Zheng 2008: 65.
45. Xu et al. 2007: 74.
46. Wo de nanfang xiangzhen sui yue; Xu et al. 2007: 165.
47. See, for instance, Xu Fei's poem, "The Feeling of Going Back Home Is Still Migrating" ("Guijia de xinqing hai dei liulang"; Xu et al. 2007: 82-87), Ma Zhong's poem, "The Homeland That is Running" ("Benpao de xiangtu"; Xu et al. 2007: 197-98), and Hei Ma's poem, "The Place That I Cannot Return to Is Called Hometown" ("Hui bu qu de difang jiao guxiang"; Xu et al. 2009: 57).
48. [Jiqi de xiangchou]; Xu et al. 2007: 186.
49. Marcuse, "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society," 34.
50. Zheng 2009: 57-58
51. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (London and New York: Penguin, 1976), 799.
52. Kovel, "On Marx and Ecology," 8.
53. Marcuse, "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society," 37.
54. Xu et al. 2007: 383
55. Quoted from Zheng Xiaoqiong's Sina blog: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_45a57d3001000bgj.html. Accessed May 2011.
56. Bernard W. Quetchenbach, "Primary Concerns: The Development of Current Environmental Identity Poetry," in *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, ed. J. Scott Bryson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002), 248.
57. Nick Kaldis, "Steward of the Ineffable: 'Anxiety-Reflex' in/as the Nature Writing of Liu Kexiang (Or: Nature Writing Against Academic Colonization)," in *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, ed. Christopher Lupke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
58. Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 475.

Chapter Eight

The Rise of the Short-short Genre

Aili Mu

The rise of the short-short genre¹ (*xiaoxiaoshuo* or *weixing xiaoshuo*) has coincided with the rise of China in the past thirty years. It is obvious that the genre took off on the wings of the market. An emerging genre involving amateur writers, the short-short needs the affirmation of readers' purchasing power to move from the margin toward the center and establish a firm foothold there. But short-shorts are not just a product of recent historical changes, another object of consumption manufactured to entertain for profit. While enjoying the logic of the market, the practitioners of the genre have also defied market imperatives and other essentialist thinking in incredible ways.

The genre, in general, aspires to the status of “pure” literature when that status has plummeted in the marketplace. Short-short stories are mostly of, by, and for ordinary people, but such popular literature has long been regarded as outdated. When many literary elites had either moved on to profitable best-sellers and TV series or been pursuing transnational fame and leisured urban audiences, short-short authors worked hard to ascend. The practice of the genre incorporates the strengths of the budding culture industry and state socialism yet believes that maintaining their separation is imperative. The genre (re)appreciates state literary establishments—associations, prizes, journals, etc.—and seeks their support and recognition at a time when “rupture” with them is fashionable. Practitioners insist on both social and economic benefits, especially their moral responsibility to the young, when lucrative vulgar writings could easily catch more eyeballs. But they do not treat consumable literature as necessarily bad; the needs of consumer audiences and the higher purpose of art are compatible.

The trajectory of from-to, i.e., that China has transformed from a unified society of intimately intertwined political, cultural, and economic life to a market society wherein the economy predominates,² is not that of the short-short genre. Its workings are made possible by the inseparable aspects of life, wherein the market is but one of the forces defining desire and creativity. The rise of the genre seems to narrate a different story: when the dominant ideology swings, the desire for truth, goodness, and beauty stays constant because people like short-short writers and promoters live, create, and aspire for the three realms of integrated value in everyday life.

If the rise of the short-short genre is in sync with China's recent transformation, the practice of the genre has also been going against its grain. What does this cultural phenomenon tell us about contemporary China, especially its capitalist modernization? The global capitalist system offers little to remedy the crisis of modernity. Wang Hui's search into China's past—especially intellectuals' effort to learn from global market mechanism so as to transcend capitalist modernity—for possible alternatives inspired this article's understanding of the short-short phenomenon.

The New Left has learned to embrace diverse ideological orientations—market mechanism and humanist values, elements of Maoism and Confucian traditions—and worked to redress the negative consequences of China's modernization. In the practice of the short-shorts we can see the grassroots cause, base, and support of the New Left's position. The predominant subjects of short-shorts share the New Left concern for social justice and the orientation of China's economic reform. The development of the genre evinces that a state-regulated market economy such as the New Left advocates can be appropriate and successful. Practitioners are like-minded and socially progressive also in their defense of people's voices and the environment. But most importantly, the resonance between the New Left and short-short writers resides in a shared cultural conception of uncertainty as an existential condition and the indeterminacy of ideological commitments.

If the New Left represents an original critique of China's contemporary situation from elite intellectuals, the short-short genre signifies an indigenous corrective from within Chinese society. This study of the rise of a literary genre entertains the view that what is happening in China at the level of everyday life cannot be encompassed by such concepts as Western modernity or a market heteronomy. Although the development of the genre, which happened randomly, does not offer a structured Chinese alternative (if such a thing is possible) amid Chinese cultural tradition, the state system, the market, serious literature, popular appeals, etc., the short-shorts highlight China's unique and innovative transformation. The agency offered by this form, to narrate historical conditions while participating in its own creation and the making of contemporary China, may help readers imagine future Chinese alternatives.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CHINESE PHENOMENON

Defining short-shorts as “an extended branch of the short story genre,” Wang Zengqi notes that they “possess the general characteristics of short stories” but “test the limits of the genre”³ with their very short length, usually less than 2,000 characters. This textual pattern may have originated in early Chinese myths and legends, Tang and Song *chuanqi* and Ming and Qing *biji*, and works from *The Classic of Mountains and Rivers* to *A New Account of Tales of the World* to *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*. But short-short stories did not emerge as a distinct genre until the last three decades, when literature was increasingly marginalized.

Writing and reading short-short stories, however, is not uniquely Chinese. Time constraints, the passion for instant gratification, and the desire to restrain excesses also have their global reach. Yet nowhere in the world has the genre been as enthusiastically promoted and received as in mainland China. According to 2011 statistics, over 2,000 newspapers and journals of commercial circulation⁴ have sections or columns dedicated to short-shorts, publishing 70,000 to 80,000 stories annually.⁵ At the height of their development, the two major journals of selected short-shorts⁶ had a combined monthly circulation over 1,300,000, surpassing the total subscriptions of the other 400 existing literary journals and magazines. Seven different anthologies and many other collections targeting diverse groups recycle a large number of short-shorts each year to millions of readers.

Similar to the cases in Taiwan and Hong Kong, mainland newspapers welcomed short-shorts also to meet the need for fixed-length features; mainland literary journals and presses produced and anthologized short-shorts to extend their profits. But in Taiwan, established writers remain the genre’s driving force; in mainland China, numerous writers and readers from all walks of life engage in writing and participate in the cottage industry of short-shorts. Throughout Greater China, educators use the genre in education, but in mainland China, it has made its way into textbooks and classrooms from elementary to tertiary institutions and become a part of the college and graduate school entrance exams in many provinces.

In Hong Kong, after being food for thought on a daily basis for forty years, the genre seems to have retired from popular media to the ivory tower of serious literature. But in mainland China, popular appeals and regional promotions have led to a recent amendment to the regulations for the Lu Xun Literature Awards, the most prestigious in China. As of March 1, 2010, the Chinese Writers Association stipulated that short-shorts can compete for the awards in the category of assembled collections.⁷ It was a big occasion for the writers and promoters of the genre, who finally received the highest national recognition that they had been striving for.

Why do writers and promoters in China make such a big deal of a literary genre? How has a common way of writing fiction led to such mass participation, local promotion, official recognition, and institutionalization unprecedented elsewhere in the world? The rest of this chapter looks at a few aspects of the short-short phenomenon, some uniquely Chinese, and argues that Chinese cultural tradition and values, with their extended manifestations in revolutionary ideals and institutional structures and functions, working in unison under the current market conditions, have facilitated the genre's exceptional rise.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE GENRE

The free market is not especially friendly for the practice of the genre. With the pay between 100 and 200 yuan for each story,⁸ the Hayekian freedom of economic life is, for short-short writers, a luxury they cannot afford. If the genre does not depend on the market for its existence, despite the fact that its popularity hinges on its market proliferation,⁹ and writers cannot count on making a decent living, then why do so many people write short-shorts? To answer this question, I start with two celebrity writers' projection of the genre. The reason to single them out is twofold. First, already famous for other genres of literature, they have less of a reason to write short-shorts than other people. Second, amateur writers look up to them and promoters of the genre maximize their appeal. Because of their established status, their critical views define the genre and its purview.

Lin Jinlan, a celebrated short story writer in China, is also one of the best writers of short-shorts. When asked about the best way to approach the short-short, he says, "Closely knit short-shorts with a surprise ending are good. One way to go. Short-shorts that harmonize the ambience of poetry and the plot of short stories are good. Another way to go. Short-shorts nurtured in the tradition of short sketches, loose but with very high attainments, are good. Yet another way to go. There are many other ways that are good, but it is best that none is the best—it is stupid to spin a cocoon around oneself."¹⁰ Lin offers a pluralistic reach of the genre that defies a single standard and embraces diversity of values. For Lin, fixation on a literary pedestal is the end, like a cocoon signaling the death of the silkworm. His counsel, "it is best that none is the best," hearkens back to the ancient wisdom of flexibility, learning, and inevitable changes.

Wang Zengqi shares Lin's association of indeterminacy with the genre: the short-short form is "all the more enjoyable, fascinating, and lovely because of its indeterminacy."¹¹ A major contributor to the rebirth of Chinese literature in the New Culture era, Wang Zengqi sets an example with his own

stories. His critical comments, bespeaking the genre's local imagination and Chinese heritage, help position it in the larger context of Chinese cultural tradition. For the purpose of this article, I focus only on his critical writing.

Wang Zengqi's seminal essay, "On Short-shorts," speaks the language of traditional Chinese art in the images of brush painting. Short-shorts are "the art of leaving blank," that is, the art of articulating what is most important by what is left out. The perpetual separating out of "the most important" from "what is left out" through reading and thinking may account for the indeterminacy of understanding. But for Wang, there is a more intimate reason: "Ambiguity is not a narrative device but a writer's state of consciousness, wherein the understanding is by no means transparent."¹² He uses a quarter of the essay to suggest what a short-short writer should aspire to.

By connecting the author's inevitable nontransparent consciousness with indeterminacy of meaning, Wang Zengqi shifts the attention from outside constraints to internal examinations. This is significant because Wang suggests that the "arbitrary" relation between the signified and the signifier, or the limitations of language, may have less to do with the impossibility of a single understanding than with the fact that there isn't one. A short-short can present the momentary real, but nobody, not even the writer, can claim that real. He quotes the last lines of Tao Yuanming's "Drinking" to make his point: "the truth is in here; but the effort to clarify it fails to find words."¹³ A writer has the potential to capture the experiential through a short-short, as Tao did with "Drinking," but any definitive clarification of the experience ruins the beauty of the moment. A short-short writer must see his or her necessary limitations and join the reader in the continuing effort to understand their works.¹⁴

To detach from the desire for the "final word," Wang Zengqi also recommends focusing on "the art of discovery" with "the wisdom of Zen." "Literature is by nature the art of discovery,"¹⁵ wherein the emancipation of the self is the emancipation from the self; the realization of the true self and the realization of aesthetic potential through art are the two sides of the same coin. He quotes from *The Book of Poetry* to reinforce this positive dynamic: "knowing it is unattainable, the aspiration for it endures."¹⁶ The ultimate (self-)realization is impossible in fixation, hence its relentless pursuit through aesthetic, self-reflective endeavors. With this proactive line of Zen wisdom, Wang reminds short-short writers that the ideal will not be in any constant form and inspires them to engage in perpetual effort toward its attainment—and in the process, attain their true self.

Wang Zengqi's essay conceptualizes the genre as a process of discovery and becoming. It has guided short-short writers' efforts, over three decades, in developing the genre and in sustaining self-growth. Extremely conscious of form, well versed in the art of fiction, and willing to experiment and

discover, Wang Zengqi and many other established writers¹⁷ led in the practice of the genre and the never-ending process of self-reflection, discovery, and realization.

MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Rooted in fundamental cultural values, Wang Zengqi's conceptualization of the genre finds resonance in popular participation. Common-folk (*pingmin*) writers¹⁸ write to express emotions and experiences. For them, writing is "a natural attribute" and "a way of life."¹⁹ Living through writing beyond instrumental reason, they come close to the aesthetic freedom that Karl Marx envisioned: work during the day, appreciate literature in the evening, and create their own on weekends. Less constrained or conditioned, they are quick to embrace Wang's theory because their aesthetic pursuit is more for challenging and realizing the self than anything else. Since self-realization, as Wang puts it, involves self-reflection and discrediting normative understanding, these writers' aesthetic practice is, therefore, invested with ethical potential and echoes a shared goal of Chinese cultural tradition—the realization of the moral self.

Living the absurdity of contemporary life, some short-short writers use the genre as a corrective measure, to find fault with institutional malpractices and personal misconduct. But most grassroots writers find in the creative process a way to transcend the absurdities. To the question, "Why do you choose to write short-shorts?" 28 percent of the young respondents (between the ages of 20 and 40) say that they write primarily to vent or for social justice. For the remaining majority, 72 percent, writing short-shorts is a way to think, to find self-expression, and to enjoy the process of creativity.²⁰

Shao Changxi from Tancheng county, Shandong province, is one of the 72 percent. He never thought about the issue of "why write" until his wife asked him before he left for the Short-short Forum for Young Writers in Henan in May 2008. "It's a hobby. Now a part of my life," Shao told me. I asked if writing helped him in his job at the Toll Department of Tancheng County Government. His answer surprised me: "It is more like the other way around. Work and entertainment all pave the way to writing." A bright young man of broad interests, Shao Changxi was active in sports and a guest anchor for a TV program at the county station. Although his job and family are priorities in life, they do play a secondary role to short-shorts in one respect: they are experiences to be accessed and issues to be contemplated through writing. Experimenting with the best ways to express himself through short-

shorts, he finds a new way to access life and the self. He wore a big grin when he said, "Now I know why I write short-shorts. It makes me realize the creative side of life and the fun part of me!"

For almost all the young writers at the 2008 Forum, higher living standards were but one measure of adequate life. Qin Yong, a brilliant young writer of short-shorts, quit a better-paying IT job, left the comfort of home in Human, and became an editor at Garden of Flowers.²¹ Now he takes great pride in the fact that the Web site he created is the recognized place to go for the short-short genre in China. The majority of the young writers at the Forum were born in the last thirty years; they are ordinary people living the cultural tradition in everyday life and, through people like Wang Zengqi, shaping the future of China in ways that existing categories cannot quite encompass. Today many youth all over the world assert themselves through what they buy and use; Chinese youth are no exception.²² But in China, there are also many, like the young writers of short-shorts, who understand that self-assertion and self-deprecation are the same thing when consumption defines identity. They still search for and try to establish their identity through pursuits of other values. Being able to write and publish provides a greater sense of satisfaction and self-worth than simply making more money. Aesthetic engagement for self-expression and discovery is, for them, a better means to be the change that they want to see happen in the world. Their "lifestyle choice" of creative writing, defined also in terms of self-aesthetic/ethical improvement, provides not only an alternative model of adequate life but also some basis of sustainable living.²³

I posed the "why write" question to hundreds of writers of short-shorts. This is the core of their answers: creative writing of short-shorts is a most joyous experience in life; the sense of adequacy and satisfaction it gives cannot be obtained in any other way. What one is given as rights or allowed to have as property is less fun, what can be measured in monetary terms is less exciting, than the experience of fulfilling this right to self-realization through creative activities. It is most important for them that their experience is shared, recognized, and acknowledged through publication, dissemination, and discussion. For most, the pay that comes with publication is an extra that they are happy to have but can do without. Far more valuable is the freedom of such personal aspiration and realization, because no politics or power of capital can relegate it anywhere if they themselves do not allow that to happen.

THE ENABLING FORM

The genre is a space that “affords ample room for the autonomous existence and unfolding of each particular entity”²⁴ especially because of its enabling formal freedom. The embrace of the local, the international, and other diverse cultural models that Wang Hui sees in China before modern capitalism²⁵ is eminently present in the formal metamorphosis of the genre.

Characterizing short-shorts as “a cross-bred new genre” that “defies definition,” Wang Zengqi discusses its formal aspects in terms of a complementary relationship with other types of literature: “While hewing close to the genre and possessing the general characteristics of short stories, a short-short differs from them. Generally, a short story has more prose elements, whereas a short-short story contains more features of poetry. . . . Written in prose, a short-short has a style freer than that of narrative poetry and a plot orientation stronger than that of lyric poetry.”²⁶ This way of understanding the formal in association shows the genre’s way to sustainable development. I use the cases of the two influential journals of selected works to make my point.

The journals *Selected Short-shorts (xiaoxiaoshuo xuankan)* and *Selection of Short-short Stories (weixingxiaoshuo xuankan)*²⁷ are publications of literature. Yet both cross-select from nonliterature publications. Their sources include lifestyle, fashion, and entertainment magazines, and even political publications. The standard for selection is minimal: a fictional narrative of less than 2,000 characters. A few more characters are allowed, as long as the piece “captures a story from one aspect, one frame, one contrast, one exclamation, or one fleeting moment” and displays “a wisdom, a beauty, an intriguing occasion, and a fresh idea.”²⁸ Both journals, therefore, encompass short-shorts of various lengths of mixed genres—fables, parodies, romances, fairy tales, dramatic monologues, classical tales, anecdotes, prose poems, popular or historical accounts, and short prose writing of miscellaneous varieties—if they meet the minimal requirements. The stories’ themes, characters, motifs, styles, representation strategies, and techniques are beyond categorization. The genre’s uncertain purview speaks to the same acceptance and flexibility that, in the Chinese tradition, transcend ethnicity and culture, welcome self-transformation, and in so doing, keep revitalizing the self. Today this relational and hybrid genre of short-shorts intersects with many genres, crosses over to many more, and blurs the line between literary and nonliterary, with forever new (re)configurations pleasantly frustrating expectations and challenging conventions.

The genre’s inclusive embrace is activated by short-short writers’ efforts from within. Reading is the one thing that most writers regard as more important than writing. Besides their fellow writers, they also find inspiration from China’s long literary tradition. I saw on the bookshelves of many the

more than 700-page volume on minifiction from the pre-Qin to Qing dynasty, a collection of stories, accompanied by appreciative comments, that was published in the early days of the genre in 1990. Short-short writers, however, read more works in the bigger genres of fiction, full-length novels, novellas, and short stories, than in their own. Many of them even “transgress” into the bigger genres with creative works of their own, only to find that the quality of their short-shorts improves with the transgression.

However relentless is the intention to learn, inability to recognize the unfamiliar is debilitating. Short-short writers in China also tend to favor stories befitting their own cultural heritage and tastes. This shortcoming, however, is offset by the attitudes and tactics still at the heart of the culture today. Contemporary Chinese short-short writers are Wang Zengqi’s students. They accept uncertainty as a constant state; they believe enduring life comes from improvement of the self. Their attitude translates into an embrace of works from foreign lands, different from the tolerance of differences we often speak of.

As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, tolerance, translated as *rongren* in Chinese, can be “precisely a form of intolerance: intolerance for the closeness of the other.”²⁹ Chinese short-short writers have a sincere attitude of respect and learning that is absent in tolerance. Teng Gang, an innovative writer, learned much from the Hungarians for his distinct style. Many writers amaze me by their familiarity with the works of Nobel laureates. Anthologizing foreign authors for Chinese readers started with canonizing Chinese writers in the late 1980s and early 1990s.³⁰ A recent volume from 2004 contains works from Japan, Russia, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, India, Italy, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, Egypt, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Spain. Major journals of short-shorts have sections dedicated to translations. If the art form of Chinese short-shorts is reminiscent of the economy of Hemingway, the profundity of Shinichi Hoshi, the irony of O Henry, the poignancy of Chekhov, and the alienation in Kafka, it is because Chinese short-short writers have made conscious efforts to incorporate different cultures and traditions and to draw profusely from great literatures all over the world.

To learn, however, is not to become an imitation. Cai Nan, known for his creative form, owns a large collection of foreign literature in translation. He gets excited when talking about his beloved foreign writers,³¹ but has this to say about his reading habits: “Every road leads to Rome. Yet my goal is not to get to Rome. I read to enjoy each and every locality on each and every road.” For Cai, the life of a short-short resides in one’s own discovery of distinct beauty in innovative form. Deliberately nonprolific, now Cai only writes when the formal properties of his stories necessitate the aesthetic disruption of understanding and the narrative strategies of his fiction trigger new ideas and perceptions.

Such understanding of formal innovations rejuvenates not only the genre but also the agency of art. With their characteristic openness, short-shorts manifest distrust of the ultimate. But more importantly, in the endless possibilities that the genre's formal freedom affords is short-shorts' continuous aesthetic enactment of alternative imaginations. Such autonomy in art, to use Janet Wilson's expression, brings to light the "constitutive features of the society," that is, the society's capacity to "accommodate plural voices and promote alternative ways of thinking."³² For those who entrust the promise of freedom and liberty to external institutions, this cosmopolitan genre of short-shorts can be food for thought. Its basic tenets—freedom of form that embraces and escapes all, and self-discovery through learning—both constitute alternative images of China and narrate a system of values/rights that liberates from within.

THE PROMOTION OF THE GENRE

If the development of the short-short genre qualifies Chinese society as "aesthetically driven" in some way, the promotion of the genre also "honors human rights and individual potentials"³³ with unique understanding of the ethical. I will focus on the editors-in-chief of the two journals of selected works for this discussion.³⁴ They are rivals in business, yet their respective promotional efforts, complementary and collaborative in effect, create an environment healthy for the genre's growth.

Yang Xiaomin, of *Selected Short-shorts*, and Zheng Yunqin, of *Selection of Short-short Stories*, are in charge of their respective journals. They have to integrate three roles—expert editor, entrepreneurial administrator, and legal representative. Fierce competition in the business has forced both to try everything in their power to reach a broader market—content arrangement, image manipulation, price adjustment, novelty in binding and printing, and marketing strategies. Both understand that they cannot afford to be preemptive in the short-short field. But conceptual differences with regard to ethics inform distinct promotional approaches: Yang with a Confucian-*cum*-revolutionary humanist inclination, and Zheng with a definite Zen plus Taoist bend of wisdom.

When we read short-shorts from outside China, they are but a window onto lived experience, local agitations, critical expressions, or discursive disruptions. But for Yang Xiaomin, a career as the editor of *Selected Short-shorts* is living a quality life for the public good. A veteran of the People's Liberation Army, Yang loves Tang poetry and writes in the old style because "the form is a conversation with the self, great for expressing profound feelings and emotions." Yang admires Zeng Guofan and Mao Zedong be-

cause they “pass on the Tao in doing their work.” Yang shares their compassion for the people and takes his work with the genre as an opportunity to make a difference in life. For China to become democratic and strong, the key is improving the quality of the people; failure to do so would mean only more money, leading to more miseries. The task, Yang believes, can only be accomplished through cultural means. He envisions himself as a Confucian official and as a revolutionary building a new human and a stronger nation. In ethical terms, he defines his goal of elevating people through aesthetic education in short-shorts as “an invincible cause for public good.”

An heir of the revolutionary past, Yang Xiaomin understands the genre along mass lines: “Short-shorts are the art form of common people. By that I mean, they can be consumed by most people, most people can participate in the creative process, and most people can benefit from an art form of simple words and profound meaning.”³⁵ If in the past, the cause of national independence and liberation made aesthetic experience of the political essential, for Yang today, aesthetic engagement for individual improvement is necessary for both character building and nation building. By insisting on the genre’s accessibility to everyone with the ability to use the Chinese language creatively, Yang validates his “cause for public good” by joining the personal with the national and linking the fulfillment of the individual with traditional and revolutionary ethical aspirations.

