

**Stories of Tin City:
Narrative Identity and the Histories of Gejiu, Yunnan Province**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York

2011

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the
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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Jane Schneider

“Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” the experiment with a socialist market economy, has brought unprecedented affluence, opportunities, and political freedom in the People’s Republic of China, but also unprecedented unemployment, corruption, poverty, and crime. Retirees in Gejiu, a tin mining town in southwest China, narrate their life histories in this uncertain context, as they try to determine their place in the shifting present by means of the political concepts, historical narratives, and institutional locations they have acquired in the course of the decades. They frame their individual experiences within institutional constraints, such as work units, education, membership of the Communist Party, and class status, and make idiosyncratic use of the cumulative vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and of the assembled storylines of official history. This dissertation examines the relationship between ideology and subject formation through a reconsideration of Communist discourse. The first four chapters of the dissertation analyze materials of successive national campaigns—a feature film about a miner who becomes a revolutionary, histories of the tin industry, biographies and autobiographies of miners, exhibitions about class struggle, and local gazetteers—to demonstrate how the Chinese Communist Party used the local landscape and details of

local life to substantiate the universal truth of Marxist historiography and to confirm the legitimacy of the Communist government. The fifth chapter shows how Gejiu retirees today make selective use of this cumulative vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and of the storylines of successive official histories of Gejiu, to give shape and meaning to their lives in the present. The analysis of the narrative identities of Gejiu retirees demonstrates not only that local residents take up Communist conceptions of self and society, as well as current and abandoned storylines of Communist discourse, but also that they produce diverse, alternative histories of the present in words and narratives intended by the Party to universalize individual experience.

Acknowledgments

My research would not have been possible without the generous support of several institutions. A travel fellowship from the City University of New York Graduate Center funded my pre-dissertation fieldwork in Yunnan in 1998. The Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program and the International Dissertation Field Research Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council, with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, funded my dissertation research in Yunnan (November 2001-April 2003). A Monroe Carrell Jr. Dissertation Year Fellowship, from the City University of New York Graduate Center, funded the writing of the dissertation.

As significant, this book is due to the assistance, kindness, enthusiasm, and patience of many individuals in China. I am foremost indebted to the people in Gejiu who shared with me their knowledge of local history and their remarkable life experiences. Of these, Gejiu retirees occupy a privileged place in my heart. I hope this book honors them. In Kunming, I benefited from the aid and support of faculty, graduate students, and administrators at Yunnan University. Above all, I am grateful to Professor Lin Chaomin for his invaluable mentorship. His wife and her family in Gejiu likewise lent a hand and cared for me when it was most needed. Professor Yang Hui, Professor Yin Shaoting, Ma Yong, Shi Yun, Xirao Yunzhen, Yang Kun, Zhang Hui, and Zhou Qiong also contributed to my research. I thank the librarians at Yunnan University and the staff of the International Exchange Program for obliging my numerous requests. Greg Ruf kindly helped to secure my research affiliation. In Gejiu, I owe my housing to Bao Shuchang. For their generosity and good-humor, I thank the leaders, staff, and residents of my

housing unit, and the cadres of the Gejiu Municipal Library and the Gejiu Municipal Archive. Last but not least, I am grateful to the used book dealers in Gejiu and in Kunming, from whom I acquired many of my prized historical sources.

I went to the City University of New York Graduate Center to study with Professor Jane Schneider, and I owe my degree to her commitment to my intellectual growth. Her counsel, support, encouragement, and help in sharpening the arguments and prose of this book have made me a better scholar. For their critical reading of the draft of the dissertation, their sharp suggestions on how to improve the manuscript, and their scholarly example, I am very grateful to Professor Vincent Crapanzano, Professor Katherine Verdery, and Professor Angela Zito. Without the incomparable Ellen DeRiso, Assistant Program Officer of the Department of Anthropology, I would have been lost at sea. Her administrative excellence saved me. I also benefited from the stellar professionalism of Dr. Charlotte Ann Frick, former Director of Student Activities and Assistant to the Vice-President of Student Affairs, Janet Finello, former Director of Financial Aid, and Jane Tartaro, Perkins Loan Coordinator, Office of Financial Aid.

The friendship, hospitality, and tender words of Susan Greenwell, Miranda Johnson, and Michael Nylan sustained me during the writing of the dissertation. Nadeen Thomas helped bring closure to my years at the Graduate Center. The intellectual insights and eloquence of phase of Christian de Pee strengthened each page of this book, while his love and devotion made its existence possible. For believing in the power of education and for supporting me on this long journey, I dedicate this book to my dear parents, Barbara and Benne Kusnetzky.

To my parents
with love and gratitude

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vi-vii
Introduction. Stories of Tin City	1
“Without Tin, There Wouldn’t Be a Gejiu”	2
The Past in the Present: Ethnographic and Historical Encounters	13
“Without the Communist Party, There Wouldn’t Be a New China”	23
“What You Call History, I Call Experience”	36
American Scholarship on China in the Mao and Reform Eras	43
Chapter One. Historical Fiction: Inscribing the Local	59
The Encounter	62
The Transition	77
The Re-Encounter	82
The Departure	101
Chapter Two. Fictionalized History: Local Inscription in the Factory Histories of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960)	105
“Go All Out, Aim High, and Achieve Greater, Faster, Better, and More Economical Results in Building Socialism”	109
The Mass Literary and Artistic Production Movement	117
“Let the Working Class Write Their Own History with Their Own Hands”	121
The Tianjin Model	122
Exchanging Experiences	131
Localizing the Model	136
Authenticating National History	152
Chapter Three. Class Education: Bodies of Evidence and Living History in the Socialist Education Movement (1962-1965) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)	155
“Classes and Class Struggle Still Exist”	158
“Grasp Class Struggle as the Key Link”	161
“Recall the Bitterness of the Past and Savor the Sweetness of the Present”: Political Education in the People’s Liberation Army during the Early 1960s	165
The Four Histories Movement: Living Ideological Education outside the People’s Liberation Army	171
“Give Prominence to Politics”: Arts, Literature, and <i>The Rent Collection Courtyard</i>	186
“Never Forget Class Struggle”	193
Class Education Exhibitions during the Period of Radicalism: <i>Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle (1966)</i> and <i>The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu (1966)</i>	197
Class Education Exhibitions during the Period of Restoration: <i>The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines (1972-1979)</i> and	

<i>The Recollect Bitterness Center</i> (1969-1978)	209
Conclusion: Bodies of Evidence and Living History	224
Chapter Four. Seeking Truth From Facts: Rewriting History in the “New Socialist Local Gazetteers,” 1978-2000	227
“Seeking Truth From Facts”	229
“Bring Order Out of Chaos”	238
“Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”	245
Reforming History: The Revival of the New Socialist Local Gazetteer	249
Excising Politics: The Regulations for the New Socialist Local Gazetteers	255
The Politics of Economy: The <i>Gejiu City Gazetteer</i>	267
Conclusion	283
Chapter Five. In the Telling: Making Sense of Lived Experience in Gejiu	285
Politics and Economy	288
Yu Shizhen (b. 1930)	293
Tao Ying (b. 1950)	305
Cadres and Workers	317
Yan Kun (b. 1931)	322
Li Heyuan (b. 1927) and Zhao Baicheng (b. 1933)	333
Conclusion	343
Conclusion. Tin Culture and Historical Speculation in the Era of Neo-Liberalism	347
Bibliography	363

Introduction. Stories of Tin City

“Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” the experiment with a socialist market economy, has brought unprecedented affluence, opportunities, and political freedom in the People’s Republic of China, but also unprecedented unemployment, corruption, poverty, and crime. Retirees in Gejiu, a tin mining town in southwest China, produce their life histories and reflect on present-day experience in this uncertain context, as they try to determine their place in the shifting present by means of the political concepts, historical narratives, and institutional locations they have acquired in the course of the decades. They frame their individual experiences within institutional constraints such as work units, education, membership of the Communist Party, and class status, and make idiosyncratic use of the cumulative vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and of the assembled storylines of official history. This dissertation seeks to understand the narratives of Gejiu retirees by examining the relationship between ideology and subject formation. The first four chapters of the dissertation analyze materials of successive national campaigns—a feature film about a tin miner who becomes a revolutionary, histories of the tin industry, biographies and autobiographies of miners, exhibitions about class struggle, and local gazetteers—to demonstrate how the Chinese Communist Party used the local landscape and details of local life to substantiate the universal truth of Marxist historiography and to confirm the legitimacy of the Communist government. The fifth chapter shows how Gejiu retirees today make selective use of this cumulative vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and of the storylines of successive official histories of Gejiu, to give shape and meaning to their

lives in the present. The analysis of the narrative identities of Gejiu retirees demonstrates not only that local residents take up Communist conceptions of self and society, but also that they produce diverse, alternative, individual histories of the present in words and narratives intended by the Party to universalize experience.

“Without Tin, There Wouldn’t Be a Gejiu”

Wedge between two mountain ridges on a central plateau in southeastern Yunnan, Gejiu is located in the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, which borders Vietnam. The 318 km-ride to Gejiu from Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, draws to a close when the “Bright Pearl,” the public sculpture that symbolizes “Tin City,” is in sight. Erected in 1987 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Honghe Prefecture, the sculpture is comprised of three converging concrete pillars that lift a huge, tin pearl skyward in a gesture of exaltation. Three figural statues, located on the base of the pillars, complete the overall design of the sculpture: a Hani woman carrying a basket of bananas, a Yi man strumming a *sixian*,¹ and a Han man in mining gear.

The pillars of the Bright Pearl represent the mainstay of the local economy and hence the viability of the city: the Yunnan Tin Corporation (YTC), the Honghe Prefecture People’s Government, and the Gejiu City People’s Government. Due to the presence of these three “work units” (*danwei*), locals assert, “The residents of Gejiu are of high ‘quality’ (*suzhi*).” A means to further China’s engagement with global capitalism, the post-Mao regime’s discourse on *suzhi* calls for a populace that will “embody international

¹ A *sixian* is a four-stringed plucked instrument.

standards of modernity, civility, and discipline.”² Gejiu residents, however, use this discourse anachronously: to characterize the cadres and workers of the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), to distinguish the modern, industrial city they built, and to thereby credit the socialist past for what Gejiu is today, even though the current regime continues to dismantle the socialist past in the name of “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*).

While its pillars refer to the city proper, the three statues at the base of the sculpture refer to Gejiu’s location in a multi-ethnic prefecture. Since the prefecture is home to 38 “minority nationalities” (*shaoshu minzu*), a population in which the Hani and Yi account for the majority, the three statues propagate the “unity of the various nationalities” of China, a post-1949 imperative that simultaneously refutes and avows the political asymmetry and social inequality that shape relations between the Han majority and the minority nationalities, the latter only 8% of the national population. The capital of the prefecture at the time of my fieldwork, Gejiu is predominately Han (roughly 70%). The statue of the Han miner personifies the city and represents the colonial aspirations of PRC ethnic politics. Considered in relation to the demographics of the prefecture,³ the heavily Han populated-counties to the north of the Red River, such as Gejiu, illustrate the

² Anagnost 1997: 75-6. On the discourse of *suzhi*, see also Hairong Yan 2003.

³ To the north of the Red River are the following five counties: Mile, Luxi, Shiping, Jianshui, and Mengzi, and two cities: Gejiu and Kaiyuan. Each of these cities has the administrative status of a county. To the south of the Red River are following six counties: Honghe; Luchun; Yuanyang; Jinping Miao, Yao, and Dai Autonomous County; Pingbian Miao Autonomous County; and Hekou Yao Autonomous County. Although the latter two more accurately adjoin the former, I represent these counties in the manner they were characterized by Honghe government cadres, both Han and non-Han, during my pre-dissertation fieldwork, in the summer of 1998. For a detailed administrative history of the counties of Honghe prefecture, see Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994-97: 1:110-6.

civilizing force of modernity, which results in urbanization, industrialization, sanitation, and declining mortality rates. The statues of the Hani woman and the Yi man personify the southern counties of Honghe prefecture, which prefectural officials describe as “backward” because they are home to “terraced mountain slopes, low-tech agriculture, and traditional minority nationalities.” This regional landscape of uneven development moreover replicates national disparities between the center and the periphery. On a local scale, it therefore reveals how “the underdeveloped periphery becomes the defining other of ‘civility’ within the nation-space itself;”⁴ it reveals how the backward minorities perform the same function; and it reveals how the Han are defined as the source of Chinese civilization and as the agents of Chinese modernity.

As the Bright Pearl recedes in the distance, we arrive in the city proper. Dividing north and south, and east and west, the Golden Lake orients the slender, elongated space of Gejiu. In each season, Gejiu residents flock to the tree-lined promenade of Golden Lake Park for early-morning exercise, mid-day sociality, and after-dinner digestion. In the northwest corner of the city, the YTC Number One Refinery occupies the elevated ground to the rear of the YTC Machine Plant. Its billowing smokestacks dominate the skyline. Due east, a driveway guarded by a pair of enormous, tin lions offers a regal approach to the Soviet-style headquarters of the YTC. The centerpiece of the Gejiu tin industry, the YTC was nationalized and designated a “state-owned enterprise” (*guoyou qiye*) under the control of the central government after the conquest of Gejiu on January 17, 1950. State-owned enterprises, like the YTC, were desirable work units in the Mao era. Likened to a “small society” (*xiao shehui*), the YTC had its own public security

⁴ Anagnost 1997: 77.

bureau, its own nurseries and schools, its own clinics and hospital, and its own housing, dining, and recreational facilities. Such providence was a reminder that the YTC, although locally situated, had the administrative status of a prefecture. Nonetheless, it was a coordinate of local urban administration, along with other work units in Gejiu. Central to policy implementation and political mobilization, these work units were more than a guarantee of lifetime employment, cradle to grave benefits, and a range of social services.⁵ In the eyes of their members, they were a means to gauge one's welfare relative to another's. Since the YTC was preeminent during the first thirty years of Party rule, the consensus among Gejiu residents was: "It's best to marry a YTC employee."

Proceeding southward, we encounter material traces of earlier chapters of Gejiu history. In the southeast bend of Golden Lake Park is the Red Battery, a patch of land once occupied by a military fort. The decisive battle of Gejiu's "liberation" was fought here and is commemorated by a rock, incised with the image of broken shackles and the date January 17, 1950. Further east, the YTC Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory meanders down the mountainside, concealing the sole remnant of the former headquarters of the YTC: the clock tower, now tilted, that defined the laboring day during the Republican era (1912-1949). Across the lake, in the southwest bend of Golden Lake Park, the abandoned tracks of the Gebishi Railroad (begun in 1913 and completed in 1920) terminate at the Gejiu Station, a small depot of French-style that is now a public security office.

To the south of the Golden Lake is "old town" (*laocheng*), an area shaped like an inverted isosceles triangle. The base of the triangle was Carpentry Street. The eastern side had an upper half that was home to a few businesses and a lower half that was shaped by

⁵ On the *danwei* system, see Lu and Perry 1997.

Rice Shop Street. The western side of the triangle was Heavenly Lord Street. Tapering off to the south, these two legs met near the Yunnan Trade Association. In this early site of settlement, the architectural remnants of young Gejiu now inhabit bygone cityscapes that are made visible through the memories of the elderly.

A YTC employee as of 1941, Zhang Xiping (b. 1922, retired 1982) recalls the upper half of the eastern side of old town, from the former headquarters of the YTC to the Linan Trade Association:

Our main office in Gejiu was not far from the Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory. It was part of a complex that was arranged like a traditional courtyard house. Residential quarters were in the rear, across from the main office, and there was a theatre in the center of the courtyard. None of these buildings exist today. When the general headquarters of the company relocated from Kunming to Gejiu in 1948, I moved to Gejiu and lived those lodgings. Gejiu was then a small town with few inhabitants. Women and children stayed in at night. The town wasn't safe after dark. Wolves sometimes entered our courtyard from the mountains. There were cases of wolves snatching and carrying off small children. And there were a lot of vagrants and gangs about. Gang members carried guns and knives. The plain where the Prefectural government is located today was then an execution ground. When the *Guomindang* (KMT) police caught these rogues, they would be taken there. So if we did go out at night, we went in groups of five or six and were always accompanied by an armed guard. We would go to see an opera in a popular theatre near the Linan Trade Association.

Rice Shop Street, narrow and dirt-packed, stretched from the Linan Trade Association to the Cherished Florescence Gate, the only extant city gate at present and the only rival to the formidable Qing-dynasty grandeur of the Yunnan Trade Association, which still stands in close proximity to its arch. A YTC employee as of 1959, Yang Guangming (b. 1928, retired 1988) grew up in this part of the city:

My father was the district head of the Cherished Florescence Mountain District. Since he was a well-respected man who held a government office, the KMT didn't suspect him of assisting the Communists. He mainly sheltered underground Party members, which later earned him the label, 'enlightened capitalist' (*kaiming zibenjia*). My family came here from Jianshui County and grew rich from mining tin. My ancestors built a fine, traditional courtyard house on the grounds of the Linan Trade Association. It no longer exists. The Gejiu Number One School is there today. When I was young, my father had a

*lufang*⁶ on the upper bank of the gully that crosscut old Gejiu. I lived there. Gejiu was then just a tiny, trickle of a town. During the rainy season, when the gully filled with water, the ore my father had transported there from his mine would be dressed using indigenous methods. I learned all about ore dressing then. I could gauge an ore by sight. Water is what is needed to separate the ore granules from the waste. The ore granules sink, because they are heavier, and the waste floats on the water. That's how it's done.

Buried beneath recent construction, the Great Bridge rests out of sight, across from the Yunnan Trade Association. Below it, water once flowed through the gully that crosscut Gejiu. From here, Heavenly Lord Street, built of stone slabs, extended northward to Carpentry Street. Lined with two-story, timber buildings, Heavenly Lord Street was the commercial heart of the city, from which alleys packed with taverns, temples, and the mansions of tin barons stemmed. A YTC employee as of 1958, Li Fang (b.1922, retired 1972) lived minutes from her father's shop on this busy street:

My father had a small shop that was located where the Gejiu Department Store now is. His shop sold cotton cloth by the yard and in bolts. The Heavenly Lord Pavilion was near there. It was similar in style to the Cherished Florescence Gate but was larger and wasn't part of the old city wall. The old city wall was an enclosing wall, not a continuous wall. It enclosed the northern section of the city, including the old railroad station and the former headquarters of the YTC. The Golden Lake didn't exist then. It was just a meadow. From my father's shop, it was a short walk to where 'the big capitalists' (*da zibenjia*) lived. Li Family Garden⁷ was where the Tin City Movie Theater now is, and Peng Family Garden was across the street from where the Honghe Prefecture Guesthouse now is. The city also had two *yamen*.⁸ One of them was on Rice Shop Street, next to the Shipping Trade Association. It was large and was surrounded by many buildings, including the Yunnan Trade Association. That was an important part of town.

In carved timber and chiseled stone, old town conveys an enduring history, succinctly imparted by the commonplace saying: "Without tin, there wouldn't be a Gejiu." Along with the YTC compound in the north, its architectural remnants point to

⁶ A *lufang* was a fortified compound for dressing and refining ore that also had residential quarters.

⁷ Li Family Garden was the formal name of the large, traditional courtyard house of the Li family. The same logic applies to the Peng Family Garden.

⁸ A *yamen* was a local seat of government in imperial and Republican times.

the shifting relation of the locality to non-local authorities, whose coordinating power prioritizes the relative and often temporary value of one place over another (the local value of Gejiu being tin), thereby creating spatial hierarchies in the name of national development. The Yunnan Trade Association, set up in the Qing dynasty, worked on behalf of its members to counteract escalating imperial taxes.⁹ Local entrepreneurs built the Gebishi Railroad in order to link Gejiu to the Yunnan-Vietnam Railroad and hence achieve the overland transport of tin.¹⁰ Provincial administrators promoted industrial modernization not only to compensate for the loss of revenue that the opium trade once provided, but also to break the grip of Cantonese, British, and French traders who were able to sell Gejiu tin on the world market after refining it to international standards in Hong Kong. They chose the YTC as a key site of investment.¹¹ The Republican-era clock tower marks this moment in time. The Soviet-style headquarters of the YTC lastly attests to its status as one of 156 recipients of Soviet assistance for the development of heavy industry during the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957). Each of these shifts, in other words, shaped local history and lived experience by positioning Gejiu in greater proximity to political or economic centers of power.

⁹ On the history of the Yunnan mining industry, see Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998; E-Tu Zen Sun 1967; E-Tu Zen Sun 1968; Kent Clark Smith 1970; Yunnan daxue lishixi and Yunnansheng lishi yanjiusuo Yunnan difangshi yanjiushi 1980; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992.

¹⁰ On the history of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railroad and the Gebishi Railroad, see Duan Xi 2002; En-Han Lee 1968; Metzgar 1973; Sutton 1980; Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Yunnansheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui 1982.

¹¹ On the development of the Yunnan mining industry during the Republican era, see Eastman 1977; Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998; Stuart Hall 1976; Metzgar 1973.

A commodity destined for foreign shores and an indispensable national asset, musty red tin ore, pried from the vein, has determined the value of Gejiu to the Chinese nation and to the world. The presence of tin has assured this frontier town a history of resource extraction and of foreign encroachment on local soil. It is a familiar story with an inevitable end: the diminishment of the very source of local value.¹² The changing administrative status of Gejiu traces out this history, while it demonstrates the repeated repositioning of this locality within the nation: A village (*cun*) of Mengzi County from 1276 to 1884, Gejiu was elevated to a department (*ting*) in 1885 by decree, a sign of the imperial court's enhanced supervision of business affairs, tax collection, and garrison troops in Gejiu. Under the flag of the Republic of China, Gejiu became a county (*xian*) in 1913. Its placement under the jurisdiction of the provincial government from 1928 to 1940 signified its rising stature as an industrial center. In the winter of 1950, Gejiu was designated a city (*shi*) with the administrative status of a prefecture, a vaulted position explained by the anecdote of a local historian, Qiu Bochang (b. 1928, retired 1986):

As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched westward to Yunnan province in the latter months of 1949, Mao Zedong called Deng Xiaoping, the Commander-in-Chief, and urged him 'to make sure to take hold of the tin production in Gejiu.'

Although cries of protestation rang out from city hall when Gejiu was put under the control and made the capital of Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture in 1958, thereby becoming a city with the lowly administrative status of a county,¹³ Gejiu still shone, due to the presence of tin. After all, the size of the YTC had increased fourfold; tin output had increased fivefold; and Gejiu tin had become the largest generator of foreign

¹² On the quality and quantity of the ore deposits of Gejiu, see Golas 1999. For an overview of the Gejiu Tin industry, see also Barnett 1993.

¹³ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 7-33, 59-60.

currency in the country. The 1959-feature film, “The Story of Tin City,” underscored how Gejiu, far from languishing in obscurity, boasted the YTC as a model of the social and industrial achievements of the Communist government.

Sanctioned by higher authorities, Gejiu ascended. Whether under the sway of Western imperialists, provincial officials, or Soviet advisors, tin and the extraction of its value brought the locality national prominence. And with this came privilege: Capital and material resources were diverted here from elsewhere—inputs that required brawn and brainpower to realize large-scale outputs. As with other mining towns, Gejiu is therefore a place marked by successive waves of migration,¹⁴ each laying claim to the locality and each in time complicating the question, Who is a local? Of immediate relevance is the population influx of the First Five-Year Plan. During those years, the Communists sent thousands of cadres (technical and managerial) from all parts of China to assume leadership posts at the YTC, and the Corporation hired an even greater number of miners and factory workers from the surrounding region. Demobilized PLA soldiers who took up civilian jobs added to the number of new residents. Because birthplace, ideally tied to ancestral soil, is an inalienable aspect of personal identity in China, the men and women who resettled in Gejiu, some more than 50 years ago, still refer to themselves as non-locals. Their foreign dialects, strange customs, and alien culinary tastes transported a wealth of variation to the locality and became indices of cultural distinction, to be compared with the dialects, customs, and tastes of those “already there.” For locals and non-locals alike, these indices of otherness are a gauge of “civilization” (*wenhua*):

¹⁴ On migration history, see Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998; James Lee 1982a; James Lee 1982b; Wiens 1967.

A cadre from Hebei Province: People from Yuxi drop their ‘g’s.¹⁵ When I was doing Party work, I met people from there. We told them this and that about the Communist Party (*Gongchandang*). They couldn’t say ‘Communist Party.’ They kept saying, ‘Ommunist Party.’ Oh, how we roared!

A worker from Gejiu: When I worked at Kafang Mine, there was a guy around my age from Shanghai who had a girlfriend. The two of them would walk around holding hands. We would stare at them and say to each other, ‘Would you look at that!’ We wouldn’t dare do the same ourselves. Our small group leader didn’t criticize them because he knew the guy was from Shanghai and that’s just how people from Shanghai are.

A cadre from Zhejiang Province: The culinary arts in the Jiangnan region¹⁶ are very refined. Each meal is carefully designed to create a perfect balance of flavors. All they eat here is hot peppers. I tell you, they are really backward.

Of an older cultural discourse, which in the second example includes Maoist notions of sexual propriety, the possession of culture (*wen*) situated one in proximity to the center of the imperium. Relocation from the center to the periphery was hence a movement from civilization to barbarism and from the present to the remote past.¹⁷ Evinced by the administrative history of Gejiu, tin (not cultural capital) brought this frontier town into greater proximity with the center, at the same time tying it to a new universalist discourse of modernization. The resulting social landscape, formed against the current of a still forceful cultural ideology of ancient origin, mapped the population of the nation onto Gejiu. As confirmed by a local official, “All 23 provinces are represented here.” This demographic shift and the concomitant cultural re-indexing of the locality facilitated the incorporation of Gejiu into the sovereign realm of China, a nation-state roughly coterminous with the territory of the Qing Empire.

¹⁵ Yuxi is a city with the administrative status of prefecture. It lies due north of Honghe Prefecture, in Yunnan Province.

¹⁶ Jiangnan is a region in the lower Yangzi valley, including southern Jiangsu and Anhui Provinces and northern Zhejiang Province.

¹⁷ de Pee 2007: 5-12.

The past fortunes and present misfortunes of Gejiu are both tied to tin. In the words of a local resident, “Gejiu is known for tin, but the tin has already been dug up. Without tin, there is nothing we can do.” As diminishing returns rise in proportion to the depletion of the profitable reserve of tin, the YTC looks to boost its earnings by relieving what the government now calls a “heavy burden.” In step with Zhu Rongji’s initiatives to restructure China’s state-owned enterprises, the YTC carried out its first round of layoffs in 1999 and by 2003 began to divest its medical facilities, its educational institutions, and its public security force, handing them over to the Gejiu City People’s Government in exchange for “local mines” (*difang kuang*).¹⁸ By breaking the “iron rice bowl” (*tie wanfan*), lifetime employment and the cradle to grave benefits that formerly stood for the beneficence of state socialism were forsaken as if they were nothing more than costly impediments to economic growth. With this, a turnaround in public opinion ensued, expressed by Yu Shurong (b. 1950), a city employee as of 1973:

In the past, being a worker at a large state-owned enterprise, like the YTC, was the ideal. The YTC was such a good work unit, but it isn’t so today. Working at any factory now is no good. Today, it is best to be a doctor, a college professor, a banker, and especially a government employee. These are the good work units. What makes them good? Salaries are high and stable, and your job is secure.

The waning of the tin industry in recent years also foretells the city’s descent. With this in mind, the Honghe Prefectural People’s Government is also acting swiftly: In 2003, it began preparation to relocate to the nearby town of Mengzi, thereby centering itself at a site of future development rather than remaining at a site of a future past. Ready to lose one of its three main sources of employment at a time when the local economy is suffering, the Gejiu City People’s Government beckons tourists as a

¹⁸ The term, “local mines” refers to the mines owned and managed by the Gejiu City People’s Government. These mines are state-owned enterprises.

new source of revenue, with “tin culture” (*xi wenhua*) as the hook that will draw outside capital to the city once more. In the place of tin, a resource that generated local, national, and even foreign investment but is now cost-ineffective to extract, the past emerges as a vast expanse to be mined for profit. Which sites and persons possess “historical value” (*lishi jiazhi*), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will again determine, so as to profitably market local history as a tourist attraction.

The Past in the Present: Ethnographic and Historical Encounters

In a time of uncertainty and instability, a time officially called a “transitional period” (*guodu shiqi*), I arrived in Gejiu to conduct 18 months of historical and anthropological research (November, 2001- June, 2003). I set out to examine processes of state building in a frontier region through the lens of the life experiences and perceptions of cadres and workers at the Yunnan Tin Corporation. I intended to base my research at on old YTC factory and to interview men and women who had lived through a significant portion of the Mao era (1949-1976). Given their experience, these individuals would be in a position to gauge social transformations across time. During my pre-dissertation fieldwork in 1998, YTC administrators welcomed my research plan.