Yang puts his principle of “public good” into practice. Soon after he assumed office in 1992, he proposed dedicating the inside back cover of the journal to establishing a national network for short-shorts. On this page of each issue there would be an image of a competitor and its contact information and solicitation of stories. Yang’s idea met with resistance because it was, in fact, advertisement for rivals in the business. But Yang’s measure worked beyond his opponents’ anticipation. This “olive branch” helped create opportunities for others, but in so doing, also constructed a lifeline for *Selected Short-shorts*. The better known the other publishers are, the more contributions they get, and the more good short-shorts they carry. This means the bigger the pool from which Yang and his colleagues can select and the higher the quality of their own journal. The publicity for others thus benefits themselves. *Selected Short-shorts*, a regional journal from a city in the heartland, gets more visibility and a chance to radiate its influence to all corners of China.

Today, Yang Xiaomin is best known for his works on behalf of the public good and respected for the major role he has played in launching the genre on the national stage. Yang believes in the genre. He did not wait for society or authority to bestow respect or recognition but went all-out to demand and command them. With the profits from his journal and support from the state, Yang has organized and hosted numerous gatherings of short-shorts writers, readers, and critics, on average twice a year: workshops, writers’ forums,

conferences, contests, symposiums, and research seminars. He was also instrumental in establishing the Golden Sparrow Awards of national prestige, commending best (original) works, writers, editors, lifelong achievement, and contributions to the genre with a big celebration and a cash prize. His lobbying for state, institutional, and academic support and recognition of the genre is not documented but does not go unnoticed. Hence the respectful title of “Commander Yang.”

Yang commands respect because he tries to infuse market practice with ethical integrity. His events benefit all participants but claim no loyalty from any. One of the consequences of his effective promotion is a smaller share of the pie for his own journal. More journals of selected short-shorts appear, more profitable genres attract the writers whom Yang helps to advance, and established elite journals join the race with financial backing from the state. Yang welcomes these developments. He sees them as signs of the genre’s growing power and successful infiltration into related fields. “None of what Lei Feng did was for any amazing results. He will live in history longer than any emperor because he carried a person on his back when that person was sick and swept the floor when he was on the train.” Yang’s sincerity is his consolation. He has no complaints about working overtime. He chooses not to take a vacation for years. The constant emergence of new cohorts of both writers and readers during his tenure and the growing interest in the genre that he helps generate give him a sense of fulfillment.

Selection of Short-short Stories does not have as enthusiastic an editor-in-chief as, but has a slightly bigger market share than, *Selected Short-shorts*. Easygoing, publicity-averting, Zheng Yunqin hates to blow his own or anybody else’s trumpet. A nationally celebrated author of children’s literature, he writes “to learn from kids,” to free framed minds, especially his own. He does not think of his journal in terms of public good, for he sees no need to categorize: “A good person and a bad person is often the same person.” He leads *Selection of Short-short Stories* in a quiet style of nonaction, participating in events when invited but reluctant to initiate deliberate acts of his own. “I am just an editor,” he says. “Editors help writers but do not construct them. No masterpiece of literature is ever created by an editor.” Zheng’s laid-back, self-effacing attitude can be deceptive.

Zheng Yunqin views the genre as “a game of chess” between the work and the reader. He looks for the same dialectic between the power to surprise and the ability to engage in a short-short. “To be seen through is to lose.” He admires Ronghua Hu because Hu is “a fiercely talented player beyond reason.” For a short-short to work, it must defamiliarize its subject toward an alternative imagination. But as a writer, Zheng also knows the importance of everyday life. He integrates his personal interests in the stock market, playing chess, diabetes treatments, Chinese medicine, etc. into his own books; he expects his journal to be in sync with the changing contemporary life too.

There is no unworthy subject matter for Zheng. Fast exposure of social issues is a plus. Stories of unconditional love, Confucian virtues, self-sacrificing people, and deeds that readers like are welcome.

It is not surprising that, doing the job of an editor as he understands it, Zheng Yunqin upholds, obstinately, the principle of literariness and readability. This means: *Selection of Short-short Stories* must publish great works of literature in disregard of possible negative market consequences; *Selection of Short-short Stories* must also serve the general public with appropriate readability. It is not easy for Zheng to walk the tightrope between the two aims, especially when his intentions are too advanced for his readers. The controversy surrounding the case of Teng Gang is an example.

In 2002, many parents protested against Zheng's idea of a special column³⁶ for Teng because Teng's stories were deemed unfit for elementary and middle school children. This demographic group happened to make up 75 percent of the journal's readership. A rare talent, Teng was too bold and ethereal for the ordinary taste, too open and critical about issues of sex. To give him the attention he deserved would mean a loss of readership, but to skip him would be a great loss to the genre. At a time when the market was flooded with mediocre works, Teng's intelligence, power of understanding, modernist imaginary, outside-the-box experiments, and unique construction of the genre in subversion offered much needed "breaths of fresh air." Zheng started the column without hesitation and ran it for two years.

That Zheng refuses to be led by the market does not mean that he disrespects readers. The opposite is true. "The success of Teng Gang lies in the dialectic of philosophical profundity through vivid, humorous representation. I will not select stories too deep to interest nonexpert readers." *Selection of Short-short Stories* did not carry "The Blind," a top national award winner in 2007, for precisely this reason. Zheng keeps writers at arm's length to keep his judgment sound. But he knows that he must stay close to readers to ensure his journal's success. The decline of literary journals in general is caused, in his opinion, by their self-alienation from the reader.

Activities that engage readers and help him understand them are the ones Zheng cares to initiate. "The Minifiction I Love" annual contest, for example, keeps his journal in touch with readers' changing appetites. The annual "Best Recommendation Award" kills many birds with one stone. Encouraging readers to make recommendations to the journal, the activity also reinforces communications between them and broadens the journal's sources of contributions. "Because of this award, many great recommendations came in from sources unheard of before—county, district, municipal newspapers, industry news, etc." The most interactive of all is the "Read and Finish" activity conducted multiple times by the journal each year. Targeting young readers in school, the activity takes them on a joyride of imagination and creativ-

ity, to write the best ending to a given, unfinished story. The competition is also strategic—it introduces the emerging genre to classrooms all over China.³⁷

If the ethical, for Yang Xiaomin, is literature's sacred function for public good, for Zheng Yunqin, being ethical is more personal, starting with an editor's sense of responsibility. The decision about a contribution is also a matter of life or death for Zheng: "It is a capital crime to miss an exceptional story or to bury a talent." This is why, through a chance encounter, Zheng Yunqing became an involuntary but determined buffer between short-short writers and expert elites with discursive power. To protest against uninformed views and to defend the genre's achievements, Zheng introduced Gang Teng's work to Professor Tang Jifu, the vice president of the Society of Chinese Fiction. In so doing, Zheng brought the best of the genre into the vision of top experts and scholars in China. The subsequent scholarly attention and academic study launched iconic writers and the genre to unprecedented national prominence.

Zheng's seriousness about his job brings visibility to the genre's highlights, with which the genre finds the footholds to stand on its own. But Zheng himself stays unattached to his accomplishment. He quoted the opening words of *Three Kingdoms*³⁸ to remind me that fame and fortune come and go fast. History has told us that we can only be momentary arbiters of good or bad from very limited perspectives. It is wise to be serious in what we do, but not to take ourselves too seriously. Under Zheng, *Selection of Short-short Stories* has become a venue where serious literature exists in entertainment form; highbrow and lowbrow mingle in harmony; instantaneous reflection of contemporary life is pregnant with meaning; creative experiments surprise and haunt with uncertainty. No wonder it has the largest readership of all the journals in the genre.

Yang Xiaomin and Zheng Yunqin have very different views. They approach the genre from seemingly opposite positions, yet they complement each other, Yang with his attention more on writers and the genre's moral potential, and Zheng focused on readers and aesthetic quality. These words of wisdom from Yang to Zheng seem most appropriate: "Your nonaction is best action; my action is for its cessation." There are many more short-short journals in China, each editor-in-chief unique in his or her own way. Most of them share a love of literature, faith in the genre, and a sincere attitude to work for its growth.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Yang Xiaomin and Zheng Yunqin also share in common lifelong tenure on the state payroll and the post of vice president of their respective provincial writers' association. To study the rise of the genre requires a look at the system of which they are a part and in which they function. The overlapping of their personal and professional identities with their bureaucratic affiliations defies simplified critique of the party-state system. China's current political and institutional structure dictates that Yang and Zheng do not make hiring or firing decisions. But their positions in the bureaucracy do provide them the means and measures to work effectively.

The publishing industry in China is undergoing fundamental reform. Publishers' ties to the state are complicated; each has a relationship a little different from others. The publishers of *Selected Short-shorts* and *Selection of Short-short Stories* are still part of the state institution, functioning like NGOs but run more as profit-making enterprises. Their different status in the system gives them different benefits. Yang Xiaomin has two bosses, with administrative supervision under the Propaganda Department of the Zhengzhou Municipal Party Committee and industry management under the Henan Bureau of Press and Publication, a branch of the state General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP). Zheng Yunqing reports to Baihuazhou Literature and Art Publishing House, a subordinate unit of the successfully listed Jiangxi Publishing Group.

It is true that close watch from the two bosses restrains Yang Xiaomin. But it is premature to assume that the role of the party-state is only detrimental. *Selected Short-shorts* had to submit a written self-criticism in response to the censure of the provincial Press and Publication Management Office in 2007. The regulative state was appropriate to intervene this time because the journal had carried indecent and illegal advertisements.³⁹

Contrary to conventional assumptions, between the two, it is the publisher of *Selected Short-shorts* that enjoys more freedom and preferential policies from the state. Because of its self-supporting status,⁴⁰ it enjoys the best tax policy and keeps all the money made. Yang Xiaomin has been able to host events because he decides how to use the money. The publisher of *Selection of Short-short Stories* does not have the same tax break; a large percentage of its profits go to the Baihuazhou Literature and Art Publishing House. Zheng Yunqin had always wanted a new office building for his journal but could not build it even though the journal had made more than enough money for it.

According to Liu Jiansheng, deputy secretary of the Publication Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC), it is possible that the state will support the publisher of *Selected Short-shorts* should it someday fall into financial difficulty. Liu also has-

tened to add that a state subsidy should not be regarded as an industry solution. With many literary journals, he said, state subsidies had not worked well and they were still losing money. The party-state values smaller publishers like Garden of Flowers because of their ties to the masses and the local markets. But publishers' independence is the way to go.⁴¹

The safety cushion of state support also takes the form of direct investment in events for the public good. Every other spring since 2005, writers of short-shorts have been able to congregate in Zhengzhou for the Golden Sparrow Awards ceremony because the event is backed by the state; 600,000 of the 900,000 yuan spent for the occasion in May 2007 were from Zhengzhou Municipal Government. Half went to the Zhengzhou TV station for broadcasting the awards ceremony to the national audience. Interspersed with top-notch performances, the ceremony honored short-short writers and promoters and celebrated them as the brightest of stars. The event brought tears to the eyes of many. Professor Mengwen Huang from Singapore remarked, "An event like this is possible only in China."⁴²

Even if the local government's support is for political credit, the fact that it looks for credit in the success of a literary genre suggests the working of a different kind of value. Could it be the point of intersection of Confucius, Laozi, Mao Zedong, Wang Zengqi, Yang Xiaomin, and Zheng Yunqing? An intersection where the aspirations of short-short writers, readers, and promoters for truth, goodness, and beauty overlap with those of the party-state? It takes a shared space or common ground like this for Yang's and Zheng's active engagement in and smart negotiation with the system to work. Both are very much at peace in their work with and within the state system.

The functions of people like Yang and Zheng from within help strike a balance between the system's democratic and authoritarian potentials. It is possible that, in what is perceived as regressive subordination, there is already an ongoing negotiation resulting in some kind of reconciliation. Take the issue of "publication code," for example. No journal or book can be published legally in China without a publication code from the GAPP. To get such a code is no easy matter. Although oftentimes money makes the mare go, people like Yang and Zheng prefer more creative methods. They created a system of one code with many uses to deal with their difficulties. This has worked for both sides. Yang's proactive maneuver can also be seen in his joint call for national events with the Chinese Writers' Association in 2002 and with the GAPP in 2003. One can let himself or herself be controlled by a system, but Yang chooses to work with and within it to empower, among other things, the genre of short-shorts and himself.

Zheng Yunqing does not suffer from "total disillusionment" of any kind because he never expects to get all he wants or get any result without compromise. "When I can do little to punish incompetence, I do the best I can to award competence." His profit-making journal enabled him to negotiate suc-

cessfully within the publishing house. This led to maximized benefits, including water, electricity, and gas subsidies at home and tours to foreign countries, for the hard-working people at the journal. The bureaucratic routine of summarizing a year's work became Zheng's opportunity to compile "our yearbook"—the annual anthology of the best short-shorts. Maneuvering the relationships that the Yangtze River Literature and Art Publishing House had and its desire for profit, Zheng was able to put the "yearbook" out through its powerful distribution network and in the name of the Creative Research Division of the Chinese Writers' Association.

The largest group of short-short writers is composed of people working for the party-state. Many of them realized both the personal dream of becoming a writer and the career aspiration to be a government employee by way of short-shorts. I have encountered many talented people from small villages who wrote their way into the writers' associations and the Federations of Literature and Arts at various levels in the 1980s and 1990s. Cultural institutions like Garden of Flowers under the propaganda departments of various county, municipal, provincial, and state party committees also employ a large number of cultural workers and officials. A unique group of government employees, these people write in their offices. Paid by the state, they have been especially effective in promoting the genre, either as individual writers or in the capacity of an editor, cultural worker, or leader.

In recent years, more and more government officials from outside literature and culture circles are becoming writers of short-shorts, or is it the other way around—more and more short-short writers are taking up all kinds of offices in the government? Examples are: Wang Qionghua, head of the Organization Department of Linwu County; Zhou Bo, secretary for the Science and Technology Bureau of Daishan County; Zeng Ping, deputy head of the Naxi District Government of Lu Zhou Municipality; He Weiping, deputy mayor of Jiangyin City; and Han Ying, deputy secretary of the Foshan Municipal Party Committee, to name but a few famous writers in the field. They entered officialdom by merit in their own line of work, and also through their talent with words. Take Zeng Ping: he started his career as a middle school teacher in a remote area. A county leader "discovered" him after reading his articles in a local paper. His quick ascendance thereafter on the official ladder has been accompanied by the publication of impressive short-shorts on the political system and people's livelihood. And his short stories and novellas have proven just as good.

In their conveniently advantageous positions, official-writers like Zeng Ping are integrating their aesthetic pursuits into their everyday work—the pragmatics of social and economic restructure and reform. What is especially significant about this group is that their complementary trajectory of career and creativity is reminiscent of the gentry-scholar-official relations of imperial times and the scholar-bureaucrats' functions in the revolutionary socialist

past. Are they a new generation of bureaucrats to revive the important roles once performed by the Confucian scholar-gentry and the revolutionary scholar-officials? The answer to this question deserves an article of its own.

I hope this article has established the link between the rise of the genre and Chinese cultural tradition, values, the left legacy of people's voices, literature, and culture. To say that the rise of short-shorts is exceptional is not to advocate exceptionalism. Like any genre of literature, the short-short field is also filled with different opinions, factional conflicts, and the desire to normalize and control, and it is still in flux. Many imitator publications mushroom, then disappear; some diversify into related genres, and others head in new directions. But this article focuses on the genre's achievements in the past three decades and argues that they highlight the living, working, sustaining, and transforming vigor of Chinese cultural tradition, revolutionary ideals of popular culture, and socialist and humanist values in today's market conditions. If Jason McGrath's 2008 prediction, "It may increasingly be within China that the decisions determining modernity's future are made,"⁴³ is true, this literary genre's rise, and with it the reaffirmation and reconsolidation of the role of literature among ordinary people, may have global relevance. In these discussions of the conceptualization of the genre and its embracing form, motivations for participation, promotion strategies, and institutional advantages, I hope to have presented glimpses of different lights on the hill.

To understand a contemporary Chinese phenomenon in terms of renewal of culture and ideals may help us (re)conceptualize China's rise less as a turnaround and more as a continuum. Such a continuum, however, does not signify simple conformity. As the rise of short-shorts shows, enduring life resides in the dynamics of a "conformist" culture that is willing to learn and change. In their aesthetic and humanistic pursuit of people's power and creativity, practitioners of the genre have valued the sense of uncertainty, surprise, and reorientation toward alternatives much more than that of righteousness and infallibility; their ferocious efforts at learning and self-reflection champion the causes of aesthetic education and of learning to be a decent human being. In them is probably the hope that someday, (self-)attainment in truth, goodness, and beauty will be as respected as winning science fairs, and held in higher esteem than earning billions.

In New Left thinking, however, there seems to be a lack of such hope in ordinary people and their everyday life. Giving excessive attention to elite intellectuals and politics, some New Leftists seem to have neglected the inherent constructive and liberating potential of aesthetic practice, the agency of people at the grassroots level, their capacity to speak their own minds, to articulate their own values. The masses may not be passive consumers; mass participation in politics may already be more than a possibility in China. Institutional/political changes may not be the only way or the best way to

nurture creative minds, ethical sensitivities, constructive literacy, and sustainable ways of life. More critical/intellectual attention to such power of discourse as generated by short-shorts and to the differences the genre has made in society may help China seize “the historic opportunity for theoretical and institutional innovation” that Wang Hui talks about.⁴⁴ In the rise of the short-short genre, there may have been elements of native participatory democracy at work from the bottom up. I hope we are not blinded to them by our own compassion for “vulnerable groups.”

I want to end by quoting from a recent speech by Han Shaogong for the 2011 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. His award-winning novel, *A Dictionary of Maoqiao* (*Maqiao cidian*), composed of short-shorts, extends the art form to the finest extremes. Han describes literary scholars’ relations to contemporary China in these words: “All the existing theories appear to be inadequate to describe this gigantic but nameless reality, or to diagnose the inconceivably distressing predicament and abounding vitality of linguistic indeterminacy.”⁴⁵ Han’s view is consistent with that of Laozi. The first line of the *Tao Te Ching*, “The Tao/way that can be told is not the eternal Tao/way,” speaks of the inadequacy of theory and diagnoses as the normal, constant state. Hence Han can speak of “the inconceivably distressing predicament” and “abounding vitality of linguistic indeterminacy” in the same breath, each being the condition and the consequence of the other. The rise of the short-short genre is exciting and inspires hope because it manifests the vitality of the predicament.

In the predicament of free-market capitalism, geopolitical tensions, economic rivalry, and environmental degradation, hope may lie in our effort, as Han Shaogong says, “to be more mindful of the limitations of our language and its various products”⁴⁶; an inward turn to look for our own limitations may prove more constructive. A cosmopolitan of legally guaranteed rights is a way to go. Harmony based on the improvement of the self is also a way to go. A harmonious cosmopolitan that learns from “a common fund of the enlightened traditions of humanity”⁴⁷ may be a better way to go. If in the past thirty years, the short-short genre has led to “new integration through new disintegration,” it must continue its effort of “pointing to new clarity with new perplexity.”⁴⁸ Life is never-ending.

NOTES

1. This article is based mainly on the materials collected during my on-site research in 2007-2008. It also brings in new developments since then.

2. Jason McGrath, “Worlds in Fragments: Culture and the Market under Postsocialist Modernity,” in *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 9.

3. Wang Zengqi, "On Short-shorts," in *The Theory of Short-shorts*, ed. Yang Xiaomin et al. (Zhengzhou: Garden of Flowers, 2004), 15.

4. There are countless "publications for internal circulation" by all levels of government—county, district, municipal, and provincial—and by private enterprises and public institutions in China. The genre of short-shorts has been a favorite with these publications.

5. Sheng Xiaoqing, *Chinese Short-shorts—Best Works of Famous Writers in 100 Years*, ed. Sheng Xiaoqing and Chen Yonglin (Changchun: Jilin Publishing Group, 2011), back cover.

6. There is a history of publishing selected works in China. There are currently multiple journals dedicated to selected works of fiction. *Selected Fictions* by the Chinese Writers Association is the most authoritative; *Fiction Monthly* under the Tianjin Bureau of Press and Publication the most popular. There are also journals of selected novellas, short stories, etc. With the short-short genre's increasing popularity, the need to improve and to guide arose, hence the establishment of the two journals of selected works in the mid-1980s.

7. "On the Call for Participation in the Fifth Lu Xun Literature Awards," Chinese Writers Association, <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/bk/2010-02-28/42198.html> (accessed July 19, 2011).

8. The pay for an original story was 100-200 yuan in 2008, depending on the journal of submission. A solicited contribution might bring 300 yuan. Those whose published short-shorts were selected by different journals are also paid by them, usually between 30 to 60 yuan depending on the journal. When a recommendation got published, the recommender was also paid a small amount, around 30 to 50 yuan, by the publisher.

9. Since no one can support him- or herself by writing short-shorts alone, many also write for more popular genres or magazines. *Stories* can afford to buy a good story at the rate of one yuan per word. Short-short writers don't see writing for *Stories* as shifting loyalty from aesthetic beauty to vulgar materiality. Rather, they believe writing in all genres benefits each.

10. Lin Jinlan, "Shorter Than Short," in *The Theory of Short-shorts*, ed. Yang Xiaomin et al. (Zhengzhou: Garden of Flowers, 2004), 22.

11. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 15.

12. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 16.

13. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 16.

14. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 16.

15. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 16.

16. Wang, "On Short-shorts," 17.

17. Lu Xun admired the genre's capacity to capture the universal through the particular and practiced the art in his own writing. Most modern and contemporary Chinese authors write in the genre. Among them are such familiar names as Yu Dafu, Xiao Hong, Shen Congwen, Xu Zhimo, Xu Dishan, Bingxin, Wang Renshu, Sun Li, Ye Wenling, Cong Weixi, Jiang Zilong, Jia Pinwa, Liu Shaotang, Wang Meng, Liu Xinwu, Chen Jiangong, Su Tong, Bi Shumin, Chen Shixu, Nie Xinsen, and Sun Chunping.

18. I use "common-folk writers" to refer to writers from all walks of life, especially those of the grassroots. I want to set them apart from the writers who are office holders in the state or employees of the Federations of Literature and Art and Writers Associations at various levels.

19. From an essay by Shi Tiesheng. As one of the judges for an online short-short contest, Shi wrote "Writing Is a Way of Life—For Yishi Short-shorts Contest" in 2007. I got a copy of the essay when I visited the Yishi office in Beijing in 2008. I cannot find a formal publication of this article.

20. I was able to survey a large group (about 40) of young writers from all over China because I went to meet with them at The Short-short Forum for Young Writers in May 2008. Intrigued by the younger generation's interest in the genre, I created a questionnaire of 31 questions for the occasion; the one under discussion was among them.

21. Garden of Flowers is the publisher of the journal *Selected Short-shorts*. It publishes two other journals of short-shorts, one of original works, the other with translated works. Garden of Flowers also owns a periodical for internal circulation with essays and information on short-shorts.

22. Drake University held an exhibition, “Consumption and the Self in Urban China,” from January 24 to February 28, 2011. It explored how Chinese urban middle-class young adults solve everyday problems related to self-identity through what they buy and use. The advertisement for the exhibition declared that “Old identities are no longer given, making a ‘sense of self’ a modern project for each individual. Consumption—of clothes, coffee, books, exercise classes, and the spaces that sell them—becomes an emergent vocabulary to craft a sense of self among young adults in Nanjing, China.” When we study China in familiar ways and categories, we risk missing many aspects of the same story.

23. Wu Jianmin calls for a “lifestyle revolution” in a *People’s Daily Overseas Edition* article on February 14, 2011. He is concerned about environmental degradation and the issue of sustainability. The difference between him and these young writers is that he wants to be the agent of the Good/Right, while they just live their lives as they ought to be.

24. Ban Wang, “Discovering Enlightenment in Chinese History: *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, by Wang Hui,” *boundary 2* 34, no. 2 (2007): 231.

25. Wang Hui, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 79.

26. Wang, “On Short-shorts,” 15.

27. The two journals seldom publish original works. Their recycling of published works has not incurred copyright issues. A journal or a newspaper feels honored if its original works get selected by one of the two journals. This reflects positively on both the author and the publisher. The genre has a few dozen different names, *xiaoxiaoshuo* and *weixingxiaoshuo* being the two most popular.

28. Wang Meng’s definition of the short-short in *Loud Sparrows: Contemporary Chinese Short-shorts*, ed. Aili Mu et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 22.

29. Slavoj Žižek, “Discussion,” in *Badiou & Žižek: Philosophy in the Present*, ed. Peter Thomas (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 93.

30. Here are two eminent examples: *An Anthology of Chinese and Foreign Short-shorts*, ed. Zhang Guangqin and Wang Hong (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 1990); *The Best of World Short-shorts*, ed. Jiang Zengpei and Zheng Yunqin (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Literature and Art Publishing House, 2001).

31. This is what Cai Nan says about Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy*: “I advertise for ambiguity in the short-short circle because his representation of one person with three identities, none truer than the other, is full of ambiguity yet so precise. I love it!”

32. Janet Wilson, “Teaching the New Zealand Novel: Prose-Poetry and the Ideology of the ‘Third Way,’” in *Crabtracks: Progress and Process in Teaching the New Literature in English*, ed. Gordon Collier et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 307–308.

33. Wang Ban, “Aesthetics and Politics in Modern China,” <http://humanexperience.stanford.edu/humanrights-wang> (accessed July 19, 2011). A sentence in the essay reads, “An aesthetically driven society honors human rights and individual potentials.”

34. I had many hours of conversation with both Yang Xiaomin and Zheng Yunqin. Recordings of the conversations are the sources for this section.

35. Yang Xiaomin, “The Art of Common Folks,” in *The Theory of Short-shorts*, ed. Yang Xiaomin et al. (Zhengzhou: Garden of Flowers, 2004), 7.

36. *Selection of Short-short Stories* reserves a “corner” for original contributions, to encourage unconventional works. It is also the space where special solicitations from writers like Teng Gang are published.

37. The rise of the genre is inextricably linked to China’s educational philosophy, system, and practice. But I will have to leave the discussion on this subject for another article.

38. These are the lines Zheng quotes: “Success or failure and right or wrong are but momentary; the green mountains are still there, the sunset seldom claims the glorious glow.” The translation is mine.

39. The self-criticism can be found in *Henan Publication Examination*, ed. the Press and Publication Management Office (Zhengzhou: Henan Provincial Bureau of Press and Publication, 2007), 90:5, 42.

40. "State institutions" or "institutional organizations" in China can be self-supporting or run entirely by state subsidies, or anywhere in between. For more details, see <http://baike.baidu.com/view/65492.htm>. Accessed July 19, 2011.

41. I got to know Liu Jiansheng at a short-short event. I was able to interview him twice in Beijing when I was doing on-site research in 2007-2008. This is from one of the interviews.

42. I was invited to the event because of the publication of *Loud Sparrows: Contemporary Chinese Short-shorts* by Columbia University Press. I participated in all the activities of the event.

43. Jason McGrath, "Conclusion," in *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 226.

44. Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 186-187.

45. Han Shaogong, "Pointing to New Clarity with New Perplexity," http://www.ou.edu/worldlit/07_2011/han-shaogong.html (accessed July 22, 2011).

46. Han Shaogong, "Pointing to New Clarity with New Perplexity."

47. Ban Wang, "Discovering Enlightenment in Chinese History," 238.

48. Han Shaogong, "Pointing to New Clarity with New Perplexity."

III

**Rethinking Socialism and Market
Reform**

Chapter Nine

The Road to Revival: A “Red” Classic or a “Black” Revisionist Epic in Praise of a Postsocialist China

Xiaomei Chen

This essay examines the complicated and paradoxical discourse in *The Road to Revival* (*Fuxing zhi lu*), a “revolutionary song and dance epic,” from the perspective of the New Left in contemporary China.¹ As the rest of the essays in this collection have demonstrated, New Left intellectuals emphasize equality and justice for the weak and exploited working class, expose the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, criticize the new rich and government corruption, and call for a resistance discourse and a return to writing the stories of the working class. From this perspective, *The Road to Revival* seems, at first glance, compatible with its predecessors in the high Mao culture, such as *The East Is Red*, which depicted the Chinese Communist Party’s leadership of the workers and peasants in its endeavor to establish a new socialist society, where the working class would become the masters of their country. It is no wonder that *The Road to Revival* was claimed by the official press as a “red classic” that restaged the CCP’s revolutionary history and called for the return of socialist values. Upon closer examination, however, *The Road to Revival* merely explored a representation of revolutionary history in order to celebrate the Dengist regime and its postsocialist reconstruction of a “capitalist” China, which was portrayed as the only “road” to restoring China to its former glory and as finally having brought modernity and prosperity to all social and ethnic groups. The epic’s success proves its political stance in support of the status quo, even though it presented the changing lives of the workers and peasants.

The strategy of inserting the memories, images, and discourse of a “red classic” of Maoist culture into a postsocialist stage extravaganza seemed clear at the very conception of *The Road to Revival*. In 2009, forty-five years after the 1964 premier of *The East Is Red*, the post-1980s generation of scriptwriters and producers brainstormed about plans for *The Road to Revival* to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. They wanted to highlight the “most earthshaking and colorful” thirty years of history in the reform era. Unlike the earlier text, which was concerned mostly with how China had caught up with the rest of world—through either a socialist or a capitalist approach—*The Road to Revival* benefited from the vantage point of a proud and prosperous China in the twenty-first-century, post-Beijing Olympics era. Surveying the world in which China was now a leading nation, *The Road* could cheerfully reflect on 164 years of history from 1845 to 2009, during which China evolved from a semicolonialist society to a modern state with the third largest economy on the globe, and an owner of foreign debts from powerful Western countries. The historical times are now different from that of *The East Is Red*: “we now live in a ‘China era,’ when China stands tall and magnificent in the Eastern part of the world,” one scriptwriter declared.² Where was China then in the 1960s, and how did the nation arrive at its present glory? “The narrative mode of this story,” therefore, one scriptwriter continued, had to be entirely different from the previous epics—“we should seek an antiepic mode to emphasize the characteristics of human beings in various historical moments.”³ This is the new epic vision that Chinese scriptwriters and producers intended to present to audiences in 2009.

Acknowledging *The East Is Red* as “a monumental epic” that they “still admire as a model” fifty years later, the scriptwriters and directors wanted to surpass the red classic and create their own classic, one that, twenty years from now, future generations would also look up to. “A great historical time calls for a great creative work. A noble mission inspires noble passions. A genuine creative work has no models!”⁴ Inspired by a national exhibition and a television documentary by the same title, Zhang Jiguang, the general director of *The Road*, vowed that his conception of the work would reject any conventions that had already appeared onstage in order to present a brand-new artistic form never before imagined. Zhang focused on what I have elsewhere termed “postepic theatricality”;⁵ rather than employ the familiar practices of the two earlier texts, he introduced “a magnificent visual spectacle” (*shijue qiguan*).⁶ He redesigned the theatrical space to evoke an emotional response from the audience. Zhang and his cohorts conceived three performance spaces that combined “performance art in the square” (*guangchang yishu*) with “performance art on a stage” (*wuta yishu*). They presented a grand arching structure that spanned the stage with seventy-two stairways, as tall as a four-story building; on the stairways stood a thousand chorus

members “singing brilliant songs” all night long to commemorate “our mother’s sixtieth birthday,” similar to ancient Greek chorus rituals and the Mormon church practice of singing congregational hymns all night during the holiday season. Looking from above and around the performance space throughout the entire stage, from “a global perspective,” the chorus singers functioned as contemporary commentators observing the historical events unfolding on the main stage. They presented a contemporary time that was still ticking away during the show, and they invited reflections on and critiques of the stage action from the audience, according to Zhang. Performance art in the square thus merged with performance art onstage to create a dialogic imagination that crossed time and space in order to contemplate the past and the present. A Chinese nationalist spirit in celebration of the nation’s birthday permeated the performance, blurring the ideological boundaries between Maoist socialist China and Dengist capitalist China, embodying the very spirit of Deng’s “cat theory”—as long as we can now celebrate a strong and prosperous China, it does not really matter how we got here, through either a socialist or capitalist approach. As long as the majority of Chinese people are now enjoying a better material life than before, it did not matter if there is an increasingly larger gap between the rich and the poor.

The narration of the revolutionary past therefore became less important than the theatrical space that explored artistic images to overpower a specific, historical chronology, now defined by the commentaries from the perspective of the reform era enacted by the chorus members standing on the stairways. Contained within an arched stairway, the conventional flat stage had been transformed into a “raked stage,” which sloped down toward the audience to improve their view. Based on stage designs from the European Middle Ages and early modern theater, this raked stage enabled a more gradual platform for imagining the “the road to history,” according to Zhang. As part of a three-dimensional space designed to interact with the dynamics of the main stage spectacle, a huge LED screen displayed images from photographs, documentary clips, paintings, and calligraphies, providing historical backdrops such as the burning down of the imperial palace in 1900, the worker and peasant movements in the 1920s, the Long March, the launching of the atomic and hydrogen bombs and the satellites, the return of Hong Kong and Macau to China, the national relief efforts for the victims of the Wenchuan earthquake, and the stunning image of the “Bird’s Nest” national stadium constructed for the Olympic Games.⁷ Other, more detailed textual information, such as a series of titles of the “unequal treaties” imposed by the imperialist powers, were also projected onto the LED screen to emphasize the humiliations of the Chinese people in past centuries, in sharp contrast to the contemporary power of a modern, reformed China.

Whenever called for, the producers blended all three performance spaces into one megaspectacle to create shocking effects, such as in the scene entitled “For Our Mothers” (*Wei le muqin*), which depicted the aftermath of the Japanese bombing of Chinese cities. In contrast to the familiar depiction of Chinese soldiers resisting Japanese invaders, this dance scene started with countless “corpses” sliding down the long stairways, their blood splashing first onto the stairs, then dripping down from the top of the LED screen and spreading across the central stage.⁸ Large pieces of red silk clothing were spread over “the earth” to cover the numerous “corpses,” with enraged dancers moving between them as if to create waving motions of bleeding and death.⁹ A grief-stricken mother emerged from this sea of blood; standing tall among her Chinese compatriots, she suddenly turned around to point at these “vengeful souls” (*bu qu de linghun*) protesting underneath and in between the red silk cloths, the dying victims struggling in agony to raise their heads in revolt.¹⁰ As in other “main-melody” (*zhuxuan li*) performances in the past three decades, the nationalist history against foreign invaders is central in *The Road to Revival*, which has seemingly inherited the tradition of *The East Is Red* but emphasizes the suffering of the people, especially women, rather than the CCP’s heroic resistance against the Japanese soldiers. This seemingly “pro-people” approach in war scenes in fact weakens the CCP narrative, which sees the party as the main force defeating foreign enemies. This stance credits equally KMT forces, whose heroic sacrifices have been depicted in recent films and other performance genres.

No longer interested in interpreting history, which was now known to all, the producers focused on “opening one aesthetic door after another” in order to present a shining detail, an unforgettable image, a memorable plot under the most unusual and particular circumstances, so they could “enlarge,” “exaggerate,” and “enrich” these images to create a sense of “freshness” that would win over contemporary Chinese audiences. However, they did not—and could not—forget to justify their story line by quoting the “important theory of the three revolutions” put forth by Hu Jintao, the party’s general secretary: the republican revolution to overthrow the Qing dynasty with Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s vision; “the new democratic and socialist revolution” with Mao’s leadership; and the fantastic revolution of economic reform with Deng’s wisdom, which later generations of Chinese leaders have carried forward.¹¹ *The Road to Revival* therefore consists of five “poetic chapters” or acts: 1) “A Memorial to the Anguished Land” (*Shanhe ji*, 1840-1921); 2) “An Epic of Heroic Martyrs” (*Rexue fu*, 1921-49); 3) “A Portrait of the Socialist Pioneers” (*Chuangye tu*, 1949-78); 4) “A Melody of the Great Waves of Reform” (*Tachao qu*, 1978-2008); and 5) “A Eulogy for a Magnificent China” (*Zhonghua song*, 2009). After many brainstorming sessions and sleepless nights, the scriptwriters finally felt satisfied that the various moods they had created—reminiscent of five different ancient literary genres: the

memorial essay (*ji*), the rhapsody or the epic (*fu*), portraiture or painting (*tu*), melody or music (*qu*), and eulogy or hymns (*song*)—would best render the essence of each chapter for contemporary audiences. In its aesthetic pursuit of an elite form of performance art (*gaoya yishu*), *The Road to Revival* to some extent negotiated or reduced the sharp ideological edge of *The East Is Red*, which explored and developed a new and popular form of a folk art that came from the revolutionary masses and hence was welcomed and could be easily imitated by the masses in the high socialist period from the 1960s to the 1970s.

For the same reason, *The Road to Revival* selected poetry as a means of artistic expression. Above all else, Zhang and his team worked hard to find a unique beginning for this epic, finally choosing two thematic, profoundly touching lines from a poem by Ai Qing: “Why do we always have tears in our eyes? / Because we love this earth so deeply.” Exploring these lines as the “poetic eyes” (*shi yan*) of the epic, they fashioned a prologue that traveled back in time, featuring a song-and-dance piece entitled “My Homeland” (*Wode jiyuan*) as well as the ancient music known as “evening bell” (*wan zhong*), to pay tribute to the five thousand years of Chinese civilization. They viewed this opening scene as a perfect poetic beginning to sing their “deeply felt eulogy” and to salute their “beloved motherland.”¹² They therefore featured a peasant plowing his land, his young, delicate wife following behind him. A female soloist expressed the people’s unceasing love for, and attachment to, their homeland, while “deepening furrows” appeared on their mother’s face “as years go by.” On this vast stretch of yellow earth, protected and watched over by this peasant couple, there had emerged 470 emperors and empresses and countless thinkers, scientists, and poets year after year, generation after generation. “This is a country with a long history, which can inspire patriotic feelings,” especially against foreign aggressors, Zhang Jigang explained to his coproducers about this first creative breakthrough in his imagining of the epic.¹³ From the mind’s eye of this peasant couple, the epic of our homeland unfolds.

On this stage covered with huge pieces of sturdy brown paper (*niupi zhi*) to symbolize the hilly land of an ancient agricultural civilization, a group of 350 soldiers hid underneath to create the waving motions symbolizing the breathing of the yellow earth, its stress, its tempo, and its gestures. In the heat of a Beijing summer, covered by huge pieces of paper without much air circulation, the soldiers themselves gave additional testimony to the earthly endurance of the Chinese people.¹⁴ As happened in the mass participation of the soldiers in the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, the highly disciplined armed forces, most of whom were recruited in rural China, worked literally beneath the gorgeous performance stage, sweating underground in unbearable conditions, hence symbolically representing their hard-working brothers and sisters who stayed in rural China, while many others

floated to the urban cities to endure exploitation by the rich Chinese and foreign capitalists alike. This post-Mao exploitation of the soldiers presents another sharp contrast to the previously superior status of the workers, peasants, and soldiers in Maoist China: the creators and performers of *The East Is Red* visited them to learn from their life experiences and folk arts, and the masses' representatives, such as "model workers," People's Liberation Army war heroes, and ethnic minority representatives, were invited to the opening by the Central People's Government (Zhongyang Renmin Zhengfu), together with Liu Shaoqi, Deng Biwu, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yi, and other party and state leaders.

Furthermore, unlike *The East Is Red*, which confined the dramatic events to "the glorious twenty-seven years of CCP history" from 1921 to 1949, *The Road to Revival* not only expanded its scope to ancient Chinese history, as examined above, but also gave prominence to the humiliating late Qing period in order to emphasize China's contemporary restoration to national pride and prosperity in the reform era.

Together with the chief scriptwriter, Ren Weixin, famous for such documentary narratives as *On the Yangtze River* (*Huashuo Changjiang*), *On the Yellow River* (*Huashuo Huanghe*), and *On the Hundred-Year Birthday of Zhou Enlai* (*Bainian Enlai*), Zhang Jigang started each chapter with a time, a place, and a detail—things commonly seen in a diary entry—to "objectively and realistically" introduce an earthshaking event. "The summer of 1840 was an extraordinary season," says the offstage narrator at the beginning of chapter 1. "In the *Yuanming Yuan* in Beijing, the largest imperial palace in the world, a majestic performance unfolds at the Qing court with grand music and fabulous costumes."¹⁵ The ensuing six-minute scene brilliantly presents the image of a declining China shattered by foreign invasions. In front of the imperial family, the marvelous players of the *Kunqu* opera are in the midst of performing "Awakening from a Dream" (*Jing meng*) from Tang Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan Ting*), which depicts Du Shiniang's tearful awakening from a beautiful dream about meeting her lover. Suddenly, gunshots from the Opium War interrupt the show, the bullets smashing to pieces a large painting entitled *The Magnificent Landscape of Tens of Thousands of Miles* (*Jiangshan wanle tu*), which was projected onto the back screen. The sound and image of a broken mirror with a painted landscape on it evoked a line from Tang poetry: "The mountains and rivers ruined when the motherland was invaded" (*Guopo shanhe sui*), which, in modern discourse, often depicts a moment of national crisis that arouses the heroic spirit of numerous martyrs to fight foreign aggressors. *The Road's* audience could then enjoy the elaborate *Kunqu* show as well as the traditional poetry and painting, and blame Western imperialists for their destruction.

Another shocking moment occurred in the next episode, “Children’s Ballads of the 1911 Revolution” (*Xinhan tongyao*), which presented a stunning group of 120 male performers dressed in traditional gentlemen’s garments. They danced for four minutes, mostly kneeling, jumping up from this knees-folded position and then banging their bodies on the ground to express their total frustration, extreme pain, and desperate protest against the Qing court’s persecution and execution of reformists. Having gone through two dozen revisions of the choreography, the dancers had rehearsed twenty different dances in order to achieve that one perfect moment that would best showcase the tumultuous spirit of the times.¹⁶ The enraged gentlemen cut off their queues as a gesture against the corrupt Qing court, expressing their determination to follow the spirit of the phrase “for the public good under Heaven” (*Tianxia weigong*). Projected in large characters on the back screen, this well-known phrase expresses Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s vision of restoring the Chinese people’s pride through the establishment of a democratic government, which would benefit all people from all walks of life. This spectacle celebrating the founding father of the Republic of China departs from the previous epic, which had commemorated only the founding fathers mentioned in the official CCP history.

The following scene, entitled “Morning Light” (*Shuse*), stages another large image of “calling to arms” (*nanhan*) to express the patriots’ fury against the status quo and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for a better life. The producers created a brand-new theatrical form: 621 soldiers with angry faces appeared onstage to form “a human wall of protest,” with 1,242 arms crossing each other and reaching out toward the audience. This five-minute scene symbolizes, as the producers explained, 80 years of “calling to arms” (*wu fengzhong de “Shuse,” ba shinian de “nanhan”*) and condenses the spirit of rebellion from the Opium War to the May Fourth movement. Here is another instance in which a postsocialist mega scene was made possible with the sacrifices of nameless soldiers, mostly from the rural area, after having endured numerous hours of disciplined training on and off stage.

The references to historical events, however, are not spelled out through the poetic narrators, as in *The East Is Red*. They were represented through stage props, such as the numerous flags with slogans from the May Fourth movement printed on them, and through the LED projection of the titles of many “unequal treaties imposed by foreign countries,” such as the Nanjing Treaty of 1842, which resulted in the leasing of Hong Kong to Britain and the opening of five seaport cities to the West, among other things. From this massive bodily display of anguished Chinese people, Peng Liyuan, a popular singer, arose to deliver a sorrowful song with resounding poetic lyrics expressing the sorrows of the Chinese people over the past hundred years, while a list of humiliating years appeared one by one on the back screen: 1840, defeat in the Opium War; 1864, the suppression of the Taiping Rebel-

lion; 1895, the loss of the Sino-Japanese War (*Jiawu zhanzheng*); 1875, the failure of introducing foreign industries and ideas (*Yangwu yudong shibai*); 1898, the collapse of the One Hundred Days Reform movement; 1900, the occupation of Beijing by the Eight Allied Foreign Troops; 1905, the abandonment of the New Policies of the Qing (*Qingmo xinzheng yaozhe*); and 1918, the crushing of the movement to protect Chinese railway rights (*Hufa yudong shibai*). Peng Liyuan's stardom as the wife of Xi Jinping, designated the future head of the CCP in the 2013 power switch after Hu Jintao's retirement, could have suggested, to some audiences, a possible connection of the bitter past with contemporary politics, and perhaps even pointed to the dubious achievement of having opened up the Chinese market to the West in the reform era. If that had happened a century earlier, the Chinese people would have resisted, with as much outcry and rage as seen in the above-mentioned scene, against foreign colonial powers and their greedy attempts to crack open the Chinese market and exploit cheap Chinese labor for their own profit.

Similarly, to avoid the earlier epic's familiar narrative of the birth of the CCP in 1921, the narrator begins chapter 2 by presenting another simple fact: "One evening in July 1921, thirteen representatives gathered in Shanghai. When night fell, a light turned on at eight o'clock in the apartment of Li Shucheng—a pioneer of the League of Alliances (*Tongmeng Hui*)—located at 106, Wangzhi Road, in the French Concession of Shanghai. Quietly, an earthshaking event occurred in Chinese history." This brief account reveals the complex nature of the founding of the CCP, in which revolutionaries with various political and ideological backgrounds participated. Then a diary entry by Xie Juezai, an early socialist, was projected onto the LED screen: "In the evening at six o'clock, Shuheng (He Shuheng) traveled to Shanghai, with Runzhi (Mao Runzhi, Mao Zedong's style name) accompanying him, in response to the call from the Communists." Because of the secrecy of the event, the word "Communists" was signified by "xxxxx" in Xie's diary, the narrator explains. According to the producers, this newly discovered, simple, but valuable detail allowed them to feature lesser-known early leaders such as Xie and He.

Such a detail, however, could potentially point to other problematic episodes in CCP history. For example, as some audiences know, the CCP leaders left behind He Shuheng and Qu Qiubai in Jiangxi in 1935 upon the Red Army's departure for the Long March, in spite of He's old age and Qu's poor health. Whereas Qu was captured and executed by the KMT, He Shuheng died upon the enemy's pursuit (some movie and television dramas have him jumping off a cliff to escape capture). Nevertheless, *The Road to Revival* did its share in reversing important verdicts on CCP history: the LED screen presented a list of other early leaders and their seminal achievements, such as Chen Duxiu's editorship of *The New Youth*, Li Dazhao's essay on the victory

of the Bolshevik revolution, and “the cofounding of the CCP by Chen Duxiu in the south and Li Dazhao in the north” (*Nan Chen bei Li, xiang yue jian dang*). These few words flashed onto the back screen restored Chen Duxiu’s original status as one of the founding fathers, against the tradition of *The East Is Red*, which accused him of being “a rightist opportunist” who led the CCP to defeat after Chiang Kai-shek’s betrayal in 1927.

Other key episodes also focused on stunning images from a new perspective. The Nanchang Uprising of 1927 was portrayed in a tense moment of numerous soldiers passing guns to each other in secrecy to get ready for the uprising on the main stage; at the same time, on the stairways at the side, their commander tied red scarves around their necks to signify their identity as members of the rebel troops and checked his watch for the exact time to launch the uprising with other coordinating units, a familiar gesture in other representations of the Nanchang Uprising. In the same spirit of presenting a brand-new and shocking image, the Long March scene depicted a small group of Red Army soldiers “flying over the snow-capped mountains” in a romantic spirit. Through slow motion achieved by having one leg of each dancer secured on a raised platform with a wire connecting them all, this modern dance presented “the magnificent beauty” of the red legend, instead of death and starvation as seen in *The East Is Red*. In contrast to the familiar images of soldiers in rags in other performance pieces on the Long March, the stage designers used silk costumes in a bright color scheme of white and light blue to suggest a flowing motion and a free spirit. The scene indeed achieved Zhang Jigang’s directives to “push history far, far back into the background and let it fly over the mountains and the grasslands; let the Long March become a beautiful painting.”¹⁷ Likewise, the scene portraying the memorable story of the soldiers’ sailing across the Yangtze River to wipe out the KMT troops and to liberate the rest of China focused on one dazzling spectacle: the stunning beauty of the shining helmets worn by numerous soldiers. Together, they formed “an ocean of waves” symbolizing the inevitable advance of one million soldiers.