My residence and research in Gejiu, however, elicited a response from local residents, YTC administrators, and government officials that serves to highlight the dramatic and on-going changes that have been brought about by the policies of reform and opening up. My presence as a foreign scholar, living with her spouse as the only

Westerners in town,¹⁹ confirmed the reorientation of China's foreign policy. Upon meeting me, locals inevitably declared, "In the past, China was closed off to the West." My presence also underscored new, related political freedoms at home. Retirees reflected, "If I had spoken to you in the past, I would have been accused of 'having illicit relations with a foreign country' (*li tong waiguo*)." And my presence even affirmed that China's experiment with a socialist market economy generated economic growth, a development that both retired and current officials explained as follows, "In the past we studied the Soviet Union, but now we are taking lessons from the United States." While my interest in the history of the Gejiu tin industry flattered the confidence of YTC administrators who were actively courting foreign investment, it compelled the government officials who were actively planning ways to attract international tourists to Gejiu.

At the same time, my presence drew attention to the ills and desperations of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. After settling into the YTC Staff and Worker's Dormitory, arranged by my advisor's sister-in-law who is a YTC employee, the Public Security Bureau evicted me from my new home. Though newly built and equipped with a security guard, I was told that the dormitory was "unfit" and more importantly, "unsafe" for a foreigner. Safety, I came to learn, meant protection from the reach of petty criminals and drug traffickers, from prostitutes who court out-of-towners, and from unruly rural migrants who congregate in wait of selling their labor for a pittance—all manifestations of the growing unemployment and immiseration of the working-class residents of Gejiu. Similarly, I was denied research assistance from the YTC. The Director of its Office of

¹⁹ A husband and wife team of American missionaries also lived in Gejiu, where they ran an orphanage, on the outskirts of the city proper. Although I had heard of them, I never saw them in town, nor had my informants. Their existence was confined to *wai* (outside), whereas we inhabited *nei* (inside).

Foreign Affairs refused to hear me plead my case in person. With the Party's advocacy of joint-stock ownership, the restructuring of the YTC had entered a new phase. YTC administrators worked to keep unsavory and sensitive issues, like escalating lay-offs and official corruption, from broader public view. My intrusive gaze was of no aid to the national reputation of the Corporation.

Gejiu retirees, in the end, shaped my experience of daily life and my research project. Through official channels, I was assigned an apartment in a gated compound for "retired revolutionaries" (*lixiu ganbu*), a place where the authorities imagined a more secure present and stable past was preserved. Located by the southeast bend of Golden Lake Park, the compound was erected in the early 1980s on the site once occupied by a guesthouse that had accommodated Soviet experts in the 1950s. Public security officers told me that my safety could be guaranteed in this setting, for I could trust my neighbors. My neighbors in turn could be trusted to represent the nation in a politically correct way. Government officials likewise directed me to retired cadres in the Gejiu Department of Culture, the Gejiu Party Propaganda Bureau, and the YTC Federation of Literary and Art Circles who could cultivate my knowledge of local history. Officials relied on these retirees, some of whom were local historians, to make the past once again serve the needs of the present. They hoped to assimilate my research into their promotion of tin culture, to make me undertake propaganda work to the benefit of local development.

In addition, my daily errands, dining outings, and wanderings through the city resulted in a multitude of random encounters and casual conversations with retired YTC cadres and workers. For instance, the proprietor of my favorite noodle shop had been a cadre at the YTC Machine Plant, the repairman who worked not far from my apartment

had been a member of the YTC Geological Prospecting Team, and the enthusiast who cheered on my playing from the sideline of the basketball court had been a worker at the YTC Gejiu Ore Dressing Plant. While some of these conversations ended without a chance of repetition, others provoked mutual curiosity, the exchange of contact information, future involvement in my research, and even the unspoken promise of friendship. Through these varied means, I developed a network of approximately 200 informants among Gejiu retirees. Comprised of the adults and adolescents of the first thirty years of Communist rule, this community of retirees shared my enthusiasm for retrieving the past in the present. Ultimately, I chose five of them as subjects for extended analysis in chapter five. Together, they constitute a balanced sample of men and women, and represent a diversity of life trajectories. Although not at all atypical, the narratives of these five Gejiu retirees are particularly rich and intersect in ways that emphasize shared and disparate understandings of Chinese socialism.

Through an analysis of life historical narration and related reflections on contemporary experience, this study examines the ways in which retired workers and cadres in Gejiu, especially YTC pensioners, make use of socialist rhetorical forms, acquired in the past, to situate themselves in the present and thereby give shape and meaning to their lives. In my talks with them, during on-going informal interviews and social engagements, I was surprised by the fact that traces of the past kept breaking through the surface—Communist subject positions, terminologies, and narrative strands from the Mao era, an array of Chinese Marxist interpretive lenses, the speech genre of “recollecting bitterness” (*yiku*), and the propaganda technique of “contrasting the past with the present” (*jin-xi duibi*). The Chinese Communist Party provided my informants

with these socialist rhetorical forms during their schooling and years spent working as state employees. Having lived through different eras of Chinese socialism, Gejiu retirees, five of whom are discussed in depth in chapter five, afford us a means to assess the resonances, and limitations, of Party propaganda over time.

The narrative identities of Gejiu retirees demonstrate not only the on-going relevance and power of the Party's word but also the limitations of its hegemony. Irrespective of the Party's current devaluation and abandonment of some of its older political language, Gejiu retirees selectively draw from the cumulative repertoire of Communist discourse to do interpretive work in the present—to make sense of the passage of time, of the lives they have led, and of present-day social transformations. Their recollections and social commentaries illustrate how effective the Party was in leaving some audiences with powerful rhetorical forms for framing lived experience. Gejiu retirees, however, also exert their own interpretive agency, producing personal pasts and visions of the present that diverge in smaller or larger measure from the Communist historiography of Gejiu and the Chinese nation. In words and narratives intended by the Party to universalize experience, they create diverse, alternative, individual histories of the present.

Absent on factory floors or in service industries now staffed by contract laborers, unfamiliar with the new “rule by law” (*fazhi*) that replaced the old politics of “rule by men” (*renzhi*), ill at ease with the new practice of self-expression through consumption, retirees who entered the workforce in the Mao era are often on the margins of studies of contemporary China, pursued in response to new reforms in Party policy. In terms of the national social landscape, however, retirees now outnumber the potential labor force. In a

place like Gejiu, where the state industrial sector has contracted without being offset by an expanding service sector, retirees are all the more visible, leading younger residents to complain that they live in a dull and boring “city of old people” (*laoren de chengshi*). In China, the retirement age for a cadre is 60 for a man and 55 for a woman, while a worker usually retires five years earlier (55 for men and 50 for women). An additional five-year reduction is an option for workers who toil in particularly harsh conditions, like shaft miners in Gejiu. Retirees fall into three categories: *lixiu*, *tuixiu*, and *tuizhi*. Although *lixiu* and *tuixiu* both mean “to retire,” individuals who *lixiu* participated in the revolution prior to October 1, 1949 and hence “retire as revolutionaries.” Whereas individuals who *lixiu* receive 100% of their former salary as a pension, those who *tuixiu* receive 60% to 90%. A portion of the latter group also gave up their post to a child one to three years early, a choice the “offspring replacement system” (*zi-nu dingti zhidu*) made available in December of 1986. Such individuals are said to “resign from office” (*tuizhi*).

Since retirement was not compulsory during the Mao era, cadres—especially Party members—often chose to remain at their posts for the duration of their lifetime. When reformist leaders made retirement mandatory in the early 1980s, these cadres were called on to give up the reins of power. The reformist drive to modernize the state bureaucracy paired the vigorous image of “*nianqinghua*” (rejuvenation) with the need to reduce urban unemployment.²⁰ The old made way for the advancement of their juniors and in turn enabled a better-educated, younger population to enter the workforce. This practice was similarly extended to the ailing state industrial sector. With the deepening of reforms in the 1990s, Gejiu officials and YTC employees were allowed to retire well

²⁰ With the retirement of senior cadres, urban unemployment was reduced from 6 percent in the late 1970s to 2.2 percent in the middle 1980s (See Tang and Parish 2000: 58).

ahead of time (50 for men and 45 for women); indeed they were encouraged to do so, for the reasons cited above. Due to enterprise reform, some state-owned enterprises have become unable to make pension payments. Retired YTC cadres and workers, however, still receive their pensions, paid monthly in cash, as do other state employees in Gejiu.²¹

Of the roughly 200 retirees in Gejiu with whom I engaged, I established a close relationship with 40 individuals, passing holidays with their extended families, sharing meals at their homes, rambling around town with them on errands, or watching television programs together in the evening. Ranging in age from 50 to 80, these pensioners, for the most part, had been retired for a good number of years when I met them. Although my sample is not proportionate in all respects, these Gejiu retirees do represent a diversity of life trajectories, with career paths in different work units of the YTC and the Party-state bureaucracy. At present, Gejiu retirees spend their time socializing with peers, dealing with family matters, attending to their health, and pursuing work or leisure.

A concrete image of this population can be glimpsed from the activities of the individuals who are the focus of chapter five. Up at dawn, Yan Kun (b. 1931, retired 1983) stops off at her former work unit, the Gejiu People's Hospital, every morning after exercising in the park. A retired revolutionary, she feels it is her duty to inquire about the needs of the staff and that it is their duty to inquire about her health. Since writing poetry is a hobby she takes seriously, she reserves a portion of her pension for private lessons. Yu Shizhen (b. 1930, retired 1987) likewise is given to cultural pursuits. Secretary of the YTC Poetry, Painting, and Calligraphy Association for Seniors, Yu exhibits widely and

²¹ See Ching Kwan Lee 2007a: 2-3; Ching Kwan Lee 2007b; Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 117-9; Tang and Parish 2000: 58, 166-7, 312; West 1999: 155-6; Whyte and Parish 1984: 38, 73, 161, 173, 201-3; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 87; field interviews.

earns extra income by teaching calligraphy to children at his home. He has a public bulletin board where he posts “lessons” on how to maintain a healthy mind and body. He frowns on the likes of Li Heyuan (b. 1927, retired 1980) who shares his wife’s obsession with mahjong. If Li’s daily fingering of tiles keeps him in touch with friends and the latest town gossip, Zhao Baicheng (b. 1933, retired 1989) is similarly sustained through his daily visits to the Worker’s Cultural Palace, a city park built in 1956. In contrast to Li, Zhao is also preoccupied with worries about his two unemployed sons. Of a younger generation, Tao Ying (b. 1950, retired 1995) has made a habit of complaining about official corruption and social injustice, a pastime she enjoys as much as free athletic events. In their respective households, Yan and Tao, the two women of this sample, are responsible for the grocery shopping, cooking, and laundry, while Yu, Li, and Zhao attend to other domestic chores, house repairs, and building projects. For all, the television is on after dinner, at which time friends and family periodically visit.

My conversations with Gejiu retirees led me to undertake historical research in Gejiu and in Kunming, Yunnan’s provincial capital. To render intelligible their life stories and reflections on contemporary experience, I needed to master their vocabulary and gain an understanding of their worldview. Our talks also forced me to see that the past was not fixed. Through the act of interpretation, Gejiu retirees created individual versions of the past, mounted varied explanations of historical experience, and used different words and storylines of Communist discourse—often out of context or in unintended ways—to make sense of their lives and their situation today. In other words, I needed to find a stable historical referent to understand the complexities and nuances of living discourse. The historical texts analyzed in chapters one through four are artifacts of Communist

practice, indices of the shifting political culture of Gejiu. They preserve in their original form and original meaning distinct Communist discourses that were allied to the shifting political goals of the Chinese Communist Party. By means of political study, the media, cultural events, meetings at work, and school lessons, Gejiu retirees were exposed to these discourses, which were transmitted in a variety of forms—for example, oral exegesis, exhibitions, plays, tracts, coursework, and government documents.

My acquisition of historical documents illustrates significant ways in which the past is repressed in the present. The current regime tightly restricts access to Party and government archives. While I couldn't step foot into the YTC Archive, I did manage to excite the staff of the Gejiu Municipal Archive, whose rush to assist me led to the halting resignation, "Impossible" (*mei banfa*), when the Party Secretary of the Archive arrived on the scene. He told me that any material that might harm the security and sovereignty of the People's Republic of China was off-limits, meaning the archive was off-limits to me. The same regime is concurrently demolishing traditional and soviet-style buildings, at a pace with its discard of political tracts from the Mao era. The paper recycling centers in Gejiu and in Kunming, where this "trash" amasses, in turn supply the used book dealers with their stock. While I benefited from the collections of the Yunnan University Library and Gejiu Municipal Library, I found a greater wealth of material in used bookstalls. At the Sunday flea market in Gejiu, for example, the past erupted in the present. Every week, on the appointed day, I heartedly rummaged the piles of weathered books for historical sources that would secure my knowledge of the present.

A meeting ground for anthropology and history, this study creates a dialectic between the present and the past. It consists of four chapters about historical texts

(Communist discourse fixed in writing during national campaigns of the Mao and reform eras) juxtaposed to a final chapter on oral histories and related reflections on present-day experience (living discourses in the present). These different forms of social discourse do not divide into stark binaries. The historical texts are living traces of public discourses and public debates of the past, while the speech of Gejiu retirees retains ideas and phrases once transmitted in writing. Chapters one through four offer sustained historical analyses and ideological interpretations of successive political and economic campaigns, to show how the Communist discourse of the Party Committee in Gejiu provided residents with a meaningful framework for conceptualizing history, for comprehending a transforming society, and for knowing the self. These analyses refute long-standing Western biases that have condemned Communist propaganda as either totalitarian or vacuous. The diverse, divergent official histories of Gejiu since 1949, moreover, show that this meaningful framework has repeatedly changed in response to the shifting goals and theoretical visions of the Party leaders.

Chapter five demonstrates how five Gejiu retirees use these same discursive elements and rhetorical devices, which they acquired in the past, as the basis for the interpretive work they do in the present. The continuities in the discursive practices of the Party, from 1949 through the present, and the continued use of socialist rhetorical forms by Gejiu retirees, raise a critical challenge to the common designation of contemporary China as a “post-socialist” state. Whereas many Western observers question the relevance of Communist ideology to the dynamics of the reform era, and turn a deaf ear to the voices of the older generations, this study recuperates the historical and ideological continuities between the present and the past in the practices of the Party and in the lives

of individuals. The critical analysis of Communist discursive practices in the present and the past offers an important corrective to current misapprehensions about Chinese politics and society as it shows, among other things, that the notion of a post-socialist China involves an uncritical acceptance of the most recent iterations of the Chinese past by the Party itself.

“Without the Communist Party, There Wouldn’t Be a New China”

With the founding of the PRC, on October 1, 1949, Gejiu had to assume a form and meaning emblematic of socialist modernity, for the “new society that is the promise of revolution does not appear as a completed design, but as a project to be realized.”²² The extension, renaming, and paving of Rice Shop Street is a telling example of the alteration of the local landscape by the Communist government in the early years of its rule: Now occupying the full length of the eastern side of old town, May First Street was laid and named in honor of Labor Day. Paved in 1953 for the first Labor Day Parade, it was then the only cement road in town. Shi Wanfu (b. 1927, retired 1985) recalls this parade, a memory popular among veteran Party cadres like himself:

By 1953, workers were very excited to participate in the first Labor Day Parade. The Labor Union existed. The Labor Union assisted workers by setting up literacy groups and by looking after their social welfare. May First Street was paved for the event. YTC miners also participated in the parade. When they came down the mountain wearing wool Sun Zhongsan suits,²³ it was really something to see. They all stood tall and proud.

²² Dirlik 1989: 28.

²³ Sun Zhongsan suits are known in the West as Mao suits. Sun Zhongsan was the first president of the Republic of China.

If affected by the memory of this parade, with its paved street and public display of YTC miners attired in a luxury good that was formerly out of reach of those of humble origin, Li Fang (see p. 7) is impressed not by the claim of its message but by its form:

Wool Sun Zhongsan suits were distributed to workers at Ma Mine in 1953. They wore them when they participated in the parade on May First Street. The road was paved, and they appeared in wool suits. It was a 'contrast' (*duibi*). It showed how much better life was at present in comparison to the past.

Each site—the street and the subject—becomes an emblem of the past and the present. Each new layer of reference draws attention to human intervention in the local landscape, in this case to the Party's investment of social space and subjectivity with new meaning. Through language, the Party also re-signifies historical experience and human agency. In other words, Communist terminology and its underlying concepts construct a "translated modernity" of the Party's making that enables new ways of seeing the self and society in space and time. As Lydia Liu has shown, the rapid influx of foreign neologisms into China, beginning at the turn of the 20th century, led to an output of cross-cultural translation that produced new meanings, neither equivalent nor reducible to the original Western words.²⁴ The history of Chinese socialism is inseparable from this process of cross-cultural interpretation, whether in forming the discourse community at the Communist base in Yan'an (1936-1947), in defining the parameters of revolutionary literature and art, or in creating the red farms and red factories of "New China."²⁵ It is a

²⁴ See Lydia H. Liu 1995. Because of this, Liu goes on to argue, China's modernity does not mirror Western modernity but is rather a distinct and creative product of translation, a "translated modernity."

²⁵ For example, see Marston Anderson 1990; Apter and Saich 1994; Kaple 1994; *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology* 1953-83.

“meaning-making history”²⁶ that is still in want of being written. This study contributes to the analysis of this history, not by examining original moments of translation, but by exploring the productive power of the new language of possibility that the translation created. The Communist Party disseminated this language in study sessions and radio broadcasts, in books and pamphlets and comic strips, and gave it a concrete reference in a radically reformed social order. This study provides a local history of this language of possibility by an analysis of historically situated writings and speech. It first describes how mass campaigns and official historiography anchored Communist discourse in time and space, and then shows how Gejiu retirees make selective use of the words and storylines of Communist discourse (both current and abandoned) in creating their narrative identities.

With his artistic photograph in hand, in which the tilted clock tower from the Republican era is juxtaposed to the upright public clock of the People’s Street (formerly Heavenly Lord Street), Lin Shijie (b. 1922, retired 1977), a city employee as of 1950, perceives and demarcates significant changes in the recent past by using key terms and phrases of Communist discourse, by now familiar to the citizenry of the PRC. Culled from our conversation at the outset of my fieldwork, his remarks reproduce the space, time, and subject positions of Chinese Marxist history as they were applied to Gejiu beginning in the 1950s and then amended in the 1980s:

Before 1949, miners were called *shading*; after 1949, they were called ‘workers’ (*gongren*).

In the past, there were ‘capitalists’ (*zibenjia*). Today, they are called ‘entrepreneurs’ (*qiyejia*). The two are not the same because a capitalist ‘exploits’ (*boxue*) workers.

²⁶ Lydia H. Liu 1995: 32.

The difference between ‘socialism’ (*shehuizhuyi*) in the past and in the present is this: In the past, we had the ‘planned economy’ (*jihua jingji*); now we have the ‘market economy’ (*shichang jingji*). Yet, the essence of socialism persists: ‘Serve the people’ (*Wei renmin fuwu*).

Before 1978, there were so many ‘political campaigns’ (*zhengzhi yundong*). Back and forth, we ‘struggled’ (*dou*). We were told what to say and what to study. After 1978, we had more freedom and more choices.

The “we” of these remarks invokes the “deep, horizontal comradeship” of the modern nation as an “imagined community.” The modern nation, Benedict Anderson argues is further imagined as a polity in which “state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory.”²⁷ While imagined to be under the purview of state sovereignty, the space and the subjects of the modern nation must perpetually be brought within the bounds of state hegemony. The officials of the Communist regime are discursively positioned within the nation-space through the Party’s use of the ancient binary “up, higher” (*shang*) / “down, lower” (*xia*). Both metaphorical and physical, this binary image previously situated the subjects of the hierarchical imperium in relation to the emperor and now takes the form of “higher authorities” (*shangji*) and “subordinates” (*xiaji*). At the same time, the civil servants of the modern polity are considered members of “the people” (*renmin*) who occupy the horizontal space of what they also constitute: the Chinese nation. Having led them to establish a new political body—the People’s Republic of China, the Party not only governs in their name but also defines the terms of national membership.

Several scholars have focused on language to explore the relationship between ideology and subjectivity. In words, Louis Althusser contends, domination finds a means to an end. Although Althusser believes that power is a repressive force and is a unique

²⁷ Benedict Anderson 1991: 7, 19.

possession of the ruling class, he considers power, when in the form of ideology, to be a productive force: Ideology, he contends, interpellates individuals as subjects.²⁸ Stuart Hall rejects Althusser's contention that we, as subjects, are prefigured by language. Like Althusser, he maintains that ideologies constitute us as subjects for discourses but he also provides for human agency. He writes, "we are spoken by and spoken for, in ideological discourses which await us at birth, into which we are born and find our place."²⁹ Since language mediates our experience of the world, Angela Zito and Tani Barlow argue that the "control of the terms and practices that produce various 'subjectivities' is itself a source of power."³⁰ Part of a critique of the Euro-centric biases and assumptions that inform current scholarship on China, their elucidation of the subject is of particular relevance to the task at hand:

Focusing on subject positionalities instead of 'individuals' takes into account that selves are processual and that they change over a lifetime of experiences; that one person can simultaneously occupy many 'subject positions' (woman, female, mother, daughter, wife, reader, consumer); and that these dynamics are constructed within an ensemble of social relations. Dynamic and not substantial, subjectivities are imposed, suggested, or pieced together; they are positioned within discursive fields (the term 'subject position' indicates the relative stability of the locations). Subjectivity as a category enables scholars to grant selves conditional, specific, historical unities rather than essential qualities that everywhere and in every epoch interact according to the same set of universal laws.³¹

As shown by Lin Shijie, the Party provided the citizenry with not only a new language but also a new Marxist narrative for understanding history, society, and the self. The imposition of this new narrative onto the past and the present necessitated the creation of new subject positions, such as the "worker" and the "capitalist," which were

²⁸ Althusser 1971: 165-76.

²⁹ Stuart Hall 1985: 102, 109. See also Zito 1997: 209.

³⁰ Zito and Barlow 1994: 7.

³¹ Zito and Barlow 1994: 9-10.

affixed as labels on the population during Land Reform. Lin notes the emergence and transformation of these two historical subjects: After 1949, the word *gongren* (worker) replaced the local, derogatory word for a miner, *shading*. Like the word “capitalist,” the word “worker” figures a local self as a national and universal subject of Marxist theory, identified by class. The living individuals who come to occupy the antithetical subject positions of the worker and the capitalist—or the peasant and the landlord—therefore become concrete illustrations of abstract Marxist concepts (such as labor, surplus value, and exploitation), who demonstrate the workings of the motor of Marxist history (class struggle).³² After 1978, the politically neutral word “entrepreneur” replaced the word “capitalist,” a change that implies the demise of the political discourse of class and class struggle and hence a new reading of Marxist theory. By defining national membership (the constituents of “the people”), the Party secures a source of power: the power to include and to exclude, which inevitably gives rise to inequality. To subject, Michel Foucault reminds us, has a dual meaning: to be tied to one’s identity through self-knowledge and to be bound by the control of someone else.³³ Occupying a subject position therefore affords either the possibility of empowerment or the reality of oppression, given the historical circumstance.

The subject positions of the worker and the capitalist indicated a new apprehension of time and a particular interpretation of its unfolding. They fostered a new idea of simultaneity: that of “homogeneous, empty time” which in Anderson’s words,

³² See Anagnost 1994: 264, 269; Anagnost 1997: 4, 17.

³³ Foucault 1982: 212.

“made it possible to ‘think’ the nation.”³⁴ Co-joining readers, the date on the secular calendar and the events in the daily newspaper were new, effective ways to envision homogeneous, empty time. As the old and the new came to be perceived synchronically, natural philosophers used the notion of competition rather than of inheritance to explain the evolution of species.³⁵ Aided by these ideas, educated citizens in turn came to believe that human history was a march of progress. Chinese nationalists of opposing political views, for instance, deployed the words “advanced” (*xianjin*) and “backward” (*luohou*) to describe the developmental states of different national societies and ethnic groups. Like Darwinian theory, Marxism is “a metanarrative of modernity.”³⁶ Karl Marx, however, charted the linear progression of human society through homogeneous, empty time—a universal course of social development (primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism). He posited that competition in the guise of class struggle and in the name of revolution propelled the movement between the sequential stages and hence socio-historical development. Naturally, the Communist Party is wedded to Marxist doctrine, held to be “scientific, objective, and correct.” Mao Zedong nonetheless believed that the general tenets of Marxism had to account for the specific historical circumstance of China, especially its semi-colonial, semi-feudal society and its numerically insignificant proletariat but vast population of peasants. This was the contribution of Mao Zedong Thought to Marxism-Leninism.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson 1991: 23-4.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson 1991: 26-36; 187-8.

³⁶ Rofel 1999: 10.

By emplotting time and by narrating Chinese history, Mao Zedong Thought gave the Chinese Communist Party the ability to shape historical memory. As in the song, “Without the Communist Party, There Wouldn’t Be a New China,” the creation of the historical subject, New China, and hence the advance of history, is attributed to the Party. Composed in 1943 by Cao Guoxin, the lyrics of this song broadcast a reading of history that can still be heard today. For example, the television infomercials that introduced Hu Jintao (now General Party Secretary) on the eve of the Sixteenth Party Congress in 2002 aired this song as an accompaniment. The nightly movies, shown the week prior to the Party Congress, moreover, celebrated two patriotic achievements of the Chinese people under the leadership of the Party: the Communist victory in 1949 and China’s stature as an economic powerhouse after 1978. In official historiography, now also dictated by Deng Xiaoping Theory, each date marks a rupture in the narrated time of the nation—a historical divide that ushers in a better present and future, as well as demarcates an outdated past. The propaganda technique to which Li Fang refers (p. 24), “to contrast the past with the present” (*jinxi duibi*), in turn illuminates the political subjects and nature of each historical era that Lin Shijie discerns (p. 25). The temporal stills of “before” and “after” offer stark emblems of discrepant times—emblems that give concrete expression to a prescribed vision of history and historical progress that legitimizes Party rule.

Chinese Communist Party doctrine, its shifting vocabulary, its malleable definitions, its naturalized concepts, its formalized language, can be likened to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls an “authoritative discourse.” Both determinative and self-referential, the “authoritative word,” Bakhtin writes:

demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically

connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers.³⁷

Fused to the authority of the Party and presented as irrefutable scientific truth, Communist discourse emanates from the lofty pinnacle of the polity and then descends the administrative hierarchy to be disseminated across the land by means of the policies and campaigns of the Party and the government. Propagated in each work unit during “political study” (*zhengzhi xuexi*), Communist discourse is also spread by newspapers, textbooks, novels, films, and so forth. Although of fluctuating intensity, the Party’s control of the media of transmission, its use of censorship, and its clamp on unauthorized political expression together ensure the “centralization of meaning.”³⁸ And because many of its terms, such as “counterrevolutionary” (*fangeming*), are always open to redefinition, the Party’s monopoly on the definition of words possesses real consequence.³⁹ Like the built environment, lastly, Communist discourse evolves. Its terminology and underlying concepts move in and out of usage, receive new definitions, and in the course of time acquire distinct layers of meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin pairs the notion of an authoritative discourse with a structuralist view of psychological development.⁴⁰ He presumes that the Western notion of the individual is universal and maintains that human beings are psychologically determined by authoritative discourses. As evidence of this psychological determination, he cites the transformation of behavior and perception caused by an individual’s acceptance of an

³⁷ Bakhtin 1981: 342.

³⁸ Verdery 1991: 431.

³⁹ See Fokkema 1965: 256-8; Schoenhals 1992.

⁴⁰ See Bakhtin 1981: 341-6.

authoritative discourse, such as religion or ideology. As contended above, the concept of subjectivity allows us to dispense with the search for universals and hence the idea that human beings across the globe and in every epoch of history have the same psychology. Over the course of a lifetime, a person is instead prone to occupy numerous subject positions, hold diverse and even contradictory beliefs, and change with each experience, which suggests that we are not determined by authoritative discourses. Despite these oversights, Bakhtin recognizes that an authoritative discourse is a striving toward rather than a guarantee of persuasion, and he also recognizes human agency in the practice of “retelling in one’s own words.” Since all utterances are comprised of another’s speech, the act of retelling is a form of “double-voiced narration,” a transmission of both another’s words and one’s own interpretation of those words. Hence:

one may speak of another’s discourse only with the help of that alien discourse itself, although in the process, it is true, the speaker introduces into the other’s words his own intentions and highlights the context of those words in his own way.⁴¹

This courtship of persuasion drives the practice of propaganda. Significantly, the negative connotation propaganda carries in the West is absent from the Chinese term *xuanchuan* (propaganda). Before the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, to conduct propaganda was “to educate” (*jiaoyu*). A YTC employee as of 1971, Wang Fei (b. 1951, retired 1999) was a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution and a “sent-down youth” (*xiaxiang zhishiqingnian*) prior to becoming a member of the short-lived YTC Machine Plant Propaganda Troupe. However pleased with China’s recent strides in science and technology, she remains disheartened by the current state of national education:

Propaganda used to permeate society. You didn’t have to rely solely on the school and on the family to educate your children. In the past, more emphasis was placed on social

⁴¹ Bakhtin 1981: 341, 355.

morality and on class struggle. That kind of spirit and vitality is absent today. Young people no longer understand such things. It was different for us. It's a pity, really. Education just isn't what it used to be.