How to portray the establishment of the PRC without duplicating the numerous, familiar scenes of Mao proclaiming its founding in Tiananmen, as presented in countless movies, television documentaries and dramas, and various forms of visual art? Zhang Jigang and his team finally came up with a touching story. A south-marching unit is fighting KMT troops on the battlefield on October 1, 1949, while the founding ceremony for the PRC is unfolding in Tiananmen Square. A radio man is shot and falls into the arms of his company commander, at the very moment when the name of his new country is being transmitted over the airwaves amid the loud noise of cannons. “What is the name of our republic?” the dying radio man asks his commander before closing his eyes. During the rehearsal of this sketch, Zhang Jigang coached the actors: nothing could more powerfully touch the

audience's heart, he told them, than witnessing the death of a young soldier on the very day of the founding of the new republic, for which he and his comrades had fought so hard and so long. Zhang asked the actor playing the company commander to pronounce "The People's Republic of China" as if he were choking back tears. When the radio man breathed his last, everyone onstage and the entire chorus shouted out "The People's Republic of China" to make sure that the dying soldier—and everyone else still fighting—heard it loud and clear.

After this memorable moment, chapter 3 begins the story of the "birth of the nation" with a side narrative: "On October 1, 1949, Beijing's sky was blue and clear, a beautiful golden day with brisk and clear air. War-weathered marshals and founders of the young republic (*yuxue fengzhan de kaiguo yuanxun*) gathered on Tiananmen to announce the era of a new China." If chapters 1 and 2, however, stage the century-long history from 1840 to 1949 to demonstrate that only the CCP could lead to the founding of the PRC, chapter 3 suggests that socialist China, although well intended and in spite of its various achievements, did not go far enough in the pursuit of its people's happiness. Quickly following this narration is a popular song in the 1950s and 1960s entitled "Socialism Is Great" (*Shehui zhuyi hao*), which best represents the optimistic mood in the early years of the PRC. Its then trendy lyrics express the composer's—as well as his contemporaries'—uplifting hopes for the new republic, where "people have high stature," "imperialists run away with their tails between their legs," and "the whole nation unites for a new wave of socialist construction."

While the chorus sang, the LED screen rapidly displayed a list of successful events, such as the marriage law and land reform in 1950, the "peaceful liberation of Tibet" in 1951, the first railroad built in the PRC between Chengdu and Chongqing (*Chengyu tielu*) in 1952, the first "five-year plan" in 1953, the military decoration of the ten marshals in 1955, the completion of the "ten big buildings in Beijing" in 1959, the Daqing oilfield construction in 1960, the PRC Constitution in 1954, the first successful test of an atomic bomb in 1964, the completion of Nanjing Bridge across the Yangtze River in 1968, the launching of the first satellite in 1970, and the final "restoration" of the PRC's legal seat in the United Nations in 1971.¹⁸

The epic's intriguing mention of the last three events, achieved during the Cultural Revolution, raises the question of how to evaluate the economic achievements of the "ten-year disaster." Internet essays have pointed out that the takeoff of the Chinese economy in the reform era could not have been possible without the foundations laid in the Mao era, in the areas of heavy industry, transportation, agricultural irrigation systems, and the establishment of countless local enterprises in the small and medium-sized towns and cities. The defense industry and aviation industry, in particular, produced the hydrogen bomb, destroyers, nuclear submarines, satellites, the hydroplane,

and the J-7 fighter (the equivalent of the Soviet Mig-21) during the Cultural Revolution, which helped bring about a safe international environment and China's emerging reputation as a strong socialist country in the Cold War era; all these paved the way for China's rapid rise in the post-Mao period.¹⁹ Zhang Jigang's unintended celebration of the economic endeavors during the Cultural Revolution in *The Road to Revival*, therefore, paradoxically undermined his own—and the official culture's—total rejection of that period as characterized by chaos and turmoil.

Brief as it is, the subsequent song and dance in *The Road to Restoration*, entitled "Let's Race with Time (*He shijian saipao*)," presents an energetic Maoist China that will build a strong foundation for socialist industries. Male automobile workers roll out the first "Red Flag car," proving themselves to be "the pillar of the socialist economy." Female weavers from a textile factory vow to spend their "youthful energy and passion to weave a great republic." An all-girl cast, dressed as elementary school students from the 1960s, performs a favorite song from 1960s socialist China, "Learn from the Good Example of Lei Feng (*Xuexi Lei Feng hao bangyang*)," to express their determination to "study hard and make progress every day," a pledge based on a quotation from Chairman Mao.

The next scene, entitled "In the Depth of the Desert" (*Da mo shen chu*), celebrates aspiring scientists who devoted their lives at the nuclear and satellite research site in the remote northwestern desert known as Jiuquan. On a bare stage, illustrating an endless land of sand, a middle-aged scientist returned to lay flowers at the tombs of his former colleagues and friends, who "never regretted having devoted their youth" to "the depth of the wilderness." As a female soloist eulogized Jiuquan as a place that "recorded blood, sweat, and hardships," a lengthy list of martyrs appeared on the back screen, as if their names were inscribed on a sky-high monument in memory of their tremendous contributions to the republic's miracle of having launched "two bombs and one satellite" (*lian dan yi xing*), a symbol of military strength in Maoist China, accomplished through the spirit of self-reliance in an era of isolation from the Western world and from other members of the socialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union.

This sublime, monumental scene praises the scientists' contributions and pays homage to the early promise of the Dengist regime in promoting science and technology, inspiring the scientists to dedicate their talents in order to "let blossom the flowers of spiritual civilization while harvesting the fruits of material civilization." In fact, *The Road to Revival* faithfully follows—and reflects—the problematic, indeed contradictory, strategies of the Dengist regime, which had tapped into the resources of the Maoist collective and selfless spirit but translated them into what Deng labeled a "spiritual civilization" in order to resist political reform of the one-party socialist system, while relentlessly pursuing the so-called "material civilization," or capitalist

restoration with Dengist characteristics. Nevertheless, the epic's staging of the scientists—and, by extension, intellectuals in general—departs radically from *The East Is Red*, which downplays this social group to reflect Maoist distrust of its loyalties immediately before and during the Cultural Revolution.

The happy Maoist days presented in *The Road to Revival* seem short-lived, however, and the colorful socialist stage quickly turns into a solemn scene of poetry recitation in the last episode of chapter 3. In contrast to the conventional practice of skipping the Cultural Revolution, Zhang Jigang pledged to confront this thorny issue.²⁰ After much brainstorming with his creative crew, Zhang chose poetry recitation as a lyrical means to reflect on the psychological and sociological damage done to the Chinese people. In a scene entitled “Reflection and Choice” (*Chensi yu juezhe*), set in 1978, a group of pensive actors wearing gray and green clothes, characteristic of the dark days of the Cultural Revolution, stood motionless as they pondered: Why did we have to endure “the endless chaos” of the Cultural Revolution for “ten long years”?

If not for looking for a turning point in history,
 If not for searching for a new start of national revival,
 Who would want to expose the scars of the past?
 Who would want to remember the trauma of bygone years?
 The earth said that she was very, very tired
 Because of heavy clouds in the sky.
 The sky said that she had suffered a lot in these ten years
 Because she had witnessed an endless turmoil.

Representing blades of grass, the poetic personas now helplessly watched the “lonely geese” in the sky and the “wild horses” losing their way “in the wilderness.”²¹ “A weeping nation began to ponder”: “When on earth would all these come to an end?” “In the bitter winter of 1978,” the “old man of history” “smiled” at the critical moment when the Chinese Communists “changed their course of action” with a “thundering voice.”²² What was the future of the socialist approach? Deng Xiaoping responded, in his own recorded voice played offstage, “We must combine the universal truth of Marxism with the practical experiences of China to break our own trails in building a socialism with Chinese characteristics.”²³ This episode echoes the official party history, which cited Deng’s statement as a watershed event in rejecting the Maoist leftist approach of class struggle in order to focus on economic development as the CCP’s central task. Similar to poetic discourse depicting Mao’s historical role in taking over the party’s leadership after the Zunyi Conference in *The East Is Red*, the stage direction in *The Road to Revival* specifies that “the black, heavy clouds” are dispersed and “the sky returned to its blue color” when Deng Xiaoping’s resounding, authentic

voice shook “the heaven and the earth.”²⁴ *The Road to Revival* also effectively explores familiar tropes such as a blade of grass—which evoked Hu Feng’s “The Grass Speaks to the Sun in This Way,” the first poem to eulogize Mao in 1949—only to critique the mistakes of Mao’s Cultural Revolution while celebrating the Dengist regime.

With the epic’s quick jump from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the beginning of the Dengist era, *The Road* skips two critical years of the transitional period (1976–78) under the leadership of Hua Guofeng. As Mao’s chosen successor, Hua collaborated with other key leaders of the CCP, such as Ye Jianying and others, to arrest members of the Gang of the Four in 1976. Despite his success in ending the Cultural Revolution, however, Hua insisted on allegiance to Mao’s theory of class struggle as a way of preventing China from capitalist restoration, as made clear in his own well-known motto: “Whatever Mao has instructed, we will faithfully follow.” This adherence to Mao’s legacy, if it had succeeded, would have prevented Deng Xiaoping from coming back to power, because Mao had labeled Deng the arch “capitalist roader still walking on the bourgeois road,” and had twice stripped him of his leadership position during the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping countered Hua Guofeng’s point by insisting in 1977 that one “should forever accurately interpret Mao’s words in their own and complete contexts,” without adhering to personal cults and frozen policies that resist change. It was not until 1978, however, upon the successful conclusion of the national debate on “whether or not practical experience should be held as the only criterion to test truth,” that the political culture was finally ready to restore Deng to the central leadership and thus to initiate economic reform with a capitalist orientation. The successful conclusion of the third plenary session of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978 established this goal, as well as solidifying Deng’s unchallengeable position as the second-generation leader who would finally succeed in leading China to prosperity, which Mao had aspired to but failed to achieve in his otherwise enviable career. Removing Hua Guofeng from the stage helped erase memories of Mao’s last attempt to prevent China from a capitalist restoration on his deathbed, therefore providing a seemingly smooth and noncontradictory transition from the Maoist socialist era to the Dengist postsocialist period.

It is therefore no wonder that *The Road to Revival* focuses on the amazing years of the reform era. Three decades after the beginning of that era, the epic was in a unique position to benefit from the numerous events of those years while using historical hindsight to interpret them. *The Road* thus lavishes more than half its stage time and space on the era of Deng Xiaoping, depicting the earthshaking events that occurred from 1978 to 2009, up to the eve of the glamorous celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Despite its claim to uphold the red classical model of *The East Is Red*, however, *The Road to Revival* stages a dramatic counterattack on the main

thesis of the former work, which aimed at preventing capitalist restoration in post-1949 China. *The Road to Revival* in effect demonstrates how Maoism led China astray, and only “socialism with Chinese characteristics” can prevail in the Dengist era. In fact, the epic argues, only through the restoration of capitalism can China find its road to prosperity. Indeed, the very title of *Fuxing zhilu* could be translated either as *The Road to Revival (Fuxing zhilu)* or as *The Road to Restoration (Fupi zhilu)*, or a combination of both, *The Road to Revival through Restoration*. By a little stretch of the imagination, the title could even suggest *No Revival without Restoration*.

Before staging the sumptuous, colorful events of the Dengist era, the narrator of *The Road* urges the audience never to forget the past, nor the difficult path just traveled. She once again starts with a year, 1978, and with a small detail, but it was a decisive event that changed rural China: the dismantling of the collective farming system that first took place in Xiaogang village, Anhui province. Memoirs, biographies, and party histories of post-Mao China have recorded the courageous actions of the Xiaogang villagers, who risked persecution by the authorities by signing their binding contract with their own blood (*xueyin*). The contract specified that they were obligated to raise the children of cadres or peasants if they were thrown into prison for their secret experiment. *The Road to Revival* then shifts quickly to show the marvelous results of this humble beginning of rural reform: gorgeous women in silk dresses fill the stage, expressing their love for their land in the same spirit as their ancestors, as seen in the prologue of the epic, but with a surging pride in being the masters of their own fate. The gold, orange, and red color scheme of the land in harvest season blends harmoniously with the yellow and brown tones of the Yellow Earth in the prologue, reflecting the changing dynamics of an agricultural civilization. The bright, warm colors of the reform era also contrast with the gloomy black and gray in the preceding episode of the Maoist days of the Cultural Revolution. With a song entitled “In the Field of Hope” (*Zai xiwang de tianye shang*), *The Road to Revival* celebrates the return of the land to the peasants in the reform era—if not in name or actual ownership, at least in deed, because their harvest now depends on how hard they work on their allocated land.

This scene of cheering old men, laughing children, and singing ladies also paves the way for the next episode, in which a group of young men stage a rock-and-roll piece entitled “The Ballard of the Migrant Workers” (*Dagong yao*). The offstage narrator lauds “a new labor force that broke away from the rigid divide between urban and rural.” Chinese peasants now “walked into the market and into the city” to become “a bright scenic spot in our contemporary times” (*yidao shidai de fengjing xian*) “on China’s road to modernization.”²⁵ The lyrics supposedly express the wishes of the migrant workers: “Others say that working in the city and away from our parents is tough,” but “I want a better life in the future.” “Thinking of my sweet girlfriend back

home” and “the newlywed chamber in my dreams.” “I have a song at heart, toward the setting sun on the horizon.” “We all strive together, to realize a life of ‘small prosperity’” (*xiaokang shehui*).²⁶ In a stunning theatrical form, this vibrant, happy modern-dance scene, with its quick and lighthearted rhythms, could potentially raise issues for some audience members familiar with the numerous riots, protests, and strikes organized by the migrant workers who receive low wages and few benefits.²⁷ This episode romanticizes, if not distorts, the migrants’ everyday experience. In fact, this exultant scene could be interpreted by those still feeling nostalgic for the Mao era as having unjustifiably ignored “the suffering of the working class for the second time from the oppression of the rich,” which Mao had predicted sixty years earlier in the event of a capitalist restoration and which his Cultural Revolution attempted to prevent.

To balance this extreme representation, *The Road to Revival* portrays the benevolence of the CCP and its compassion for the people alongside the equally hard-working PLA commanders and soldiers, who risked their lives in protecting the dams and rivers during the “great flooding” of 1998. Exploring to the fullest extent the dramatic impact of the scene, numerous chorus members joined the soldiers on the main stage, passing sand bags to stop the rising rivers, forming an indestructible human wall to protect the dam.²⁸ The ensuing scenes celebrating the return of Hong Kong in 1997 and of Macau in 1999 turned a massive “disaster relief” scene, bustling with danger and activity, to a serene and empty stage with the Chinese national flag projected onto the back screen. Standing alone on the main stage, a dynamic conductor in a white tuxedo faced the audience to direct a symphonic chorus, entitled “Never to Forget Forever” (*Yongshi bu wang*). Numerous chorus members on the archway around the global stage followed their maestro in singing the beautiful lyrics that reflect on the humiliating past of a semicolonialist history and its official end with the return of Hong Kong and Macau to the motherland:

Whose voice traveled through the boundless land for centuries,
Which smoke of the battlefields still lingering in our dreams.
The sound of guns and cannons woke me up from a deep sleep,
Ancestor’s ideal, broken heart, never to forget forever.

Whose bosom embraced the sunlight in the sky,
Whose longing welcomed glorious returns from a long journey.
Zijing and *Bailian* flowers competed to blossom,²⁹
Mother’s love, children’s attachment, never to forget forever.

Deep-water bay, low-water bay,
Five-starred national flag rises, never to forget forever.
Looking at the oceans from the east and the west,

Five-starred national flag rises, never to forget forever.³⁰

The repeated phrase “never to forget forever” urges us not to forget the great achievements of Deng Xiaoping, whose ingenious creation of “one country, two systems” (*yi guo liang zhi*) had brought about the unity of the country, in a way his predecessors Mao and Zhou could not have envisioned or accomplished. Originally designed to open a dialogue with Taiwan on the subject of national unification, Deng’s formula in fact succeeded with the return of Hong Kong and Macau, although Deng’s sentimental wish to visit Hong Kong afterward was never realized: he passed away in 1994, and his wife attended the ceremony of Hong Kong’s return on his behalf, an emotional occasion for the Deng family, as recorded in several historical accounts.

It is therefore no wonder that the following scene presents a romantic dance of a young couple in the moonlight, longing for each other’s embrace on opposite sides of the Taiwan Strait, in the mood of the familiar lines from Tang poetry: “Looking up at the moon / Thinking about the hometown” (*Jutou wang mingyue, ditou si guxiang*). Two senior lyric writers, one from Taiwan and the other from the mainland, composed the lyric by following the Tang poetic model, and two other senior performers, Chen Duo and Tian Hua, recited the poem skillfully and with great emotion. The aged composers and performers were themselves witnesses to the sixty-year separation between Taiwan and the mainland. The appearance of Tian Hua might have been intriguing in particular for those who remembered her award-winning role as “the white-haired girl” in the movie of the same title, which narrated a well-known story of how the old society under KMT rule had turned a peasant girl into a ghost, and how the new society in socialist China turned her back into a human being, a typical CCP-celebrating film. This scene thus dramatizes the tragic consequences of the CCP–KMT conflict, and the pain and sorrow of the countless families and friends separated for more than half a century as the result, symbolized by three rows of dancers—dressed in white silk costumes, and all arranged in pairs—acting as moving waves in the ocean in front of the two lovers. From the militant theme of “We must liberate Taiwan,” frequently performed at the time of *The East Is Red*, to the gentle breeze of longing for reunification in *The Road to Revival*, the mainland and Taiwan have traveled a long way toward realizing a shared dream of building a strong, modern, and prosperous China in spite of their different political systems. The next episode, celebrating the opening of the first direct airline route between China and Taiwan in 2008, further contrasts with the negative portrayal of the KMT in *The East Is Red* as the root of the Chinese people’s sufferings before 1949. The ensuing scenes of the national relief efforts after the Wenchuan earthquake and the Beijing hosting of the Olym-

pic Games in 2008 present a virtual image of an even more unified China hailed by Chinese people throughout the world, in spite of their diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

All these achievements culminate in chapter 5, in which representatives from fifty-six ethnic minority groups all over China gather in Tiananmen Square on the eve of the National Day to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Unlike the ending of *The East Is Red*, where the ethnic minority performers eulogize the wise leadership of Mao Zedong and his great achievements in establishing a new, socialist country, the narrator in *The Road to Revival* makes it clear that “the last thirty years of tireless efforts to experiment in the reform era” finally led China to “its great revival.” Entitled “Shining Memories” (*Shanguang de jiyi*), this scene stages traditional folk songs and dances from six ethnic minority groups—Mongolians, Chinese Muslims (the *Huis* and the Uyghurs), *Zhuangs*, Tibetans, and Koreans—all voluptuously dressed and each with an enormous sense of pride and gratitude as they recall and celebrate their genuine happiness in the “great reform era.”³¹ The slim, glamorous figures of minority women, fabulously costumed in striking colors and exotic ethnic fashions, turn the stage into a carnival on the eve of the National Day, when various minority groups sitting in Tiananmen Square huddle together to “remember the great changes that had taken place in the reform era” while “looking at the brilliant star of the sky with deep emotions.”³²

The producers and directors invited the best and brightest choreographers and dancers from ethnic troupes to create what they claimed to be brand-new pieces never seen before on stage: the Mongolian girls in red dresses embraced the grassland with their ancient rituals under the starlit sky as if “breathing in the white clouds” while “sliding through the soft breath of the earth”; the Uyghurs in golden dresses displayed their abundant grapes to celebrate their bumper harvest and “their motherland’s birthday” to the drumbeating rhythm of their handsome men; the *Hui* girls in white and blue costumes washed their hands with “holy water” from golden vases before presenting red flowers to their “motherland” to express good wishes from the “daughters of the *Huis*”; the Korean girls dressed in white and purple outfits in the image of cranes, symbols of good fortune, that “fly over from the Lake of Heaven (Tianchi) to bless an old Korean couple,” could not stop laughing and telling others about the “great changes” that had occurred in the past thirty years in their families’ and children’s lives;³³ the Tibetan girls, arms encircling the waists of their young lovers, walked slowly and gracefully to form a “seven-color rainbow” across the stage, “walking toward the happy and beautiful life of their dreams”; the young men from the *Zhuangs* presented a bronze drum dance to express their gratitude toward the “magnificent mountains, waters, and life” (*hao shan, hao shui, hao nianhua*).³⁴

In spite of the obvious contradictions between the endings of *The East Is Red* and *The Road to Revival* in their central message, *The Road* blends images, stage conventions, and ideological twists in the old and new revolutionary epics by staging, in the last scene, the grand celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC, as if it were a coherent tale of continuities despite its obvious discontinuities. In a resounding voice, the offstage narrator declares that the Chinese people will always remember the great achievements of the first generation of collective leadership under Mao in establishing a new socialist country, the second generation under Deng in carrying out the magnificent economic reform, and the third generation under Jiang Zemin in leading the reform era into the twentieth-first century. “Let us unite more closely around the CCP central committee headed by Comrade Hu Jintao,” he says, “to create an even greater future for China’s astonishing revival.”³⁵

Whereas *The Road to Revival* expressed the cult of Deng by honoring the collective leadership of four generations of CCP luminaries and the ordinary people, the reception history of this epic, however, created a cult around the artists, especially Zhang Jigang. According to his co-workers, most of the marvelous details from *The Road* came from the brilliant mind of Zhang, who possessed “talent, courage, willpower, and efficiency,” and combined the style of an army commander (because he is from an army performance troupe) with that of the most passionate artist. Originally from a small place in Shanxi where he grew up breathing in the local folkloric traditions, Zhang arose from an indigenous artist to the enviable status of deputy director-in-chief producing the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games and director-in-chief of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Disabled Olympic Games, only to beat his own record by producing one of the most difficult revolutionary epics in a nonrevolutionary time. He was described as a “perfectionist” in an era when “being conscientious” almost became “a negative characteristic of people.”³⁶ With “superb artistic talent,” he could even “turn a piece of stone into gold” (*dian shi cheng jin*). In the episode “Children’s Ballads of the 1911 Revolution,” for example, the choreographers were frustrated by the rather flat dance without a real climactic moment. Zhang came up with an ingenious idea: he asked all 120 dancers to lie face down on the floor. When they raise their heads to pose in a dramatic gesture (*liangxiang*), their long gentlemen’s clothes are already cast away, revealing naked chests tied tightly with ropes, an image of martyrs before execution. All of a sudden, they stand up, announcing loud and clear the thematic words—“for the public good under Heaven”—to express “the pulse of the historical past.”³⁷ In another example, the episode entitled “People’s Monument” (*Jinian bei*) features a chorus singing the lyric from Mao’s inscription on the Monument of the People’s Heroes in Tiananmen Square, and the directors were puzzled as to what to do with an empty stage. Zhang

invited the chorus conductor on stage to face the audience while directing; when all the stage lights suddenly turn on upon the conductor's arrival, all the chorus members burst into passionate singing. This interrupted the ongoing narrative of the war of liberation in 1949 with an alienation effects that invited contemporaries' reflections on the noble sacrifices of numerous martyrs.³⁸

When the cult of Zhang displaced the cult of Deng, *The Road to Revival* finally realized on stage a complete restoration of capitalism through a unique artistic form, with a cast of 3,200 performers and a team of 150 script writers, composers, stage designers, and staff members. Zhang demanded that every single participant carry out every simple detail in the epic to perfection in order to express "sharp themes, grand spectacles, profound emotions, and pure aesthetics."³⁹ "The music and dance epic is a commiserative ritual with unique Chinese characteristics," Zhang said, and persistently searched for "a unique form" that "did not repeat" his previous work, "nor the works of others."⁴⁰ This would not be easy for a nationally known director who had produced sixty to seventy performances and had five other shows going on at the same time *The Road* was staged, in performance genres as diverse as a "talk-and-sing drama" (*shuochang ju*) entitled *Liberation (Jiefang)* and a "grand epic Peking opera" (*daxing shishi jingju*) entitled *Red Cliff (Chibi)*. Labeled a "thinking artist" who was not afraid of breaking conventions, Zhang was deemed the one and only person who could succeed in creating an unprecedented performative form that celebrated the thirty years of economic reform. One cannot help but reflect on Mao's early insights perceiving Chinese artists and writers as deadly enemies of the proletariat dictatorship, and his will to initiate the Cultural Revolution, which first targeted the cultural front to preempt the Western dream of a peaceful evolution from socialism to capitalism, even at the expense of destroying his own people's republic. The power and danger of performing arts, and their potential to collaborate with and challenge the status quo, found their best manifestations in the evolutionary stories of the "red classics" in question, and the creative energies of the best performers in the past half century.

NOTES

1. I presented an early and much shorter version of this chapter at an international conference on "The Red Legend in China," Harvard University, April 2-3, 2010. I am grateful to Wang Der-wei, Li Jie, and Zhang Enhua for inviting me and to the conference participants for their feedback.

2. Wang Xiaoling, "My Recollection of the Brainstorming Sessions for Creating *The Road to Revival* (*Fuxing zhilu* cehua guocheng pian yi)," in Mao Shi'an, ed., *The Road to Revival (Fuxing zhilu)* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenshi chubanshe, 2009), 96.

3. Wang Xiaoling, "My Recollection," 96.

4. Zhang Jigang, "Introduction: Motherland, We Are Singing for Your Honor (Zuguo, women wei ni gechang)," in *The Road to Revival*, 14.

5. Here, "postepic" refers to going beyond the explanatory mode of why and how certain chronological events occurred, as seen in previous epics, in order to present a theatrical spectacle of visual and audio effects. Even though Brechtian alienation effects were explored in *The Road* in keeping with the central concern of the theater's social and political dimension, "postepic theatricality" is also different from the Brechtian notion of the specific relation of the epic theater to the spectator: it "forces him to take decisions," because the decision to promote a Dengist regime was predetermined in this state-sponsored megaperformance to celebrate the official culture's achievements. This is not to deny that room was available for the audience to think differently, as is spelled out in this essay.

6. Ren Weixin, "Afterthoughts That Cannot Be Really Explained (Shuo bu qing de gan-yan)," in *The Road to Revival*, 95.

7. Liu Xing, "This Is an Epic Created by Our Chinese People (Zhe shi women zhongguo-er ziji chuangzao de shishi)," in *The Road to Revival*, 101.

8. Ju Yi, "A Counterpoint Structure between Two Spaces of Aesthetics (Liangge meixue Kongjian de fudiao goucheng)," in *The Road to Revival*, 117.

9. *A Record of the Text* (Ben Wen shi lu) in *The Road to Revival*, 23-87, 39.

10. Mao Shi'an, "The Passing of Time Has Warmed up Our Memories (Suiyue wenuan zhe women de jiyi)," in *The Road to Revival*, 151.

11. Wang Jianjun, "From Winter to Spring, We Sculpture Time (Dong qu qiu lai, women diaoke shiguang)," in *The Road to Revival*, 127.

12. Wang Jianjun, "From Winter to Spring," 129-130.

13. Wang Xiaoling, "My Recollection," 96.

14. Qiu Hui, "An Outstanding and Moving Experience Essential to One's Life (Shengming zhong bu ke quefa de jingcai he gandong)," in *The Road to Revival*, 105.

15. *A Record of the Text*, 27.

16. Tan Guangpeng, "Perspiration on the Rehearsal Sites (Hanshui saman panyian chang)," in *The Road to Revival*, 107.

17. Xing Shimiao, "A Landscape through Another Door of Aesthetic Perspective (Ling yi shan men de fengjing)," in *The Road to Revival*, 111.

18. *A Record of the Text*, 45-46.

19. Yunwu Zhongren, "The Tremendous Achievements in Economic and Social Development During the Cultural Revolution (Wenge shiqi juda de jingji shehui chengjiu)," *Phoenix Criticism* (Fenghuang ruiping), September 15, 2009, <http://q.ifeng.com/group/article/111527.html>. The statement was correct that these weapons systems were produced during the Cultural Revolution. It was also a fact of life that more would have been made if there had been no Cultural Revolution, which greatly hampered China's military technology development. Many of the best scientists were forced to be "re-educated" in the countryside instead of working in labs. I am grateful to Bin Yu, a specialist in Chinese military history, for confirming this fact.

20. For example, in *The Song of the Chinese Revolution* (*Zhongguo geming zhi ge*), which premiered in 1984, the people's protest against the Gang of Four in 1976 is depicted in one quick dance, to indicate the end of the Cultural Revolution. For the epic's script, see *The Song of the Chinese Revolution* in Wang Ying and Shi Xiang, *Rare Record between the Stage Curtains* (*Muhou zhenwen*) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1986).

21. *A Record of the Text* (Ben wen shi lu), in *The Road to Revival*, 51-52.

22. *A Record of the Text*, 51-53.

23. *A Record of the Text*, 53.

24. *A Record of the Text*, 53.

25. *A Record of the Text*, 57.

26. *A Record of the Text*, 59.

27. For recent works in the changed conditions of the Chinese laborers, see Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

28. *A Record of the Text*, 61.
29. *Zijinghua* (redbud), the regional flower of Hong Kong, and *Bailianhua* (white lotus), the regional flower of Macau, were used during the national celebrations of the two regions' return to China as symbols of the regions and their people.
30. *A Record of the Text*, 62-63.
31. *A Record of the Text*, 74.
32. *A Record of the Text*, 71.
33. *A Record of the Text*, 77.
34. *A Record of the Text*, 76.
35. *A Record of the Text*, 84-85.
36. Shan Sanya, "Zhang Jiguang: The Singers of Motherland (Zuguo de gezhe)," in *The Road to Revival*, 111.
37. Zhang Hua, "Reflection on *The Road to Revival*" (*Fuxing zhi lu shiri tan*) in *The Road to Revival*, 147.
38. Zhang Hua, "Reflection," 137.
39. Shan Sanya, "Zhang Jiguang," 155.
40. Shan Sanya, "Zhang Jiguang," 156.

Chapter Ten

A New Narrative of Development in Chinese Television Media Representations of Africa

Megan M. Ferry

Much ado has been made about Chinese–African relations at the dawn of the twenty-first century. In the wake of the United States’ global “War on Terror” and the economic crisis reverberating out of Wall Street and across the continents, attention to China’s “go global” strategy stirs up a range of responses that see China as a competitor advancing on what used to be U.S. and developed countries’ sphere of influence, or as an alternative model that is coming into its own and whose ideological ambitions are yet to be defined. China’s “rise” has elicited fears of imperialism as well as threats of changes in global leadership. This expanding role in global relations creates the need for China to construct a new self-perception that better reflects its contemporary situation, while keeping both interpretive reactions from the rest of the world in mind.

This essay examines two televised representations of Africa: *Forever Africa* (Yongyuan de Feizhou),¹ a fictional series about a contemporary Chinese medical mission to an unnamed African nation; and *A Passage to Africa* (Zoujin Feizhou),² an extensive travel documentary. I focus on how these media use the familiar concepts of civility (wenming) and scientific progress to construct a new narrative of China’s place in the world community, directed at a Chinese audience. *Forever Africa* and *Passage to Africa* offer a view to the underlying assumptions behind the government’s political and economic actions since the 1980s and reactions to the rise of entrepreneurialism in the 1990s. Predating the more recent articulations of and platforms for China’s scientific and civic progress (as formulated by Jiang Zemin’s “The Three Represents” and Hu Jintao’s “Four Perseverances”), these media re-

flect the ethical and moral values that constitute foundational knowledge for development. *Forever Africa* takes a micro perspective to reflect upon the tension between state and individual interests, government-sponsored and independent enterprises in Africa. It emphasizes humanism as the defining ethical value for China's forays into Africa. *A Passage to Africa*, in contrast, takes a macro perspective to reflect upon and demonstrate civility as a complementary manifestation of development and citizen mobility. Both portray humanism as an extension of traditional values that predate China's interactions with the West, and as a product of a nation-state represented as anticolonial.³ China's emphasis on egalitarian humanism contests a Western-derived humanism held responsible for the disparity model between developed and developing nations.

I take a close look at the persuasive narrative of China's soft power initiatives in Africa and its ideological underpinnings. Soft power, as Joseph Nye defined it in 2004, is the ability to "shape the preferences of others," not through force but via the power of attraction.⁴ "Soft power uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation—an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values."⁵ Constituted in the cultural realm, soft power entices or co-opts the values, beliefs, and practices of another country. It is an inviting perspective that the recipient is willing to share. The narrative structures in China's media representations of Africa have been cultivating its soft power for more than sixty years. An examination of the dominant messages in these media relations can shed light on China's role in Africa, and on how soft power, a reflection of collective behavioral beliefs and practices, is cultivated domestically.

Clifford Geertz has taught us that culture is not an innate characteristic of an individual or peoples, but a product of manufactured social relations.⁶ Ideas, values, actions, emotions, and institutional and architectural structures orient the individual as to how to behave within a culture. One way that a culture is shared is via media. In particular, television, because its reach can convey the same story to a massive audience, has the ability to capture the consciousness of a population on a large scale. It can play to the emotional responses of its viewers; the seriality of its content unfolding a common narrative over time allows the narrative to assume its way into the public's consciousness and solidify. The two television media examples examined here, a drama series and a travel documentary, reinforce China and its people as heroes of globalization. Both the media content and form reflect this consciousness by emphasizing China's cultural and technological strengths, whose ethics of contact, so the tales go, suggest a renewed humanism. These media tales of transformation reconfigure China from a minor third world subject to a major player on the world stage.

Fears of Chinese imperialism and expansion abound in the Western media. The television productions examined here engage with the West's critique of China's rise. A closer examination of the production elements and content will address whether the new narrative supports this critique.

CULTURE AS CAPITAL IN *FOREVER AFRICA*

Filmed in Tanzania but fictionally set in E country against the backdrop of Mount Kilimanjaro, the 2000 television drama *Forever Africa* (Yongyuan de Feizhou) is about a contemporary Chinese medical mission in Africa that has come upon an infectious disease rapidly killing the tribal population. The mission wants to declare a state of emergency, but cannot get consent from the host country or confirmation from medical labs in the West. Determined to discover the roots of the disease, the medical team heads off to the bush, sets up a lab and hospital there, and works closely with a tribal leader. The head doctor tells his younger colleague, Dr. Zou, that the tribal people have long embraced a shamanistic tradition and are not always willing to work with the Chinese, as the doctors question the hygienic practices of some traditions. Yet the two parties get along, having forged a strong bond of friendship and mutual respect for each other's traditions over the years.

Whether in the hospital or in the bush, the drama films the Chinese physicians in the same frame alongside Africans, thereby putting them on an equal footing. Within the frame of a typical encounter, Dr. Zou faces the tribe members attentively, listens actively, and takes turns when speaking. The framing of the Chinese doctor with the tribal people constructs for the viewer a one-on-one identification with both, thus reiterating the visual rhetoric long used to depict China–Africa state relations of mutual respect. The African characters frequently call out to their “Zhongguo yisheng” (Chinese doctor) to help with a difficult birth or illness. The framing and the constant invoking of the Chineseness of the doctors suggest that these Chinese are considered a respected part of the African community.

The respect and acceptance accorded the Chinese doctors stand in stark contrast to the reception given the French Dr. Louis, who is also working on communicable diseases in Africa. He stands as the epistemological rival to the Chinese doctors, hoping to be the first to discover the nature of this disease in order to secure his chance at a Nobel Prize. He is depicted as having a different intercultural relationship ethic. Whereas the Chinese are not afraid of contact with the Africans and are thereby sought after, the Western doctor must find his patients, coaxing each of them to be his subject with the offer of a dollar bill. He is often shown alone in the frame, and is shot at a low angle in one particular scene when he wears a gas mask and

protective suit when approaching a patient. This low-angle shot positions the doctor as superior and intimidating; his subjective distancing not only represents his dangerous presence but also connotes his fear of contamination and isolation from the indigenous culture, and thus establishes as natural his opposition to both the Africans and the Chinese. On this particular venture he angers the tribe and finds himself captured and tied to a tree with his gas mask still around his neck, ready to be sacrificed to the tribe's god. Dr. Zou, invited by the Africans to take part in the ceremony and to partake of the Westerner's flesh, relies on the tribes' faith in him as a physician and a friend to save the Western doctor. Zou convinces the tribal leader to release Dr. Louis, and declares magnanimously that he is less concerned about losing a competitor for the Nobel Prize than he is about losing another man of science.

This brief scenario reiterates the rhetoric of mutual respect for alternative modernities that has governed the more than fifty-year relationship between China and African nations. It follows China's and other Southern nations' historical contestation of the West's scientific and humanist authority and questions whose path brings a nation within cultural proximity to modernity. The Chinese medical mission's breakthrough in discovering what ails the tribal population stands superior to Western science, whose desire to cure is steeped not in the Hippocratic oath but in a determination to maintain its superiority through more selfish means. The simple juxtaposition of the Chinese and French doctors evokes current critiques about the effectiveness of international aid in Africa. The drama portrays the Chinese doctor as more altruistic than his Western colleague, thereby resonating the Chinese government's response to critics about its aid practices in Africa. The filmic positioning of these two archetypal characters manifests the ideological conflict between China and the West. Through recognizing a developing nation's cultural knowledge and questioning Western hegemony, the drama reveals an alternative development model that does not privilege the West.

By now most of us are familiar with the visual rhetoric of the propaganda posters and foreign-language publications that circulated inside and outside China during the 1960s and 1970s, which frequently depicted representative third-world peoples alongside the Chinese, all facing in unity the revolutionary challenges that lay ahead. Technical, political, and social development is portrayed as an ongoing process that everyone shares equally. China is portrayed as giving generously of both its culture and technology to its counterparts, as seen in the image of Africans in native dress receiving a Chinese-manufactured tractor or medical assistance, or of Africans gathered around the works of Mao Zedong. The image of a Chinese doctor in her lab coat working alongside a woman in native African dress speaks to their affinity. The two women in sandals share a mutuality as they prepare medicine with a mortar and pestle in the countryside. Although China brings technology to

the rural fields, it does so as complementary to local knowledge and thus does away with the urban center, long the symbol of modern advancement. Such depictions represent the very potent desire to create imagined worlds of reciprocity outside the territorial and epistemological boundaries we have become used to in nation-state rhetoric.

Zhou Enlai's famed trip to several African nations in 1963 and 1964 elicited responses in the West that along with aid, China would be spreading its ideology through indoctrination. But typically, as in the case of the highly publicized construction of the TAZARA railway between Tanzania and Zambia, local workers remark that they learned more about diligence and virtue than Maoism.⁷ Research by scholars Jamie Monson and Deborah Brautigam suggests that the Maoist flavor of China's presence in Africa had greater effect in China's propaganda material than it did in actuality on the ground. Then, as now, China reiterated that it was not a model to emulate, but a "reference point."⁸ Even in today's China, there is no consensus among politicians and intellectuals that there is a China Model opposite the Washington Consensus. It is evident that China's presence in African nations has been based on China's own experience as aid giver as well as recipient. Its aid model has consistently emphasized infrastructure, mutual benefit for giver and receiver, and technical training.⁹ It did not follow Western donor nations who in the 1990s shifted their emphasis from infrastructure projects to structural adjustment, with emphasis on growth, privatization, and democratic governance. China insists its assistance to and business relations with African countries promote self-reliance and build capacity; a win-win situation for both participants.

Since the 1950s, China has courted Africa by way of their shared history, both real and imagined. Not only has the Chinese government frequently referenced Chinese–African trade relations from the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties (long before European countries became a formidable presence in international trade), but it has also spoken to their shared colonial histories, with references to Chinese coolies who worked in Tanzania under German colonial rule and the postcolonial liberation struggles of individual nation-states.¹⁰ These references demonstrate that China's relationship with Africa has been ongoing, and that the current forays into Africa are part of a longer historical continuum. Such a long relationship predates modern Western imperial projects.

The cultural connection between China and African countries is only one aspect of China's early soft power initiative. Nye highlights that soft power relies on three resources for its legitimacy, of which culture is only one. The other two are political values and foreign policy. One of the strongest articulations of China's legitimacy as a different model from the West came out of the 1955 Bandung Conference, at which several African and Asian nations met to work on economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonial-

ism. Prior to the conference, Premier Zhou Enlai outlined the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that was a foundational platform in Bandung. Emphasizing mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, nonaggression, noninterference in a country's internal affairs, equality, and mutual benefit, as well as peaceful coexistence, Zhou promoted a political model whose nonalignment with either U.S. or Soviet hegemony contrasted with the Cold War polarization and later became the backbone of Chinese foreign policy and aid to Africa. For many African and Asian members, this third position reflected the realities of a multipolar world. The alternative modernity model of nonalignment suggests it offered a less bellicose and more egalitarian worldview.

Presented on Chinese national television in the fall of 2000, *Forever Africa* looks beyond the socialist state-defined rhetoric that sent medical missions to Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. Instead of being read as a purely nostalgic piece about China's generous assistance to its socialist comrades fighting a proletarian revolution (several memoirs of former missionaries to Africa were printed about the same time, and in the final episode of the series the Chinese doctors pay their respects at the grave of a previous physician who dedicated her life for Africa's well-being), the program must also be contextualized within China's global network and what the network brought and continues to bring to China's modern development. New and renewed political and economic alliances with African states enhance China's export power, in terms of both goods and technology experts (engineers and entrepreneurs among them). While the themes of friendship and mutual benefit recur throughout this twelve-part series, the most salient aspect of it underscores China's technological advancement and its crucial humanitarian presence in global flows.

The humanism in the drama bears the mark of Confucian morality and its tenets of "harmony, familism, and patrnomialism."¹¹ These beliefs dominated China's politics and social ethics long before its interactions with the West, and were cast aside as unhelpful to China's modern development in the early twentieth century. Only recently have these values taken hold again in China, with a strong emphasis on peaceful coexistence.¹² The male protagonist, Dr. Zou, demonstrates his break with the specter of Western society that has haunted his country in the last century by giving up his chance to win a Nobel Prize when he saves Dr. Louis from death, thus invoking an altruistic humanity that is larger than Louis's European ideology of self-interest.¹³ It helps, of course, that the Chinese medical mission finds a cure in the end with the science of herbal medicine and receives recognition and praise from the president of E country. The Chinese sympathize with and accept native traditions while simultaneously seeking to resolve E country's backwardness by instilling Chinese science and values. This is not to say that all the indige-

nous people accept the Chinese doctors' presence, but the series does evoke a general acceptance of China's help, especially as the natives fondly address the doctors as *gege* (older brother) or *jiejie* (older sister).

Though the camera work and narrative structure show China as different from the West, the drama also integrates those very markers of difference that have kept China and Africa as the West's other. The stereotypical representations of Africans in *Forever Africa* differ little from those in the West. Contemporary Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina critiques Western authors' routine depictions of Africans as maladjusted, unclothed, undeveloped, tribal, and keenly rhythmic dancers.¹⁴ One might extend the same critique to the Chinese. *Forever Africa's* production elements carry all the typical signs of Western "Africanity": the strains of African music and dance resonate throughout the series and almost all the Africans appear in native tribal dress. Cannibalism still exists; hygienic practices still do not. A paternalistic relationship between Dr. Zou and the tribal leader's daughter suggests that Chinese can respect, but not fall in love with Africans. Stereotypical shots of the African landscape (golden sunset on the endless horizon upon which stands a lone tree in silhouette) invoke the vastness of the landscape and the dominant role that nature (not civilization) plays in Africa. Though filmed in Tanzania, the series explicitly erases references to any particular nation-state, singularizing Africa as a homogenous cultural entity. The television show suggests that clearly, the people of Africa are in need of Chinese expert medical intervention if they are to survive.

Despite the familiar visual rhetoric of "Africa," director Du Xiao's commentary on why he filmed this series reveals affinities. He felt compelled to go to Africa because it symbolizes for him the plight of human existence. Influenced by Hemingway's depiction of Africa as a "deathly and fearful zone" in *Under Kilimanjaro*, Du finds a new appreciation after having traveled there himself, vowing to "ponder carefully this place's inevitable poverty and backwardness, as well as the inability to grasp the possibilities of its fate." In the same breath Du takes a macro perspective on the wealth disparity between developed and developing nations and the unevenness of global development:

The United States pushes the material world to the extreme and steals the limelight. Europe stands for Western civilization and treats others with disdain. The human race has left for Africa only primitive backwardness. . . . Every bit of Africa's existence is flowing in blood. I believe that this blood has also flowed through every bit of my own existence.¹⁵

In reflecting on his own fate and that of other nations, Du Xiao reactivates the specter of Western-dominated perception of otherness. He pulls together the personal and the political in what I see as part of a larger trend in

contemporary Chinese media to change the cultural perceptions and material reality of China and Africa as the West's traditional other. His sentiments reflect Zhou Enlai's political speeches that see China's self-reflection in many African countries. Furthermore, his drama reinforces the eight principles of Chinese foreign aid established in Zhou's tour of Africa in 1963 and 1964. Of these, equality, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty still resonate in China's foreign policy rhetoric today.

The real focus within the drama, however, is on the Chinese individual, Dr. Zou, with whom the audience identifies and through whom viewers learn the values of this new cultural narrative. In the unfolding of Zou's transition from rogue individual to national hero, the audience too learns how to become new global citizens. Dr. Zou's character reminds them to respect other traditions and peoples as well as to think and act as cultural ambassadors. When an African woman dies of the unnamed disease, Dr. Zou insists on doing an autopsy. A young woman agrees, saying, "I know that it is through science that we can cure our people of this illness," but the tribal chief disagrees. Zou faces a confrontation with the chief. His zealous belief in science pits him against the shamanistic traditions of the tribe, and brings him close to his own death as he too finds himself tied to a tree. Zou claims the chief is spreading the disease among his people, while the chief argues Zou's spirit is disturbing the land. The impasse lies with Zou's unflinching belief to a fault in the benefits of science and modern technology, and he oversteps the boundaries of his host culture. What eventually saves him is the appearance of the Chinese medical mission's chief doctor. He apologizes to the chief, cuts Zou's hand so that the Africans (and Zou as well) can see that Zou is human, and thus admonishes Zou for not respecting the local customs as an invited guest in the country. "We represent a nation," he admonishes. "They use their own way to live out their fate," he intones, "and we must find a way to complement their beliefs." Zou's apology to the chief accomplishes a renewed understanding of China–Africa relations with a medium shot of Zou alongside a tribal ally, drawing the viewer in as a close witness and implicit participant. The intimate relationship between the audience and the characters is reinforced when they hear the chief respond, "We black people will always be friends with you."

This scenario enacts a visual narration of China's political policies articulated by Prime Minister Li Peng in 1990, wherein he states that "[The] new order of international politics means that all countries are equal and must mutually respect each other regardless of their differences in political systems and ideology." Furthermore, he adds, no country "is allowed to impose its will on other countries" or "seek hegemony in any regions. . . . They are not allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of the developing countries, or pursue power politics in the name of 'human rights, freedom, and democracy.'"¹⁶ Noninterference in the affairs of other sovereign nations plays as

crucial a role in contemporary Chinese politics as it did in the 1950s. Despite the fact that the new globalism brings nations together in a more interdependent fashion, the political and visual signs indicate that nations need autonomy to resolve domestic problems. Dr. Zou's rugged individualism, established early in the series, needs to be tamed to the chimes of familial nationalism.

From the Bandung Conference in 1955 to the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation in 2000 and the Declaration on the New Asian–African Strategic Partnership signed in Bandung in 2005, technology and education have driven China and Africa's determination for economic independence from Western nations and self-rule. Whether critical or in favor of China's global rise, both sides assert China's cultural difference from the West by distinguishing its political and economic actions from the more familiar Western dominance, positioning China as the third leg in the global triangle of power relations between the United States and Europe. I address the critical voices at the end of this essay. Here I focus on why Chinese media portrayals of Africa cannot be considered apart from the scientific and humanist epistemologies that have traditionally marginalized China's and Africa's places in the global context. How are we to interpret China's paradoxical use of representations of the other, in this case Africa, against which China, a nation also sharing in the iconography of otherness, appears playing a re-cognizing role? The paradox arises when contemporary media use existing epistemologies of othering to free China from its marginal, othered position.