Reformist leaders disparaged the term *xuanchuan* by associating it with the “politics” of ultra leftism. After taking power, they characterized their rule as guided by scientific Marxism (as opposed to the pseudo-science of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution) and hence as a retreat from the blind worship of political ideology. Yet the reformers, too, disseminate ideology through propaganda to facilitate their political goals. Party propaganda departments still exist at every administrative level of the country, and they still coordinate “propaganda work” (*xuanchuan gongzuo*) across these administrative levels, just as they did during the Mao era. By spreading propaganda, these departments provide Chinese citizens with an interpretive framework to re-conceptualize history, society, and the self in accordance with the prescriptive vision of the Chinese Communist Party at any given moment, as the propaganda mobilizes the citizens to realize the current political goals of the Party.

By recognizing “ideological work” (*sixiang gongzuo*) as instructive rather than simply manipulative, and by recognizing propaganda texts as historical artifacts of Communist practice rather than historiographical records of a Chinese past, I recuperate the historicity of propaganda materials (and of Communist discourse more generally) as valuable primary sources for the understanding of Chinese socialism. Western scholars have long dismissed propaganda texts either as misleading accounts of the Chinese past or as complete fabrications. But if one reads these documents as instructive texts—texts that teach every political subject of the nation to think and speak in the language of the Party—the notion of *xuanchuan* acquires its proper historical meaning, as Gejiu retirees learnt it during the Mao era and as they understand it today. “Propaganda” instructs and

educates. Propaganda demonstrates by concrete example how Communist discourse applies to local, individual circumstances. The careful analysis of propaganda texts as primary documents of Communist practice allows us to discern how Communist discourse provided a meaningful framework for lived experience.

Like all such committees in the young People's Republic of China, the Party Committee in Gejiu configured the new conceptions of space, time, and subjectivity in local narratives, so as to fix the meaning of universalizing Marxist concepts in a specific geographic and historical context. The analysis of the written traces of propaganda campaigns in chapters one through four demonstrate the agency of the Party, while at the same time identifying the discursive elements and rhetorical devices that the Party has used over time to re-conceptualize history, society, and the self. Chapter one introduces the conceptual apparatus of the Party by a close reading of a 1933 novella by Ba Jin and a 1960 screenplay by Wang Meiding, two leftist writers who used the imported literary style of realism to write the local. The next three chapters examine the rewriting of Gejiu history during successive national campaigns: the campaign to write factory history in chapter two; the four histories movement and class education exhibitions in chapter three; and the compilation of new local gazetteers in chapter four. The chapters analyze this official historiography of Gejiu not as a singular, cumulative historical narrative, but as a collection of diverse, divergent histories that accord with the shifting goals and changing theoretical visions of the Party leaders since 1949, and as a record of the continued effort by the Party Committee in Gejiu "to make the past serve the present" (*gu wei jin yong*).

The retrievable traces of the on-going re-writing of Gejiu history by the local Party Committee, from the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), to the Socialist Education

Movement (1962-1966), to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and lastly to the reform era (1978-), record this endeavor in the form of official history. The foundation on which subsequent writers would build and elaborate new themes, the factory histories of the Great Leap Forward applied literary techniques to historical writing for affective purposes. Whereas these histories used speech captured in writing to effect the economic goals and to instill the political vision of Mao Zedong's permanent revolution, the Four Histories of the Socialist Education Movement (family, village, factory, and commune history) and the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution privileged actual speech, in the form of "recollect bitterness narratives," that were recited by elderly men and women who invoked the revolutionary past. Although often mediated by material objects (e.g. historical artifacts, texts, artwork), the speech acts of these so-called "living educational materials" substantiated the "iron facts" of official history by offering up to an intensive, realist gaze the laboring body and its corrupting agents. Lastly and in contrast, the "new socialist local gazetteers" of the reform era authenticate the claims of official history by means of a new ideological stance: scientific objectivity. Whereas the aforementioned propaganda relied on living individuals to voice official history, these propagandistic texts let "the facts" speak for themselves.

In all its various forms, official history, in sum, narrates the past in the shifting vocabulary of Communist discourse, with the intention of providing an interpretive framework for individual and social experience that accords with the changing needs of current policy, legitimizing the rule of the Party by contrasting the sweetness of the present (or the future) with the bitterness of the past. Whether depicting class struggle as the motor of history or identifying the quality of local characteristics as the engine of

progressive growth, the official history of Gejiu places the locality in a national space of shared experience. The use of autobiography and biography, beginning with the parceled memoirs of *A History of Gejiu Tin* (1959) and ending with the topical and biographical entries of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* (1998), allows History to be spoken and hence to be represented as undeniable, embodied truth. The individual, like the local, becomes an instantiation of the national, which bears out the universal truth of modernity, as defined by the Party's shifting interpretation of Chinese Marxism. The interpenetration of the particular and the universal, of divergent experience and shared history, textually aligns the self and society with the Party's historic mission and with its vision of national development.

“What You Call History, I Call Experience”

When introducing myself to Gejiu retirees, I often began by stating that I was interested in Gejiu history, especially the 1950s and 1960s. On one such occasion, a retiree retorted, “What you call history, I call experience.” This remark points out that as a researcher I have a different relationship to the Chinese past than my informants do, and it also infers that historical writings exist at a greater epistemological remove from the past than do personal recollections. Despite their differences, historical writings and oral histories both present the past through narrative. Temporality, Paul Ricoeur argues, “cannot be spoken of in the direct discourse of phenomenology, but rather requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration.”⁴² Put somewhat differently, lived experience cannot be

⁴² Ricoeur 1984-88: 3:241.

directly represented. As soon as it is mediated by language, experience is no longer physical, immediate, and direct. Historical accounts, whether written or oral, therefore do not represent past as it “really was,” but rather stand in indirect relation to lived experience, in the metaphorical sense of “such as.”⁴³

Unlike historical writing, which is constrained by recourse to documents, oral history is a record of interviews and hence a product of dialogical exchange. The historical account that an informant relates is affected not only by the researcher’s input but also by the shifting circumstance of the informant. In response to social change and the vicissitudes of daily life, the same informant can narrate the same events in different ways over time. The researcher in turn impacts the historical account by selecting what to include and omit in the analysis. In respect to the genre of the life history, Vincent Crapanzano explains,

The life history, like the autobiography, presents the subject from his own perspective. It differs from autobiography in that it is an immediate response to a demand posed by an Other and carries within it the expectations of that Other. It is, as it were, doubly edited: during the encounter itself and during the literary (re)-encounter.⁴⁴

The life history and the autobiography, Crapanzano further argues, “are essentially self-constitutive; they are moments, fixed in time by the word, in the dialectical process of self-creation. They require, as such, the mediation of an Other.”⁴⁵

The life history is a retrospective construction in which the past, the present, and the self are figured anew through an act of interpretation. Born in the exceptional space of the interview, in an encounter between strangers (added in this research by the remove of

⁴³ Ricoeur 1984: 1-3, 34-5.

⁴⁴ Crapanzano 1980: 8.

⁴⁵ Crapanzano 1980: 9.

an investigation across substantial cultural and linguistic boundaries), the life history resembles the re-narration of the self that occurs in the interaction between the therapist and the patient of psychoanalysis.⁴⁶ The life history is not a static record of the way an individual understood lived experience in the past or the way an individual identified him/herself during prior decades. Life histories are rather interpretative readings of the past in the present, reassessments of who we were and who we are today. Partial in scope and selective in content, the life history is nonetheless “self-constitutive.” It represents a moment in the life-long process of making sense of lived experience. Recollection consequently does not elicit the “past presents” we once lived but rather constructs a “present past,” a retrospective account of experience. Considered in this light, recollection creates only “verisimilitude.”⁴⁷

The life histories collected in chapter five are retrospective constructions and present interpretations of lived experience that my interlocutors devised both for me and for themselves. Like all the life histories I heard in the field, the life histories of these five selected individuals represent only a partial instantiation of their narrative identities. The life histories they imparted to me were particular and to some extent unique—distinct from the versions of their life that they might share with relatives, or friends, or neighbors—but they were not therefore fictive or inauthentic. The informal interviews that I conducted over time in various settings took the form of social engagements. While shopping around town, taking walks in Golden Lake Park, or socializing of an evening with our respective spouses, I asked Gejiu retirees to share their life experiences with me.

⁴⁶ See Crapanzano 1980: 9-10; Crapanzano 1996: 108-9; Freeman 1993: 8-9, 21-2, 30-1.

⁴⁷ Bruner 1991: 4.

In most cases, I also met with them alone in a space of relative privacy, such as at their home or in their shop after closing time, to talk about a particular episode in their past or to follow up on a previous conversation. Even at family gatherings I engaged retirees in talk about their lives, while their children and grandchildren listened or posed their own questions. Inevitably, their life historical narrations were punctured by digressions about contemporary experience. Nevertheless, if the occasion permitted, I steered retirees back to the events of the past. My presence created an exceptional space for unusual conversations, a space devoted to reflection on lived experience. Gejiu retirees created this space with me. It is therefore improbable that they were performing political rhetoric for my benefit. Because I chatted and conducted interviews with the retirees in front of their friends, families, and neighbors, I am certain that they used everyday speech and assumed personas that were familiar to both intimate and casual acquaintances.

Which passages of lived experience Gejiu retirees narrated and which passages they passed over and thereby relegated to silence was, no doubt, influenced by their perception of me, by my needs and comments, but most importantly, by the context in which they find themselves today. Gejiu retirees repeatedly drew attention to my youth and my nationality. These two aspects of my person became a means for them to gain power and status vis-à-vis the younger generations. Both because I am an American and the United States had been the most prominent enemy of the PRC during the Mao era, retirees gravitated to talk of the Cold War. They were also well aware that the Chinese government now wishes to emulate the United States, which lent me prestige. However, retirees were far less prone than their juniors were to view me as a status symbol. They instead made use of what I represented to gain the recognition and the respect of their

children and their grandchildren, who noticed that my attention, deference, and praise were directed at the most senior generation. My youth only enhanced their ploy, for it acted as a reminder of the proper hierarchy between the old and the young.

Gejiu retirees also cited my dealings with current officials to gain a sense of superiority and to feel validated in their censure of a younger generation of leaders. Retired YTC cadres, for instance, made much of the fact that the Corporation would not offer me formal assistance. They referred to this offense to show that their successors have no regard for history, disrespect their achievements, and are of an inferior caliber. I was assured that if they were still in power, I would not have been turned away empty-handed. Retired YTC workers likewise shook their heads in disapproval of the robust eating, drinking, and sexual overtones that pervaded the dinners I had with current officials. They referred to this behavior, which they elaborated with other stories of official corruption, to illustrate the skewed priorities of the leaders of today.

The loss of guaranteed employment and welfare benefits, the validation of political subjects formerly considered class enemies, and the disparities between rich and poor that have resulted from the new socialist market economy are examples of present transformations that force a reappraisal of recent history. The life histories and social commentaries of Gejiu retirees are above all a response to the unsettling time of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Consider the retirees in chapter five: Yan Kun constructs her identity as a Party cadre who “serves the people” (*wei renmin fuwu*) by contrasting her commitment to Communist ideals with the immorality of current officials. Li Heyuan and Zhao Baicheng both use the Communist term *guan* (to manage; to care about) not only to assess what it once meant to be a worker but also to insist that the

Party still has an obligation to meet the needs of the people. Whereas Yu Shizhen blames ultra left ideology for his political suffering and feels vindicated by the present-day achievements of expertise, Tao Ying uses the same ideology to argue that the Cultural Revolution was a time of real economic growth, unencumbered by the falsity and corruption of recent decades. Products of the present, these interpretive acts are at the time productive of the present, giving meaning to life in contemporary China.

My conversations with Gejiu retirees, in sum, created an exceptional space in which they situated themselves in the present vis-à-vis an Other—whether their offspring, the cadres and workers of today, or their antagonists, superiors, or compatriots of a time now past—an Other that through me, granted them the recognition, sympathy, respect, and social standing they felt to be their due. My presence, however, also demanded a price of them: the obligation to recollect the past and to work through it. Some retirees found this pursuit of little interest while others proved unable to sustain it. That I came to be associated with talk of the past was made clear by Lin Shijie (see p. 25) who after a few months renounced our friendship. Spotting me deep in conversation with a mutual friend, he hollered, “The past is the past!”—as if to convince himself that the memories that haunted him had no substance. With a warm smile, his friend waived him on and resumed to talk about the cherished moments of his youth.

In narrating their life histories, retired cadres and workers in Gejiu make idiosyncratic use of the vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns and the storylines of official history (both current and abandoned) and refer to institutional constraints such as work units, career paths, education, Party membership, and class status, to formulate and frame their individual experiences. In other words, “narrative

identity”—identity as figured and refigured “by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about himself or herself”⁴⁸—takes shape in a dialectic with the discursive and institutional framework created by the successive policies and campaigns of the CCP. Narrative identity, Paul Ricoeur contends, grants “self-constancy,” while also allowing for “change, mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime.”⁴⁹ It is a notion of identity understood in the sense of self-sameness (*ipse*) as opposed to in the sense of being the same (*idem*). Ricoeur argues that the self is not only culturally determined—identity in the sense of *ipse* is “a self instructed by the works of a culture that it has applied to itself”⁵⁰—but also is “both the reader and writer of its own life.”⁵¹

The narrative identities of Gejiu retirees demonstrate not only the adoption of Communist conceptions of history, society, and the self to articulate personal experience, but also the creative redeployment and reconfiguration of Communist discourse. Through a focus on two sets of binary neologisms as they occur in the narrative identities of Gejiu retirees: “cadre” / “worker” and “politics” / “economy,” chapter five exposes to view an interpretive space in which Gejiu retirees take up terminology and stock narratives of Communist discourse as meaningful determinants of social identification and of lived experience. Like the architectural remnants of the last sixty years—the urban layout and

⁴⁸ Ricoeur 1984-88: 3:246. Likening the person to a character in a story, Ricoeur (1992: 147-8) goes on to explain narrative identity as follows: “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.”

⁴⁹ Ricoeur 1984-88: 3:246-8.

⁵⁰ Ricoeur 1984-88: 3:247.

⁵¹ Ricoeur 1984-88: 3:246.

material form of work units, public parks, monuments, and government buildings—the presence of Communist discourse in their speech reveals the powerful role the Party played in the past and continues to play in giving shape to lived reality. At the same time, chapter five shows that the ever-accumulating vocabulary and proliferating narratives of Communist discourse can be dissociated from their historical context, selectively recalled to perform intended or unintended explanatory tasks, and reassembled in varying combinations respective or irrespective of the time associated with their meaning. Unlike the personal testimonials that were proffered by the Party during various campaigns to facilitate ideological education, the narrative identities of Gejiu retirees produce not a singular, univocal past but a multiplicity of meanings that fracture the uniform space, the linear time, and the universal experience represented in official history. The narrative identities of retired cadres and workers thus give voice to diverse, alternative histories of the present in words and narratives first intended to universalize experience.

American Scholarship on China in the Mao and Reform Eras

In his highly influential book, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984), Paul Cohen argued that the field of late-imperial and modern Chinese history had been dominated by three main paradigms prior to the 1970s: the impact-response, modernization, and imperialism paradigms.⁵² In each,

⁵² See Paul Cohen 1984. According to Cohen, the scholarship of the first two paradigms examined changes (i.e. industrialization) that altered “traditional” Chinese culture and society and hence led to “progress,” whereas the scholarship of the third paradigm examined the negative impact of Western imperialism in China (i.e. economic stagnation), in other words, retardants to development

the West was held to be the agent of Chinese modernity. He then praised recent scholarship for adopting a “China-centered approach.” Though his critics commended this shift in focus, they also contended that the new American scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s was not in fact a radical departure from what came before, due to unexamined methodological practices and theoretical assumptions.⁵³ The idea of a homogenous, essentialist, and trans-historical Chinese culture; the acceptance of the universality of Western theories; and the imposition of modern, Western concepts onto the imperial past, not to mention the use of the nationalist construct “China” to speak of the imperium—ideas and practices like these persisted. Put somewhat differently, the Western-centric search for us in them remained a preoccupation of American historical writings.

American scholarship on contemporary China is no different. As I will show, social scientists have also adopted a Western-centric stance and consequently have demanded of China a historical trajectory that conforms to our own. Jonathan Spence’s *The Search for Modern China* (1999) epitomizes this scholarly practice. This widely read monograph pursues a search for modern China that begins in 1600 and is still underway in 1998, the cut-off date of the book. Spence selects 1972, the date of the resumption of U.S.-China relations, as the most recent turning point in Chinese history, whereas reformist leaders in China bestow that privilege on the Third Plenum of 1978, the date that Deng Xiaoping rose to power. The fifth and final part of book, titled “Re-entering the World,” begins with Nixon’s visit in 1972 and is devoted to the political and economic events of the last decades of the 20th century. Although attentive to the decisions of the Chinese leaders, Spence nonetheless maintains that for China to be modern, not to

⁵³ See Barlow 1993; de Pee 2007; Farquhar and Hevia 1993; Marks 1985.

mention a member of the world, it must become just like us, blessed with a democracy and a free market. No other kind of modernity will be acknowledged or will do. In the 1989 Tiananmen Incident and in the Party's encouragement of greater experimentation with a market economy, he sees signs of hope, even if future remains uncertain: "Would China stay in the world as a modern nation at last? Or would its rulers seek to perpetuate policies that would place China at odds with other developed nations?"⁵⁴

Communism, of course, is the main obstacle to Spence's search for modern China in the twentieth century. Like much of the scholarship on modern China, his analysis of contemporary Chinese history is under the sway of Cold War politics. Chinese studies, a field of area studies, was itself an outgrowth of the Cold War, the battle the United States and the Soviet Union fought over spheres of influence after the Second World War. At the outset, the Cold War not only abolished travel to Mainland China but also shaped the lens we brought to bear on our object of study. Unable to access the Mainland, anthropologists went to Taiwan in pursuit of first-hand knowledge. To study "traditional" Chinese culture, they converted space into time and consequently denied coevalness, a practice Johannes Fabian terms allochronism.⁵⁵ In other words, their obfuscation of the history of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan (1895-1945) and the forced submission of the local population to KMT rule by martial law (1949-1987) enabled them to represent Taiwanese culture as if it were the preserve of a primordial Chinese past. This depiction of the local, moreover, converged with the political goals of the Nationalist regime under Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang courted U.S. support in part by representing his domain as the

⁵⁴ Spence 1999: 593.

⁵⁵ Fabian 1983.

preserve of Chinese tradition, which he tried to effect through educational policies and cultural campaigns designed to eradicate Japanese and Taiwanese influence. American scholars and foreign investors in Taiwan furthered the KMT political agenda by projecting the image of a “Free China” as opposed to a “Red China.”⁵⁶

Social scientists concurrently fixed their sight on our adversary across the Formosa Strait, and up until the mid-1960s, they studied the People’s Republic of China at a distance through the distorted lens of the totalitarian model. The publication of Edward Hunter’s *Brainwashing in Red China* (1951) introduced into English the term “brainwashing” (*xiniao*), a derogatory colloquialism for *sixiang gaizao* (“thought reform” or “ideological remolding”), and substantiated the claim that totalitarian society was characterized by ideological indoctrination and social atomization. He did so by arguing that the Chinese possessed a “mysterious oriental device” for waging psychological warfare: brainwashing.⁵⁷ An American journalist stationed in Hong Kong, Hunter related accounts of indoctrination by defectors from the PRC, intensifying their force with a content analysis of examples of Communist propaganda. With fascination and horror, he surmised that the Chinese had made advances in controlling the brain and that tens of thousands of Mainlanders, of all ages and walks of life, had been brainwashed since the Communist victory in 1949. In the Western media, the term brainwashing was subsequently used to describe a practice universal to Communists.

The term brainwashing retains connotations associated with the supposed application of the technique to one quarter of humanity. It suggests a terrifying scale of

⁵⁶ See Allen Chun 1996; Murray and Hong 1991.

⁵⁷ Lifton 1969: 3-4. See also Schein 1961; Walder 1986: 2-3.

power, far-reaching in scope and in depth. Early studies of Communist China cultivated these associations by focusing on the “pervasive” and “penetrating” propaganda machine (or mass communication system) and the “comprehensive” and “psychological” methods of coercive persuasion. Studies of the former considered the political reform of Chinese intellectuals, while studies of the latter, undertaken by psychologists and psychiatrists, were part of the rehabilitation effort of American prisoners of war after the armistice in Korea. The understanding of Communist power was primarily informed by the particular experience of these two groups, which was in turn taken to be the general experience of the Chinese populace. It merits pointing out that the universally negative experience of American prisoners of war helped to fortify the conclusions of scholars who wrote about thought reform. The latter suggested that Chinese intellectuals suffered at the hands of the Party, a still common misperception that grants a false uniformity to this collectivity by overlooking the fact that many intellectuals supported and even joined the Party. Nonetheless, the unprecedented scale of the Communist re-education effort, a fact reiterated by many scholars, only fanned the flames of sensationalism.⁵⁸

Even as social scientists adopted different approaches to the study of modern China in the mid-1960s and 1970s,⁵⁹ they perpetuated dichotomizing discourses of exclusive binaries—East vs. West, backward vs. advanced, closed off vs. opened up, politics vs. economy, coercion vs. consent. The East as a reserve of timeless tradition set against the West as a force of relentless change, this old construction was again used.

Consider for example two prominent studies of this period: Franz Schurmann’s *Ideology*

⁵⁸ For example, see Theodore H. E. Chen 1960; Houn 1961; King 1966; Lifton 1969; Schein 1961; Frederick Yu 1964.

⁵⁹ For a review of this literature, see Perry 1994; Vivienne Shue 1988.

and Organization in Communist China (1968) and Richard Solomon's *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (1971). Taking an institutional approach, Schurmann looks at the creation and institution of Communist "structures of organization." He argues that organization characterizes a "new China" uprooted from tradition. Like the "ethos" of China's defunct "traditional social system," ideology, "a new phenomenon in China," is what holds together the new, complex structures of organization.⁶⁰ Adopting a behavioral approach, Solomon contends that the socialization process of a given society structures its political culture. And since the socialization process in China encourages dependency, Chinese political culture is shaped by this trait. A traditional ambivalence toward authority and an avoidance of conflict—the indices of this "dependency social orientation"—persist to the point of hindering the Communist effort to promote change.⁶¹ Although these two scholars differ as to the fate and force of Chinese tradition, each views the West as the agent of modernity: The one attributes complex social organization in non-European societies to the impact of the West, while the other attributes innovation and social change—which are credited with spawning the modern world—to the "independent" social orientation of Western psychology.⁶²

During these decades, three inter-related practices of American scholarship on contemporary China also came to the fore: the designation of 1949 as the divide between the traditional past and the modern present, the equation of Communism with modernity, and the opposition of Communism to Chinese tradition. The first of these three practices

⁶⁰ Schurmann 1968: lii-15.

⁶¹ Solomon 1971: xii-6.

⁶² See Schurmann 1968: 5-6; Solomon 1971: 1, 28-38, 521-4.

converges with the official historiography of the PRC by appointing 1949 as a marker of progress, a departure from the old and an embrace of the new. What is most significant about this practice, however, is the retention of a prefigured, monolithic Chinese tradition that presumably endured across time and was only abolished by what we then feared: a confrontation with Communists. Since scholars now recognize the many commonalities that the KMT and the CCP share, the second practice is obsolete. Nonetheless, there is still a tendency to view the nationalist project of the CCP as the more traumatic break with the past, especially because Communist China is considered the wrong kind of modern nation in the eyes of the West—a nation politically backward, devoid of a civil society, and without liberal values. The last of these three practices, the opposition of Communism to Chinese tradition, works to represent the former as inauthentic and consequently as a political system that must be imposed by force.⁶³

In the 1980s, social scientists began to analyze state-society relations in contemporary China.⁶⁴ This shift in focus came about just as the new regime led by Deng Xiaoping spoke of “regulating the relation between state and society.”⁶⁵ To this end, the reformist leaders appraised the history of Party rule. They put forth their official assessment of Mao Zedong and of the Cultural Revolution in the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China”(1981). As Vivienne Shue perceptively argues, this document not only legitimized the use of phrases such as, “the cult of personality,” “the ultra-left feudal dictatorship,”

⁶³ For example, see Feuerwerker 1968b; Goldman 1967; C.T. Hsia 1971.

⁶⁴ For a review of this literature, see Perry 1994; Vivienne Shue 1988.

⁶⁵ Vivienne Shue 1988: 11.

and “the unlimited expansion and abuse of state power,” to describe Maoism but also led to the resurgence of the totalitarian model in the American academy. She explains that the latter resulted because the Party’s “new framework in which the Mao era has been frozen...is none other than that of totalitarianism!”⁶⁶

This misinterpretation of the 1981 Resolution best illustrates how American scholars have misconstrued the rhetoric of the reformist leaders, have then used this misreading to unwittingly impede our understanding of China under Mao, and have consequently aided the ideological goals of the reformist leaders. The Resolution strove to distance the reformist leaders from “ultra leftism” *and* to connect the past and present effort of the Chinese Communist Party in promoting economic growth and national development, thereby securing its legitimacy. In contrast, Shue reads the Resolution as an admission by Party leaders of American presumptions about Communism. When the reformist leaders utter the artful ideological equation of “politics” with left ideology, American scholars hear “the Mao era,” an era of “totalitarianism,” a nation “closed off.” When the reformist leaders utter “economy” as opposed to politics, American scholars hear “the Deng era,” an era of capitalism, a nation “opened up.” Although these Western interpretations of PRC history differ from the Party’s, by ignoring political continuities and by discrediting socialist imaginaries,⁶⁷ they also help confirm the legitimizing contrast between the past and the present that the new regime propagates.

A sample of monographs, published in the 1980s and early 1990s, will serve to illustrate how the study of state-society relations in contemporary China not only again

⁶⁶ Vivienne Shue 1988: 4, 23-4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Dirlik and Meiner 1989.

depicted China under Mao as a totalitarian society but also depicted China under Deng as a period devoted to economy as opposed to politics. The important monographs of Chan, Madsen, and Unger; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden; Potter and Potter; and Helen Siu all offer readers a portrait of rural life during the Mao era.⁶⁸ In each, the Mao era exemplifies the heavy hand of authoritarian politics. The “structures of domination”⁶⁹ of the Communist state (its organizational, political, and ideological means of control) determine social life. A shared conclusion is reached: The state fully penetrated society.⁷⁰ The implied scale of state power—total and repressive—presumably explains why compliance or complicity are said to be the sole options of the state’s subjects. Put somewhat differently, the party-state is the agent of change, whereas society is merely reactive and hence the preserve of tradition. The socialism of the Mao era is moreover set against the revival of “Chinese tradition” in the reform era. These studies thereby suggest that Communism results in disruption and transformation, but only by means of violence, force, and alienation. It is a political order that effects only “surface changes,” having failed to imprint the “deep structures” of traditional Chinese culture.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Specifically: Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991; Potter and Potter 1990; Helen Siu 1989.

⁶⁹ Helen Siu 1989: 11.

⁷⁰ Some authors state this argument explicitly, whereas others imply it in the assertion that the Party eradicated traditional customs, beliefs, and/or institutions. Moreover, some authors proceed to contradict or retract this assertion at later time in their book.

⁷¹ Potter and Potter (1990): 256, 262. *Agents and Victims in South China* (1989) is an exception, in that Siu posits a discontinuity between the religious and economic practices of the traditional past and of the reform era. The latter are held to qualitatively differ in form and meaning from the former.

The diverse monographs of Vivienne Shue, Andrew Walder, and Mayfair Yang assess China under Deng in light of their understanding of China under Mao.⁷² In contrast to Yang, Shue and Walder offer interpretations of China under Mao that depart in part or in whole from the totalitarian model. Nonetheless all of these authors perceive timeless economic traditions to be in confrontation with Communism. Their association of tradition with economy, in other words, is opposed to politics. State-society relations in China under Deng in turn are determined by economic factors. Building on the work of G. William Skinner,⁷³ Shue contends that the cellular, honeycomb-like structure of the traditional peasant economy determines the nature of Chinese politics. Because this economic structure persisted over thirty years of socialism, state penetration was not as complete under Mao as has been assumed. Economic reform in China under Deng in the end will dismantle this cellular grid, resulting in an omnipresent state.⁷⁴ In contrast, Walder defines Communist political authority as a form of “neo-traditionalism.” In other words, traditional clientel relations shape authoritarian politics in the Mao and Deng eras. The Communist state operates through the provision of material incentives, the creation of vertical loyalty, and the cultivation of instrumental personal ties. In this modified cost-benefit approach, individuals are calculating, economic maximizers.⁷⁵ Although Yang,

⁷² Specifically: Vivienne Shue 1988; Walder 1986; Mayfair Yang 1988; Mayfair Yang 1989; Mayfair Yang 1994.

⁷³ Skinner explained the structure of Chinese history in terms of macro-regions and marketing systems. See Skinner 1985.

⁷⁴ See Vivienne Shue 1988: 2-3, 6-7, 47-8, 52-3, 70-1, 80-1, 117-21.