The media examined here reflect a domestic marketing of China's well-known soft power initiatives, such as the ideological, cultural, and social values that distinguish China from the rest of the world. They complement its hard power (economic and military) actions that make it an important global player. *Forever Africa* stages China's cultural transformation from an impoverished nation to a serious contender in global politics. China's atavism is represented as both tribal and cosmopolitan at the same time, for its cultural uniqueness and global presence are today as strong as ever, and both are to be coveted by African nations in search of the latter.

The centuries-old commercial trade between African nations and China, which began with textiles, tea, porcelain, gold, and animals, is now consolidated in oil well investments, dam construction, mining projects, economic zones, and arms sales. References to China's development (economic capital, entrepreneurship, citizen mobility) in contemporary representations of Africa do not necessarily change or enrich the way the Chinese view Africa, but change and enhance the way they view themselves. As China's concept of modernity has shifted from an ideological to an economic emphasis,¹⁷ so too have the content and messages in Chinese media. Not only does the Chinese medical mission dispense scientific reasoning, it also promotes corporate sponsorship. Emblazoned on the doctor's shirt throughout the drama is not

the red cross of medical assistance but the corporate logo of Epson computers. Capital accumulation is not the focus of the drama. The shirt suggests that China's new narrative includes an economic as well as cultural element, both of which precipitate China's global mobility. This reflects the government position that China's political and economic rise is ethical as well as moral.¹⁸ Dr. Zou emerges as a heroic figure transformed from a man running toward Africa to avoid his pain at home; he returns to China renewed and with a greater sense of national mission. He serves as a model reconfigured citizen. Dr. Zou has not exploited his African host country, but rather assisted in its modern development. He returns to China not materially wealthy, but rich in intercultural experience and mutual understanding.

CITIZEN *SUZHI* (QUALITY) AND MOBILITY IN A PASSAGE TO AFRICA

With its economic development in the last twenty years or so, China has also experienced shifting expectations of its citizens. The individual plays an important role in this newly restructured economy, as this is the person who ultimately drives consumer capital. One's personal development, reminiscent of Confucian self-cultivation, is an important agent for the nation's progress. An individual's development is defined by *suzhi* (quality), a term that does not have a precise definition but is widely used to encompass physical, intellectual, social, psychological, and cultural characteristics. It justifies the exploitation of individuals in the name of a perpetually unattainable completeness.¹⁹ *Suzhi* drives Chinese migration from the rural countryside to the cities in the hope of better social and economic conditions, and holds individuals' lack of *suzhi* responsible for unequal labor practices, not the institutions that employ them. In general, people living in the coastal cities are considered to possess more *suzhi* than those from the countryside, which can also loosely be restated as those living in the Han areas possess more than those living in minority areas. Likewise, those who are educated and earn higher wages are considered superior to those who are not and do not. Thus the quality of individual development parallels the development of the state, which implies elements of North-dominated definitions of capitalist development promoted by the IMF and World Bank, with which China competes.²⁰

The market economy works when the people learn the habits associated with its consumerist values. Of course, not all people possess the capital to consume, but as Deng Xiaoping encouraged, letting a few get rich now will eventually bring the rest of the population along. The Dengist strategy of unequal development has helped create a new, upwardly mobile petit bourgeoisie as the vanguard of China's modernity with their consumption of

cosmetics, name brands, electronics, and tourism, but it is to the returning old bourgeoisie that China entrusts its entrepreneurial hopes. Dr. Zou's transformation from incomplete individual to worldly humanist represents this ongoing development of the individual. The travel documentary *A Passage to Africa* serves as an educational model for social development at home by highlighting Chinese entrepreneurialism abroad while reconfiguring cultural and historical knowledge of the self and other in preparation for a renewed cosmopolitan return. This focus informs China's recent television documentary impulse.

China Central Television (CCTV) and Rupert Murdoch's Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV launched the documentary in 2003, highly ambitious in scope and content and with over 100 short episodes. A 25-member production team covered 27 countries and 80,000 kilometers in 100 days. Divided into three teams, three hosts narrate their venture through the African continent, joining up again at the end of the documentary at Mount Kilimanjaro, its highest peak. When first broadcast on Phoenix TV, the documentary was divided into 15-minute segments about African history, culture, and traditions, followed by a brief quiz hosted by a hip VJ, much like those on STAR (Asia) or MTV. The production was one of the first television documentary serializations in China, heralding a new entertainment market industry. It was an early model for future documentary projects in terms of its continuous self-promotion, high-profile stars, and storytelling.²¹ An extensive *Passage to Africa* Web site contained camera crew travelogues, photos, and more detailed information about the places visited. A boxed set of the documentary was for sale in bookstores in 2005, and the site on CCTV.com has undergone various revisions over the last few years. The quizzes and the VJ encourage viewers' participation in learning about Africa, which in itself creates a new kind of citizen behavior that encourages audience participation and repeat consumption of the media. The format is seductive in that it promotes acquisition of knowledge as a means for the average Chinese citizen to fantasize about his or her own global mobility, or at least potential mobility.

The African continent emerges on the screen as a destination, a cultural and history lesson, a tourist spot, and not least, a place of business and technology. The Chinese people, who have long been viewed by Westerners as objects of tourist scrutiny (as in their own ethnic theme parks, acrobatic troupes, and tourist industry), are now tourists themselves with the ability to maneuver through various landscapes, the "authentic lives" and "natural scenery in Africa." The directors of the series speak of their intention to take away the audience's fear and to emphasize the "real Africa" in terms of its civility, social life, and economic development, alongside the land's natural beauty and animal world.²²

The series commences in Fes, Morocco, historically the seat of Muslim and Christian scientific and religious study and where the Treaty of Fes signed over Morocco as a French protectorate in 1912. The segment is devoted to Moroccan struggle and self-determination, including the monument dedicated to the Manifeste de L'Indepence signed in 1944 and the five-year development plan of Hassan II in the 1970s that encouraged education and peace. The documentary claims to be more authentic in its representation than the West. The Chinese host verbally chastises the West's lacunae in its understanding of Morocco, remarking how the Hollywood film *Casablanca* was not shot on location and no resident of Casablanca has heard of it. According to him, the two Casablanças live worlds apart, one in the dreams of Euro-Americans, the other in the quotidian existence of the town's inhabitants that the Chinese camera crew captures on tape. From the outset the documentary's narrative makes clear that it intends to challenge the West's version of authenticity, and hence its dominant worldviews.

The segment presents Morocco as developing and unchanging at the same time, which is a recurrent theme throughout the documentary and resonant with China's own construction of its historical self. The documentary makes frequent visits to the mosques and medinas of Islamic countries, and to the villages of remote peoples and the remnants of their millennial history, where the inhabitants can even watch CCTV 4 (China's international channel), but the world cannot see them. The Chinese camera crews thus are ready to bring these remote people into view, showing how they are connected to the global community yet not destroyed by it. This historical and cultural archaeology establishes China as the new explorer of the African continent. The crew uses the preexisting tools of a superior power, namely the same production elements (filming technique and camera positions). The resonance of imperialist expeditions to Africa is not lost to the viewer as the CCTV crew observes with enthusiasm that their tour guide has said they are the first foreign TV crew to be allowed to visit a particular town, connoting trust. The abundant shots of the *Passage to Africa* insignia on the crew's multi-SUV caravan traversing the golden African horizon bear the hallmark of Western voyages: both colonial and more recent travels, such as those presented in Discovery or National Geographic documentaries. Beyond tracing the physical and emotional remnants of Africa's recent colonial past, this expedition also looks at capital enterprise, liberation struggles, and cultural exchange, which is what distinguishes China's discovery of Africa from the West's. China's relations with Africans and its humanitarian approach describe the natural order of things.

The segments that visit work sites reflect Chinese values. While in Morocco, we are introduced to Alibaba, a leather merchant, and his handicraft production. He quotes from the Koran on the value of labor. In Niger, Suli works as a silversmith, living in the countryside and using the old methods of

production to craft items for his brother's tourist shop in the city. We meet President Mamadu, who states that his goal is not to use theory to run the country, but to get up every day to make living conditions better for his people through education and health care. Abubaka, a former exchange student to China, manages a joint-venture textile factory. The segment recounts how he encouraged his government to establish diplomatic relations with China (which it did in 1996) so that his Chinese classmates could invest in Niger's development. In Ghana's Massa gold mine, the China crew makes a special visit to where the gold is processed and weighed. The workmen say they like their jobs because they can make money to support their families. The men's positive comments on the value of labor complement China's own views and help establish affinity between the two countries.

Abundant archival footage in most segments usually highlights political protests for national independence, national heroes, or important state visits between China and the country. Former President Nyerere of Tanzania recalls sitting at the table with the Chinese and being surprised, and somewhat suspicious, when Liu Shaoqi asked him what else he needed. Nyerere could not secure a loan from the World Bank, but China funded his request for support to build the TAZARA railroad. This segment and others highlight the political intricacies and contrasting values of Chinese and U.S. aid to Africa, demonstrating the many ways China's forays into African nations have benefited Africa and augmented nations' capacity through Chinese assistance, in contrast to Western aid that has created dependent states.

The documentary also highlights the Chinese living in Africa in order to connect Chinese on the mainland with those abroad, and to demonstrate how Chinese have successfully found their place in the world. The wife of Nigerian Abubaka is from southern China; she decided to return with him to Niger. She is successfully running two Chinese restaurants, and the family has three homes. Their two children speak fluent Chinese, which their oldest demonstrates when she speaks to the camera an endearment accorded to one's elders, "Ayi, Shushu, Wo ai nimen" (Aunt and Uncle, I love you). Chinese engineers working in a copper mine in Zambia appear content and relaxed as they comment that only four of them come from China; the rest of the workers are locals. The Chinese-owned mine is part of an economic investment strategy in Zambia's copper-mining industry. The overarching theme of the interviews with the Chinese and Africans in Africa is their unflinching commitment to personal and national development, and through this, peace and harmony. China is witness to Africa's vast history, the struggles of independent nations, reflective of China's own engagement with other countries and its diasporic population. The documentary suggests that the congruent roads of development the Chinese and Africans are choosing lead to greater physical, psychological, and social mobility.

What is noteworthy about *Passage to Africa* is the many ways it expands the global stage, reworking China from a minor character to a major player both at home and abroad, viewed as constructivist, rather than destructive. The camera is constantly turned back on the crew, their equipment, and their trials in Africa, such as when their SUVs get stuck in the sand. The crew appears to overcome the adversity of Africa's harsh and sometimes limited conditions through its stoicism and the help of local residents. The documentary positions China and its citizens not as hanging weakly onto capitalism's threads for meager sustenance, but as in full possession of the warp and weft of capitalism's fabric, much like the United States and Europe. Possessing the capital to go abroad, as investor, worker, or tourist, implies that China has a cultural advantage over its Southern counterparts. Throughout the documentary, the Chinese crews marvel at the souvenirs for sale in the markets, chuckle at that friendly old man who follows them around as an unsolicited guide, and brush off their ineptitude at native customs, such as eating couscous with their hands. Upon their visit to the Kabre people in Togo in April, they convince the locals to perform a sacred initiation ceremony that usually takes place in July, thereby altering the rhythmic cadences of the Kabre's quotidian lives for the spectatorship of the camera. These moments recall the typical behaviors of U.S. tourists and travel documentary cameramen. In fact, there is very little to distinguish the slick production values and camera work from U.S. travel documentaries, except that the narrative content reflects Chinese values.

The documentary is entrepreneurial in spirit and intent. It expands the reaches of Chinese television media with such a large crew adventuring on an ambitious project outside of China, which requires not only monetary capital to produce but also a competent film crew to sustain the cultural narratives it weaves. It is also one of the first attempts by CCTV to make documentary profitable and entertaining. On an ideological level, it challenges the West's political and economic dominance by emphasizing Chinese cultural values as more humane, more respectful of other cultures and traditions. And it feeds the imagination of couch tourists in China who long to see a reflection of themselves projected positively around the world.

The television documentary genre is not without its shortcomings, notes media scholar Lu Xinyu. The format borrows from Western television documentary, which tends to speak from a fixed ideology, thus promoting a common worldview of science and exploration that does not engage self-reflexively with problems of race, class, and gender.²³ The future of this genre is up for debate. Some say that marketization is the path to China's self-awakening (*zijue*), in which the serialized documentary participates. Lu warns that such a path leads documentary out of one autocracy into another by letting the market drive media content. In the effort to create a new vision of China, the media representations of Africa have the potential to distract

the public from the hard-core realities of domestic inequalities and unrest. The uncomfortable dissonance between real and imagined worlds does not surface as an ambiguous yet pressing issue.

GIRAFFES, SPORTS, AND GLOBAL POWER: WHY THE NEED FOR REPRESENTATION

Forever Africa and *A Passage to Africa* reflect a collective story of China's development that ruled social and political life and defined cultural and moral value systems throughout the twentieth century. Cultural and scientific knowledge were crucial to improving individual social conditions and empowering Chinese subjects, as well as being elements to ensure national political sovereignty and social mobility.²⁴ These media projects share a common ideological narrative that illustrates China and its people as no longer seeking, but possessing scientific and civic knowledge. They reinvoke the symbolic figures "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy," which were emulative models for modern progress in the early twentieth century, and turn them into embodied agents.²⁵ These spur China's growing global presence, contesting the perception that China is backward.

These media representations inform a larger set of questions regarding China and its participation in globalization, and the role media plays in supporting national agendas. China's rise has precipitated the need for a new national narrative, and television is the broadest format to present it. So, while this narrative suggests the dominant role that development (both scientific and human) plays in state policies, it does not critically reflect on social, political, and economic realities.²⁶ The production elements in contemporary media representations of China–Africa relations show an unequal relationship despite a rhetoric that projects equality. This highlights a need to consider the role of cultural authorship in realizing political and economic agendas. China's embracing of the political economy of development and North/South discourses promotes a new sense of national and international self that, while unsettling the uneven dyad of rich and poor nations, contributes to a new imbalance of global power. Development in our current world system not only implies access to global capital but also contains the inherent strains of colonialism, domination, and suppression of indigenous culture. Herein lies the tension, I believe, of using the model of development that has for so long shaped the uneven terrain of modernity to render the topography more egalitarian. There is no given that China can successfully bypass the dominant paradigms these epistemologies represent. Nor is there sufficient evidence to suggest that this is the overarching objective of China's self/other representation.

On his return trip from Africa in the early fifteenth century, Zheng He is reported to have brought back the giraffe, along with African ambassadors. This giraffe symbolized China's far-reaching greatness that brought an exotic world to its feet. Now more than one giraffe serves as the symbol of China and Africa's long historic relationship. In contemporary China, the links with Africa take many educational and technological forms, as in the China–Africa Cooperation Forum; student exchanges; commercial, industrial, military, and peacekeeping support to Africa; not to mention the increase in teachers and the opening of Confucius Institutes to promote the language and culture of China.²⁷ Yet in order to move beyond symbolism, China is encouraging more cooperation with Africa in order to better understand the culture and history of its nations. Li Anshan writes that knowledge about Africa's vast continent is in its nascent stages because scholars have neither been there nor made it a specific topic of study until just recently.²⁸ Furthermore, most studies rely on previously researched English sources. Africa is only beginning to be a subject of original archaeological and anthropological study. Li's stress on archaeologists and anthropologists is reminiscent of the colonial foundations upon which these fields arose and have traditionally defined the cultural, historical, and scientific context of knowing the self and other. It remains uncertain that China's own archaeological and anthropological forays in Africa can reframe the perception of otherness. The propaganda to support China's hosting of the China–Africa Cooperation Forum in Beijing in 2006 reveals an essentialist representation of Africa, yet such visual representations do not speak for all there is between China and Africa. Dialogues between China and specific countries within Africa have particularized their relationships even if the media images presented in China do not reflect this.

These two media depictions of China–Africa relations must also be contextualized within a global continuum. China's investment of people and capital in Africa has stirred reactions on several international fronts. The May 19, 2007, cover of the *Economist* proclaims "America's Fear of China" with the image of a panda scaling the Empire State Building, which is all too reminiscent of King Kong's uncivilized rampage through the heart of civilization on screen some eighty years ago. Other images of a threatening, villainous, and sometimes bellicose China have regularly haunted the covers of the *Economist*, *Newsweek*, and *Der Spiegel*, to name a few, since 2000. The Deutsche Bank reports on China's alarming "commodity hunger" while others call it an "insatiable appetite." These reports demonstrate a general mistrust of China's dealings, and also repeat familiar Cold War rhetoric of the last century. Only this time, it's not communism that is scary, but China's employment of capital. China's presence in Africa has raised concerns about long-standing (Western) financial institution and donor organ practices.²⁹ The mirror of colonial oppressor is now being turned toward China by the

hands of the colonialists.³⁰ The “facts” used to prove their cases are sometimes built on fiction.³¹ African nations have varied responses to China, depending on who has been on the receiving end of beneficial exchange and who has not.³² China argues that it has taken a different approach in its relationship to Africa than the West, that its aid and debt policies contrast sharply to Western commands that recipients embrace Western-style democracy and freedom.³³ China’s respect for national sovereignty has caused Westerners to squirm, and even to call for renaming the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games the “Genocide Games,” due to frustration with China’s approach to the conflict in Sudan. Remarks that China supports “evil dictatorships” and allows the rise of “rapacious governments” also bring to mind the boycotts of previous Olympics, in that they reflect cultural and ideological impasses that bump against lofty universal ideals. China’s rhetoric of difference thus cannot be understood in isolation from the difference accorded it in the West. It does not seem fruitful at this juncture to argue that China is reacting to orientalism, an a priori condition. Rather, China’s self-definition of difference should be read in dialogue with Western difference. In this, I agree with Claire Conceison, who views China’s occidentalism as presenting self and other in “mutual dialogue,” even if it privileges the former.³⁴ This dialogue opens up space for more complex representations and understanding.

While the Olympics and the 2010 World Expo are celebrated in China as its symbolic debut on a West-dominated world stage, its political and economic strategy in Africa and its rise as a contending global power alongside Europe and the United States remind one of the important role representations of the self and the other play in global politics. Since Deng Xiaoping’s Southern tour, China’s international relations have shifted from self-reliant to interdependent. Therefore, cultural and ideological clashes are emerging, eliciting a range of public responses, as seen above. The more recent policies of Hu Jintao stress peace and harmony (*hexie*) above all, in stark contrast to the confrontational approach of current U.S.-dominated world relations. Yet the need for such a policy has arisen because of China’s own conflictual development strategies and practices in minority-dominant areas at home and in its interactions abroad.

China’s increasing global power, and African nations’ own rise with the help of China’s presence, is shifting the landscape of globalization. The perceptions of China abroad and its own internal struggles with development helped shape the messages in *Forever Africa* and *A Passage to Africa*. These media dramatize China’s moral and political credibility. Their images of China and Africa—in the context of molding cultural, political, and economic interdependence—hope to take China beyond the inegalitarian rhetoric of difference with which we are already familiar, but what they do for Africa remains to be seen.

NOTES

1. Xiao Du, *Forever Africa* (Yongyuan de Feizhou), VCD, China Central Television and Henan Television, 2000.

2. *A Passage to Africa* (Zoujin Feizhou), VCD, China Central Television (CCTV) and Phoenix Television joint production, 2003.

3. Tianyu Cao, "The Theory and Practice of the Chinese Path," *The Chinese Economy* 36, no. 4 (July–August 2003): 67-98; Hui Wang, "Humanism as the Theme of Chinese Modernity," trans. Edward Peng, *Surfaces* 5, no. 202 (1995), <http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol5/hui.html>. Accessed May 30, 2007.

4. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 5.

5. Nye, *Soft Power*, 7.

6. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

7. Jamie Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

8. Zhou Enlai as quoted in Deborah Brautigam, *A Dragon's Gift* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

9. Brautigam, *A Dragon's Gift*.

10. George Yu, *China's African Policy: A Study of Tanzania* (New York: Praeger, 1975).

11. These values are "reaffirmed [by China] as being eminently functional to capitalist development" (Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," *History and Theory* 35, no. 4 [1996]: 109). See also Will Waechter, "The Language of Chinese Soft Power in the US," *Asia Times*, May 24, 2007, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/IE24Ad01.html> (accessed May 30, 2007).

12. China's contemporary concept of humanism is formulated from the Asian Values, East Asian Modernity, and Confucian Values models espoused by Singaporean Lee Kuan Yew as well as other Asian leaders in the 1990s that used Confucian or Asian elements to explain Asia's economic rise. For a discussion of contemporary Chinese humanism, see Alan Chong, "Singaporean Foreign Policy and the Asian Values Debate, 1992-2000: Reflections on an Experiment in Soft Power," *The Pacific Review* 17, no.1 (March 2004): 95-133; Hui Wang, "Humanism as the Theme of Chinese Modernity."

13. The Nobel Prize signifies global recognition and acceptance for many Chinese. See Wendy Larson and Richard Kraus, "China's Writers, the Nobel Prize, and the International Politics of Literature," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 21 (January 1989): 143-160.

14. Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write About Africa," *Granta* 92 (Winter 2005), <http://www.granta.com/extracts/2615> (accessed May 30, 2007).

15. Xiao Du, *Forever Africa* (Yongyuan de Feizhou) (Shanghai: Dongfang Publishing Center, 2000), 24.

16. Li Peng quoted in Ian Taylor, "China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa in the 1990s," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 3 (1998): 443-460.

17. Hui Wang, "The Historical Origin of Chinese Neoliberalism: Another Discussion on the Ideological Situation in Contemporary Mainland China and the Issue of Modernity," *The Chinese Economy* 36, no. 4 (July–August 2003): 3-42.

18. Aihwa Ong, "Chinese Modernities: Narratives of Nation and Capitalism," in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (New York: Routledge, 1997), 179.

19. Hairong Yan, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks," *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (November 2003): 493-523.

20. China's forays into a market economy employ a pro-market attitude toward development, which supports the World Bank and IMF's ideology and practices (Yan 2003). China's development strategy abroad, however, differs from that of the World Bank and IMF in its wooing of African nations because its contracts and loans are not attached to development

projects espoused by the IMF, World Bank, and other Western donating organizations. Westerners have criticized this practice as damaging to African development as well as the Western organizations. See Joshua Kurlantzick, "Beijing's Safari: China's Move into Africa and its Implications for Aid, Development, and Governance," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Policy Outlook* no. 29 (November 2006), http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/kurlantzick_outlook_africa2.pdf (accessed May 20, 2007). For greater detail on how China approaches aid and business deals in Africa, see Deborah Brautigam, *Chinese Aid and African Development: Exporting Green Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) and *A Dragon's Gift*.

21. Xiaoming Duan, "Column and Market: Two Fences in Chinese Television Documentary" (Lanmuhua yu shichanghua: Zhongguo dianshi jilupian de liang dao weicheng), *Journal of Zhejiang Institute of Media and Communications* (Zhejiang chuanmei xueyuan xuebao) 12, no. 2 (2005).

22. "A Passage to Africa: Three Team Leaders Host Online" (Zoujin Feizhou sanxian lingdui zaixian zhuchi), CCTV.com (January 23, 2003), <http://www.cctv.com/geography/theme/africa/wyhd/4423.shtml> (accessed February 10, 2010).

23. Xinyu Lu, *Recordings of the Problems Currently Facing the Development of Chinese Documentary* (Dangqian Zhongguo jilupian fazhan wenti beiwang), academic.mediachina.net (Zhonghua chuanmei wang xueshu wang, November 28, 2005), <http://academic.mediachina.net/article.php?id=4150> (accessed February 10, 2010).

24. See in particular the documents regarding education reform in Ssu-yu Teng and John K. Fairbank, *China's Response to the West: A Document Survey, 1839-1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), as well as William C. Kirby, "Engineering China: Birth of the Development State, 1928-1937," in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Wen-Hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 137-160. Kirby discusses how engineering has reconfigured the importance of scientific reasoning for political and social development since the turn of the twentieth century.

25. Chen Duxiu created the symbolic figures "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy" in 1919.

26. Hui Wang, "The Historical Origin of Chinese Neoliberalism."

27. See the China-Africa Cooperation Forum Web site and the Beijing publication *China-frique*.

28. Anshan Li, "African Studies in China in the Twentieth Century: A Historiographical Survey," *African Studies Review* 48, no. 1 (2005): 59-87.

29. Kurlantzick, "Beijing's Safari"; Joshua Eisenman and Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Africa Strategy," *Current History*, 105, no. 691 (May 2006): 219-224, <http://www.currenthistory.com> (accessed May 30, 2007).

30. See "Hong Kong Article Defends China's Africa Policy against Neo-colonialism Charges," *BBC Monitoring-Asia Pacific* (Monday, August 21, 2006), http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/asia_pacific/ (accessed May 15, 2007).

31. Brautigam, *A Dragon's Gift*, discusses the myths and facts pro- and anti-China Westerners employ when talking about China's aid and economic policies in Africa. Her blog, *China in Africa: The Real Story*, frequently parses the misinformation circulating in Western media about Chinese-African trade and development exchanges.

32. In terms of media culture, we are just beginning to see films from individual nations that speak to a Chinese presence, as in *The Congo* and *Nigeria*.

33. See *Foreign Policy's* 2008 interview, "Ask the Author: Serge Michel," http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4284 (accessed October 27, 2008) and Brautigam, *Chinese Aid and African Development*, for an understanding of the different approaches China has taken in its foreign engagement, in both business and aid practices. See also Serge Michel, Michel Beuret, and Paolo Woods, *La Chinafrique: Pékin à la conquête du continent noir* (ChinAfrica: On the trail of Beijing's expansion on the Dark Continent) (Paris: Grasset, 2008).

34. Claire Conceison, *Significant Other: Staging the American in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 38-39.

Chapter Eleven

Redistribution of the Sensible in Neoliberal China: Real Estate, Cinema, and Aesthetics

Hai Ren

Aesthetic politics entails a procedure of subtraction or a practice of breakage. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Jacques Rancière argues that aesthetic politics inevitably engages in the distribution of the sensible. He writes: “Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together.’”¹ This political task of the artist is exemplified by literature. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “[t]he writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion—in view, one hopes, of that still-missing people.”² With respect to the subject of workers, Rancière clarifies that the politics of literature does not “provide messages or representations that make workers aware of their conditions. Rather, it triggers new passions, which means new forms of balance—or imbalance—between an occupation and the sensory equipment appropriate to it.”³ This political “art of writing,” a technics “inherent” in literature, *breaks* “the rules which make definite forms of feeling and expression correspond to specific characters or subject matters.”⁴

In contemporary Chinese “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*), it is the policed distribution of the sensible that makes possible “the existence of a ‘harmonious’ relationship between an occupation and an equipment; between the fact of being in a specific time and place, practicing a particular occupation there, and being equipped with the capacities for feeling, saying and doing appropriate to those activities.”⁵ Since Chinese citizens are tied together-

er by a certain policed distribution of the sensible that defines their way of being a “harmonious society,” politics is about transforming that particular way of distributing the sensible. More precisely, the meaning of politics is embedded in emancipation, or breaking the normal fit between an “occupation” and a “capacity” to alter the way the sensible is distributed. For political thinkers such as Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Alain Badiou, art, whether in the form of literature, cinema, or theater, plays a critical role.

In this essay, I examine the politics of aesthetics as reflected by cinematic art, particularly as practiced by Jia Zhangke’s “independent cinema” (*duli dianying*). During a public discussion of his films in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009,⁶ Jia Zhangke discussed two kinds of pressures (*yali*) he experienced as a creator of independent cinema in relation to China’s evolving space of communication (*chuabo kongjian*). The first pressure comes from government censorship (*shencha*) that controls the circulation of films. Because the government completely blocked any uncensored film’s exhibition in the theater system, an independent film could only be shown through exchanging videotapes among a few individuals and friends. Consequently, since the appearance of the first independent film, Zhang Yuan’s *Mama* (The Mother) in 1990, according to Jia, independent cinema had been underground cinema (*dixia dianying*). In 2003, the government officially launched film marketization and industrialization, as consumerism had arrived in the mainland. After emerging aboveground, independent filmmakers now have to confront the pressures of the market in addition to government censorship. Although the government may disguise its censorship power through phrases like being unacceptable to the market (*shichang bujieshou*), the market often excludes (*paichi*) and refuses (*jujue*) an independent film. Under these combined pressures, Jia said:

Independent films have become artworks in art museums and galleries. As soon as they are made, they become part of the art museum system. In my view, independent cinema does not reject the commercial system. Films should be circulated commercially before becoming part of museum and library collections. . . . The commercial system, the most common bridge between a cinematic work and its audience, has not been adequately accessible for independent cinema and independent filmmakers. Thus, the space of communication has yet to become more open.⁷

What is at stake in Jia’s discussion is the relationship between independent cinema as an artistic practice and the economic process that involves both the government and the market. Between 1990, when China’s “first” independent film appeared, and 2009, when the interview took place, according to Jia, the year 2003 marked a significant change in the Chinese film industry: the government officially announced the commercialization of Chinese film

production, marketing, and distribution. Although commercialization can be traced back to as early as the mid-1990s, when a mainstream film like Xie Jin's *The Opium War* (*Yapian zhanzheng*) (1997) was privately financed through public relations campaigns during the countdown to Hong Kong's return to China from 1994 to 1997,⁸ what Jia referred to as Chinese film's industrialization (*chanyehua*) in 2003 was part of the broad official launching of the cultural system reforms (*wenhua tizhi gaige*).⁹ In signing agreements with other national governments upon becoming a member of the World Trade Organization on December 11, 2001, the Chinese government strategically developed a timetable for transforming China's various business sectors, including service and media sectors such as advertising, telecommunication, and film. In advertising, for example, the accession document shows that in the first year after China's accession, a foreign advertising agency could operate in China only as a joint venture with no more than 49 percent ownership; in the second year, it could own the majority of the joint venture; and in the fourth year, it could become a wholly foreign-owned enterprise.¹⁰ Thus, in the period from December 11, 2001, to December 12, 2005, Chinese advertising companies had to develop their capacities to be able to compete with foreign advertising firms. This kind of time-management strategy also applied to television, film, news media, and information technologies.

Against the broad background of developing China's cultural industries since the early 1990s, Chinese independent cinema and its artistic practices have developed complicated relations with many sectors of the economy. In studying the development of Chinese independent cinema, we may look at the rise of the sixth-generation filmmakers in comparison with the fifth-generation filmmakers, the "new Chinese documentary film movement,"¹¹ and the role played by China Central Television's News Department.¹² Studies of Jia Zhangke's films commonly address several aspects, whether his deployment of digital media and technology,¹³ his critique of mainstream ideologies and spatial practices,¹⁴ or his compassionate portrayals of marginalized people such as the rural youth and rural-to-urban migrants.¹⁵ Drawing insights from these studies, I examine the ways Jia's cinematic practice engages in negotiating and critiquing the distribution of the sensible, a process policed by the Chinese state and the market for building a harmonious society. I pay particular attention to his cinematic engagement in issues that connect both to China's transformation from a socialist country to a neoliberal state—a system that combines both socialist and capitalist aspects¹⁶—and to the experiences of Chinese citizens, for example, urban real estate development resulting from land marketization (*tudi shichanghua*), the transformation of the socialist *danwei* or work unit system, and the development of a new working subject, whom I call the precariat, the laboring person who becomes the successor of the proletariat through living in, struggling through, and dying of the state-sanctioned "harmonious" life.¹⁷

There is no doubt that China has gone through radical transformations since the late 1970s. However, questions about the nature of these changes and how they take place are subject to interpretation. To understand the politics of making sense of these changes, I focus on the case of transforming the site of Factory 420 (one of the largest state-owned enterprises in Chengdu) into a luxury middle-class residential community by comparing how China Resources (*Huarun*, a major Chinese state-owned company based in Hong Kong and the developer of the new housing project) and Jia Zhangke conceive of and communicate about the historical experience of socialism closely tied to the factory's transformation. China Resources Land, Ltd. (CR Land) (*huarun zhidi*), a China Resources subsidiary, acquired the property and has been developing the site into a large-scale, ten-year real estate project called Twenty-four City (*Ershisi cheng*). Jia Zhangke looked at the factory's archives and interviewed workers to make the film *24 City* (*Ershisi cheng ji*) (2008). While CR Land's uses of public relations campaigns, including Jia and his film, deploy a spectacle of socialism that detaches the new real estate project from the concrete experiences of the workers, as I demonstrate below, Jia's cinematic practice—despite partial funding from China Resources—engages in learning about workers' lives and their changes during China's transformation, and offers a public record of new working-class subject formation.

CHINA RESOURCES' TWENTY-FOUR CITY: COMMUNICATION AS A MEANS OF PRODUCTION

China Resources (Holdings) Co., Ltd., one of the largest Chinese state-owned transnational companies, is a good example of how a major state-owned company based in Hong Kong has operated transnationally and taken advantage of China's neoliberalization during the countdown to Hong Kong's return in the 1990s. The company's expansion into the real estate sector benefited from China's neoliberal transformation, especially the development of capitalist zones within socialist China.¹⁸ Deng Xiaoping's theory of "one country, two systems" was used to legitimize the creation of a series of four special economic zones (beginning in 1980) in Guangdong and Fujian provinces, where nonsocialist systems—not only private markets but also private controls of the economy and the population¹⁹—were developed. In 1984, the year of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration about Hong Kong's return to China, the government expanded the special economic zone concept to another fourteen coastal cities and to Hainan Island. In the 1990s, many priority development regions and export processing zones were established across the country. In 1997, Hong Kong became the first special

administrative region of the People's Republic of China, and two years later, Macau became the second. Each region is supposed to operate for fifty years according to its own miniconstitution.

Within the special zones of private markets, the Chinese government operates effectively through state enterprises. Major state-owned companies such as the Bank of China, China Travel Service, and China Resources appropriated Hong Kong's free market system to enhance their status as transnational superfirms. China Travel Service, for example, leveraged its status as both transnational and state-owned to advance the government's objective of realizing the one country, two systems framework.²⁰ In recent years, the state firms that have operated effectively under the free private market system have expanded into areas in western China to develop free private markets there. For example, the real estate divisions of both China Resources and China Travel Service are major players in the development of private housing in the city of Chengdu. CR Land, one of the major divisions of China Resources, operates three property development companies there, each of which enjoys the status of "a wholly foreign owned enterprise established in the Chinese Mainland."²¹

CR Land (Chengdu), established in 2002, has three major residential real estate projects: Phoenix City (*Fenghuang cheng*), Jade City (*Feicui cheng*), and Twenty-four City. In December 2005, CR Land acquired the land of the former Factory 420 (559,883 square meters) for 2.14 billion yuan to build the Twenty-four City project. Meanwhile, Factory 420's production unit was to be relocated to Xindu, a suburban county in Chengdu. Like China Resources, Factory 420, known as Chengdu Engine (Group) Co., Ltd, is a state-owned enterprise, established in 1958 to produce aviation engines for the air force. It was administered by the State Commission of Science and Technology for the National Defense Industry, and now is managed by China Aviation Industry Corporation II (AVIC II). In response to Mao Zedong's strategy of developing the third-front (*sanxian*) areas, about 4,000 workers of Factory 111 were relocated from Shenyang to Chengdu to found Factory 420. In the 1990s, reduced demand from the Chinese military meant that this factory had to shift to produce for nonmilitary purposes. Consequently, many workers were laid off. The municipal government decided that the factory should be relocated to a suburban area in the mid-2000s.

As soon as it received the factory land, CR Land began to develop the living community, starting in 2006. The company made efforts to include aspects of the site's history in the new Twenty-four City. The company's publicity booklet, for example, tells potential buyers: "This piece of land has developed a rich history and connection with humanity. The builder does not have the right to use development as an excuse to wipe out the past traces and create a strange life out of nothing. History is always worth our respect, and cultural vein is always worth our inheritance."²² During the planning pro-

cess, the company hired Neil Cooke, an English expert in historical preservation. The same publication quotes Cooke: “The value and importance of historical buildings at Twenty-four City come from the fact that tens of thousands of people have worked there over fifty years. If we preserve that aspect, after many years, new residents will still be able to find this community’s historical memory.”²³ In the building designs, the architects considered using thick red bricks and vertical steel line themes to represent the site’s history. The company worked closely with the local media to promote the project through telling stories about the factory’s past.

During my fieldwork in the summer of 2007, I learned that real estate companies like CR Land in Chengdu were very active in promoting their projects in various ways. I encountered numerous real estate ads daily. They showed up in city streets, in both commercial zones and residential areas. They appeared on regular and cable television. They popped up on Web sites about Chengdu and made news stories in the daily papers. For example, *Chengdu Commercial News* (*Chengdu shangbao*), one of the most popular daily newspapers in the city and part of the Chengdu Newspapers Group, published several real estate ads each day, covering topics such as residential development projects, land auctions, and commercial real estate projects.²⁴ Moreover, the paper’s real estate section, which was devoted to the promotion of the local real estate industry, regularly published several pages of ads from one company sponsor like CR Land. A reporter worked with a public relations person from the developer to write a story detailing the project, which was published along with elaborate graphic images.

On August 9, 2007, for example, *Chengdu Commercial News* published four full pages of information and ads by CR Land. On one page (31), the reporter Lei Lei’s half-page article “Chinese Resources Broadens Its Mind, Bears the City’s Future on Its Shoulders” (*Huarun xiongjin, jianfu chengshi weilai*) introduces the company’s five years of history in Chengdu. The lower half on the same page carries an ad to promote the fourth phase of Jade City with the slogan “One Beautiful and Kind City, One Family” (*Yi cheng meishan, yi jia ren*).

On the next two pages (32-33), one half-page article discusses Twenty-four City and another talks about Phoenix City. Both are by Lei Lei, the author of the article on the previous page. While the article on page 33 introduces Phoenix City as “an artistic city that guides the future of the city,” the article on page 32 is entitled “China Resources’ Twenty-four City: Establishing a New Chapter of the City” (*Huarun ershisi cheng: kaiqi chengshi xin pianzhang*). It introduces the project’s background and some of the people involved. Four people are mentioned and their photos included. The first three are foreign architects (American, English, and Australian). The fourth person is Jia Zhangke, “the director of the film *24 City*.” In fact, Jia is always mentioned in the company’s promotional materials and at the sales site. His

name, as a marker of cultural capital coming from art, is used to show the company's investment in arts that deal with historical and social memories (discussed further below).

A half-page Twenty-four City ad is placed below the article and extends to the next page. It is entitled "Twenty-four City, Forthgoer of City" (in English) and "China Resources Twenty-four City Leads Urban Transformation" (*Huarun ershisicheng, lingyan chengshi bianqian*) (in Chinese). The ad introduces Twenty-four City through an illustrated comparative narrative (in Chinese) of a universal history. Four images are connected through a straight time line, from the earliest on the left to the present on the right. The first image links Twenty-four City to an ancient irrigation system in Rome: "In every great city, human needs are placed as the top priority, just like the irrigation system of ancient Rome two thousand years ago and Twenty-four City of tomorrow." The second image shows an ancient carved pillar in Paris with the description: "Every great city must have its own spiritual palace, just like the Parisian Plaza eight hundred years ago and Twenty-four City of tomorrow." Next is the Forbidden City with this text: "Every great city must never forget her history, just like the Forbidden City six hundred years ago and Twenty-four City of tomorrow." Finally, the ad shows a design of Twenty-four City: "China Resources Twenty-four City continues the city's deep cultural vein, searches for the city's ideal form. A beautiful and happy urban life is shown here." No viewers of this ad can miss the narrative's epic and monumental tone. Despite its references to particular times and places, it presents a fundamentalist view of universal history, according to which the creation of Twenty-four City follows the natural law of development, addressing life necessities, spirituality, memory, and happiness. Absent from this commercial imagination of history are actual historical experiences, whether collective or individual. The present, its uneasiness with inequality, injustice, as well as pain and suffering, is avoided. Understandably, this ad does not envision a social or cultural history other than the history of a commodity, that is, Twenty-four City.

While the company's ads promoted the project's care for historical memory in a particular way, the sales site displayed that memory through its built environment. One day in August 2007, I visited the sales site with my father, a retired worker who was one of the first group of workers relocated from Shenyang to Chengdu to establish Factory 420. We walked around to see changes in the area, spoke to the company's employees to learn about the project, and looked at miniaturized building models and furnished model apartments. We also watched a multimedia presentation and visited the exhibits at the sales hall.

This Twenty-four City preview site was located in the northern section of the factory. Outside its western wall was the Second Ring Road, a major road that circles the whole city. Many trees had been planted in the area between

the wall and the road. Walking north along this road, I could see the old factory's deteriorating red-brick wall and tall grass growing inside. As the factory wall ended, Twenty-four City's new and decorated wall appeared. Although the two structures connected seamlessly, they were really related through clear contrasts of material, color, and design pattern. They pointed to two contrastingly different life worlds. This was the first of a series of discontinuities and breaks I witnessed.

At the intersection between the northern and the western walls, a giant sign, "Twenty-four City," was placed. Along the sidewalk outside the northern wall, every ten meters or so, a flag was raised to promote sales. The phone number was printed on every flag. After about 100 meters, we arrived at the entrance. While a guard secured the entrance, a driver would be prepared to transport clients to the sales building on a golf cart-like vehicle. We declined the driver's polite invitation and continued to walk inside.

The whole site was divided into three sections: a large garden, the first-phase construction area, and a sales building complex. Inside the gate, a nicely paved road led all the way to the sales building. The whole landscape was designed to be hilly. Grass, flowers, trees had been planted carefully to give visitors a strong impression of a cultivated country-style landscape. If one paid attention, the Twenty-four City logo could be seen everywhere, on cement plant containers, manholes, and colorful flags. From a distance, some old factory workshops were still visible. The inactivity of a tall smokestack, a quintessential marker of heavy industry, signaled not merely the end of heavy industrial pollution but also the disappearance of the socialist industry. In front of visitors instead were green grass, beautiful flowers, and nice trees. We no longer heard the sounds of factory machinery; we heard sounds of construction.

The construction area was blocked off by a series of billboards depicting tall buildings against an urban backdrop. Every one included the company's key public relations message: "Together with you, we change life" (*Yu nin xieshou gaibian shenghuo*) (in Chinese) and "Better Life Together" (English). In front of the billboards, plants and bushes were arranged to attract visitors' attention. As we were walking toward the sales building, we passed by a small parking lot, intended for visitors with cars. I saw twenty parked cars.

The sales building complex in the southeastern corner was bordered on the north by the old factory. The architecture and its surroundings had been designed in such a way that a visitor could hardly miss the old factory in the background. Standing in front of it, I could see both the new, modern building and the old factory building. In the gallery of model homes, I also saw both new homes and the old factory building simultaneously. This was because the whole south wall of the gallery was made of glass. Through it I could see wild tall grass and untrimmed trees. The factory walls were cov-

ered with stains; almost all the windows were broken. Behind me, the model homes were fully decorated—cozy and picture-perfect. The two worlds, of the ruin and of the modern homes, were only about 20 meters apart. Facing each other in a spectacular way, they forcefully defined the difference between the two built environments, or rather, between the two cities (Factory 420 and Twenty-four City) and their separate life worlds.

The information and sales area was located on the ground floor. Visitors could see two large-scale dioramas in the center, showing the whole project and Phase I. The finished buildings were to be 32 stories high. Ten small dioramas showed different apartment floor plans. A visitor could get a cardboard carrying bag with the project's logo on it, containing information about the whole project like the booklet quoted earlier and all of the floor plans. Those who wanted to learn more about the company and the project could watch a six-minute film in the multimedia room. A few small LCD monitors installed in the restrooms continuously showed the same film. While washing their hands, visitors could glance at the images and listen to the soundtrack. The presentation gave a brief historical overview of China Resources' expansion, its real estate business activities across fourteen major cities, and the Twenty-four City project. The film also mentioned the company's collaboration with the filmmaker Jia Zhangke:

In April 2007, CR Land and the famous director Jia Zhangke, the maker of *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*) and the winner of Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, held a news conference to formally announce the production of the film *24 City*. Through this film, CR Land and director Jia Zhangke work together to record the memory of this piece of land and explore changes in people's lives brought about by urban transformation. By this unique means, Twenty-four City appears in public.

If a visitor was interested in buying an apartment, he or she needed to see a salesperson. A prospective buyer, according to a salesperson, first had to apply for membership in CR Land. Upon approval, the buyer would be assigned a number indicating the order of apartment selection after the construction's completion. The sales staff emphasized that the sooner one applied, the more and better choices the person would have. Each salesperson would communicate directly with each member, providing updated information and answering questions through cell phone messages, phone calls, e-mails, and online chats. The membership application area had been designed similarly to a bar. Two servers provided drinks to clients. Circular sofa chairs were intended to offer a sense of privacy. Poster-size photographs showed the company's other real estate projects in Chengdu and other cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Wuhan. Shelves of new books, such as classic Chinese novels and translated foreign novels, were displayed, suggesting the company's appreciation of literature.

Next to the membership application section was an area that functioned both as a rest area and as an exhibition gallery. Several sofas were there, and two old machines from Factory 420 were on display. In front of each, a label described the machine both in Chinese and in English. Made in 1959, the two machines were imported: one from the former Soviet Union and the other from Czechoslovakia. They were supposed to represent the oldest machines used by Factory 420 workers. A few black-and-white photographs showed workers, emptied buildings, and the surrounding environment. My father was very interested in the exhibits. As one of the first group of workers moving from Shenyang in the 1950s, he tried to see whether the machines really were the oldest and whether the text was accurate. For example, one photo caption mentioned that the earliest workers were migrants from both Shanghai and northeastern China. “The order is inaccurate,” he said. “The workers first came from Shenyang rather than from Shanghai. In addition, those who are said to come from Shanghai were mostly from the areas outside Shanghai.” I noticed a difference between his words and the photo caption. My father used “Shenyang” where CR Land used “northeastern China.” He also pointed out that the factory building on the other side of the wall was where my mother used to work before her retirement. At the new Twenty-four City site, a visitor or potential buyer would see the green lawn and beautiful garden and imagine a tasteful, modern way of living emerging from the ruins. A retired worker like my father would see the traces of the old factory and envision a fast-changing time now at a standstill. His experience of looking at the site was deeply concrete and personal.

It is clear that the exhibits represented CR Land’s care for some aspects of memories associated with Factory 420. The representation of the past, however, was nostalgic. It was about socialism not as a principle of equality or justice but as a spectacle useful in generating additional value for the real estate project. If the machines pointed to history, a large quantity of books marked knowledge, and Jia Zhangke’s film represented art, it was clear that the company had packaged all of them—history, literary culture, knowledge, and creative art—through the Twenty-four City brand name to support the sales of its real estate products.

CINEMATIC 24 CITY: THE “GROUP IMAGE” OF PRECARIOUS PEOPLE

China Resources, one of the three financial sponsors of Jia Zhangke’s film, invested both to appropriate cinema to increase the real estate project’s value and to claim the project as a spectacle that respects history and humanity. The film’s name, whether in Chinese or in English, contains “twenty-four

city.” The film also includes various scenes of the factory’s disappearance and the new real estate project. A reporter from Chengdu Television announces that CR Land has acquired the factory land for 2.14 billion yuan. Viewers can see workers disassembling machinery, trucks with machinery leaving the factory, factory buildings being demolished, and the new name, “China Resources Land Twenty-four City,” being placed at the factory’s main entrance. One interview even takes place against the backdrop of the sales division of the new Twenty-four City. Without a doubt, China Resources benefited from the film’s cross-promotion, which has become a common strategy in the cultural sectors of the Chinese economy.²⁵

However, Jia Zhangke made the film neither as promotional material for China Resources nor simply as a story of the factory’s physical transformation into a real estate project. Jia produced the film for a different purpose: to be a record of a historical event and its vibrations, clinches, and openings. While documenting CR Land’s project as part of the event, Jia focuses on Factory 420’s transformation and people’s changing working and living experiences to reflect on changes in Chinese society. This film extends Jia’s commitment as a filmmaker who captures the experiences of those at the margins in contemporary Chinese society: from a petty thief in *Xiao Wu* (1998) and small-town youth in *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) to migrant laborers in *The World* (2004) and *Still Life* (2006). In *24 City*, for the first time, Jia pays attention to workers who were part of the socialist work unit system.