⁷⁵ See Walder 1986: xiii-v, 5-27, 246-51. Walder moreover opposes “traditional” Communist institutions to “modern” Western ones. The characteristics of the former are deference, dependence, and particularism, whereas the characteristics of the latter are contract, independence, and universalism.

following Michel Foucault, argues that power is productive, she too depicts Communist state power as repressive in the Mao era. The Cultural Revolution thus is an example of “social resistance against total state saturation.” She maintains that traditional forms of sociability, in particular the Chinese gift economy, re-emerge in the reform era. Unlike Walder, she moreover holds that the Chinese gift economy is an oppositional praxis that challenges state power (specifically the state redistributive economy). Said to be “remains of a pre-modern kinship- and locality-oriented social system,” this practice signals the rebirth “of a realm of social relations independent from state principles.”⁷⁶

Whether explicating state-society relations in the Mao or the Deng era, the scholarship above sets an ahistorical and essentialist “Chinese tradition” in opposition to a monolithic Chinese Communism. In the case of Walder, Chinese tradition even alters the form of Communist political authority. In almost all of these studies, moreover, the reification of structure denies human agency and mutes local interpretation. By locating economic rationality in institutions and practices that are of the past, the economy can become a sphere of social practice untouched by history. It can either transform or remain impregnable to what the Communism of the Mao era represents to us: politics. Disinvested of ideology, the economy seems to exist outside of politics. The reformist leaders under Deng contended exactly this in order to secure their rule and to promote their vision of national development. In making this argument, we unwittingly, and ironically, further the ideological goals of the post-Mao regime. As unfortunate, we

⁷⁶ Mayfair Yang 1994: 48, 172. See also Mayfair Yang 1988: 410-5; Mayfair Yang 1989: 49-52; Mayfair Yang 1994: 10, 15, 45, 48, 172-6.

obscure continuities in Chinese Communist discursive practice and social policy, allowing for the erroneous conclusion that contemporary China is a “post-socialist” state.

Fortunately, during the last two decades, American scholarship on contemporary China has begun to challenge the use of dichotomizing discourses of exclusive binaries, in part by pointing out how such discourses create exclusions and hence inequalities that facilitate domination.⁷⁷ To deconstruct essentialist, uniform, and frozen categories, such as Chinese tradition, avails a critical, interventionist stance that restores historicity. For example, scholars in frontier studies have recently rejected the sinicization thesis, precipitating a shift away from Han-centric models of state building and a questioning of China’s nationalist narrative of cultural unity, territorial sovereignty, and the inviolability of the legacy of the political boundaries of the Qing Empire.⁷⁸ Anthropological research on national minority populations in China have further exploded the received notion of a monolithic Chinese culture and national identity, while at the same time they have shown how the civilizing discourses and projects of the Chinese Communist Party have not only produced new national subjects but also provoked ethnic discontent and conflict.⁷⁹

Recent scholarship, in so doing, has begun to seriously examine the role of language, ideology, and representation in the constitution of social life. The trailblazing monograph series *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology* (1956-1983) contributed to this pursuit early on. During its run, Communist literature, art, and historiography were

⁷⁷ See Barlow 1993; Rofel 1999.

⁷⁸ See Crossley 1990; Duara 1995; Rawski 1996. Classic studies of the expansion of the Chinese imperial polity and the migration of Han agriculturalists into China’s frontiers emphasize the autochthonous and exclusive nature, and assimilative power of Chinese culture. This is known as the sinicization thesis.

⁷⁹ For example, see Gladney 1991; Harrell 1995; Mueggler 2001; Schein 2000.

equated by others with didacticism and disparaged for their role in regime legitimization. Propaganda of this sort was said to serve falsehoods. In contrast, *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology* analyzed the creation of a potent lexicon that expanded with every new national political campaign. By excavating the layers of Communist discourse, its authors revealed an evolving Communist worldview. In its wake, a growing body of work on Communist literature, art, and historiography has shed new light on Chinese modernity.⁸⁰ These studies tend to focus on one field of cultural production, either tracing out its transformation over time or exploring the politicization of culture.

Among the most interesting innovations in American scholarship on contemporary China are the theorization of subjectivity; the analysis of Communist discourse as a technology of state power; and the foregrounding of the role of meaning in shaping social reality.⁸¹ Anthropological monographs continue to offer valuable insights into the ways in which Communist political culture affects specific, local audiences and especially into the ways in which those local audiences interpret and respond to the state's dictates and desires. As she ponders the narratives of her research subjects, for example, Ann Anagnost poses the question, "Who is speaking here?"⁸² Focusing on the Land Reform trope of "venting bitterness" (*suku*), she argues that the spoken word of the speaking subject always derives from Communist discourse. And so she asks what it

⁸⁰ For example, see Andrews 1994; Xiaomei Chen 2002; Paul Clark 2008; Evans 1999; McDougall 1984; Xiaobing Tang 2000; Unger 1993; Wasserstrom and Tuohy 1993-96.

⁸¹ For example, see Anagnost 1994; Anagnost 1997; Evans 2008; Farquhar 2002; Harrell 1995; Hershatter 1993; Hershatter 2002; Carolyn L. Hsu 2007; Lee and Yang 2007; Rofel 1999; Liu Xin 2002; Zito and Barlow 1994.

⁸² Anagnost 1994: 257; Anagnost 1997: 28. See also Anagnost 1994; Anagnost 1997: 17-44.

means to engage in fieldwork in a place where ethnographic practice aspires to elude the ubiquitous presence of the state. Anagnost contends that, because narration dissolves the binary of “state” and “society,” the speaking subject cannot escape the state.

Notwithstanding these new directions, however, social-scientific studies have continued to proceed under the faulty assumption that it is possible to extricate the speaking subject from the state. In the late 1970s and 1980s, when Americans were still unable to conduct research in the PRC, a number of social scientists maintained that the absence of the watchful eye of the Chinese Communist Party was the methodological advantage of interviewing PRC emigrants in Hong Kong.⁸³ This epistemological claim was meant to bolster the objectivity of these “field” studies of Communist China. Context does shape speech acts. But the contention in discussion is based on a binary that opposes the “freedom” to speak “outside” China to the “constraint” on speech “inside” China, a premise that disregards narration and assumes that language is unrelated to power. Recent studies, conducted in China, likewise perpetuate the exclusive binary of “state” and “society,” now through the trope of domination and resistance—a dualistic opposition of “official” to “popular” historiography, of “official history” to “unofficial pasts,” and of “master narratives” to “post-Mao counternarratives.”⁸⁴

The strength of Anagnost’s argument lies in the recognition that speech acts, like other forms of social practice, bear the imprint of culture. We are not entirely free, for we are socially constituted, and hence we think, speak, and act within the parameters of our received traditions. Her attention to discursive practice also promotes an understanding of

⁸³ For example, see Chan, Madsen, and Unger 1984: 2-9; Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden 1991: xv; Parish and Whyte 1978: 344-51.

⁸⁴ For example, see Woei Lien Chong 2002; Unger 1993; Rubie S. Watson 1994.

identity as a rhetorical construction, although unfortunately impeded by her use of the word “internalization.” Her argument at the same time serves to illustrate a weakness of recent American scholarship on contemporary China: it still accepts as a given a radical divide between the Mao era and the post-Mao era. The speaking subjects of the Mao era have internalized Communist discourse, whereas the political subjects of the post-Mao era speak in terms provided by the Party but also create meanings of their own.⁸⁵ Put somewhat differently, our current investigation of post-Mao China seems to be giving a new form to an old binary: the self-regulatory ideologies of neo-liberalism lead us to perceive creative liberty during the post-Mao era as opposed to forced conformance during the Mao era. Whereas in fact, the Communist regime has always resorted to violence to suppress political opposition and has always relied on self-regulatory ideologies to discipline the populace.

The presence of the Party in the utterances of the subjects of Communist rule does not in fact cancel the agency of these subjects and never did. The recognition of this agency, however, requires that we abandon the tenacious dichotomizing discourses that have shaped our understanding of contemporary China for so long. This dissertation opens new perspectives on the Chinese neo-liberal present by recuperating its continuities with earlier periods in the socialist past of the People’s Republic of China, and by re-evaluating its apparent departures from that past. The continued power of the Chinese Communist Party, and its continued legitimization of this power by reference to the language and the achievements of past decades, also sustains the efforts of Gejiu retirees to give shape and meaning to their lives by means of the subject positions, the language,

⁸⁵ See Anagnost 1994: 258-9, 274-8.

and the historical narratives that the Party has made available to them. Even if these retirees disagree with current policy or disparage the present generation of officials, they discern in the background of today's politics the discursive continuity of a transcendent Party that confirms the contributions they made in the past, lends substance to their sense of self, and gives them hope that their better expectations may still be realized.

Chapter One. Historical Fiction: Inscribing the Local

Society pushed us onto the political stage. Whoever thought of indulging in Marxism previously? I hadn't even heard of it.
Mao Zedong¹

Asking how we have come to recognize ourselves as a society, Michel Foucault directs attention to the modes of objectification that have transformed individual selves into modern subjects, and rendered them objects of a new political rationality of governance. Among the modern technologies he examines are the modes of inquiry that now occupy the status of sciences. These modes of inquiry, he contends, have become the source of knowledge by which human beings understand themselves.² In China, the sciences found a place in institutions of learning and in the social imagination during the 1910s and 1920s, as a corollary of the subject position of the *zhishifenzi* (intellectual). Possessed of a universalizing knowledge that they acquired from the study of translated Western learning, the *zhishifenzi* converted this knowledge into power by claiming the authority to speak and to write on behalf of the Chinese nation.³ In pursuit of this task, these self-appointed saviors of China inserted themselves between external and internal others, such as the West and the East, the enlightened and the backward, the industrializing cities and the countryside. Ba Jin's novella *Sand Hog* (*Shading* [pron. shah-ding], 1933) and Wang Meiding's screenplay for *The Story of Tin City* (*Xicheng de gushi*, 1960) show how the

¹ "Talk on Questions of Philosophy" (August 18, 1964), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 220.

² Foucault 1982: 208; Foucault 1988a: 17-8; Foucault 1988b: 146, 153, 158, 160-2.

³ Barlow 1991: 209-14.

alien, universalizing discourse of the *zhishifenzi* was brought to bear on Gejiu, and how in time their imported words, their unfamiliar categories, and their stylized representations transformed the local perception of history. Through their scripts of self and society, a foreign discourse, with its distinct theoretical posture and emotional politics, became the historical Real, a source of self-knowledge and local identity, the definitive that surmounted the multitude of visions and valuations that inhabit the past and the present.

Both Ba Jin (1904-2005) and Wang Meiding (1922-1995) used the imported style of literary realism to create a vision of “objective reality” that was prescriptive rather than reflective. Neither Ba Jin nor Wang Meiding had grown up in Gejiu, and Ba Jin did not even visit the area until 1960, yet both took up the *shading* (sand hog) and other local particulars of the Gejiu mines to give material form and concrete meaning to the abstract Marxist concepts of exploitation and political oppression. By fixing a critical gaze on China’s underrepresented others, realist writers exceeded conventional literary representations of society in order to expose in full the concrete nature of social reality.⁴ In the perception of these two leftist intellectuals, the *shading* of Gejiu represented the afflictions of the body politic and the reasons for national underdevelopment. Although Wang Meiding’s socialist realism differed in certain formal and political aspects from Ba Jin’s critical realism, the two authors shared a redemptive, political goal: by the affective medium of the text, with its visceral local detail, they sought to incite their readers to engage and to transform the social world.

Both *Shading* and *The Story of Tin City* demonstrate, however, that the literary representation of objective reality yields only an objective reality of literary

⁴ Marston Anderson 1990: 26.

representation. Ba Jin deliberately omitted place-names from his novella, so that the local detail of his work would point to the universal condition of the exploited worker of the nation rather than to the specific condition of Gejiu miners. But after 1949, cadres involved in “culture work” (*wenhua gongzuo*) in Gejiu valued the novella for its depiction of specific, local historical conditions, and they claimed *Shading* as an evidentiary source, a preserve of local historical reality. The local prominence of the novella owed much to the national prominence of its author, for Ba Jin, who had long shared the revolutionary longings of the Chinese Communist Party, had become an eminent figure in the literary bureaucracy of the People’s Republic of China. If Ba Jin had used the mines of Gejiu to draw attention to the national destiny, cadres in Gejiu now used the national fame of its author to draw attention to the true universality of local historical conditions. Although other authors had used Gejiu as the background for their literary compositions, local cadres designated *Shading* as the model that literary and artistic workers in Gejiu should emulate in the service of Party politics. In 1988, the *Gejiu City Cultural Gazetteer* ascribed a prominent place to *Shading* in the literary history of Gejiu, and in the current effort at self-promotion the city upholds the novella as an artifact of “tin culture” (*xi wenhua*). Present and former cadres of the Gejiu Department of Culture talk about commissioning a bust of the author and imagine that their claim to Ba Jin may help open up Gejiu to the world. Their imagined bronze bust of Ba Jin, after all, would place Gejiu’s weight behind the bronze imprint of Ba Jin’s hand, cast on the door of the new National Museum of Culture in Beijing, a metaphor for the author’s leading role in “opening China’s great door of culture.” As the creation of a venerated national figure, in other words, *Shading* elevates the prestige of Gejiu, placing

it in greater proximity to the cultural center. The prestige of the author ensures that his fiction is real.

But even Ba Jin and Wang Meiding themselves believed in the truth of their fictional representations. Although Wang Meiding lived and worked in Gejiu when he wrote his screenplay for *The Story of Tin City*, he based an important part of his screenplay on Ba Jin's *Shading*. Ba Jin, in turn, realized the profound truth of his own novella when he saw Wang Meiding's film during a visit to Gejiu, his first and only visit, in March of 1960.⁵ Wang Meiding gradually convinced himself that he was "from Gejiu," because it was through his work on the fictional representation of Gejiu that he adopted the class standpoint of the proletariat and was reborn as a cadre. Ba Jin returned to his novella after his rehabilitation in 1978, with a long essay about *Shading* that demonstrated Deng Xiaoping's injunction to "seek truth from facts."⁶

The Encounter

In his 1932 preface to *Shading*,⁷ Ba Jin reflects on the conception of his novella. He had intended a work on the scale of Émile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), but "limitations of time and talent" forced him to abridge it. And yet, he writes, "I love it as much as my other work," for it contains, "my sympathy, my tears, my grief, my rage, my despair." He imagines that critics will condemn him for his neglect of light in favor of darkness, but he

⁵ See Ba Jin 1960a; Ba Jin 1960b; Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 23.

⁶ See Ba Jin 1980.

⁷ Ba Jin 1933: 269-70.

dismisses such criticism beforehand and instead blames his imaginary critics (and other unenlightened readers) for their failure to discern “the light and hope concealed beneath despair and melancholy.” Ba Jin uses the political conditions under which he wrote the novella to shift from his discussion of the novella as an expression of the author’s personal convictions to a discussion of the novella as a political vehicle for objectifying the reality that exists outside the text. The censorship, persecution, and murder of left-wing activists by the Nationalist Party will not intimidate him: “I will cry even louder in my search for the light.” He declines “to consider my own interests” or “deliberately to create a record of distorted facts.” Rather, his pen is compelled by hope: “I place a moribund system before the public, and I point at it so that the people will see it: ‘Here is a wound, here is blood, look!’” Ba Jin implores the reader to behold the scenes he has created and to believe in the reality of his fiction, so that China may be saved. His critical realism claims the social Real as its referent.

Like *Germinal*, *Shading* describes the grim toil and bleak daily life of miners. The protagonist is Wang Shengyi, a carpenter’s apprentice. In the novella, Wang travels from manorial fields along a river to the towering peaks and carved gullies of ore-rich mountains, from the hospitable to the uninhabitable, from the familiar to the foreign. With each step along the road, he proceeds on a journey of self-transformation. His trajectory begins at dusk by the river’s edge where he meets his lover, a servant in the manor. Wang tells her of his plan to work in the tin mines, where, in just three short years, he will earn enough to redeem her from bondage. With her consent, they bid farewell.

Only an implausible ignorance can explain this optimistic departure for Death City, a pseudonym in use so long that “miners have forgotten its real name.”⁸ With its strange customs, peculiar dress, unfamiliar expressions, and unaccustomed work, Death City is a foreign land to an outsider. Behold the alien sights along the streets: men in blue Chinese robes wearing felt hats and carrying weapons; raucous gambling dens; a woman whose lower body is entwined in the trailing tassels of her umbrella; and a black-faced child who points and shouts at the protagonist and his fellow recruits, “Look! *Shading*. Newly arrived *shading*!”⁹ The naïve recruits imagine that the unknown word must be an expression of welcome.

Along with the protagonist, the reader encounters one by one the signposts of the local, familiar to the inhabitants but each an exotic discovery to the outsider: In mining towns, water is scarce; if you use it to wash in the morning, don’t expect soup at meal time. The Tin Company is corrupt, and its agents cajole gullible recruits to borrow a pittance and then force them to repay it a hundred-fold. Miners lodge in a *lufang*, a chilly, windowless bunker where ten or more sleep off the day’s labor under old blankets on a floor covered with straw. Meals consist of a bowl of coarse rice and soup made of soybeans boiled with salt. A tin miner wears a two-sided hemp shoulder bag for hauling *huang*, a local term for ore. In one hand he holds a pickaxe, and in the other a small coal lamp. He enters the mine in a group of five, but the shackles on his ankles restrain his pace. The shafts are so narrow that he must crawl his way through the labyrinth of pitch-black tunnels to reach his post. The coal lamp emits a small globe of light by which he

⁸ Ba Jin 1933: 276.

⁹ Ba Jin 1933: 277.

digs. When his shoulder bag is full, he crawls back through the narrow shafts. Armed guards are cruel and pitiless, beating the disobedient and shooting fugitives. Tin miners offer prayers and incense to *Zhaoer zuzong*, their mythical ancestor, requesting his blessings and his protection from danger. These elements, which Wang gathers from the ground of experience, represent the life of a tin miner in Death City.

Just as the reader slowly gathers an understanding of the concept of exploitation from the concrete detail of the story, Wang Shengyi gradually comes to understand what it means to be a *shading*—the particular, local, embodied form of exploitation. Early in his experience, he senses that the term *shading* carries a slightly derogatory meaning. A few chapters later, he wonders, “In the eyes of the guards, do *shading* retain any trace of humanity?”¹⁰ Through practice, he and his fellow recruits pass through a process of becoming to actualize a state of being. Once a foreign term, *shading* now signifies a known reality: the wretched and intolerable existence of a tin miner. Whereas the reader learns about exploitation at a distance, the protagonist possesses an intimate experience of the represented reality that forces him to recognize that he *is* a *shading*. A co-worker screams out in rage against this imposed identification: “I don’t want to be a *shading* my whole life. If they want to get rich, they should dig the ore themselves! You suppose that I don’t know who earns the yearly thousands upon ten thousands of shiny silver dollars! Those dollars are covered in blood, our blood! I want to make them pay for this! My fist fears no man!”¹¹

¹⁰ Ba Jin 1933: 297.

¹¹ Ba Jin 1933: 304.

Whereas *Germinal* ends with a suppressed strike that nourishes the sprouts of a future victory, *Shading* ends on a dark note. Just when hatred sparks a desire to revolt, the mineshaft suddenly fills with water. As the water rises in the shaft, miners, young and old, beseech *Zhaoer zuzong* for mercy, calling out, “The virtuous will be virtuously rewarded!”¹² But their prayers are in vain. All perish. The tragedy passes, and the reviled system remains in place. Instead of suffering losses, the company profits; the guards receive their bonuses; and new *shading* replace the dead. Death City continues to flourish, as does the neighboring manor where Wang’s beloved prays to the gods for his safe return. The novella concludes with her death and with the narrator’s parting summation: “The days pass insipidly, without any marked change, continuing in this way up to the present and on into the future, changing only when everything will be overturned. That time will come, but when it does, she, her beloved, and all the countless bones of *shading* will already have decomposed in their graves.”¹³

By the overt political rhetoric of these final lines of the novella, Ba Jin affiliates himself not only with the critical realism of Zola, but also with the transformative vernacular fiction advocated by *zhishifenzi* during the New Culture Movement (1915-1919) and the May Fourth Movement (1919-1922). Yan Fu (1854-1921) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929), for example, argued that the high status accorded to fiction in the West indicated its importance as a progressive social force, and therefore urged the use of fiction to awaken the Chinese people.¹⁴ Yan Fu, who had translated Charles Darwin and

¹² Ba Jin 1933: 305.

¹³ Ba Jin 1933: 308.

¹⁴ See Marston Anderson 1990: 29.

Herbert Spencer into Chinese, contended that fiction aided Western countries in becoming “enlightened or civilized.”¹⁵ Liang Qichao insisted that in order “to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction.” He singled out fiction in this call for radical literary reform, because he believed that it was “capable of shaping the world as well as establishing and nurturing the various norms of society.”¹⁶ Chinese intellectuals rallied such unprecedented ideas under the banners of “science” and “democracy” in their assault on the social and moral bulwarks of “Chinese Tradition,” a notion they simultaneously invented, naturalized, and rejected.¹⁷ They named and attacked the “patriarchal family” and its subjugation of women, “feudal superstition” and its blind faith in false gods, “Confucianism” and its oppressive conformism, and so forth. Proponents of the New Culture Movement intended to transform Chinese culture by destroying its clay-footed icons, and thereby to establish the grounds for lasting political reform. In this context, Hu Shi (1891-1962) implored his fellow men of letters not to “imitate the ancestors,” and to write in the vernacular instead of the classical language, because “only vernacular fiction ... can be compared without shame to the world’s literary ‘first rank.’”¹⁸ The cultural agenda of these reformers was subsumed within the subsequent May Fourth Movement,¹⁹ famed for its insistence on Western scientific rationality and its radical rejection of the old in favor of the new.

¹⁵ Yan Fu quoted in Marston Anderson 1990: 29.

¹⁶ Liang Qichao 1996 (1902): 74, 78.

¹⁷ Barlow 1991: 212-3.

¹⁸ Hu Shi 1996 (1917): 125, 127.

¹⁹ See Schwarcz 1986.

The translation of theories of social evolution, such as those of Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, reoriented the sense of time and human history among Chinese intellectuals, who perceived their own place in a unilinear path of universal development and experienced a burgeoning, bracing sense of the new. Starting with the writings of Liang Qichao, *xin* (new) became one of the most deployed and evocative words of the modern period.²⁰ The new stood for a progressive modernity: a “new people” (*xinmin*) that would build a powerful nation, a “new literature” (*xin wenxue*) written in an accessible vernacular, a “new culture” (*xin wenhua*) created by bold activists such as Mao Zedong. *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) and *New Tide* (*Xin chao*) were the most prominent journals of the first quarter of the new century. And there was talk of a “new society” (*xin shehui*) and a “new epoch” (*xin shidai*) in the making.²¹ These new ideas and new ways of seeing required the adoption of dense clusters of new words that translated and interpreted foreign terms—such as “nation/race” (*minzu*), “struggle” (*douzhen*), “capitalist” (*zibenjia*), “contrast” (*duibi*), and “objectivity” (*keguan*)²²—as well as new modes of representation, such as “realism” (*xieshi zhuyi*).²³ Through the fluid, fluent brushes of Chinese intellectuals, these new ideas flowed rapidly into China and into the Chinese language, resulting in what Lydia Liu has called China’s “translated modernity.”²⁴

²⁰ Li Chi 1956: 12.

²¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee 1990: 110-1.

²² See Lydia H. Liu 1995: 284-98.

²³ The neologism *xieshi zhuyi* (realism) was later replaced by *xianshi zhuyi* (realism). See Marston Anderson 1990: 28.

²⁴ Lydia H. Liu 1995: xviii.

Along with his peers, Ba Jin was roused by the passionate words, the provocative ideas, and the innovating translations that charged the writings of the May Fourth period. He joined the literary revolution that was instigated by Chen Duxiu's (1879-1942) rejection of the "stale, ostentatious literature of the classics" and his praise for the "fresh, sincere literature of realism."²⁵ And Ba Jin familiarized himself with the Western literary and philosophical tradition by reading canonical works in translation as well as in the original. During a sojourn in France, in 1927, he devoted his time to reading late-nineteenth-century Russian literature and the *littérature engagée* of French authors, among whom he favored Émile Zola. Ba Jin distinguished himself from many leftist writers of his generation by maintaining a firm commitment to anarchism after the political fashion had shifted to Marxism during the late 1920s.²⁶ Although left-wing writers, most of whom lived in Shanghai, bitterly debated whether it was art or politics that should "inflect" the social,²⁷ they all agreed that realism was the style best suited to the revolutionary task of transforming China.

Left-wing writers associated realism with science and democracy, and found in it an objectivist epistemology, a materialist mode of perception, and an instrument of historical agency. Realist fiction objectifies and naturalizes the literary representation of reality by "the inclusion of apparently nonfunctional details that contribute descriptive richness to the work but seem to contribute nothing to its instructional purpose."²⁸

²⁵ Chen Duxiu quoted in Marston Anderson 1990: 27.

²⁶ See Lang 1967: 248.

²⁷ Barlow 1991: 211.

²⁸ Marston Anderson 1990: 16.

Culled from the author's observations in the world, these details fill out the setting and the plot, their mediation by the body (via the senses) lending credibility to the objective reality of the representation. The thematic fixation on the corporeal body and its corrupting agents—on “hunger, violence, disease, sexual desire, death”—imbues realist fiction with a palpable and seductive physicality.²⁹ Its “pure referentiality” appears to bridge the gap between the world and the word.³⁰ Mao Dun (1896-1981), indeed, argued that realism offered a method of “objective observation” (*keguan guancha*), a method that allowed an extensive portrait of society and the exposure of its ills.³¹ Mao Dun and other left-wing writers felt the physical immediacy of realist fiction so strongly that they called it “a literature of blood and tears.”³² The appeal of realism increased during the late 1920s, when Chen Duxiu promoted its acceptance within the Chinese Communist Party. Marxist writers, as a result, recast realist literature in a new political mold, first as “new realism” and then, after 1933, as “socialist realism.”³³

In their portrayals of violent backwardness and cruel exploitation the left-wing writers in Shanghai relied not only on their own observations in squalid urban neighborhoods, but also on the reports and photographs of folklorists and ethnographers who documented more distant internal others. Equipped with a new objectivist epistemology, Chinese intellectuals departed urban locales and cultural centers to observe

²⁹ Marston Anderson 1990: 17.

³⁰ Marston Anderson 1990: 9, 200-1.

³¹ See Marston Anderson: 31, 33, 36.

³² Marston Anderson 1990: 44.

³³ See Sylvia Chan 1983.

the denizens of the nation whom they hoped to portray and to enlighten. In 1919, Li Dazhao (1888-1927) began a movement of “going to the people” (*dao minjian qu*). He implored the educated to venture into the countryside and to instruct villagers, to wipe out superstition, and to unite with the “laboring masses as a single unit.”³⁴ As they went into the field, Chinese intellectuals pursued a kind of ethnographic inquiry. By their scientific, objective descriptions of the people they encountered—people whom previous generations of intellectuals had deemed beyond the pale of culture, and unworthy of description—they expanded the purview of the nation, using their ethnographic authority to bestow visibility on the disenfranchised. Their physical experience, being in space and seeing in time, authenticated their knowledge claims.

Despite their work to enlarge the modern nation and to create enlightened citizens, these ethnographers replicated an older cultural geography in which the urban center was both superior in civilization and advanced in time.³⁵ In their travels they therefore descended both into the depths of the national imaginary and against the current of power/knowledge, in a condescending movement that identified them as *zhishifenzi*, subjects conversant with modernity. As space correlated to time, their travels from the urban centers led them through the successive stages of universal history, which confronted them in reverse order, from civilization to savagery. These anachronistic encounters they remitted in writing for the consumption of cultured urbanites. The primitive state of “the people” represented in these reports convinced educated city dwellers of the backwardness of the nation and inspired them to work for its invigoration.

³⁴ Chang-tai Hung 1985: 10.

³⁵ On the cultural geography of the Chinese empire, see de Pee 2007: 5-12.

Chinese ethnologists, for instance, considered the minority nationalities to be survivals from an earlier stage of social evolution,³⁶ but they praised the folk songs, historical legends, and proverbs of these peoples as expressions of a rural purity and genuine popular sentiment that could revitalize the national spirit.³⁷ The same cultural geography emerged also in international reports. Drawing on a 1935 field report for the League of Nations on the labor conditions in the Gejiu mines, for example, Nicol Smith writes of the high incidence of child labor (50 percent), slavish wages (three US cents a day), pervasive ailments (arsenic poisoning, trachoma, skin disease), and corruption.³⁸ He identifies these iniquities as the signs of a hoary barbarism:

You think this is the twentieth century, don't you? You think civilization has progressed; you think we are all getting some place, hey? Well, go to Gejiu and find out. How would you like to step into a section of the world where time has not only stood still, but has gone backward? Back beyond the Middle Ages and the Spanish Inquisition, back through the days of Kublai Khan and Genghis Khan, back through the days of the Roman Empire and its tortures, back through the days of Alexander the Great—and you'll find at Gejiu a horror such as those ancient days never saw. ... Go to Gejiu, and if you don't see what civilization can do by way of stream lining savagery, then, by God, write me and I'll know that they haven't let you see it.³⁹

Left-wing writers, however, did not depend entirely on ethnologists and folklorists for their ethnographic detail: Many writers went to the field themselves in search of local color. The 1930 platform of the League of Left-Wing Writers, for instance, encouraged its members to visit villages and factories in order to train local farmers and workers to become “worker-peasant reporters,” thereby advancing the

³⁶ On the development of the discipline of ethnology, see Guldin 1994.