How does Jia himself describe why and how he decided to make this film? Referring to the mid-1990s, when millions of workers were laid off, Jia said:

There emerged a philosophy of the strong (*qiangzhe zhexue*): we must change, we must change from a planned economy to a market economy. The consensus was that the planned economy was not reasonable and should be changed into a free economy. . . . According to the philosophy of the strong, to make the change, many people must be sacrificed. . . . But why only the weak?²⁶

Around the year 2000, Jia considered making a film about state-owned factories, the experiences of workers during “the transition of Chinese society from the planned economy to the market economy.”²⁷ He wrote a script entitled *The Factory’s Gate* (*Gongchang de damen*) to address the laid-off workers’ hard lives. In this story, two young people enter the factory in the same year as apprentices under the same “skilled worker” (*shifu*). They become model workers and fall in love in that same year. At almost the same time, each has a child. Later in the same year, they are laid off and have no work. They play mahjong and drink together. As their children grow up, they decide to go into business together. As time goes by, the two harmonious families begin to have conflicts mainly due to money-related problems. Jia

locked the script in his office before starting to shoot the film because he wanted to find out more about life experiences of state-owned factory workers first.

This opportunity arrived at the end of 2006. Jia learned from the news media that Factory 420, a large state-owned factory in Chengdu, would transfer its land to CR Land. “After a year, the whole factory, which carries the life memories of its 30,000 employees and 100,000 family members, will disappear like the vanishing smoke of a cigarette after it drops its last ash. Its replacement will be a modern residential high-rise building complex.”²⁸ “The huge change from a state-owned confidential factory to a commercial real estate project shows the fate of land,” but Jia wants to understand, “What about the life and death, and up and down memories of numerous workers? Where are they placed [in this change]?”²⁹ To reveal how the land transfer reflected changes “from the planned economy to the market economy, from collectivism to the individual,” he wanted the film *24 City* to tell “a story about [the changes in] the system, about the collective memory of the whole Chinese [people].”³⁰

In showing these changes, music plays an important part. In his previous films, Jia tended to use “affinity music” (*youyuan yinyue*), which spontaneously connects to a character’s activity in a plot. For example, when a character is passing by a shop, the music being played in the store is affinity music. In *24 City*, “subjective music” (*zhugua de yinyue*) is used to represent the kind of changes mentioned above.³¹ The music in the first half, composed by Yoshihiro Hanno, is primarily a symphony that emphasizes “regularized, collectivized feelings” (*youguize de, jitihua de ganjue*). Later, the soundtrack changes to Lim Giong’s free-form electronic music to express individual feelings. The two types of subjective music help the narrative to move beyond the obvious transition from a planned to a market economy by elaborating what this transformation means for ordinary people, for example, a shift from the collectivized to the individualized life.

The film combines both documentary and fictional genres by including a series of nine characters, five of them affiliated with the factory and four fictional. As a whole, the nine characters compose a “group image” (*qunxiang*),³² to which each person’s story contributes. The “group image” is made possible by a shared historical memory: “From the 1950s to the present, the nine characters relay a linear history.”³³ However, the history “is very complex, and you can’t judge it simplistically, for example, only through criticism. It contains rich information and complicated situations.”³⁴ “When I began shooting *24 City*,” Jia said, “I used my personal judgment, for example, entering the work with a very critical mindset, because all the materials I had collected and read underscored how the system caused suffering to ordinary and individual workers, and how it imposed constraints on freedom.”³⁵ When he began to interview workers and their families, however, Jia found

something new: “I learned that when they decided to work for the system, they were very idealistic and pure. Moreover, they trusted the system and thought of it as an alternative means for transforming China, remaking human beings, and bringing individual happiness.”³⁶ Thus, things the characters say about the past point to another present that marks a break from the contemporary consensus about how to make sense of the socialist system and its effects on ordinary people, whether collectively or individually.

In composing the group image and its present temporality, Jia’s editing eliminated certain “very excited speeches” and “shocking moments”³⁷ that could have been used to make concrete what he had read about how repressive and suffering the socialist system was. Instead of using cases to verify statistical representations of the individual, that is, to make the abstract concrete and the normative common, Jia Zhangke wanted to focus on the ordinary person, who is concrete, bodily, and common. Unlike a fashion model in a lifestyle magazine, an ordinary person often slouches. Unlike the statistically ideal Chinese citizen who speaks the standard Chinese or Putonghua, an ordinary person only speaks a local language or dialect. Thus, the final film turns to the real, “ordinary experiences” (*changshixing de jingli*): “For most Chinese people, these experiences, these living experiences are ordinary. . . . [I] hope that ordinary stories offer the audience an even larger space of imagination, within which each individual knowledge and experience can be situated, not as an individual case but as a group memory.”³⁸ Thus, the group image and the group memory are inseparable in Jia’s cinematic art of storytelling.

In making a group image, the documentary and the fiction modes of storytelling are complementary. Jia and his crew published an ad in *Chengdu Commercial News*, looking for former workers who would voluntarily talk about their experiences.³⁹ Eventually, they contacted more than 100 people, of whom 50 were interviewed and taped.⁴⁰ The five individuals included in the final film contribute to the production of the group image. In a factory setting, He Xikun (born in 1950) tells of his experience as an apprentice of a skilled worker, one of those who moved from Shenyang in the late 1950s. After this story of the workers’ dedication and devotion to their work in the 1950s, the audience gets a brief history of when, why, and how Factory 420 was established as a response to the central government’s planned strategy of the “third-front” construction from Guan Fengjiu (born in 1930), a retired factory official who was one of the earliest migrants from Shenyang and worked as the head of security and vice party secretary. The factory’s meeting hall as the backdrop of this interview reminds the audience of experiencing or learning about mass meetings during the socialist period. Next, the audience meets Hou Lijun (born in 1953), a worker’s daughter laid off from the factory. In a moving bus, Hou emotionally tells a story about her mother’s visiting her Shenyang parents for the first time since moving to Chengdu

fifteen years earlier, and most important, her own experience of finding work and making a precarious living after being laid off in 1994. After Hou, the film moves on to Zhao Gang (born in 1974), a worker's son and a TV host on Chengdu Television. Compared with Hou, Zhao does not talk about her parent (father), a factory worker. Instead, he talks about his own experience of attending a technical training school in order to become a skilled worker at the factory but eventually realizing that he was much more interested in the "outside world" (*waimian de shijie*), pursuing anything other than being a worker. Zhao's story of finding another world outside is appropriately told at the Twenty-four City sales site. The last person associated with the factory is the security guard Wang Zhiren. Instead of telling his story, the film shows Wang's patrolling work. In an emptied workshop ready to be demolished, Wang takes a final look to make sure that no valuable things are left. He finds an "examination registration certificate" (*zhun kaozheng*), an ordinary document in a young worker's life. All together, the five characters clearly illustrate Jia Zhangke's cinematic art of making ordinary people act through their own bodies, voices, and stories.

In his comparison of *24 City* with *The World*, Jia mentions that while *The World* uses the rapid appearance of foreign themes to critique a "decorated China" (*bei zhuangxiu de zhongguo*), *24 City's* portrayal of Factory 420 shows a "locked China" (*bei suo qilai de zhongguo*).⁴¹ What does he mean by a "locked China?" Such things as the factory workshops and the worker dormitories are markers of the *danwei* system, a social structure through which the Chinese used to build their lives, including weaving their social ties. In contrast to the world outside, people inside the factory still live in the structure founded on the *danwei* system. Jia describes his own experience upon encountering lives inside the factory community:

When I first arrived at the factory, the most shocking thing I saw was the disjuncture of the factory from contemporary China. It is part of, but disconnected from the contemporary China most people know. Outside the walls of the worker dormitories, one can see what contemporary China offers: for example, travel agencies, shops, discos, Internet cafes, and bars. Upon entering workers' homes, however, their furniture, their remodeling and repairing, their restrooms, their photographs, all decorations linger in a past time, whether at the end of the 1970s, the beginning of the 1980s, the mid-1980s, or the end of the 1980s. Their world is not the same as the outside world.⁴²

The spatial differences Jia Zhangke presents in the final film may be understood through a politics of disappearance. The film uses four fictional stories. They tell about a mother's loss of her child during the migration to Chengdu in the late 1950s; a middle-aged man's misbehaving childhood during the Cultural Revolution; a Shanghai woman's misfortunes of courtship from the late 1970s to the 1980s; and a young woman's rejection of the "failing"

(*shibai*) way of life associated with her parents' life world in the 1990s. As the media scholar Lu Xinyu points out, they are all about "losses" or "things past" (*shiqu*): lost child, lost youth, lost love, and lost times.⁴³ This narrative cinema of losses underscores a politics of disappearance: while loss evokes a sense of lost materiality or materialized emptiness, disappearance refers to the problem of vision associated with the human eyes. Things may be there. But one may not see them, whether because of accelerated speed or mistaking them for other things. Jia's incorporation of poetry into the fictional mode of storytelling transforms the sentimentality of loss into a thought about disappearance. The poet Ouyang Jianghe, for example, recognizes the coexistence of two spatial formations:

This resettlement story narrates the disappearance of the factory and the appearance of another city, a new living space. Those who live in their newly bought apartments develop a different way of life, their lives do not cross one another. They merely live there and do their own things. They have completely different souls, education, and culture. As long as they have money, they can live there. The space of those who moved from Shanghai and Liaoning was an independent kingdom, an independent cultural community, which had nothing to do with the surrounding city. They left their homes in the 1950s to establish an idealist city. After fifty years, however, everything is being displaced.⁴⁴

Ouyang recognizes not merely the replacement of the socialist urban space (Factory 420) by the new commercial urban space (Twenty-four City) but also the displacement of the old body politic associated with the socialist space (*danwei*) by a new body politic associated with the new urban space. In this politics of disappearance, it is the production of space that differentiates the emerging Twenty-four City way of life from the vanishing Factory 420 culture.

Factory 420 may be disappearing, but the lives of those affiliated with the factory and the socialist system still matter. A cinematic technique much favored by Jia Zhangke to make this point is the "long take" (*changjingtou*): "I very much like the long take, like its distinct discursive appeal: showing a character's natural state, and conveying a perfect sense of time. In addition to these aesthetic charms, I also think the long take maintains a democratic quality: it does not cut off a character, but observes a character with potential respect."⁴⁵ That is, the long take technique slows time down to enable a longer duration for a particular plot event. For example, in the scene where He Xikun describes his job as a repairman, the film's long take conveys not merely the detailed process of the work itself but also the kind of subjectivity expressed through He's enunciation. In using long takes, Jia Zhangke says, "I hope the entire film can refrain from imposing any opinion on the audience. A viewer may possess her or his own subjectivity, invest her or his own experience, and make her or his own judgment."⁴⁶ The long take's distinctly

“democratic” presentation invites the audience’s responses and interpretations. In doing so, the cinematic technique demonstrates the principle of equality.

THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS: RETHINKING SPATIAL RELATIONS IN NEOLIBERAL CHINA

Not only does the name of 24 City mark a series of changes taking place at Factory 420, it also speaks to the effects of the changes on the residents and their social relations. Through a market-measured transfer of land ownership, a changing Chinese state is represented by two state-owned enterprises (China Resources and Factory 420) and redefines its relations to the economy (from a planned to a market economy), the people (from the working class to the “successful”), and the national time (from the socialist to the neoliberal era). At the ruins of Factory 420, two different kinds of historical timelines meet in a disjointed manner. The neoliberal timeline that is used as the temporal logic of operations by China Resources, the new owner of the factory land, displaces the socialist timeline of Factory 420, the previous owner. The way China Resources communicates the site’s past does not establish any concrete, real connections with the workers in the socialist period; it distances itself from the life world of these workers’ successors (such as the retired, the self-employed, the laid-off, the unemployed and underemployed); and it only speaks of the site’s value to the company’s clients, potential consumers who enjoy culture and history as markers of social distinction. This mode of communication is that of the spectacle actively controlled and policed by real estate developers.

They are deeply invested in shaping the proper interpretation of social and cultural changes through regulating and regularizing the tempo of the city. They attempt to transform the event of thought⁴⁷ into a spectacle by naming themselves as “creators” and “thinkers.” In July 2007, for example, the *Company* (*Gongsi*) magazine of the Chengdu Daily Newspaper Group published a new issue entitled “The Real Estate Developer: A City’s Thinker” (*Dichanshang: yizuo chengsi de sixiangzhe*). According to the magazine, the real estate developer is not only “a city’s creator” (*zaochengzhe*) but also “the city’s thinker.” Such a bold claim is also reflected in China Resources’ communication about Twenty-four City. The ad published in *Chengdu Commercial News*, for example, proclaims the real estate project’s civilizational and universal appeal, and its promise as a “city of tomorrow,” as discussed earlier.

The figure of the real estate developer has cast a spell on every Chinese city through the enchanting siren sound of speedy development and the magic wand of architecture.⁴⁸ The whole landscape of urban China is being rapidly transformed into a mobile machine. Even before leaving an aging, boxlike low-rise building, one already arrives at a brand new high-rise building. This is what Jia Zhangke witnessed when he first went to Factory 420: the simultaneous presence of two spatial worlds. No or very little visual interval exists between the two paradoxically recognizable spaces. On the one hand, the experience of an interval or change is highly controlled and regulated by the real estate industry, which deploys the spectacle as its “thoughtful” equipment. On the other hand, the perception of the experience is also shaped by loss of memory due to the acceleration of change. Every two or three years, an old neighborhood disappears: its buildings demolished, streets widened, and residents resettled. Parallel to the fast urban development is the proliferation of spectacles—not just of parades of commodities but also of mass media—that communicate “life” and its vibrations as aspirations, struggles, and accomplishments. Appearance and disappearance are thus constituted continuously from urban space to media sphere.

The complicit relationship between real estate and media also involves the deployment of art. Historians of the Chinese real estate industry quickly point out that a certain degree of coziness has been developed between the real estate sector and modern (avant-garde) arts since 1992, when the “real estate market” (*dichan shichang*) began. Such developers as Chen Jiagang and Deng Hong in Chengdu, Pan Shiyi, Zhang Xin, and Zhang Baoquan in Beijing have promoted the integration of modern art into real estate projects. As a result of these dialogues and collaborations, “conceptual real estate” (*guannian dichan*) has emerged: real estate now becomes the medium of the arts, not simply of the art of architecture but also of painting, sculpture, cinema, and multimedia.⁴⁹ From this perspective, real estate also mediates between China Resources’ Twenty-four City and Jia Zhangke’s *24 City*. China Resources invested in Jia Zhangke’s film precisely because the company could use Jia’s cinematic art as a public relations piece to shape how its consumers and the general public perceive the Twenty-four City project. Thus, the company reified the advertising claim of its project generating “a beautiful and happy urban life” as it “continues the city’s deep cultural vein” and “searches for the city’s ideal existence.”

For Jia Zhangke, receiving China Resources’ collaboration—an example of how he negotiated with the market and the state after 2003—enabled him to reclaim a historical memory for the working people. In producing the film, he acknowledged the existence of a life world in which these working subjects build their lives as individuals after the dissolution of the socialist *danwei* system. Their life world is shown through both personal stories and fictional narratives. The contrast between it and the life world fabricated by

China Resources' real estate project marks a gap between the lingering socialist China and the transforming neoliberal China. From my fieldwork at the factory, I learned that the working people—old or young, male or female—also recognize these gaps. In their daily lives, they have much in common with those living in the “outside world,” whom they call “mainstreamers” (*zhuliu renshi*). They read the same newspapers (including *Chengdu Commercial News*), watch the same television channels, and visit the same supermarkets. However, what they share with the outside world is mostly marked by predications, gaps, and discontinuities.

In critical theory, one of the most challenging issues is how we understand the subjectivity of this group of working people, who live under precarious conditions and are no longer the same working-class subjects as those in socialist China. Although it is possible to imagine their awareness of the above differences as an expression of collective consciousness, it is difficult to assess whether the collective consciousness is class-specific or across classes, across generations. The significance of Jia Zhangke's film *24 City* lies in its insistence on the relevance of this group of working people, or a group of precariats. Factory 420 may be disappearing, but the lives of those affiliated with the factory and the socialist system are still visible, as shown by Jia's cinematic art of long takes.

In his discussion of the politics of aesthetics, particularly with respect to the worker as a political subject, Rancière points out that in an artwork, the normal meaning of the worker lies in the “right” relationship between what the worker's body “can” do and what it cannot, that is, between capacity and incapacity. However, the worker becomes emancipated and thus a real political subject when the artist exercises “a politics inherent” in the art of creating—whether in literature or cinema—by overthrowing the consensual “distribution of the whole set of relationships between capacities and incapacities that defines the ‘ethos’ of a social body,”⁵⁰ that is, by introducing the worker's body into “a new configuration of the sensible.”⁵¹ Rancière argues that what occurs during “a shift from a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance” are “processes of dissociation: a break in a relationship between sense and sense—between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt. Such breaks can happen anywhere and at any time. But they cannot be calculated.”⁵²

Jia Zhangke's cinematic writing of the group image, I believe, is an exercise of this Rancièrian politics of aesthetics, inventing another sensible world, not for its present value but for its potent future. According to Jia Zhangke, the cinematic *24 City* speaks to a “documentality” (*wenxianxing*) of these precarious subjects at the disappearing Factory 420. Jia emphasizes that the film is a record for the future: “In *24 City*, there is a real factory, Factory 420, which has more than ten thousand workers and becomes a real

estate project, Twenty-four City. My goal is to establish a significant relationship between cinema and reality, between fiction and truth. Thus, after ten or twenty years, when you watch the film again, you can recognize its documentality.”⁵³ By “documentality,” Jia means that it is more than documentary (*jilu*). The interview stories function as documentaries; they are about personal situations, offering testimonies to how individuals are affected by actual events, such as the establishment of Factory 420 and the land transfer. However, they cannot replace the fictional stories, which are composed on the basis of actual life stories. The latter are used to bridge the gaps between personal and concrete situations, for example, to elaborate complicated social relations. The film’s future orientation addresses Jia’s concern about the Chinese people’s tendency of forgetting (*yiwang*) at the present moment: “Things happened yesterday but are gone entirely today. . . . But by blending documentary into fiction, I believe, the film maintains a documentality by always containing real life experience and indestructible evidence.”⁵⁴ If the real estate Twenty-four City, for example, becomes a dominant discourse about spatial relations in the future, each story in this film may be retraceable as a disagreement with the dominant discourse. Thus, by pointing to the future, the film becomes a historical record of Factory 420, materializing a temporality shared by a group of precariats whose lives are affected by China’s transformation from a socialist country to a neoliberal state, and yet whose historical experience is being forgotten. Insisting on its futurity, Jia is no longer just an independent filmmaker who gives voices to the disenfranchised, those from the bottom (*diceng*) of society. Instead of celebrating something that just happened, the film commemorates “the ear of the future.”⁵⁵

NOTES

1. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 56.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 176.

3. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.

4. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.

5. This quote is from Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator*, 42. Although the idea originally refers to a critique of the Platonic “harmoniously structured community,” it is also quite relevant to the critique of the Confucian harmonious society, which is advocated by the Chinese government.

6. The event was organized by the Hong Kong International Film Festival and the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China. For its translated transcript, see Sebastian Veg, “Building a Public Consciousness: A Conversation with Jia Zhangke” (*China Perspectives* 1 [2010]: 58-64). My quotations of Jia’s speech in this essay, however, are based on my own translations.

7. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.

8. Hai Ren, *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong: The Countdown of Time* (London: Routledge, 2010), introduction.

9. For an excellent analysis of how the reforms affected mass media, see Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), chapter 2.

10. See the World Trade Organization, "Report of the Working Party on the Accession of China" (October 1, 2001), http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/comple-teacc_e.htm#chn (accessed May 2011), 12.

11. Chris Berry, Lu Xinyu, and Lisa Rofel, eds., *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement: For the Public Record* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

12. Lu Xinyu, "Rethinking China's New Documentary Movement: Engagement with the Social," in *The New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, 15-48.

13. For example, Tonglin Lu, "Fantasy and Reality of a Virtual China in Jia Zhangke's Film *The World*," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no. 3 (2008): 163-179.

14. See Kin-Yan Szeto, "A Moist Heart: Love, Politics and China's Neoliberal Transition in the Films of Jia Zhangke," *Visual Anthropology* 22 (2009): 95-107 and Xudong Zhang, "Politics of Vanishing: The Films of Jia Zhangke," *New Left Review* 63 (May/June 2010): 71-88.

15. For an excellent discussion of Jia's practice of realism, see Esther M. K. Cheung, "Realisms within Conundrum: The Personal and Authentic Appeal in Jia Zhangke's Accented Films," *China Perspectives* 1 (2010): 11-20.

16. For a detailed discussion of this transformation, see Ren, *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong*.

17. In *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), Guy Standing refers to precariats as a group of people across the world who live and work precariously, usually in a series of temporary jobs, without recourse to job securities and stable occupational identities, as well as social protection. While agreeing with Standing that issues of underemployment and unemployment are critical to the understanding of the precariat, I use the precariat in the broad context of the life-making and -building process. Moreover, as I do in this essay, I investigate if aesthetic practice might make legible and intelligible the precariat as a figure of the political. My concern is less about whether the precariats are forming a coherent class, but more about whether the precariat enables us to imagine across-class, across-generation, across-ethnicity/race coalitions.

18. Ren, *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong*.

19. Aihwa Ong argues that special economic zones and their expansion have created a phenomenon called graduated sovereignty, meaning that in these zones, populations are governed by techniques and laws different from those used in non-special economic zones and their expanded areas. See her *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), chapters 3-4.

20. Ren, *Neoliberalism and Culture in China and Hong Kong*, chapter 5.

21. China Resources Land Limited, *Annual Report* (Hong Kong, 2006), 129-130.

22. Huarun zhidi, *Ershisi Cheng* (Twenty-four City) (n.d.), 21, my translation.

23. Huarun zhidi, *Ershisi Cheng*, 3, my translation.

24. Xia Jun and Yin Shan describe in detail how the newspaper engaged in the real estate market in Chengdu and became one of the most profitable media companies in Chengdu mainly due to publishing real estate ads. *Juzhu gaibian zhongguo* (Housing transforms China) (Beijing: Qinghua Daxue Chubanshe, 2006), 141-159.

25. Hai Ren, "Life Spectacles: Media, Business Synergy and Affective Work in Neoliberal China," *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 6, no. 2 (July 2009), <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal/article/view/934>. Accessed May 2011.

26. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.

27. Jia Zhangke, *Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu: ershisi cheng ji* (Interviews of Chinese workers: 24 City) (Jinan: Shandong Huabao Chubanshe, 2009), 2.

28. Jia Zhangke, *Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu*, 3.

29. Jia Zhangke, *Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu*, 3.

30. Jia Zhangke, *Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu*, 3.

31. Jia used “affinity music” and “subjective music” in a public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
32. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke dianying shouji* (Jia’s thoughts 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke cinematic notes) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 2009), 253.
33. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 254.
34. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
35. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
36. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
37. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 254.
38. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 253.
39. Jia Zhangke, *Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu*, 4.
40. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 253.
41. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 256.
42. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 256.
43. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 256, 258.
44. Jia Zhangke, *Jia xiang 1996-2008*, 256, 261.
45. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
46. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
47. Thought cannot be precisely described and prescribed by communication. In this sense, it is open and eventful.
48. This point is clearly shown in the television series *Juzhu gaibian zhongguo* (Housing transforms China) produced by Xia Jun. For an architecture scholar’s perspective, see Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).
49. See the unauthored article “Yishu yu dichan de chanmian yu jiuchan, dichanyishu dashiji” (Entanglements between arts and real estate: major events of real estate arts) (November 26, 2004), <http://house.focus.cn/news/2004-11-26/83780.html> (accessed May 2011). For an analysis of SOHO China, a company of Pan Shiyi and Zhang Xin, see Yomi Braester, “Chinese Cinema in the Age of Advertisement: The Filmmaker as a Cultural Broker,” *The China Quarterly* 183 (September 2005): 552-553.
50. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 72.
51. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 71.
52. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 75.
53. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
54. Public discussion in Hong Kong on April 13, 2009.
55. The phrase “the ear of the future” comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of monument in *What Is Philosophy?* 176.

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