³⁷ On the development of folklore as a field of study, see Chang-tai Hung 1985.

³⁸ See Nicol Smith 1940: 159-69.

³⁹ Nicol Smith 1940: 149. Cf. Snow 1981: 44.

revolutionary front of proletarian literature.⁴⁰ Their efforts would give a voice to the desires of a new collective subjectivity and help replace “the people” with “the masses.” Around this same time, writers of mass fiction such as Sha Ting and Ai Wu abandoned their formulaic style, and breathed life into fiction by introducing regional phrases and customs that they had observed in rural communities.⁴¹ Left-wing writers, in other words, participated in a more general intellectual practice. By means of realist literary techniques they created fictional worlds authenticated by an objectivist epistemology and ethnographic authority, populated by the internal others (especially peasants and workers) whom the Chinese Communist Party had identified as the future agents of revolution.

Although an anarchist rather than a communist, Ba Jin joined other left-wing writers in observing and representing the social reality of workers and peasants. After returning from France in 1928, he traveled to the northern cities of Beijing and Tianjin, and then headed south to visit the towns and villages of Guangdong and Fujian. “I did not go to see famous mountains and big rivers,” he wrote, “but to see the people.” In one village he even witnessed “class struggle” between the village head, of peasant stock, and the “local bullies and villainous gentry.”⁴² Part of the winter of 1931 he spent in a coal-mining town, conducting research for *Snow* (1934), a closer copy of Zola’s *Germinal*.⁴³

⁴⁰ Sylvia Chan 1983: 64-5.

⁴¹ See Marston Anderson 1990: 182-90.

⁴² Ba Jin quoted in Lang 1967:145; See also Nathan K. Mao 1978: 144-5.

⁴³ See Lang 1967: 248-50; Nathan K. Mao 1978: 26.

For *Shading*, however, Ba Jin relied on the fieldwork of a friend who supplied him with “richly detailed” data about the locality.⁴⁴

The ethnographic facts that Ba Jin acquired from his friend—the material background of the landscape and the characteristic phrases of the Gejiu mining industry—infuse *Shading* with life. The authenticity of the setting lends substance to the suffering body of the miner, endowing its blood and tears with the palpable physicality they require to make the body of the fictional *shading* into a site of social exposure and a critical locus of Ba Jin’s redemptive politics. By harnessing empirical details—the *shading* (the miner’s person), the *lufang* (the miner’s residence), and the *huang* (the miner’s burden)—Ba Jin creates the impression that his fictional novella references “the category of the Real,” a social reality outside and independent of the text. He appears “not to be applying its structures of meaning to the world, but to have discovered them there.”⁴⁵

The preface of *Shading* lays the groundwork of Ba Jin’s realist artifice by carving out discrete spheres of authorial presence and authorial absence. On the one hand, Ba Jin uses the realism of the miner’s body to establish his own presence in the world of the text. *Shading*, he writes, contains “my sympathy, my tears, my grief, my rage, my despair.” On the other hand, he asserts his absence from the world of the text by claiming for his novella an objective historicity that corrects the “record of distorted facts” produced by official historians. *Shading*, moreover, is not about Gejiu: its material authenticity lends substance and conviction to Ba Jin’s condemnation of a “moribund

⁴⁴ Ba Jin 1937: 272.

⁴⁵ Marston Anderson 1990: 16-7.

system” of exploitative labor and feudal superstition. Its specific reference to Gejiu is therefore inconsequential, and indeed early generations of readers did not know that Death City was created in the image of Gejiu. The *shading*, likewise, serves as a representation of universal exploitation and as a metaphor for national oppression by the trinity of capitalism, imperialism, and feudalism, rather than as a specific local self. The pain and suffering of the individual instantiate the pain and suffering of the nation, and the particular conditions of Gejiu represent the common social ills of China. Authentic detail lends conviction to Ba Jin’s complaint, but the effective exposure of national failings requires that the specific identity of Gejiu be erased.

In the preface to *Shading* Ba Jin also hails his own desired reader. Just as he eliminates himself from the text to create the illusion of an independent, three-dimensional world, he turns the reader into a viewer who looks upon the suffering body of the *shading*: “Here is a wound. Here is blood. Look!” And he taunts his reader with sarcasm and shame to recognize the universal conditions that have created their marks on this body: “But surely the intelligent reader will be able to recognize the wound-ridden corpse as the product of a reasonable system?”⁴⁶ By crying loudly in his “search for the light,” Ba Jin hopes to awaken his readers from their slumber and to incite them to collaborate in the transformation of China. The memory of the wounded *shading* and the vision of Death City—images both local and universal—will haunt these enlightened readers and inspire them to dedicate themselves to national advancement.

Different from the ethnographers, left-wing writers were committed to creating a synchronic space of historical experience, in which the local and the universal co-existed

⁴⁶ Ba Jin 1933: 270.

in “national-historical time.”⁴⁷ The creation of this synchronic national space required, not the collection of authentic local phrases and folk songs, but the application of a new, scientific vocabulary that exposed universal conditions of oppression and backwardness in the remote corners of rural China. By their mastery of this objective vocabulary, realist authors were able to turn two-dimensional words into three-dimensional worlds that demonstrated the inescapable truth of their socio-political theories: the “capitalist exploitation,” “class inequality,” and “feudal superstition” that shackled workers and peasants all across China, and the “enlightenment,” “progress,” and “revolution” that would overturn the old system and liberate the backward and the oppressed.⁴⁸

Objectification and naturalization empowered leftist writers not only to assimilate “the people” or “the masses” within a new national narration, but also to call into being the “new people,” the “new society,” and the “new epoch” of the nation.⁴⁹

Although critical realists and socialist realists shared a commitment to social exposure and national salvation, literary critics and other scholars in the West have often evaluated their efforts by different standards. Scholars have praised critical realists for possessing “humanistic aspirations” and “a concern with individual rights in the face of an increasingly monolithic society,”⁵⁰ and for having produced “a genuine literature of

⁴⁷ Bakhtin 1986: 21-5.

⁴⁸ The neologisms “progress” (*jinbu*), “liberation” (*jiefang*), and “revolution” (*geming*) are examples of “classical Chinese-character compounds that were used by the Japanese to translate modern European words and were reintroduced into modern Chinese.” (Lydia H. Liu 1995: 302.)

⁴⁹ Cf. Anagnost 1997: 25-6.

⁵⁰ Goldman 1967: 272.

protest.”⁵¹ By contrast, they have condemned socialist realists for having collaborated with “the Party’s attempt to control human feelings and individual thought”⁵² and with “the production of what appear to the bourgeois mind to be essentially propaganda and educational materials cast in the forms traditionally employed by literature: fiction, drama, and verse.”⁵³ The coincidence of the political convictions of critical realists with the tenets of Western liberal democracy occludes the historical particularity of the universalist aspirations of critical realist writers in Republican China. The rejection of socialist realist fiction as worthless propaganda, similarly, ignores that writers who took up the directives of the Chinese Communist Party supported the same modern, universalist platforms when they called for a national literature and art, first in the late 1930s and then again in the late 1950s. While readers of today may prefer the literary work of critical realists and welcome the demise of socialist realist literature during the 1980s, both forms of realism assumed the same ability of language to represent the Real, asserted the same disputable claim to universal truth, and possessed the same commitment to the political task of nation building.

The Transition

The foundation of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949 coincided with the creation of “New China,” a nation with a “new society,” a “new state,” a “new politics,” a

⁵¹ Boorman 1963: 16.

⁵² Goldman 1967: 272.

⁵³ Boorman 1963: 16.

“new economy,” and a “new culture.”⁵⁴ The new leaders of the country took up the daunting task of reconstruction—rebuilding a war-torn economy, repairing the broken infrastructure, and mobilizing the demoralized and impoverished populace—while redefining the terms of national membership. As Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong both planned the future course of the revolution and practiced “the art of government” by administering and disciplining the population.⁵⁵ In creating their new order, the Party and the state placed an uncommon importance on words. Mao declared in 1949 that the efficacy of Party rule depended on the establishment of a “common language.”⁵⁶ This common language, devised by the Party, determined the subject positions available to Party members and to citizens, and thereby determined the positions from which they could speak on behalf of History. By monopolizing language and the creation of subject positions, the Party usurped from the intellectuals the prerogative to represent the nation to itself.⁵⁷

Land Reform during the early 1950s reordered society along class lines, imposing on the entire populace the new language of self and of socio-historical conceptualization that had been developed in the “Red Areas” (*hong qu*, or *jiefangqu*, “liberated areas”) of wartime and that was now institutionalized in the form of the “class status system” (*chengfenzhi*). All across China, living individuals were made to occupy fixed, antithetical subject positions—“worker” (*gongren*) and “capitalist” (*zibenjia*), or

⁵⁴ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (January 1940): 2:340, 382.

⁵⁵ Mayfair Yang 1988: 409.

⁵⁶ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 13, 1949): 4:378.

⁵⁷ Barlow 1991: 215-6.

“peasant” (*nongmin*) and “landlord” (*dizhu*). The imposition of these state categories gave material form to the abstract Marxist concept of “class” (*jiejì*), hailing the classed subjects of Marxist theory in the flesh and placing the People’s Republic of China in universal history. The class status of an individual rigidly defined the self in relation to the ownership of the means of production, in accordance with Mao’s analysis of the classes in Chinese society. Even designations of class status that were not defined in relationship to the ownership of the means of production, such as “intellectual” and “revolutionary cadre,” still distinguished friends and enemies of the revolution—an antithetical pair of utmost importance.⁵⁸ The subject positions assigned during the 1950s defined each individual’s membership in the nation and formed the basis for the “blood and flesh relationship” (*xuerou guanxi*) between the Party and the populace.

Mao Zedong’s *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art* dictated the place of writers and artists in the new nation, as well as their role in the revolution. Given as a series of speeches in 1942, the *Yan’an Talks* became the official guideline for cultural policy of the PRC. The speeches did not simply stipulate permissible literary and artistic practice: Mao wrote them as directives of the Rectification Campaign of 1942-1945, as didactic devices for the enactment of political reform. Within the encompassing Marxist worldview of the speeches, Mao extricates literature and art from bourgeois assumptions such as “art for art’s sake” and exposes them as the tools and products of “definite classes.” Creative work, he explains, is ever inseparable from and “subordinate to politics.”⁵⁹ In order to serve the collective, a society under the dictatorship of the

⁵⁸ See Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 1926): 1:13-21.

⁵⁹ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:86.

proletariat, writers and artists must perform a unique feat of transforming themselves into their antithesis by changing “from one class to another.” This “long and even painful process of tempering” will enable them to “take the class stand of the proletariat and not that of the petty bourgeoisie,”⁶⁰ and to speak and write in “the rich, lively language of the masses.”⁶¹ The successful transformation of their interior class-consciousness depends on a prolonged confrontation with the exterior reality of the revolutionary classes, apprehended through the senses:

They must for a long period of time unreservedly and whole-heartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, go into the heat of struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyze all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work.⁶²

This naturalization of the acquisition of class-consciousness inverts the cultural geography of the 1920s and 1930s, and elides the theoretical lens of Party policy. By sending urban intellectuals “down” to learn from the masses and to uphold the masses as the wellspring of national and revolutionary culture, Mao deprives the intellectuals of authority and turns them into instruments of the mass line: from the masses, to the masses. By concentrating on the senses and the interiority of writers and artists, Mao directs attention away from the prescriptive categories created by the Party, and away from the forcible imposition of those categories on the intricate, diverse humanity, now divided into a few schematic classes. “Thought reform” (*sixiang gaozao*) aligns the self

⁶⁰ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:73, 77.

⁶¹ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:72.

⁶² Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:81-2.

with the dictates of the center, with the stand, spirit, and policy of the Party, but the center and the Party are misrecognized as the countryside and the proletariat.

After transforming their bourgeois selves through the assimilation of mass culture, urban intellectuals must dedicate themselves to transforming bourgeois literature and art, both Chinese and Western. The old literary and artistic forms must be “remolded and infused with new content.”⁶³ The new work should not only reflect lived reality but should “be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”⁶⁴ It should expose “the dark forces harming the masses of the people” and extol “the revolutionary struggles of the masses of the people.”⁶⁵ It should “awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment.”⁶⁶ Mao lastly called on writers and artists to be soldiers in a “cultural army,”⁶⁷ brave revolutionaries who would recast the national past in the language of the Party and naturalize Party discourse through speaking subjects.

It fell to Zhou Yang (1907-1989), Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee and Vice Minister of Culture, to expound the characteristics of the new socialist realist literature and art. At the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, in July of 1949, he heralded the *Yan'an Talks* as the dawn of “a truly new

⁶³ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:76, 81.

⁶⁴ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:78.

⁶⁵ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:91.

⁶⁶ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:82.

⁶⁷ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:69.

people's literature and art." Their grasp of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought gave writers and artists the "ability to independently observe, analyze, and synthesize life in all its manifestations, that is, the ability of artistic generalization."⁶⁸ By creating typical characters and typical circumstances revolutionary artists and writers would portray objective reality, the darkness of oppression and the light of the revolution clearly brought out by the use of positive and negative characters. But only at the Second National Congress of Writers and Artists, in September of 1953, did Zhou Yang endorse socialist realism by name.⁶⁹ By then, the Movement to Suppress Counter-Revolutionaries (1950-1952) had secured the power of the Party; state-owned enterprises had become the centerpieces of the national economy, and symbols of international pride; and the PRC began to approximate the image of its mentor, encouraged by the injunction, "Let's be modern and Soviet!" These accomplishments, he concluded, provided "a broad and real foundation for the development of a socialist realist literature and art."⁷⁰

The Re-Encounter

Born into an intellectual family in north China, Wang Meiding (1922-1995) entered Yunnan in 1949 as a soldier of the Second Field Division of the Fourth Corps of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In 1952, he was transferred to civilian rank to begin a new career as a writer affiliated with the Yunnan Federation of Literary and Art Circles

⁶⁸ Zhou Yang quoted in Fokkema 1965: 33, 36.

⁶⁹ See Fokkema 1965: 36-7.

⁷⁰ Zhou Yang quoted in Fokkema 1965: 39.

in Kunming. When the Yunnan Party Propaganda Department and the Yunnan Federation of Literary and Art Circles beseeched writers and artists, in early 1953, to “plunge into the thick of life,” Wang chose Gejiu as the place where he would develop his knowledge of new China.⁷¹ To refine his craft, he labored for two years alongside miners at the YTC Laochang Mine. In 1955, he held a joint appointment in the Yunnan Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Trade Union in Kunming. In September of 1959, he left Kunming once more to set up the Gejiu Federation of Literary and Art Circles, of which he became the resident director. Like many high-ranking officials, he was deposed and labeled a counter-revolutionary during the early years of the Cultural Revolution but was fully rehabilitated in 1979.⁷²

Like many other “cadres who went south” (*nanxia ganbu*) during the Civil War, Wang Meiding became a new man in Yunnan. Gejiu became the site of his rebirth, the place where he forsook his family origin, adopted the class-stand of the proletariat, and emerged as a cadre. In an autobiographical essay from 1984 he poignantly recalls his double birth, and the complicated relationship it created between place and identity. He remembers that he was once asked by a fellow train passenger about his place of origin, and that he emphatically responded, “I am from Gejiu!”—only to add the clarification, “I’m actually not from Gejiu.”⁷³ Since patrilineal blood and ancestral soil define the self as an extension of the Chinese family, Wang is bound as tightly to his birthplace as he is to his surname. His declaration, “I am from Gejiu!” can therefore be understood as an

⁷¹ Wang Meiding 1992: 45.

⁷² See Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 69; Wang Meiding 1984: 361; Wang Meiding 1992: 45-6; Wang Meiding 1997: 313-4.

⁷³ Wang Meiding 1984: 360.

assertion of another self: the cadre (*ganbu*) who sacrifices in the service of the Party and in the name of the people.

Just as Wang Meiding's double birth complicates his place of origin, it complicates the voice of his autobiographical writings. Although Wang's retrospective accounts of Gejiu during the early 1950s can be construed as autobiographical because they are told in the first person, he writes as a cadre, in the language of the Party. This language elides individual experience in favor of an objective account of History, informed by the objectivist epistemologies of Marxism and realist fiction. When Wang first visits Gejiu in 1950, soon after its liberation, the town appears to him as "a tiny mountain hamlet, a scene of pervasive devastation, with ruined and desolate muddy streets full of skeletal beggars." With a shock he realizes that he has seen these pitiable beings before: they are not beggars, but *shading*, the *shading* of Ba Jin's novella. The next time he visits Gejiu, in 1953, he finds the town changed: "The *shading* had become the masters of the mines."⁷⁴ Although the essay never extols the "I" of the bourgeois intellectual and consistently portrays the author as a model of self-sacrifice and service—a cadre who lifts his pen to write for the masses, not for himself—the essay points to this bifurcation of the author's self by incorporating the moment of Wang's transformation. As he writes elsewhere: "I realized that I would only be able to write outstanding work by becoming thoroughly familiar with the working class, by becoming one with them, and by learning from them."⁷⁵ The lessons of this transformation, however, he applies

⁷⁴ Wang Meiding 1984: 361.

⁷⁵ Wang Meiding 1992: 46.

retrospectively to his first impression of Gejiu, as he looks back with the eyes of a cadre to a town that he already recognizes as a local instantiation of Chinese Marxist history.

Wang Meiding wrote the screenplay for *The Story of Tin City* (1960) in April of 1958, under the auspices of the Gejiu Party Bureau. It earned the endorsement of the Changchun Film Studio, and received its final revision in September of 1958. By that time Gejiu was riding the high tide of the Great Leap Forward. Because cultural work units were urged “to launch literary and artistic satellites,” film production proceeded in haste. That same month, the Changchun Film Studio sent director Zhang Xinshi to Gejiu to shoot scenes of the movie on location, using locals as extras. Onsite footage nonetheless accounted for only a fraction of the final cut. On October 1, 1959, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the PRC, *The Story of Tin City* premiered at the Tin Capital Movie Theatre and at the Workers’ Cultural Palace, the two theatres in Gejiu.⁷⁶ In these dark auditoriums, masses of assembled miners faced a screen of brilliant, flickering electricity that brought Gejiu history to light. In the same city where he had adopted the class-stand of the proletariat, Wang Meiding represented the nation to itself.

The Story of Tin City is a fictional account of local history, from 1939 to 1959. In Wang Meiding’s own words, it “describes the life and struggle of Gejiu tin miners.”⁷⁷ The presumed objectivity of this historical fiction is rendered palpable by the material reality that confronts the filmgoer on the screen: The mountains crossed by the PLA on route to the mines, the dark and narrow pits in which *shading* toiled, the cement walls of

⁷⁶ See Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 20, 22, 71; Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 34, 1376; Wang Meiding 1960: 76; personal interviews.

⁷⁷ Wang Meiding 1960: n.p.

the shaft renamed “Victory Tunnel” (*Shengli keng*) after 1949, and the blazing river of molten ore at the YTC Number One Refinery—all capture a recognizable local landscape. The use of locals as extras likewise lends authenticity to the represented reality. Although Tin City is a fictive name, the city in the film is accurately situated on a narrow plateau wedged between two mountain ridges. Likewise, the fate of the fictive Gutoushan Mine that merges mid-movie with the Tin Corporation parallels the fate of the actual Gushan Mine.⁷⁸ Finally, the Tin Corporation depicted in the movie is itself a jointly owned, central government enterprise, just like the actual Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd. of the 1940s.⁷⁹

The Story of Tin of City centers on a protagonist named Pu Genqiang, and narrates his transformation from a *shading* into a *gongren* (worker). The first half of Pu’s journey of transformation parallels the course followed by Wang Shengyi, the protagonist of Ba Jin’s *Shading*. We first meet Pu, just as we first met Wang, at a moment when he is exchanging tender words with his beloved in a private moment of village life. Unlike Wang’s furtive meeting on the dark riverbank, Pu’s conversation takes place in broad, sweet daylight, after he has reunited with his beloved. His happiness about the present moment, however, elicits bitter recollections of his prior life as a miner. In a flashback, we learn of his father’s death in the mines, of his own conscription at age thirteen, of Tin Baron Chen’s greed and his cruel whip, of Gang Boss Liu’s ruthless punishment of sick and dying miners, and of the local terms and labor conditions that defined Pu’s existence as a miner. In hemp clothes and ankle shackles, he crawls through the narrow shafts,

⁷⁸ Both names share the Chinese characters, *gǔ* (“ancient”) and *shān* (“mountain”).

⁷⁹ For an overview of the administrative history of the YTC, see Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 54-87.

wiping away beads of perspiration with a “sweat scraper” (*guahan pian*) before loading his shoulder bag with “ore” (*huang*). In the evening, he retires to the *huofang* (“bunker”) to eat *laomama tang* (“old mother’s soup”), made from diluted, mashed soybeans. In the morning, he greets the wretched and intolerable life of a *shading*, known also as a *hong jiaogan* (“red leg”) and as *zouchang* (those who “go to the factory,” i.e., become tin miners).

Because Pu Genqiang, unlike Wang Shengyi, is the protagonist of a socialist realist text, he overcomes the exploitation of the gang bosses, as well as the backwardness of his native village.⁸⁰ Pu and his beloved both belong to the Yi nationality, and their modest love colors the screen with folk dances, songs of courtship, and musical performance by actors in ethnic garb—expressions of primitivity that at the same time make the film, in the words of my informants, “attractive” (*haokan*). The leadership of the CCP launched the Great Leap Forward, not only to “surpass England and catch up with the United States,” but also to accelerate socialist reform in regions populated by minority nationalities. Prior to 1958, the government had used a gradualist policy of national modernization, attempting to unite a country of diverse nationalities by appointing minorities to government offices while respecting their “special characteristics” and supporting cultural pluralism. During the Great Leap Forward, the government abandoned this gradualist approach and instead determined to advance and assimilate all minorities, so that the nationalities of China could all stand together on the

⁸⁰ In *Shading*, ethnicity is not a category of identity. The same is true of the commentary, “When I Was a Miner” (1934) and of the short story, “How is Tin Refined” (1937), by Li Qiao, a Yi writer who, in his youth, was a *shading*.

same stage of historical development, in a unified, contemporaneous socialist nation.⁸¹ When Wang Meiding was finishing his script in September of 1958, Gejiu became the capital of the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture, founded eight months earlier in nearby Mengzi, the previous prefectural capital.⁸² The autonomous prefecture represented a rejection of “local nationalism” and a joint commitment of the minority nationalities of Honghe to a higher, national authority.⁸³

The central narrative of *The Story of Tin City*, however, concerns Pu Genqiang’s transformation from a *shading* into a *gongren*. The screenplay tells of this transformation by situating Pu between two opposing characters, Lu Zhennan and Wan Zhong, who vie to shape his person. Although based on real individuals, both Lu and Wan are what Friedrich Engels called “typical characters.” “The truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances,” as advocated by Engels, had long been a mark of socialist realist literature and art.⁸⁴ In the late 1950s, socialist realism was recast as the “combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism,” designed to impart “truthfulness and revolutionary fervor.” In the words of Zhou Yang,

Many outstanding realistic works in the past are imbued with a spirit of fervent romanticism, while many outstanding romantic works often contain a rich vein of realism. In depicting life, our classical artists and writers seldom indulged in photographic, naturalistic representation of reality but devoted themselves to bringing out all the essence and the inner spirit of things. Their works are full of bold fantasy and imagination. Socialist literature and art must be rich in ideals and must to a high degree

⁸¹ Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994-97: 1:372, 377. See also Dreyer 1976: 139-71; Moseley 1973: 103-33.

⁸² See Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994-97: 1:74, 109, 112.

⁸³ Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994-97: 1:377. See also Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994-97: 1:73, 109, 112, 372-82.

⁸⁴ Arkush 1981: xxxiii.

combine truthfulness and revolutionary fervor. Revolutionary romanticism is what we need.⁸⁵

To achieve “truthfulness and revolutionary fervor”, the world of the text was simplified, middle characters were eliminated, and formulaic portraits of good and evil monopolized the spotlight.⁸⁶

In *The Story of Tin City*, Lu Zhennan is the oppressor and Wan Zhong is the savior. When first introduced, Lu Zhennan is a comprador, hired by a Hong Kong firm whose business deal with Tin Baron Chen, the owner of Gutoushan Mine, drives the ruthless exploitation of Pu Genqiang and his mates. In the latter half of the movie, Lu is the Director of the Tin Corporation, the new employer of Tin Baron Chen, Gang Boss Liu, and miners like Pu. As a “bureaucrat-capitalist” (*guanliao zibenjia*), he wears a Western suit, in an office decorated with nude paintings of foreign women. From here, he implements the management techniques of his class and orders the suppression of worker unrest. All this comes to an end in late 1949, when a strike forces him to concede to the demands of workers. The strike, which is the climax of the movie, is based on the strike against the *guapai* system, of December 1, 1949.⁸⁷ This lauded instance of mass activism moreover strongly implies that the character Lu Zhennan is modeled on Lu Miannan (1894-1971), the French-trained chemist who was the Assistant Director of the Yunnan

⁸⁵ Zhou Yang quoted in Laing 1988: 30.

⁸⁶ See Arkush 1981: xxxiii, xxxv.

⁸⁷ The *guapai* (“hang a placard”) system tightly regulated labor. Workers were to pick up a placard when their shift started and return it when the shift ended. Since the system demanded that workers return their placard at the start of the next shift, their own time on the shop floor was extended. To complicate matters, the allotted time for picking up and dropping off placards was so short that it was not uncommon for workers to assume their post without a placard in hand. If this happened, management refused to record their hours for the day, meaning their labor went unpaid.

Tin Corporation Ltd. in the late 1940s and who acted on behalf of the company to negotiate an end to the strike.⁸⁸ When the movie went into production, Lu Miannan had already been exposed as “the ringmaster of a capitalist clique” and condemned as a Rightist for his many crimes.⁸⁹ In the movie, as in contemporary politics, Lu is represented as an exemplar of evil who, in this case, is to blame for the bodily suffering and humiliating existence of *shading* such as Pu Genqiang.

Wan Zhong, in contrast, is a model of righteousness. He supplies the tools for the emancipation of Pu and hence his identity as a worker. In the first half of the movie, Wan earns the trust of Pu and becomes his mentor. He teaches Pu and a select group of miners about the real nature of their existence by means of a song:

How strange indeed! How very strange!
Moss springs up on the back of a snail,
A snail does not have feet, yet it can walk,
A tin baron does not work, yet he grows rich.

The boss is wealthy, it's plain to see,
He just picked another young flower,
In his mouth he chews *shading* flesh,
While his stomach swells with *shading* blood.⁹⁰

As a teacher, Wan is also a text, for his words and actions are to be read and emulated.

When Wan assumes the alias Liu Xin, in the second half of the movie, the informed viewer knows that he is modeled on Li Xin (1897-1929), a martyr of the revolution. In 1928, the CCP Committee of Southern Yunnan sent Li, a native of Yunnan and a

⁸⁸ Both names share the Chinese characters, *lǚ* (surname) and *nán* (“south”). See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1543-4; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 964-5, 1194-5; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui 1990: 217-9.

⁸⁹ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 220-5. See also Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1195; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 1544.

⁹⁰ Wang Meiding 1960: 16-7.

graduate of Beijing Agricultural University, to Gejiu to establish the CCP Special Branch Committee of the Gejiu Tin Mines. In order to organize the miners, he became a lathe worker at Ma Mine.⁹¹ Living and laboring alongside miners, Li cultivated their politics by explaining their afflictions in propaganda songs about exploitation and oppression. His best-known song, the twelve-stanza *Zouchang diao* (“The Song of a *zouchang*”) (1928), narrates the course of a year in which a young man becomes a tin miner. With every new stanza, a new month brings new misery, piling up exorbitant taxes, forcing the young man off the land, and sealing his fate with gambling debts. The last month inaugurates the rest of his life:

In the twelfth moon, the year draws to a close,
The thought of home gets harder and harder to bear,
The tin boss and the landlord are exactly the same,
The *shading*'s suffering is ineffable.⁹²

Like his namesake, Liu Xin enlightens his listeners as he transmits the Party's message. Under his guidance, Pu Genqiang assumes the role and fulfills the function of the positive hero in the movie. At this point, Pu has recovered from the shocking disclosure that Liu is a Communist organizer, and he is now deeply involved in underground Party activities. Frequent attendance at Party meetings disciplines his body and trains his mind to serve the Party and to fight for the political cause. Revolutionary songs, political pamphlets, and Party documents teach him to see and to explain the world in new terms, as demonstrated in this exchange between Pu, now a well-read student, and his mentor:

⁹¹ The Chinese characters of their given names are not identical but are homophones. See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1528-9; Gejiushi zonggong hui 1999: 167-8; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 1189-91.

⁹² Li She 1966 (1928): 52. For a draft of the song, see Shao Chunsheng 2000: 1-11.

Pu Genqiang: “The more I discern the enemy, the more I understand the workers. Only under the leadership of the Party will the laboring masses be able to obliterate the old world!”

Liu Xin: “Yes, struggle is the richest form of study.”⁹³

As a product of propaganda, Pu Genqiang is compelling not because he has renounced his identity as a *shading* in favor of a new identity as a *gongren* but because he has learned to perceive his own circumstances as a general condition of the laboring masses. His altruism is forged in an alliance with the Party, for “only under the leadership of the Party” will the collective find redemption. The promise of a better future propels him to organize the 1949 strike, to combat the KMT troops in the “War of Liberation,” and to fight American “devils” in the Korean War. When Pu at last returns home after ten years of service in the PLA, he is startled by what he sees: trains loaded with countless, gleaming tin ingots; workers’ dormitories with their own shower facilities; pressurized drills for mineral extraction; and electric trams for mineral transport inside and outside the mines. Tin City, pictured in the midst of the Great Leap Forward, is unbelievable. Overcome with awe, Pu is rebuffed by an old friend for his naivety: “For goodness’ sake, this is nothing. All the credit goes to the Party, to Chairman Mao, and to the people.”⁹⁴ In the final scene, Pu stands tall and proud as the Manager of Gutoushan Mine, a post assigned to him by Liu Xin, Director of the Tin Corporation. A song floods the theatre with a lyrical rendition of the political message of the movie:

The mountains of Tin City are so very tall,
They are aflutter with great red flags,
The Three Great Enemies are completely overthrown,
Miners will stand up straight forever more.

⁹³ Wang Meiding 1960: 52.

⁹⁴ Wang Meiding 1960: 73.

To eat rice one must first transplant seedlings,
 To refine tin one must first dig ore,
 Because miners have the Communist Party,
 They will be masters in their own house for generations!⁹⁵

Wielding his pen, Wang Meiding combines the conventions of socialist realism and Marxian historiography to insert Gejiu into the universal history of the nation. The physical setting of the film, the local phrases, the labor conditions, and the historical personages all create a sense of objective reality. Despite its apparent mimicry of life, however, *The Story of Tin City* offers a particular reading of reality that links local biography and national history. The transformation of Pu Genqiang from a *shading* into a *gongren* coincides with the transformation of the “old China” into the “new China.” In the figure of Liu Xin, Wang Meiding has extended the life of Li Xin from 1929 to 1949, so that the underground organizer can teach Pu Genqiang the language of the Party and provide him with weapons in time for the liberation of the mines by the People’s Liberation Army. The film offers concrete visual evidence of Mao Zedong’s triumphant declaration, on the eve of the Communist victory, that “The Chinese people have stood up!”—a declaration that unites all ethnicities into a collective body politic, while dividing the narrated time of the unified nation into time past (“the old society”) and time present (“the new society”).⁹⁶ Presumably, at the rupture of narrated time, on October 1, 1949, the prostrate peasants in their dark hovels unbent into the light, hunchbacked porters in the harbors threw down their burdens, and bowed factory workers seized the whip from their overseers—just as Pu Genqiang rose up from the dark tunnels of the Gutoushan

⁹⁵ Wang Meiding 1960: 74-5. The “Three Great Enemies” (*san da diren*) are feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism.

⁹⁶ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (September 21, 1949): 5:15. *Zhan* (“to stand up”) is the verb used in this sentence.

mine to take over the headquarters of the Tin Corporation, and exchanged his ethnic costume for a PLA uniform.

Wang Meiding's screenplay adopts many of the literary conventions developed during the previous decade to illustrate the bifurcated historical time of the nation. The socialist realist literature of the 1950s had created an extensive series of exclusive binaries, both material and metaphorical, to represent life in the old society and the new society—before liberation (*jiefang qian*) and after liberation (*jiefang hou*). The past is uniformly dark; the present is uniformly bright. The old society is dominated by exploiters and oppressors whose backward ideas and inhuman practices tether the exploited and the oppressed; the new society is led by noble leaders whose progressive ideas and beneficent practices compel socialist subjects to realize an ever brighter future. The old society of course counts an enlightened few—prophets or disciples of Communist thought—who are ahead of their time and see into the future. They build the bridge that the morrow's victors will cross on their way to forge the new society. Some of these texts are in fact themselves divided into discrete “pre-liberation” and “post-liberation” sections. Because each such section is significant only in relation to its antithesis, these works derive their full meaning from an implied act of comparison, the interpretive act of “contrasting the past with the present” (*jinxi duibi*). This dramatized historical and moral contrast supports the Party's claim to political legitimacy.

The transition from the old society to the new society in 1949 places the People's Republic of China in a wider context of world communism, and in a longer trajectory of Marxian history. Marxian theory first takes history to be national rather than imperial in character—as Chinese, German, Russian, or Italian—and then constructs the history of

the nation as universal, as it teaches that all nations (and nation-states) follow a unilinear and teleological trajectory of universal, social evolution. During the 1950s, archaeologists and historians debated the approximate dates of the early stages of Marxian history as they had occurred in the Chinese past—primitive communism, slave society, and feudal society—while the Party leadership deliberated about the precise shape of the more recent past—semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and the New Democratic society—as well as the projected dates of the future stages of classless society—socialism and communism. The dates of the recent and future stages shifted repeatedly, revealing that the “scientific, objective, and correct” Marxist history of the Chinese nation follows very closely the factional strife and changeable policies of the Chinese Communist Party.

The synopsis of *The Story of Tin City*, printed inside the cover of the published screenplay, offers both a summary of the story and an interpretation of its Marxist lessons:

This is a literary movie script that describes the life and the struggle of tin miners in Gejiu, Yunnan province.

The protagonist of the script, Pu Genqiang, is an Yi youth who was forced to work as a child laborer in the mines where he was subjected to inhuman persecution and exploitation by compradors and capitalists. Because of this, Pu Genqiang, from his youth onward, harbored deep class hatred toward the reactionary rule of the Nationalist Party. Owing to the influence of Communist Party member Wan Zhong, he held within his heart the sparks of the revolution. After more than twenty years of life as a miner, Pu Genqiang, as a result of his education by the Party, matures to become a resolute revolutionary soldier of the working class who uncompromisingly wages struggle against the enemy. At last, liberation is ushered in, and under the leadership of the Party he builds the new socialist mines.

The script follows Pu Genqiang’s maturation, penetratingly exposes the darkness of the old society, and sings the praise of the Party’s leadership and of the indomitable spirit of struggle and heroic disposition of the working class.⁹⁷

The history of Gejiu, in other words, is an instantiation of Chinese Marxist history. The director of the Tin Corporation, with his ties to Hong Kong, represents bureaucratic

⁹⁷ Wang Meiding 1960: n.p.

capitalism and imperialism, while the *shading* represent the victims of feudal oppression and exploitation. This setting offers a full complement of “The Three Great Enemies” (*san da diren*: feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism) that define China’s semi-colonial and semi-feudal past. At the end of the film, the miners in the lighted tunnel of Victory Shaft, upright and in protective gear, signal the firm dictatorship of the proletariat in China’s socialist stage of development. The screenplay further characterizes distinct historical periods by the contrastive nature of their respective classes—each given living form and meaning by concrete, historical individuals who are first made into classed subjects of Marxist theory and then portrayed as typical characters under typical circumstances. Lu Miannan becomes the vile Lu Zhennan who characterizes the darkness of the semi-colonial and semi-feudal past; Li Xin becomes the virtuous Wan Zhong who characterizes the enlightened and liberating impetus of the socialist present. And while not modeled on a specific historical personage, Pu Genqiang represents countless, unnamed miners, both living and dead. Unlike Wan Zhong who, as a Party member, is already one with the proletariat, Pu, as we first encounter him, has yet to grasp and occupy the subject position of the worker. Pu’s assumption of his proper classed identity not only gives Wang Meiding the opportunity to depict the antithetical states of self and nation as they are rewritten by the drama of proletarian revolution, but it also allows him to represent class struggle as a battle between good and evil. However admirable the deeds of its heroic individuals, however, the synopsis makes clear that the Party supplies the language and revolutionary agency of the masses, and that only the Party can save China.

The Story of Tin City tells its Marxist history of China not only through the local history and the local landscape of Gejiu, but also through the local figure of the *shading*. The indeterminate consciousness and generic character of Pu Genqiang make his body and his actions available as metaphors of the body politic. He crawls through the dark mines of the Republic, his body lacerated by feudal whips and threatened by capitalist guns. Guided by the Party, he learns to understand the structural causes of his individual misery, and to harness his anger in collective political action and armed resistance. At the moment of liberation, he rises up as a “soldier of the working class” under the leadership of the Party. After liberation, as a cadre and a hero of the revolution, he is “both red and expert,” a model of self-sacrifice and service. His belated return to Gejiu, after his participation in the Korean War, enhances the contrast between the grimy, violent mines before liberation and the clean, lighted tunnels of the new society, and invites the viewer of the film to see the present landscape anew, through the eyes of a former *shading*. As a member of the Yi nationality, moreover, Pu Genqiang foregoes the special needs of his ethnic self in order to advance the socialist goals of the nation, in accordance with the assimilationist policies of the late 1950s.⁹⁸ *The Story of Tin City*, in other words, stages Chinese Marxist history on the body of the *shading*, and tells the history of national transformation as biography, as the transformation of an individual self.

The intersection of biography and history, and the effectiveness of the *shading* as a metaphor of the body politic, hinges on the coincidence of the individual experience of *fanshen* (emancipation) with the national experience of *jiefang* (liberation). Although *The*

⁹⁸ In contrast, the Yi wife of Pu Genqiang, who also fought to realize the goals of the revolution and who, in the new society, becomes a tram driver in the mines, still displays her ethnic self. Her gender binds her to represent the traditional and backward past. On gender and internal colonialism in China, see Schein 1997; Schein 2000: 86-8.

Story of Tin City never uses the word, its tale is essentially a tale of *fanshen*. *Fanshen* means “to turn (the body) over,” both literally (e.g., in the course of sleep) and metaphorically (“to free oneself” or “to stand up”). “To turn over” is to cast off the chains of oppression and to be free at last. The word appears in powerful Communist phrases such as *fanshen zuo zhuren* (to stand up and to be master of one’s fate) and its corollary *dangjia zuozhu* (to be master in one’s own house, or: to be master of one’s own affairs or destiny). Successful emancipation of the body, however, requires emancipation of the mind. *Fanshen* was to be preceded by what my informants call “the transformation of thought” (*sixiang zhuanbian*)—once referred to as *fanxin* (to turn [the mind/heart] over), as in the saying: “In order to turn over the body, you first must turn over the mind/heart” (*Yu fanshen, di yi fanxin*).⁹⁹ *Fanshen*, in other words, is the mental and physical process by which the agent of proletarian revolution comes into class-consciousness, under the leadership of the Party.¹⁰⁰ In Gejiu, this takes the form of the transformation of the *shading* into the *gongren*.

The Party began emphasizing the relationship between individual emancipation and collective liberation already before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China. William Hinton’s study of Long Bow village, for example, chronicles the methods and rhetoric of “The Turn Over Movement” (*Fanshen yundong*), implemented during Land Reform in the Red Areas of northern China in the late 1940s. He vividly recounts how soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army stripped the landlords and rich peasants of their status and property, and how they subsequently distributed “the fruits of the struggle”—

⁹⁹ See Fangchun Li 2009.

¹⁰⁰ See Anagnost 1994; Anagnost 1997; Rofel 1999.

cash, land, livestock, farm implements, buildings, clothing, etc.—to the village poor who “turned over” as a result. The oral testimonies gathered by Hinton give expression to the persuasive power of the experience of *fanshen* and of the reforms it entailed. The wife of a hired laborer, for example, describes the transformations in her material conditions and general well-being:

In the old days I worked as a servant; I was busy every night until midnight, and I had to get up before dawn. Now I am very busy too, but now I work for myself. This is happy labor. No one oppresses me and the money that I earn is my own. My condition now is good. I’ve got a house, land to till, clothes to wear, and the right to speak. Who dared speak before? In the past when I served other families, even when they didn’t beat or curse me, still, if I committed some trifling error their eyebrows and their eyes met. It is hard to eat with another’s bowl. To live in one’s own house and eat out of one’s own bowl is the happiest life.¹⁰¹

During this same period, Communists in Gejiu organized underground mass societies, such as the “Workers Turn Over Society” (*Gongren fanshen hui*), to mobilize activists from the labor force.¹⁰² Later literary representations of *fanshen*, however, often manipulate the dates of *fanshen* and *jiefang* (liberation), to create the impression that they coincided, and that the Chinese nation had stood up as a unity, in October 1949.

By its convergence of *fanshen* with *jiefang*, the Chinese Communist Party blurs the boundary between self and nation and creates a double, self-reinforcing claim to political legitimacy. The individual experience of *fanshen* legitimizes Party rule in the life story of national subjects, just as the collective experience of *jiefang* legitimizes Party rule in the official history of the Chinese nation. It is this metonymical equation of the bodies of workers and peasants with the body politic that allows the nation to be narrated through biography and autobiography. Pu Genqiang’s transformation from the *shading*

¹⁰¹ Hinton 1966: 155-6.

¹⁰² See Gejiushi zonggong hui 1999: 169-70; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui 1990: 38-9, 178.

into the *gongren* illustrates Mao Zedong's famous declaration that "The Chinese people have stood up!" And it demonstrates that the Chinese working class has finally *dangjia zuozhu* (become the masters in their own house). As Wang Meiding himself observes in his autobiographical essay, "The *shading* had become the masters of the mines." The convergence of *fanshen* with *jiefang* objectifies the transformation of self and nation, but it does not naturalize it, for both require the active, heroic intercession of the Party. As Mao Zedong himself admitted (in the epigraph to this chapter), "Whoever thought of indulging in Marxism previously? I hadn't even heard of it." The *shading* Pu Genqiang is not the hero of *The Story of Tin City*: he is the medium for the narration of national history, the critical locus of political education, and the substitute for the viewer.

If Pu Genqiang's transformation from a *shading* into a *gongren* illustrates the main lessons of official history, his boundless gratitude to the Party and his enthusiastic admiration for its achievements offer the viewers a model for their behavior in the present. His selfless labor and sacrifice contrast, for example, with the assessment of the experience of *fanshen* in terms of the individual acquisition of material wealth. William Hinton describes several peasants in Long Bow who felt that they did not gain by the redistribution of goods either because their possessions prior to emancipation matched the common standard devised during Land Reform or because a fellow villager got the better pick of "the fruits of the struggle." These peasants mocked the Party's language by saying, "I have turned over an empty body" (*fan le yi ge kong shen*).¹⁰³ But Pu Genqiang submits himself to the achievement of national goals and to the realization of Communist ambitions. *The Story of Tin City* marshals the conventions of socialist realism and of

¹⁰³ William Hinton 1966: 150.

Marxian historiography to remind viewers that “The Communist Party is good” (*Gongchandang hao*), that the Party has forged a brilliant present infinitely preferable to the cruel past, and that they owe the Party their gratitude and their selfless labor. Under the strains of the final song of the film, they are to step into the world created by the Party and to carry out the slogan of the Great Leap Forward: “Go all out, aim high, and achieve greater, faster, better, and more economical results in building socialism.”

The Departure

During the 1910s and 1920s, Chinese writers turned the literary techniques of realism into instruments of political agency. Realism offered a new interpretive stance that objectified a social world that urban intellectuals were actively calling into being by means of a new universalizing vocabulary and translated socio-political theories. In *Shading* and *The Story of Tin City*, Ba Jin and Wang Meiding rely on ethnographic authority to assert the objectivity of a literary representation, making use of authentic material detail in order to inscribe the local into a universal space of historical experience. Both authors make the *shading* the focal point of their narrative and the medium of their political message. Local history and national destiny intersect at the suffering body of the miner, whose fate makes the abstracts concepts of modernity concrete and intelligible. Wang Meiding’s assimilation of many details from Ba Jin’s novella, however, shows that universal knowledge and literary authority determine local detail rather than the reverse. Despite their efforts to create an objective representation of

reality, Ba Jin and Wang Meiding demonstrate that realism yields only an objective reality of representation.

Yet this objective reality of representation possesses a creative agency that literary critics, social scientists, and historians have too often dismissed, and that I propose to recover as a powerful, historical element of socialist praxis. American scholars have criticized the division of Chinese history into an “old society” and a “new society,” and the designation of 1949 as a watershed date, as an arbitrary political device that obscures the “broad patterns” and “formal continuity” in “the Chinese past.”¹⁰⁴ They have discredited Chinese Communist historiography not only as a tool of Party legitimization but also for its perceived failure to create a meaningful past.¹⁰⁵ They have even rejected Communist subject positions, such as the peasant, as the constructions of a “culturally impotent” regime.¹⁰⁶ The legacy of Ba Jin’s *Shading*, however, proves the real, enduring power of his objectivist representation of Gejiu. Amplified by Wang Meiding’s screenplay, *Shading* became a literary model of historical fiction and created the representational ground for the social reality that literary and artistic workers in Gejiu would subsequently depict in the service of Party politics. *The Story of Tin City*, with its compelling images and stylized plot, showed successive generations of Gejiu residents their own history: first at its premiere in 1959, then in the context of class education during the late 1960s, and then again during the festivities surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the official establishment of Gejiu in 2001.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Cohen 2003: 131, 133. See also Paul Cohen 2003: 131-47.

¹⁰⁵ See Feuerwerker 1968b.

¹⁰⁶ Myron Cohen 1994: 152. See also Myron Cohen 1994.

Ba Jin and Wang Meiding themselves, moreover, were convinced of the truth of their representations. After being attacked in 1958 for the pessimism of the ending of *Shading*,¹⁰⁷ Ba Jin made a compensatory pilgrimage to the setting of the novella and published two essays to commemorate the occasion, “Remembering Gejiu” and “The Springtime of Gejiu.” Although Ba Jin had avoided using place-names in the novella in order to enhance the universality of its message, he now acknowledged that Gejiu was indeed the referent of Death City, and confirmed that his representation had been accurate:

In the novel I wrote in 1932, Gejiu was a lifeless and miserably dreary city. With my own eyes, I now see an endless, clear sky. Everything is permeated by sunshine. The streets are filled with inspiring slogans and touching murals. Everyone sings while at work. And everyone sings Great Leap Forward songs on their way to work. The gambling dens of the past, filled with ruckus and shouting, are no more; they have been replaced by the display of daily goods at the department store and by the supply of mental nourishment at the New China Bookstore. The *huofang* of the past, filled with sighs and moans, are no more; they have been replaced by the three-storied workers’ dormitory. The *shedong* (snake pits) of the past are no more; they have been replaced by spacious shafts and strip mines. The *shading* who carried an oil lamp on their head, stuck a sweat scraper to the side of their forehead, grasped a wooden stick in their hand, hung a double-sided ore-hauling bag over their shoulder, and dressed in hemp clothes are no more; now there are young and robust *gongren* (workers) who hold up their heads and throw out their chests. ... When I imagine the future of the Golden Lake and of Gejiu in five years, ten years, twenty years from now ... I just smile to myself. The future will indeed be glorious!¹⁰⁸

The miserable past that Ba Jin contrasts with the glorious present he derives from his visit to *The Exhibit on Miners’ Lives in the Past as Compared to the Present* and his attendance at a screening of *The Story of Tin City*—both of which were based in part on his own novella.¹⁰⁹ Even the miners he meets respond to his queries in the universalizing language of local experience that Ba Jin himself brought to Gejiu. One miner, for

¹⁰⁷ See Fokkema 1965: 217-20.

¹⁰⁸ Ba Jin 1960a: 329-30.

¹⁰⁹ See Ba Jin 1960a: 331; Ba Jin 1960b: 324-6.

example, sighed with emotion as he told Ba Jin, “Before liberation, I only knew that I was a *shading*, a red leg, who worked on a monthly basis; I had no idea at all that I was a *gongren* (worker).”¹¹⁰

Wang Meiding, likewise, revisited his early work in later years. To repay these miners and Gejiu “for having reared him over the years,” he planned to write a three-part novel, entitled *The Tin Miners*. The only part of the novel that he completed for publication, *Zouchang: A Tin Miner’s Tale* (1997), “describes the miserable life of tin miners in the old society and the early activities of the Party in the mines of Gejiu.” In the second part of this chronological narrative he had intended to relate “how miners join the Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guizhou Border Unit of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and carry out armed struggle,” and part three would have recounted “how after the liberation of Tin City, the working class, due to the spirit of being one’s own master, raise production, restore the economy, and struggle against hidden enemies.”¹¹¹ Wang Meiding’s son, Wang Yuning, who fulfilled his filial obligation by publishing *Zouchang*, confirms that his father had indeed captured the objective reality of the miners of Gejiu:

It is obvious that father drew on very deep feelings to write about the onerous labor and miserable life of tin miners. This, without doubt, will be of great educational value to tin miners today. In reading this book, they will behold their predecessors; they will see how their ancestors worked and lived, as well as how they awoke, rose up in revolt, and strived for liberation under the leadership of the Party.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ba Jin 1960b: 324.

¹¹¹ Wang Meiding 1997: 313-4.

¹¹² Wang Meiding 1997: 315.

Chapter Two. Fictionalized History: Local Inscription in the Factory Histories of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960)

When the people overthrew the rule of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, many were not clear as to which way China should head—towards capitalism or towards socialism. Facts have now provided the answer: Only socialism can save China.

Mao Zedong, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957)¹

The previous chapter analyzed Ba Jin’s novella, *Sand hog* (*Shading*, 1933), and Wang Meiding’s script for the feature film, *The Story of Tin City* (*Xicheng de gushi*, 1960), to illustrate how different varieties of the imported literary style of realism allowed new ways of writing the local. Despite their marked differences, both these works of fiction disseminated a new reading of history, proposing a vision of “objective reality” that was prescriptive rather than reflective. Conceived after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, *The Story of Tin City* moreover demonstrated a specific way in which the official history of Gejiu instantiated the history of the Chinese nation, as interpreted from a Marxist standpoint.

In the present chapter, the focus of the dissertation shifts from literature to historical writing. Similar to the “referential illusion” of realism, objective historical discourse depends, Roland Barthes argues, on “a radical censorship of the speech act” and hence on the erasure of the speaker. As a result, “history seems to tell itself.”² In this way, Chinese Marxist history presumes to relate objective truth rather than a subjective reading of reality by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The factory histories written

¹ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:394.

² Barthes 1986: 131-2, 135.

during the Great Leap Forward iterated the official historiography of the nation and the local through speaking subjects. Presented as compilations of spontaneous recollections of workers, factory histories authenticated the Party's narration of Chinese Marxist history by representing official history as individual memory, and thereby as undeniable, embodied truth. The interpenetration of Communist historiography and life writing thus extended the synecdochic relationship between the local and the nation to the individual. The laboring body of the worker represented the body politic.

Factory history was born of a “mass movement for literary and artistic production” (*qunzhongxing wenyi chuangzuo yundong*), a movement premised on the same theory of permanent revolution that informed the industrial and economic ambitions of the Great Leap Forward. Under the slogan “Let the working class write their own history with their own hands,” the movement wrested historiographical authority from “expert” (*zhuan*) writers to entrust it to “red” (*hong*) authors, that is, to workers and peasants.³ The superiority of this new approach to historical writing would be demonstrated not only by the accurate content of the factory histories, but also by the volume of its output. Like the unprecedented steel production and unparalleled harvests enabled by the Great Leap Forward, the historical writing spurred by the mass movement for literary and artistic production would surpass all imaginable quotas.

Created in a time when socialist construction consumed the attention and energy of the populace, the Chinese factory histories of the 1950s represented labor as a transformative process, both in the industrial process of writing and in the resulting historical narratives. Political education focused on the Marxian concept of labor rather

³ Xiao Yu 1958: 11.

than on the notion of work. Although the Great Leap Forward marked a departure from the Soviet model of socialist construction, the conditions of the People's Republic of China during the late 1950s bore a strong resemblance to those of the Soviet Union during the 1930s, and when a literary initiative in Tianjin urged the working class to write its own history, it cited Maxim Gorky's advocacy of factory history as a precedent. After the Tianjin initiative became a national model in July of 1958, enthusiasts from around the country exchanged experiences in literary journals and edited volumes, recounting their experiences in emulating the model, and rallying the national citizenry to follow their example. In accordance with Mao's theory of permanent revolution, moreover, these publications proved that the creation of Communist social relations and consciousness drove the development of the productive forces. In other words, the production of factory histories testified to the mental emancipations of workers. Overcoming false beliefs to take possession of their own socio-historical representation, workers across the country demonstrated the power of the slogan, "Do away with superstition, emancipate the mind" (*Pochu mixin, jiefang sixiang*).⁴ The national outpouring of writing therefore assisted in the demonstration of the heightened productivity and plenty of a nation at the gates of communism. Because writing generated a quantifiable, material output, it became the privileged mode of "speaking History" during the Great Leap Forward.⁵

The readers of factory histories, like their authors, were to acquire a proletarian, communist worldview and thereby become new communist individuals, both red and expert. This empowering combination would make readers into vehicles of national

⁴ For a history of this slogan, see Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 233-8.

⁵ Anagnost 1997: 18. See also Anagnost 1997: 17-44.

development who would advance production by leaps and bounds. All mass campaigns in the PRC have made available to all regions of the land the subject positions that can be assumed and that can speak on behalf of History at a given time, and thereby have created the political subjects that Chinese Marxist history demands, willing to work hard and to sacrifice for revolutionary progress. The Great Leap Forward and the mass movement for literary and artistic production are extreme instances of this.

In Gejiu, the national campaign to write factory history produced a pictorial exhibition on the history of Gejiu mining, with over 900 illustrations, and six historical compilations: *A Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine* (1959), *A Forty Five-Year History of the Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory* (1959), *A History of the Gejiu Refinery* (1959), *A Preliminary History of the Malage Mine* (1959), *A History of Gejiu Tin* (1959), and *Recollections of Tin Miners* (1959). Each of these works demonstrates the instantiation of Chinese Marxist history in the local circumstances of Gejiu, and in the figure of the *shading* (sand hog). The metonymical relationship between the bodies of Gejiu miners and the body politic, and the convergence of the individual experience of *fanshen* (turning over) with the national experience of *jiefang* (liberation), allows Chinese Marxist history to be narrated through life history. Whereas *The Story of Tin City* narrated national history as biography, factory histories narrate Chinese Marxist history as local history and as autobiography—as the lived and local experience of Gejiu tin miners. The recollection, by living individuals, of the transformation of a *shading* into a *gongren* (worker) authenticates Chinese Marxist history and the class subjects of Marxist theory, and mediates the reader's interpellation as a political subject.

“Go All Out, Aim High, and Achieve Greater, Faster, Better, and More Economical Results in Building Socialism”

In his speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,” delivered to the Supreme State Council in February of 1957, Mao Zedong refuted the position reached at the Eighth Party Congress of the CCP in September 1956. Under the direction of Liu Shaoqi, the Congress had declared that the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in China had been resolved; that the system of class exploitation had mostly been brought to an end; and that socialism in the main had been established.⁶ Mao, in contrast, asserted that “contradictions continue to exist in a socialist society.”⁷ He attributed these contradictions among the citizenry to “survivals of bourgeois ideology” and “certain bureaucratic ways.”⁸ “Class struggle is by no means over,” he argued, “Class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the ideological field will still be protracted and tortuous and at times even very sharp.” As a result, “the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not settled.”⁹

The speech revitalized Mao’s anti-bureaucratic drive, begun with the Hundred Flower policy in May of 1956, by pointing out a contradiction of political consequence: the contradiction “between the leadership and the led.”¹⁰ Mao’s insistence on the

⁶ See “Resolution of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Political Report of the Central Committee” (September 27, 1956), in *The Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Volume One: Documents 1956*: 115-6.

⁷ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:393.

⁸ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:393, 395.

⁹ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:409.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:386.

continued existence of contradictions not only initiated a theoretical departure from Soviet Marxism, but it expressed his practical reservation about the Soviet model of urban industrialization, bureaucratism, and centralized state-authority, a reservation that had grown stronger after Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in February of 1956. Whereas the Eighth Party Congress had reiterated the commitment to the Soviet model, Mao feared that this would further shift the balance of political favor from the masses to the experts. He opposed the strategy of Zhou Enlai, who had appealed to intellectuals with promises of better salaries and greater freedom in exchange for their aid during the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957).¹¹ By declaring a contradiction between the leadership and the led, Mao invited the people to judge and criticize their leaders.

The new anti-bureaucratic drive, the Rectification Campaign of April 1957, at first yielded the opposite of what Mao had intended. The citizenry responded with force to the encouragement to air criticism, but they denounced ill-educated workers and the Communist Party, instead of experts and bourgeois elements. In Gejiu, for example, managers and scientists at the Yunnan Tin Corporation (YTC) protested the shift of decision-making power from the well-educated factory manager to the peasant-based Party Committee—an event that my informants characterize by the phrase, “the Party is the first in command” (*dang shi diyiba shou*). The managers and scientists thus declared, “Laymen cannot lead experts!” Elsewhere, writers and artists advocated the depiction of “the true face of life” and called for the rejection of collectivism in favor of “individual liberation.” Socialist realism and the methods set forth in the *Yan'an Talks* of 1942 had, in their judgment, resulted in creative work of poor quality. The widespread discontent

¹¹ See Zhou Enlai 1956. The historical outline of this section is based on Meisner 1986.

led even to personal attacks on powerful Party officials, and to questions about the legitimacy of the Communist regime.¹²

In the end, however, these events strengthened Mao's position in the Party, as they justified a full-scale crackdown on the experts and officials, both within and outside the Party, who had answered Mao's call for criticism. Mao explained the tasks of this Anti-Rightist Campaign in the revised version of his speech, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," published in June. The speech distinguished "fragrant flowers" from "poisonous weeds" by pointing out that the "words and actions" of the former "unite," "consolidate," and "strengthen ... the socialist path and the leadership of the Party," whereas the latter "divide," "undermine," and "weaken" them.¹³ By setting the parameters of permissible speech, the Party was able to designate its critics as the new enemy of the people. Such deviants from the left now bore the label of "Rightists." Because the majority of the critics belonged the intelligentsia, Mao could cite this as evidence that bourgeois ideology was indeed a source of contradictions in socialist society, and that experts should not be trusted. "Their politics were unreliable" (*Tamen de zhengzhi bu kekao*) in the words of an informant. He hence advocated vigilance in "waging the struggle in the ideological field."¹⁴

Socialist education was again the means to eradicate bourgeois ideology. At the start of 1957, cadres suffering from bureaucratism had been sent to live and labor

¹² Fokkema 1965: 135, 137. See also Fokkema 1965: 132-9.

¹³ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:412. On the publication and revision of "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," see Meisner 1986: 186, 192-3.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:410.

alongside the masses and thereby remold themselves—a physical removal from the city to the countryside that was matched by the discursive move of the new term *xiafang* (“to transfer downward”).¹⁵ In April of 1957, cadres who retained their posts learnt the meaning of labor through a new physical labor requirement, which demonstrated parity between the leaders and the led.¹⁶ In late 1957, Rightists likewise were sent down to factories and farms to undertake thought reform through labor. Along with others who had been swayed by bourgeois ideology, they were instructed to “shed their bourgeois world outlook and acquire the proletarian, communist worldview so that they can fully fit in with the needs of the new society and unite with the workers and peasants.”¹⁷

In January of 1958, Mao set forth the platform for a leap forward in socialist construction. When ratified in May, it enjoined the people to “Go all out, aim high, and achieve greater, faster, better, and more economical results in building socialism.”¹⁸ By re-conceiving the relation between the city and the countryside, between politics and economics, and between mental and manual labor, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) replaced the Soviet method of modernization with an indigenous strategy of national development. By this indigenous strategy, Mao challenged the interpretive monopoly of

¹⁵ See T. A. Hsia 1963: 20; Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:418.

¹⁶ T. A. Hsia 1963: 15-6, 21.

¹⁷ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:404.

¹⁸ Liu Shaoqi “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress” (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 422, 426. See also “Sixty Points on Working Methods: A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Center of the CCP” (February 19, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1970: 57-76; “Speech at the Supreme State Conference” (January 28, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 91-5. For a history of the slogan, “Go all out, aim high, and achieve greater, faster, better, and more economical results in building socialism,” see Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 180-94.

the Soviet Union and indicated the growing discord between China and its mentor. The Soviet model of urban industrialization had made the city the privileged site of investment in modern technology and heavy industry. The Great Leap Forward, however, promoted rural industrialization, to balance the urban industrial and the rural agricultural sectors. Although the countryside still bore the burden of generating capital for urban industry, it was now the emblem of national progress. The People's Communes, established in the summer of 1958; the labor-intensive rural enterprises, epitomized by the backyard furnaces that forged iron and steel around the clock; and the large-scale construction projects that changed the landscape, were all established as vehicles of growth and plenty, to inculcate the nationalist principle of "self-reliance" (*zili gengsheng*).¹⁹

The Great Leap Forward sprang from Mao's theory of permanent revolution. This theory advocated speed instead of the gradualist approach to development that the Soviet Union endorsed and that had characterized China's First Five-Year Plan. According to this theory, social evolution is characterized by contradiction and struggle, which thrust evolution forward by sudden leaps and bounds. Hence, "revolutions come one after another."²⁰ The 1958 slogan "Leap forward, leap forward, and again leap forward!"

¹⁹ On the concept of self-reliance, see Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 280-97.

²⁰ "Sixty Points on Working Methods: A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Center of the CCP" (February 19, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1970: 62. Mao denies any equivalence between his theory and Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Meisner (1986: 214) explains that Mao theorized the transition from socialism to communism, whereas Trotsky theorized the transition from bourgeois-democracy to socialism. Mao also did so irrespective of the international revolutionary context, which is central to Trotsky's understanding of the transition to socialism. See also "Sixty Points on Working Methods: A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Center of the CCP" (February 19, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1970: 62-3; "Speech at the Supreme State Conference" (January 28, 1958),

implies the qualitative change that this speed would accomplish. The Great Leap Forward was after all a “revolutionary” drive for socialist construction, devised to usher in Communism. Rallied to surpass England and catch up with America,²¹ YTC workers, for example, sweated a double shift at a single-shift salary in order to raise productivity to unprecedented heights. Even the size of the YTC workforce illustrated this new emphasis on a measurable, surpassing output (greater, faster, better, and more), as it doubled in size. Collective day-care centers and canteens, formed in the summer of 1958, freed housewives from domestic chores and allowed them to join the drive to do things that hadn’t been done before. In the provocative words of Mao Zedong, this “wave-like form of progress is the unity of opposites, deliberation and haste, the unity of opposites, toil and dreams.”²²

The theory of permanent revolution was likewise bolder and more productive. It departed from Marxist orthodoxy by inverting the relationship between the superstructure (politics) and the base (economy). Traditional Marxism taught that the superstructure was dependent on the base. But Mao now declared that “Ideology and politics are the commanders, the soul.”²³ The superstructure, in other words, spurred the development of the productive forces. The slogan “Politics takes command” (*Zhengzhi guashui*)

in Mao Zedong 1974a: 94; “Talks at the Chengtu Conference” (March 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 103, 107-8.

²¹ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 985-7.

²² “Talks at the Chengtu Conference” (March 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 106. See also “Speech at the Supreme State Conference” (January 28, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 93.

²³ “Sixty Points on Working Methods: A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Center of the CCP” (February 19, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1970: 64.

popularized this notion in the spring of 1958. The slogan referred not only to the Party's assumption of command after the events of 1956-1957, but also to the prioritization of correct ideology over technical expertise.²⁴ Ideology and politics were to propel the transition to communism, specifically by creating communist social relations and consciousness. The Great Leap Forward would demonstrate that "the subjective can create the objective." A voluntarist reinterpretation of the Marxist dictum "men make their own history,"²⁵ this stance necessitated the subordination of the individual to the collective for the sake of national fulfillment. In the words of Liu Shaoqi: "The broad masses of the working people have realized more fully that individual and immediate interests depend on and are bound up with collective and long-term interests and that the happiness of the individual lies in the realization of the lofty socialist ideals of all the people."²⁶

The slogan "Do away with superstition, emancipate the mind" proposed a practical approach to the voluntarist reversal of superstructure and base. Broadcast after the Second Session of the Eighth Party Congress in May of 1958, it paraphrased an injunction by Mao Zedong: "Encourage numerous petty intellectuals, workers, peasants, and old cadres to eradicate their sense of inferiority, cease belittling themselves, do away with superstition, and rouse their indomitable creative spirit of daring to think, daring to

²⁴ Schram 1973: 56-7.

²⁵ Meisner 1986: 215. The quotation by Karl Marx (1972 (1852): 1) is: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."

²⁶ Liu Shaoqi "Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress" (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 422.

speak, and daring to act.”²⁷ In other words, the slogan both incited the elevation of consciousness and roused the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses. Mental emancipation would transform individuals into “new communist men,” both red and expert, both “virtuous” (*de*) and “able” (*cai*). “Mental laborers” (*naoli laodongzhe*) would become red through physical labor and political study, while “manual laborers” (*tili laodongzhe*) would become expert through literacy and scientific training, each thereby embodying a unity of opposites. Being both a “technical revolution” and a “cultural revolution,” the Great Leap Forward would create new political subjects, ideally suited to the realization of socialist construction and hence the delivery of communism.²⁸

These new communist men lived in representation as never in life. In literature and art, they tirelessly conveyed the “heroic communist spirit of self-sacrifice.” “Their slogan is: ‘Hard work for a few years, happiness for a thousand.’”²⁹ At the center of a Great Leap Forward mural executed in Gejiu, five youths held a giant peach. In the background, a young man carried a hoe and his female companion swung a basket of fruit. Terraced rice fields faded into the distance. In the foreground gleamed the Gate of Heavenly Peace (in Beijing). The text stated: “Ascend the terraced fields into the clouds; Pluck the peaches of immortality of the Queen Mother of the West; Offer them to your

²⁷ Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 237.

²⁸ See Liu Shaoqi “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress” (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 427-8, 436-8; “Sixty Points on Working Methods: A Draft Resolution from the Office of the Center of the CCP” (February 19, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1970: 63-4, 72-4.

²⁹ Liu Shaoqi “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress” (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 422.

beloved Chairman Mao; Wish him happiness and longevity greater than the sky is vast.”³⁰ According to Mao, peasants and youth were “poor and blank” and therefore yearned to transform reality: “Poor people want change, want to do things, want revolution. A clean sheet of paper has no markings, so the newest and most beautiful words can be written on it.”³¹ The youthful peasants in this mural created a vision of beauty and bounty. The fruits of their labor proved not only their expertise but also the falsity of Rightist ideas, for everything surpassed former harvests in size and plentitude. For this, they have Chairman Mao to thank. By trading superstitions for new ideas, the red and expert peasant enabled in representation what the viewer could enable in reality: a communist society of limitless abundance, in which “everyone will be a mental laborer and at the same time a physical laborer; everyone can be a philosopher, scientist, writer, and artist.”³²

The Mass Literary and Artistic Production Movement

The Mass Literary and Artistic Production Movement exemplifies Mao’s faith in voluntarism and in all that new communist men could achieve. At the start of the Great Leap Forward, writers and artists were asked to lend a hand in the delivery of communism. Like farmers and factory workers, they too were to realize higher targets of

³⁰ Ba Jin 1960b: 324-5.

³¹ Mao Zedong quoted in Liu Shaoqi “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress” (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 437-8. See also “Speech at the Supreme State Conference” (January 28, 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 92.

³² Meisner 1986: 234. See also Marx and Engels 1976 (1845-46): 53.

production. The fruits of their labor, moreover, were to advance the leap forward in development by stimulating the working class. Swept up by the initial gust of campaign enthusiasm, Ba Jin, for example, promised to publish one novel, three short stories, and several translated works by the end of 1958.³³ Yet, by the spring of 1958 professional writers and artists, such as Ba Jin and Wang Meiding, were no longer the sole purveyors of culture. As in other fields, leadership was ceded to virtuous amateurs who were politically red. The sight of miners composing verse and poets mining ore was a sharp reminder that the devaluation of the intelligentsia was matched by the exaltation of amateur literature and art.³⁴ Worker-writers and peasant-painters confirmed that the laboring people, with a heightened consciousness and a firm will, could accomplish anything.

The Mass Literary and Artistic Production Movement began in earnest in April of 1958, with a national campaign to collect folksongs. Two months later, Zhou Yang, Deputy-Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Party Committee (CPC), celebrated the new folksongs as an expression of “the heroic determination of the working class and laboring people to transform the world and to conquer nature.”³⁵ With their “dominant theme” of labor, the new folksongs demonstrated that “Poetry has been integrated with work, while work has been integrated with poetry.” They moreover suggested that in the future, “The dividing line between folk singers and intellectual poets

³³ See Fokkema 1965: 202-21; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 276-88.

³⁴ Goldman 1967: 244.

³⁵ Zhou Yang 1958: 34.

will gradually disappear.”³⁶ In this manner, the folksongs bore out “the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism,” the Party’s new guideline for literature and art. Revolutionary realism represented concrete, realistic truth, and revolutionary romanticism represented abstract, heroic idealism. Like the combination of red and expert, this new unity of opposites gave expression to the era of socialist revolution, a time when dreams become reality.³⁷

Although the numerous, anonymous folksongs were collected, rewritten, and published by professionals and cadres in literary and artistic circles, their composition was attributed to workers and peasants.³⁸ The process was described as a “new method of collaboration between those who have the material of literature but lack the requisite skill [red], and those who have the skill but lack adequate understanding and material [expert].”³⁹ By adopting rhyme schemes and meters of classical Chinese poetry, the new folksongs moreover celebrated the national patrimony. But if traditional folk literature contained political criticism and laments about social ills, the new folksongs were empty of such content.⁴⁰ Consider, for example, one of the thousands of mining songs that YTC workers composed at this time and that Yunnan University faculty and students in the Department of History collected and rewrote:

Mine production marches ahead,

³⁶ Zhou Yang 1958: 36, 38.

³⁷ See “Talks at the Chengtu Conference” (March 1958), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 106, 123; Zhou Yang 1958: 35-6.

³⁸ See S.H. Chen 1960: 5-7; Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 66, 94.

³⁹ “Professional-Amateur Collaboration” 1958: 20.

⁴⁰ See S.H. Chen 1960: 5-7; Fokkema 1965: 202-5.

Aim high and make innovations,
In both production and thought, leap forward,
Thoroughly smash old habits of mind.

Listen resolutely to the Party,
Fear not immeasurable hardship,
Work to greatly build the nation,
No difficulty can surmount determination.⁴¹

As stated above, the obligation to produce “greater, faster, better, and more” applied to literary and artistic creation as well as to industrial and agricultural output. In Gejiu, therefore, 3,300 folksongs were composed in early 1958 at just one YTC factory alone. Yunnan University students heralded these folksongs, and all of the anonymous mining songs they had collected, as “the battle drums of production” and “the sprouts of Communist culture.”⁴² By mid-fall, the production of amateur literature and art skyrocketed all over China as a result of two significant developments in national literary and artistic policy: the mobilization of cultural work units in September to put forth “literary and artistic satellites,” and the endorsement of the mass culture movement by the Central Bureau of Culture in October. By November, peasants and workers across the country, rallied by local officials in the Bureau of Culture and in the Department of Propaganda, had generated an estimated 880 million creative works nationwide.⁴³

⁴¹ Li She 1966: 21. My translation of this folksong conveys content but captures neither the meter nor the rhyme scheme (the final Chinese character of the first, second, and fourth lines rhyme).

⁴² Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 283-4. The Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory is a work-unit of the Yunnan Tin Corporation.

⁴³ See Fokkema 1965: 209; Mei Huaxuan, Zhang Weiping, and Xiao Shen 2006: 285.

“Let the Working Class Write Their Own History with Their Own Hands”

An artifact of the Mass Literary and Artistic Production Movement, the national campaign to create factory histories demonstrates the application of the above literary and artistic policies to genres of historical writing. The Tianjin literary initiative to write factory history developed along with all other forms of amateur literature and art. In April, local reportage drew attention to the initiative. The designation of the Tianjin experience as a national model in July followed Zhou Yang’s identification of anonymous collective creation as a portent of communism. Other localities rallied to write factory history in November, when the Bureau of Culture and the Department of Propaganda urged the entire country to send “satellites soaring to the heavens” (*weixing shang tian*)—i.e., to raise output—and to produce signs of advancement such as mass culture. Yunnan University students in the Department of History departed for Gejiu at this time to assist in the local application of the Tianjin model. In addition, the campaign to write factory history proceeded under a specific concern with historiography. The 1958 directive “Stress the present, not the past” (*Hou jin bo gu*) steered historical research to previously neglected topics, in particular modern labor movements and the contemporary history of the working class. Under this campaign and this directive, the field of history was to leap forward.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Feuerwerker 1968b: 37-40; Xu Shiqian 1959 (October 8, 1958): 6-12.

The Tianjin Model

The *Tianjin Daily* editorial of April 28, 1958, “Describing the History of the Working Class,” announced that: “To write factory history is in reality to write the history of the working class, the history of the labor, life, struggle, and liberation of the working class.”⁴⁵ A commentary, “On ‘Describing the History of the Working Class,’” published two months later in the same newspaper, further pointed out that the practice of history had always been monopolized by one class: “The history of our China from antiquity to recent times was either written by ‘official historians’ of the feudal court or was penned by literati and lay historians.” Like amateur literature and art, factory history was to rectify this, for “now the masters of society—the working class, will write the history of their own class.”⁴⁶

The April 28 editorial cited Maxim Gorky’s 1931 advocacy of factory history in the Soviet Union, drawing on Gorky’s enduring status as a “great proletarian writer and founder of socialist literature” to rally support for the Tianjin literary initiative.⁴⁷ Despite the growing rift with the Soviet Union, old-guard Soviet writers and theoreticians were still venerated in 1958, and celebrated figures such Gorky legitimized the Marxist-Leninist tradition, even as the Communist Party of China undertook to alter this tradition to fit the country’s particular, independent needs.⁴⁸ The Vice-Director of the Propaganda

⁴⁵ *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 1.

⁴⁶ *Tianjin ribao* pinglunyun 1959 (June 20, 1958): 30.

⁴⁷ *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 1.

⁴⁸ Fokkema 1965: 223, 232-6, 247-8, 255.

Department of the Tianjin Party Committee and Chairman of the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Writers' Union, the professional writer Fang Ji, confirmed that in the spring of 1958 the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Writers' Union had bestowed approval on the budding effort to write factory history, and that it had done so with Gorky in mind. To help clarify the work ahead, it invited a group of cadres from local factories to a study session of pertinent essays by Gorky.⁴⁹ Gorky may have discovered factory history, Fang later explained, but China's working class and literary workers had inherited "this scientific literary style of collective creation"⁵⁰ and, by implication, would develop it in their own manner.

When Gorky proposed the writing of factory history, the Soviet state was pursuing the industrial goals of the First Five-Year Plan (1927-1931). Like grain farmers and steel workers, writers were being asked to lend a hand in the construction of socialist society. National transformation foremost depended on the "remaking" (*perekovka*) of individual selves into new Soviet men and women, just as in China during the late 1950s.⁵¹ Professional writers, whom Stalin had designated "the engineers of the human soul," possessed the means to accomplish this task.⁵² As editor-in-chief of *The History of Factories and Plants* (1932-1935), Gorky therefore relegated the explication of historical truth to literary writers. Politically reliable professional writers were to chronicle the history of Soviet production in order to highlight the contributions of the working class,

⁴⁹ See Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 13.

⁵⁰ Fang Ji 1959: 8.

⁵¹ See Katerina Clark 1978: 192; Ruder 1998: 2-3, 45-7, 145-50.

⁵² Ruder 1998: 44.

about which so little was known. The writers would however assume only a supportive role. Since “workers built the factories,” Gorky argued, “they should also write the history of factory construction—the history of their own labor.”⁵³

In a number of articles—translated in *New Harbor (Xingang)* in July of 1958 and in *Translation (Yi wen)* in November of 1958⁵⁴—Gorky prescribed how to write factory history. Working collectively, writers were to ground the text in a firm understanding of each individual industry; they were permitted to use a variety of genres such as journalistic prose, novellas, or memoirs; and in the end, they were to fuse the gathered data into a consistent, integrated, accessible, and compelling totality. A compulsory comparison of factory life and labor before and after the October Revolution occupied a central place in Gorky’s scheme.⁵⁵ His intentions were clear:

In order for the working class to understand the tremendous significance of their accomplishments and economic achievements, they must understand the past. They must understand that when they began to build the new country, its foundation was in very poor shape. Everything can be clarified in the context of comparison. In order to accurately evaluate the present, the past must therefore be understood. Presently, many people among us are completely ignorant about how hard and servile life was in the past. As a result, they are unable to accurately evaluate the present.⁵⁶

Foremost among the ignorant were Soviet youth: “Our youth never suffered the brutal oppression of the enemy classes characteristic of the past.”⁵⁷ Factory history

⁵³ Gorky 1959 (September 7, 1931): 5. My translations are based on Chinese translations of Gorky.

⁵⁴ *New Harbor* published the articles, “Factory History” and “On the Work of ‘Factory History’” and *Translation* published the articles “Work!” and “Workers Write the History of Their Own Factories.”

⁵⁵ See Gorky 1958a: 40-2; Gorky 1958b: 43-5; Gorky 1959 (April 1, 1932): 10-3, 15, 17; Gorky 1959 (September 7, 1931): 5-7.

⁵⁶ Gorky 1959 (September 7, 1931): 2-3.

⁵⁷ Gorky 1958a: 41.

would compensate for this missed experience by teaching “the tragic history of their fathers’ generation.”⁵⁸ The compilation of factory history, moreover, would rear a new generation of worker-writers. All this was in reach because, in Gorky’s words, “facts can educate people.”⁵⁹ Yet to fulfill this potential, the facts had to be conveyed in a way that was politically instructive.⁶⁰ Given their mastery of language and of literary convention, writers were the best placed to capture the old Russian and new Soviet society in comparative terms. By contrast, professional historians, hindered by their class biases, only excelled at distorting the past.⁶¹

As Zhou Yang praised the treatment of labor in folksongs, in June of 1958, the *Tianjin Daily* gave more space to reports on the literary efforts of local worker-writers. By July, this new, homegrown practice had attracted national attention. Issue 13 of the national *Journal of Literature and Art* (*Wenyi bao*) described the Tianjin initiative under a title in the bold calligraphy of Mao Zedong: “Let everyone write factory histories.” The journal had created this special issue in consultation with the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Writers’ Union and the editorial department of its literary monthly *New Harbor*, which had published a *Theme Issue on Factory Histories*. It also invited the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Writers’ Union to contribute an article that would introduce its endeavors to the readers. Issue 13 not only conferred model status on the Tianjin experience of writing factory history, but it also marshaled the nation to follow suit and

⁵⁸ Gorky 1959 (April 1, 1932): 10.

⁵⁹ Gorky 1958a: 42.

⁶⁰ See Yueka’er 1958 (July 1957): 51-2.

⁶¹ See Gorky 1959 (September 7, 1931): 6; Ruder 1998: 91, 95.

“launch this important weapon of the cultural revolution.”⁶² As these essays were reprinted in local journals and edited volumes, along with significant *Tianjin Daily* and *New Harbor* articles, their account of the history, creative process, and purpose of writing factory history became the official theory and method of this new literary practice.

According to these essays, the campaign to write factory history was initiated by workers but brought to fruition under the leadership of the Party. The transition from impetus to revolutionary agency, in other words, depended on the Party. During the Rectification Campaign (1957-58), several Tianjin factories organized workers to debate the topic, “For Whom Do We Labor?” As workers recalled what life was like in the past in comparison to the present, the Tianjin Textile Industry Party Committee determined that a pictorial exhibition on factory history would further advance socialist education. The Number Three Cotton Mill put it to test. And indeed: as old mill workers reflected aloud on the exhibition, several literate workers spontaneously began to record their poignant reminiscences. Caught up in the excitement, other workers asked that these stories be collected and made into plays, movies, and comics. When word of these events reached the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Writers’ Union, it sent four staff members of *New Harbor* to assess the situation. Shortly thereafter, the Tianjin branch proposed a campaign to write factory history, which the Tianjin Party Committee immediately endorsed.⁶³

⁶² Xiao Yu 1958: 11.

⁶³ See Chen Zhen 1959 (June 20, 1958): 32-4; Chung Ho 1959: 13; Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 12-20; Shi Quan 1958a: 18; *Tianjin ribao* pinglunyun 1959 (June 20, 1958): 31-3; *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 1, 4-5; Zhou Jiliang 1958: 12-4. The Socialist Education Movement was undertaken in response to the CPC Department of Propaganda initiatives issued in the summer of 1957.

Obstacles nonetheless arose. At first, workers at the Number Three Cotton Mill expressed hesitation about the campaign: “Writers write books; wait and have them do it.”⁶⁴ Yet as the workers reflected on the wealth of stories the exhibition had incited, they gradually realized that their knowledge of factory life and labor was extensive. One old worker, who was so engrossed in recalling the past that he forgot to eat, presumably said, “Three days and three nights wouldn’t be enough time for me to finish talking about the past.” In addition, the workers realized that their knowledge gave them greater authority to write factory history than any professional writer possessed. Yet how were they to write it? The Propaganda Department of the Number Three Cotton Mill gathered the old workers who had visited the exhibition, and “those who could speak spoke and those who could write wrote.”⁶⁵ To assist the workers, the department proposed creating a sub-committee of the Committee for the Compilation of Factory History to be comprised of old workers, amateur writers, Party cadres, and a handful of instructors, such as professional writers, university students, scientists, and professional historians.

The essays from *Tianjin Daily*, *New Harbor*, and *Journal of Literature and Art* divide the process of writing factory history into four stages: the gathering of relevant materials, the creation of an exhibition, the recounting and recording of oral histories, and the compilation of a book. That final product should pay “special attention to the accuracy of historical facts” and preserve “the language of the narrative event,” but it could assume many different forms.⁶⁶ “Scientifically compiled” from a variety of

⁶⁴ Zhou Jiliang 1958: 12.

⁶⁵ Zhou Jiliang 1958: 13.

⁶⁶ *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 4. See also Chen Zhen 1959 (June 20, 1958): 30-2; Chung Ho 1959: 14; Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 18-9; *Tianjin ribao*

sources (archives, historical documents, memoirs, exhibitions on factory history, and so forth), the final text could encompass one or more genres of writing, such as memoirs, feature articles, historical essays, Great Leap Forward songs, or novellas.

In contrast to the seamless chronologies of narrative history (objective historical discourse), factory history was to retain traces of the stylistic diversity of the writings it bound together. Even if assistants had transcribed and rewritten the words, readers should be able to “see the history of one factory through the experiences of numerous workers.”⁶⁷ Even if only one person wrote it all down, the final product remained a collective creation, a joint effort to preserve the authentic voice and lived experience of the proletariat. By participating, workers would “smash their various superstitions and their sense of inferiority in respect to literary writing.”⁶⁸ Their instructors, who had been sent down, at the same time would remold themselves. Like Gorky, these essays promised that a new generation of worker-writers would be forged in this way.

Proponents of factory history addressed young members of the workforce and youth as the primary readership, arguing that both groups were at a loss to understand the very meaning of “the working class, this great title.”⁶⁹ While these arguments echoed Gorky, they also acknowledged insights of Mao Zedong, who was already placing great emphasis on the revolutionary potential of youth. According to Mao, the young were in

pinglunyan 1959 (June 20, 1958): 31-3; *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 4-5; Shi Quan 1958a: 17; Xiao Yu 1958: 11-2; Zhou Jiliang 1958: 13-4.

⁶⁷ Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 19. Fang cites the *History of the Civil War in the U.S.S.R.* as an example of the former and the *People of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory*, a collective work in series *The History of Factories and Plants*, as an example of the latter.

⁶⁸ *Tianjin ribao* pinglunyan 1959 (June 20, 1958): 31.

⁶⁹ *Tianjin ribao* shelun 1959 (April 28, 1958): 3.

need of a proper political education, for “their lack of experience in political and social life” made them “unable to see the contrast between the old China and the new.”⁷⁰ By teaching about the life, labor, and struggle of the working class, factory history would remedy this shortcoming, granting youth wisdom and perception beyond their years.

To make factory history compelling and instructive, its proponents favored the “educative method” of contrasting the past with the present (*jinxī duìbǐ*). It was a method that the Party had used early on:

Right after liberation, it was called “contrasting the old life with the new” (*xinjiū shènghuò duìbǐ*). One could say that the writing of factory history is a continuation and elaboration of education through contrasting the old life with the new. Yet the content is richer today: in the past, the emphasis lay on the contrast in individual lives, but now we have added contrasts in political status, development of production, and labor conditions. Methods are also more varied: past methods emphasized informal discussions, but now we have added painting exhibitions, one-act plays, and most importantly, a wide variety of literary works that portray typical characters under typical circumstances, including feature articles, memoirs, etc.⁷¹

The comparative method was applicable to all media, the proponents argued. Done well, factory history would appeal not only to workers of various stripes but also to peasants, for working class history belonged to all laboring people.

The aim of factory history, in the end, was to “Do away with superstition, emancipate the mind,” first among the writers, then among the readers. Just as the worker-writers, depicted in these essays, overcame mental obstacles to take possession of their own socio-historical representation, the readers of factory history were to overcome mental obstacles and hence propel production at a speed so astonishing that “twenty years

⁷⁰ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 27, 1957): 5:414-5.

⁷¹ Xiao Yu 1958: 11.

are concentrated in a day” (*yi tian deng yu ershi nian*).⁷² According to Mao’s theory of permanent revolution, mental emancipation made the impossible possible and the unfeasible feasible, on every front of the Great Leap Forward. After the Hubei Commune harvested a record crop of 36,956 *jin* of early rice in August of 1958, its Director explained: “The only thing we fear is a lack of the power of imagination, since everything we can imagine, we can do.”⁷³ The industry of writing factory history and the resulting texts, in other words, were to hail communist subjectivities: new political subjects both red and expert. Shi Quan, a writer for the *Journal of Literature and Art*, therefore characterized factory history as the expression of “the mental emancipation of workers.”⁷⁴ This emancipation was accomplished both by the content and by the educative method of factory history:

Its concrete and vivid historical facts, and its contrast of the past with the present will raise the communist consciousness of the working class, will cause the working class to know who to love and who to hate, and will thereby transform the deplorable suffering of the past into the material strength to build the happiness of the present. Under the leadership of the Party, the working class will go all out, aim high and gain greater, faster, better, and more economical results in building socialism.⁷⁵

The campaign to write factory history had emerged from the educational efforts of the Rectification Campaign and become firmly allied with the goals of the Great Leap Forward.

⁷² This is another Great Leap Forward slogan. It is a quotation of Karl Marx, taken from a 9 April 1863 letter to Frederick Engels (Marx and Engels 1985: 41:468). For examples of its usage in Chinese sources, see “Beijing wenyi” 1958: 15; Liu Shaoqi “Report on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the Second Session of the Eighth National Congress” (May 5, 1958), in Bowie and Fairbank 1962: 424; Shi Quan 1958b: 6.

⁷³ Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 245.

⁷⁴ Shi Quan 1958b: 5.

⁷⁵ *Tianjin ribao* pinglunyuan 1959 (June 20, 1958): 33.

Exchanging Experiences

In November of 1958, the *Journal of Literature and Art* devoted another full issue to factory history. The lead article explained that, “Since this is new work, nobody has experience, and everybody has a different understanding.”⁷⁶ The journal proposed to tackle this problem by offering readers experiential accounts of the different ways in which other factories had met the challenge and produced a bona fide factory history. This would also demonstrate how the Tianjin model could accommodate local variation. A factory established after 1949, for example, could write an acceptable factory history by highlighting recent strides in development, as the Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory in Wuhan had done. The article also assured readers that factory history did not have to take the form of a memoir, and cited the historical monograph, *A Fifty-Year History of the Qinghe Woolen Mill*, as an example of an alternative form. Arguing that factory history fulfilled the goals of the Communist Education Campaign then underway across China, the article praised the factory history of the Number Five Cotton Mill in Tianjin for having provided workers with a “traditional revolutionary education,” an education that would “strengthen the class responsibility of workers and keep up the practice of hard work and plain living.”⁷⁷ This educative force of factory history was indispensable at a time when workers everywhere felt the pressure to meet targets and to surpass quotas. And factory histories offered not only an effective, but an efficient way to propel production, as writing such histories required little time. It took the workers at the Wuhan

⁷⁶ Shi Quan 1958b: 5.

⁷⁷ Shi Quan 1958b: 5.

Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory only a few weeks to execute a factory history, which subsequently incited them to surpass in one month the output of the previous eight months. This enabled them to raise the initial Great Leap Forward year-end production target from 65 machines to 130 machines.⁷⁸

And yet, for all its emphasis on local variation, this issue of the *Journal of Literature and Art*, validated the Tianjin model. The experiences at the Longyan Iron Mine in Hebei, the Qinghe Woolen Mill in Beijing, the Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory in Wuhan, and the Shijing Mountain Power Plant in Beijing replicated the model devised in Tianjin. The spontaneous expression of ideas and recollections by ill-educated workers did not result in significant local variation. This tautological (rather than dialectical) course of experience confirmed theory; experience did not circle back reflexively to cast theory anew. The model thus in effect precluded the possibility of diversity and instead established uniformity in words, experience, knowledge, and meaning. The accounts of local practice could therefore be read as expressions (*biaoxian*) of correct politics. Local implementation confirmed compliance with national dictates. Each application of the model limited local experience, circumscribed local knowledge, and prescribed local meaning, as local experience instantiated the Tianjin model.

To take one example, the account about the Shijing Mountain Power Plant begins by asserting that localities need not adhere to the Tianjin model, but this assertion is then negated by a lengthy recapitulation of the Plant's endeavor to write factory history. Although it began its efforts a year ahead of Tianjin, the Plant achieved success only after it took up the Tianjin model, specifically by creating an exhibition to rouse the masses

⁷⁸ See Hong Yang 1958: 8; Shi Quan 1958b: 5-7; Shi Ziming 1959 (1958): 47.

and by relying on Party leadership.⁷⁹ The account of the Shunmao Iron Works Factory in Chongqing, which was published in a local literary journal in 1958, suggests that the local reports in the *Journal of Literature and Art* in turn became models for writing about the local experience of executing a factory history. Like the account of the Shijing Mountain Power Plant, the report of the Shunmao Iron Works Factory centers on the abandonment of ineffective local methods in favor of the Tianjin model. The implementation subsequently yields almost identical results. The report describes, for instance, an old worker who was roused to recall prior conditions and said, “Three days and three nights wouldn’t be enough time for me to finish talking about the past.”⁸⁰

The inclusion of university students as collaborators in the writing of factory history, an important element in the accounts collected in the *Journal of Literature and Art*, became a standard practice in local applications of the model. The Wuhan Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory account, for example, noted the value of student participation and related how Wuhan University students helped to evoke and record workers’ recollections.⁸¹ The participation of students was the central focus of the account about the *Fifty-Year History of the Qinghe Woolen Mill*, as both the history and the account were written by history students from Beijing University. Since they had been rallied in late July “to go to the sites of productive labor and write the history of factories, mines, communes, businesses, schools, and army units along with the laboring people,” first-

⁷⁹ See Beida lishixi 56 ji 1 ban *Qinghe zhinichang wushi nian bianxie xiaozu* 1958: 12; Cao Zixi 1958: 13-5; Chen Jing 1959 (1958): 36-42; Hong Yang 1958: 7-9; Jiang Baiji 1958: 10; Shi Quan 1958b: 5-7; Zhi Ting 1958: 15.

⁸⁰ Chen Jing 1959 (1958): 41.

⁸¹ See Hong Yang 1958: 9.

and second-year undergraduate history majors at Beijing University had already undertaken several factory histories.⁸² The collective histories that resulted from these fieldtrips quickly earned them widespread fame, and selected chapters from these histories were published in the volume, *Write the History of Laboring People While Laboring* (1959), along with accounts of the students' experience of writing factory history.

Their participation in the campaign to write factory history placed students in unfamiliar working-class environs. The “four links” of educational reform (study, labor, scientific research, and thought reform) caused them to sweat during the daytime and forced them to write during whatever spare time they could find.⁸³ When Lu Dingyi, Director of the CPC Propaganda Department, had unveiled the new educational policy in his “Education Must Be Combined with Productive Labor,” an article published in *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*) on 1 July 1958, he had marshaled a range of quotations by Marx, Engels, and Lenin to validate its merits, while pointing out that Mao Zedong had been pushing for its implementation as early as 1934. Karl Marx's statement on education in *Capital* had provided the central quotation: “This education will, in the case of every child over a given age, combine productive labor with instruction and gymnastics, not only as one of the methods of adding to the efficiency of production, but as the only method of

⁸² Xu Shiqian 1959 (October 8, 1958): 6. See also Beida lishixi 56 ji 1 ban *Qinghe zhinichang wushi nian bianxie xiaozu* 1958: 11-2.

⁸³ See Beida lishixi 56 ji 1 ban *Qinghe zhinichang wushi nian bianxie xiaozu* 1958: 11; Beijing daxue lishixi 1959: “Bianzhe shuoming”: 1; Shi Quan 1958b: 6; Xu Shiqian 1959 (October 8, 1958): 16. For an overview of educational policy during the Great Leap Forward, see Pepper 1996: 259-301.

producing fully developed human beings.”⁸⁴ Lu had deployed this statement to refute “bourgeois pedagogues” (many now labeled Rightists), whom he chided for advocating “all-round development” while rearing only “know-alls.” Marxists, by contrast, raised “fully developed human beings.”⁸⁵ The new educational policy would further this. Spare-time factory schools would turn out worker-intellectuals, while full-time educational institutions would produce their complement: intellectual-workers.

Personal testimonies of thought reform, included in the experiential accounts by Beijing University history students, bore out Lu Dingyi’s central contention that “education must serve politics, must be combined with productive labor, and must be led by the Party.”⁸⁶ These personal testimonies at the same time confirmed the efficacy of the Tianjin model, in which political awakening obviated the conservative practices of “bourgeois historians” (many now labeled Rightists).⁸⁷ In their account about the compilation of *A Fifty-Year History of the Qinghe Woolen Mill*, for example, the students recollected that their greatest difficulty had been to overcome the abiding influence of “the divorce from reality and the divorce from the masses instituted by the bourgeois educational line.” To write factory history, they had to challenge their received knowledge of what history was and of how it should be written. Formerly trained to

⁸⁴ Lu Dingyi 1962 (July 1, 1958): 444.

⁸⁵ Lu Dingyi 1962 (July 1, 1958): 440, 444-5.

⁸⁶ Lu Dingyi 1962 (July 1, 1958): 446.

⁸⁷ For example, see Beida lishixi 56 ji 2 ban *Beida xueyunshi bianxie xiaozu* 1959: 46-7; Beida lishixi 56 ji 3 ban *Anyuanlu kuanggong yunshi bianxie xiaozu* 1959: 23, 25, 27-30; Beida lishixi 57 ji *Tiancun zai qianjin bianxie xiaozu* 1959: 31-3; Beijing daxue lishixi 57 ji xuesheng *Tian Qiao kejiu gongzuozu* 1959: 34-7, 39-42; *Menghu lian shi bianxie xiaozu* 1959: 48, 50-4.

elaborate “systematic generalizations heavily based on theoretical analysis,” they had to open themselves up to new genres such as popular literature. Thanks to the guidance of the Party, they gradually came to realize that, “Scientific research isn’t for the sake of scientific research, and writing factory history isn’t for the sake of writing factory history; rather both make use of the historical experience of workers for the sake of educating workers and ourselves.”⁸⁸ History, in other words, had to be written in a way that workers would find accessible, vivid, beneficial, and stimulating, just as the Tianjin model prescribed. The students also realized that if they had not lived and labored alongside the workers, “they would have treated us as guests, and what we wrote wouldn’t have been as profound. It would have lacked the thoughts and feelings of the working class.” As a result, they confirmed that “our historical work must serve production and politics.”⁸⁹ In the words of Xu Shiqian, the Party-Branch Secretary of the Beijing University History Department, they had learned, in sum, that when politics takes command the bourgeois line is abandoned.⁹⁰

Localizing the Model

Like their peers at Beijing University, the undergraduate history majors who departed Yunnan University for Gejiu in November of 1958 were resolved that “education must serve the politics of the working class” and that “education must be combined with

⁸⁸ Beida lishixi 56 ji 1 ban *Qinghe zhinichang wushi nian bianxie xiaozu* 1958: 11-2.

⁸⁹ Beida lishixi 56 ji 1 ban *Qinghe zhinichang wushi nian bianxie xiaozu* 1958: 12.

⁹⁰ See Xu Shiqian 1959 (October 8, 1958): 6-12.

productive labor.”⁹¹ To temper book learning with practical experience, they lived and labored alongside YTC workers. They assisted in the installation of a pictorial exhibition on the history of Gejiu mining, with over 900 illustrations, and rounded up some ten thousand people to visit the galleries. In addition, they compiled six factory histories under the direction of the Gejiu Party Propaganda Department: *A Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine* (1959), *A Forty Five-Year History of the Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory* (1959), *A History of the Gejiu Refinery* (1959), *A Preliminary History of the Malage Mine* (1959), *A History of Gejiu Tin* (1959), and *Recollections of Tin Miners* (1959). The first four of these books are institutional histories, *A History of Gejiu Tin* is a local history, and *Recollections of Tin Miners* is a two-volume anthology that offers a selection of more than 740 memoirs that were collected during the compilation of *A Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine*. All six were completed in two to three months. Unlike the histories edited by Beijing University students, however, these examples of collective writing were never formally published. Instead, they were distributed for internal use in the form of stenciled editions. They are less polished in style than the Beijing texts, and the narrative voice shifts along with the penmanship.⁹²

The experience in Gejiu—like the experiences in Beijing, Hebei, and Wuhan—demonstrated that the universal truth of Marxist history resolved in practice the paradoxes of the Tianjin model, a model that generated discoveries that were at the same time local,

⁹¹ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 287. The factories and mines that are the focus of the cited factory histories are the oldest and most prestigious of those owned and administered by the Yunnan Tin Corporation.

⁹² See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 33; Yunnan daxue lishixi and Laochang shixidui 1959: “Bianzhe de hua”: n.p.; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 287-8.

spontaneous, and uniform. Because feudal oppression and capitalist exploitation had presumably occurred everywhere in the same manner, in the tin mines of Gejiu as in the factories of Tianjin, local history necessarily instantiated the national past, and workers in different cities could spontaneously recollect identical experiences. The Party Secretary of the Laochang Mine, like the Party Secretary of the Wuhan Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory, launched the campaign by writing down his recollections of the past. Old workers in Gejiu quickly set to write their own, as had their colleagues in Wuhan.⁹³

Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory workers, for example, were so provoked by the local pictorial exhibition of mining history that they authored over 400 memoirs in just four days. At the Tianjin Number Three Cotton Mill a worker on sick leave had been cured by a visit to the mill's pictorial exhibition, and such physical wonders also occurred in Gejiu. Although running a 39° Celsius fever, the Party-Branch Secretary of District Eight of the "Victory Tunnel" recounted the history of the Laochang Mine unaffected, and worker Liu Guohong wrote a four-volume memoir, even though he was practically illiterate.⁹⁴ Like the Tianjin Number Five Cotton Mill workers who cried at the news that strikers had triumphed in 1946, after five failed attempts at justice, Gejiu workers welled with tears as they listened to worker Yang Peizhong recount how his life was transformed after 1949. Yang pledged that, "Chairman Mao saved me, a cripple more dead than alive." After hearing such stories a young worker in Tianjin said, "If you didn't suffer the bitterness of

⁹³ See Hong Yang 1958: 8; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 287-288. For the Party secretary of the Wuhan Heavy-Duty Machine Tool Factory's own account of these events, see Shi Ziming 1959 (1958): 45.

⁹⁴ See Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 20; *Tianjin ribao* pinglunyun 1959 (June 20, 1958): 31; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 287-8; Zhou Jiliang 1958: 12.

the past, how can you understand the sweetness of the present?"; after reading factory history a young worker in Gejiu observed, "If you don't know the bitterness of the past, how can you understand the sweetness of the present? From now on, I will certainly study hard, raise my political consciousness, and listen to the Party."⁹⁵ And just as communist education propelled production at the Tianjin Number Four Mill, feats of performance at the YTC, such as the increase of ore recovery from 80.6% to 89.8% at the Gejiu Ore Dressing Factory, testified that in Gejiu, too, "politics is in command."⁹⁶

Recollections of Tin Miners and *A History of Gejiu Tin* can serve as examples of factory history and its paradoxes. Like all factory histories, these two texts create their own authors and readers, and manifest a universal historical reality through the detail of local events. Their authors, presumably members of the working class, authenticate the Party's narration of Chinese Marxist history by representing official history as individual memory, and thereby as undeniable, embodied truth. The transformation of the *shading* (sand hog) into the *gongren* (worker) coincides with the transformation of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial Republic of China into the independent, new-democratic People's Republic of China. The convergence of emancipation (*fanshen*, "turning over") with liberation (*jiefang*) allows Chinese Marxist history to be narrated through life history. The lived experience of Gejiu miners, in this way, makes visible and intelligible the exploitation and oppression of the old society, the transformative power of revolution, and the working class as masters of the new society.

⁹⁵ Fang Ji 1959 (June 14, 1958): 14; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 288.

⁹⁶ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 288; Zhou Jiliang 1958: 12.

Recollections of Tin Miners magnifies the contrast between past and present by dividing local history into separate volumes. The first volume “exposes the ruthless exploitation of workers by capitalists in the old society,” depicting the “sorrowful life of workers” and their struggle to topple “the old system.” The second volume recounts how “the working class became the masters of the country after liberation” and how they “labored selflessly” to build socialism.⁹⁷ The life histories of former *shading* identify concrete, living individuals as class subjects of Marxist theory, and transport them through the stages of Chinese Marxist history. In these histories, former *shading* first represent their older recollections—the suffering caused by the Three Great Enemies: imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism⁹⁸—and then the more recent memory of “turning over” in time with national liberation, to become *gongren* who testify to the sweetness of the present. Illustrations of historical progress, these life histories instruct by contrasting the past with the present, not only in words, but in their implicit corporal choreography: the slouching, oppressed body of the *shading* becomes the upright, liberated body of the *gongren*.

“The Original Clapper Song of Li Youcai” is the best-known example of the memoirs bound together in *Recollections of Tin Miners*. After its publication in *Border Literature* (*Bianjiang wenxue*) in April of 1959, it achieved national recognition by its inclusion in the *Anthology of Writings on Factory History* (1959). It was also reprinted in the *Anthology of Yunnan Factory and Mine History* (1961).⁹⁹ If a former *shading* did

⁹⁷ Yunnan daxue lishixi and Laochang shixidui 1959: n.p.

⁹⁸ See footnote 95 in chapter one.

⁹⁹ See Fang Ji 1959: 9; Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 68; Shi Quan 1959: 6.

indeed author this memoir, its likeness to “The Clapper Song of Li Youcai” (1943) by Zhao Shuli (1905-1970) is a remarkable coincidence. Lauded as a masterpiece, Zhao’s novella was held up as a model application of the principles on literature and art that Mao Zedong had set forth in the *Yan’an Talks* of 1942.¹⁰⁰ Zhao’s remolding of a traditional genre into a new national form, his use of local dialect and colloquialisms, and his achievement of popular appeal made this work suitable for emulation in the 1950s. Although notable differences exist between the novella and the memoir (Zhao’s novella is artistically superior, propagates the role of the peasant association and the goals of Land Reform, and does not explicitly eulogize the Communist Party), their commonalities are nonetheless striking. In both texts, a songster named Li Youcai composes clever rhymes that interpret the true nature of reality from a Marxist standpoint. And in both texts, the traits, actions, and desires of the characters accord with the parts that Marxist theory prescribes to the different classes in revolutionary struggle.

In “The Original Clapper Song of Li Youcai,” the narrator switches between the first person singular and third person plural as he recounts the individual and collective experience of being a *shading* in the old society. Interspersed throughout the memoir are clapper songs, some of which adhere to the form and rhyme scheme of classical poetry.

The memoir begins with a portrait of tin miners:

How pitiful, how pitiful, how very pitiful,
Shading couldn’t be more pitiful.
 Entering the pits, they look like mice,
 Leaving the pits, they look like beggars.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Zhou Yang 1954 (1946): 138, 154-5. For a discussion of this novella, see Hilary Chung and McClellan 1996: 8-11.

¹⁰¹ Li Youcai 1961: 10.

Li then relates his own story: After the local landlord beat his parents to death, he found shelter in the Cui household. When he reached the age of ten, economic necessity drove him to join the unfortunate on their journey to the Gejiu tin mines. As he fled from one mine to another to toil in unchanging slavery, he came to know the insatiable avarice of the tin baron, the brutality of the taskmaster, and the varieties of oppression that flourish in the environment of the mines:

The abacus of oppression in the boss's hands,
 Allows him to exploit and to calculate.
 Just listen to its resonating beads,
 Counting the money earned by the *shading's* blood and sweat.¹⁰²

Having had enough of the private mines, Li entered the corporate labor force of the YTC, working first at the Niaoge Coal Mine and then at the Laochang Mine. At the Laochang Mine, he heard about the PLA. He participated in the workers' strike, and he rejoiced when the mines were "liberated" in 1949:

Awaiting stars, awaiting moonlight,
 Awaiting the savior, the Communist Party.
 The dark evening sky is illuminated,
 Chairman Mao's brilliance shines on Laochang.¹⁰³

Afterwards, "In the new society, we were our own masters. I then assumed the post of Section Chief. ... Under the tutelage of the Party, my consciousness was raised, and I joined the Communist Party that I so ardently love." He concludes:

The Communist Party plants trees of happiness,
 The flowers of happiness produce fruits of happiness.
 The flowers of happiness blossom everywhere under heaven,
 I, Youcai, will forever listen to the Party.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Li Youcai 1961: 22.

¹⁰³ Li Youcai 1961: 24.

¹⁰⁴ Li Youcai 1961: 24. The Niaoge Coal Mine and the Laochang Mine were part of the Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd.

Whereas *Recollections of Tin Miners* uses autobiography to narrate Chinese Marxist history, *A History of Gejiu Tin* uses an array of primary documents as well as oral histories of miners to tell the same Chinese Marxist history through local history. Covering a span of 494 years of industrial development (from 1465 to 1959), the macro-perspective of *A History of Gejiu Tin* reduces the individual even further to a theoretical abstraction. The juxtaposition, in its pages, of factual data and recollections of disparate miners demonstrates common trends and events. The shared experience of specific individuals and distinct localities in turn substantiates a universal historical reality and thereby acquires new meaning as incontrovertible proof of the collective history of the Chinese working class. As Gejiu miners pass through the stages of Chinese Marxist history, assume a new consciousness under tutelage of the Party, and become agents of historical progress, the Chinese working class transforms social reality.

The first three out of the seven chapters of *A History of Gejiu Tin* conform to the version of Chinese economic history found in textbooks of the period.¹⁰⁵ Mao Zedong's 1939 essay, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," guides historical interpretation, and local experience bears out Mao Zedong Thought. The transition from the feudal stage to the modern period occurs in the fourth paragraph of chapter one, as the Opium War of 1840 transforms China into a semi-colonial and semi-

¹⁰⁵ See Feuerwerker 1965: 33-8. Chinese history is periodized as follows: "modern history" (*jindai shi*) 1840-1919, "contemporary history" (*xiandai shi*) 1919-1949, and "current history" (*dangdai shi*) 1949-present.

feudal society.¹⁰⁶ By the late 19th century, the aggression of French and British “imperialists” (*diguozhuyizhe*) penetrated Yunnan province. By insisting on access to the Red River and by designating nearby Mengzi as a trading post in an 1887 treaty, the imperialist powers extended their reach into Gejiu. The construction of the Yunnan-Vietnam Railroad (1897-1910), and in particular the French and British investment in the development of Yunnan mines (1902), facilitated the “imperialist plunder” of Gejiu tin. Under foreign sway, Qing officials in Yunnan established “government-run” (*guanban*) enterprises (1883) and subsequently encouraged the formation of “joint government-merchant” (*guanshang heban*) enterprises.¹⁰⁷ These enterprises exacerbated the exploitation of workers and the looting of local mineral resources. Foreign incursions such as these precipitated local revolt: “The history of China’s transformation into a semi-colony and colony by imperialism in collusion with Chinese feudalism is at the same time a history of struggle by the Chinese people against imperialism and its lackeys.”¹⁰⁸ The “anti-imperialist” riots that broke out in Mengzi in 1899, and the “armed revolt” of Gejiu miners led by Zhou Yunxiang in 1903 advanced China’s “democratic revolution,” but these revolts were not modern labor movements, because

¹⁰⁶ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 8,10, paraphrasing Mao Zedong 1967-77 (December 1939): 2:309, 312.

¹⁰⁷ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 8-13. The government-run enterprises differed from the government-merchant jointly run enterprises in their method of financing. The latter invited outside investment, which let the government defer the cost of industrial growth.

¹⁰⁸ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 13, quoting Mao Zedong 1967-77 (December 1939): 2:314.

their instigators lacked Party leadership as well as a developed working-class consciousness.¹⁰⁹

At the turn of the century, in Gejiu as elsewhere, “China’s national capitalism took its first step forward.”¹¹⁰ The Revolution of 1911, a “bourgeois-democratic revolution,” stimulated the development of national capitalism. In Gejiu, the steady influx of bankrupted peasants into the mining districts supplied the newly empowered national bourgeoisie with the cheap labor necessary to expand production. Emergent “capitalists” (*zibenjia*) owned “private mines” (*si kuang*), of which there were three varieties. “Small producers” (*xiaoshengchanzhe*) worked their own mine, often with the help of a few hired hands. If lucky, small producers struck it rich and became “bosses” (*laoban*), but usually they lost it all and became *shading*. The mines owned by bosses ranged in size and employed anywhere between twenty and four thousand *shading*, at a pay that sustained a meager existence. The mines of the “lords” (*laoye*), finally, were in the hands of “feudal bureaucratic capitalists” who throughout the 1920s vied for dominance with the bosses and the “feudal local warlords.” Armed raids and skirmishes for access to ore were common at this time. Regardless of their age, workers were consigned to a hellish existence, toiling with primitive tools in stifling, narrow pits where death and illness patiently waited to claim overworked and undernourished bodies. Child laborers

¹⁰⁹ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 13-23. The protestations of rail construction worker, due to unfair labor conditions, catalyzed the attack on the French consulate in Mengzi, also known as the Mengzi Revolt. Whereas Harold Metzgar (1973) characterizes these riots as anti-foreign and anti-gentry in nature, the discussed texts depict them as solely anti-imperialist, thereby vilifying bureaucratic capitalists but not national capitalists. It is worth noting that the *Gejiushi zhi* (1998: 8), in contrast, depicted this event as “the earliest miner revolt in modern Chinese history.”

¹¹⁰ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 5, quoting Mao Zedong 1967-77 (December 1939): 2:310.

comprised 40% to 60% of the workforce. The presence of British, French, and German imperialists aggravated this ghastly situation, as favorable foreign exchange rates whetted their insatiable hunger for profit and the price of tin on the world market was subject to “British imperialist manipulation.”¹¹¹ “The purpose of the imperialist invasion of our country was not to transform our country into a capitalist society but to transform our country into a colony,” an action which moreover impeded the growth of national capitalism.¹¹² Against the background of feudal, capitalist, and imperialist domination, CCP members such as Li Xin began in 1927 to unite and organize Yunnanese workers to combat their oppressors.¹¹³

While Long Yun, “the local emperor of Yunnan” (1927-1945), clashed with Chiang Kai-shek, “local bureaucratic-capitalists” (*difang guanliao zibenjia*) tightened their grip on Gejiu’s economy. After 1937, the “Four Great Families” (*si da jiazu*) took control of the national economy and put the reins of political power in the hands of the “comprador bureaucratic-capitalist class” (*maiban guanliao zichanjieji*). The merger that in 1940 established the Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd. (1940-1950) fatally undermined the considerable influence that local bureaucratic capitalists had acquired through investments in enterprises such as the Gejiu Tin Corporation Ltd. (1905-1940) and the Yunnan Refinery (1932-1940). The Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd. brought together as partners the Bank of China (30% share holder), the Commission on Natural Resources

¹¹¹ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 24-34, 38-52.

¹¹² Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 38, 41-2, paraphrasing Mao Zedong 1967-77 (December 1939): 2:310.

¹¹³ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 52-9.

(30% share holder), and local bureaucratic-capitalists whose stock was jointly owned by the Yunnan Provincial Government (40% share holder). Through this merger, the Four Great Families manipulated the tin industry and strangled national capitalism.¹¹⁴

The Japanese bombings of Gejiu factories during the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945) caused fewer economic losses than the unconstrained plunder of Gejiu tin that the Four Great Families carried out on behalf of “American imperialists” after 1945. Chiang Kai-shek’s need for cash to wage his “counter-revolutionary civil war” (1946-1949) intensified the “savage persecution and ruthless exploitation” of workers. *A History of Gejiu Tin* cites the recollections of Zhang Jiating, an old worker who recalls the cycle of abuse practiced by the Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd.: the trickery that brought workers to the mines, the payments that extended their stay, and the guards that kept them captive. Old worker Lai Jiacheng recalls how wages were paid several months late, so that the company could earn interest. And the maimed Wang Jin recalls the company’s disregard for labor safety: “During the reactionary rule of the Nationalist Party, the circumstances of living workers were not much better than those of the dead.”¹¹⁵ To combat the “political deception and mental poisoning” of the Nationalists, miners engaged in “revolutionary struggle” under the leadership of the CCP, heroically

¹¹⁴ See Mao Zedong 1967-77 (December 1939): 2:311-3; Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 34-8, 60-77, 79-87. The Four Great Families refer to the families of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), Song Ziwen, Kong Xiangxi, and, jointly, Chen Guofu and Chen Lifu.

¹¹⁵ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 74, 82, 84, 86.

attacking “the enemy” on every front. On January 17, 1950, Gejiu was liberated and “the slaves of the old society became the masters of the new society.”¹¹⁶

In line with the slogan, “Stress the present, not the past,” the last four of the seven chapters of *A History of Gejiu Tin* depict contemporary history. As these chapters exceed the scope of Mao’s 1939 essay, they write historical experience through excerpts from Party policy and pertinent quotations by Mao Zedong.¹¹⁷ They extend the linear, teleological trajectory of Chinese Marxist history as they record the developmental strides of the tin industry and the political victories of the working class in the course of consecutive national campaigns. Each chapter concludes by contrasting the past with the present, citing the improvements in living conditions and the gains in production during the period treated in the preceding pages. The indices of socialist development thereby acquire concrete significance. The historical narrative of the chapters is the narrative of mass campaigns. The foundation of the PRC ended the semi-feudal and semi-colonial stage and inaugurated the New Democracy, ridding the people from the affliction of the Three Great Enemies and liberating them to build a new China under the leadership of the Party. The triumphant implementation of national campaigns in Gejiu demonstrates the effects of this liberation: the restoration of production, the Democratic Reforms, the Three-Anti Campaign, and the Five-Anti Campaign in chapter four; Soviet-assisted industrial development, the socialization of industry, and the Sufan Campaign in chapter

¹¹⁶ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 118. See also Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 77-9, 88-118.

¹¹⁷ See Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 119, 122, 134, 138, 140, 167, 175, 190, 212, 214, 221, 241-2, 254, 272, 276.

five; the Rectification Campaign, the Anti-Rightist Campaign, and the Great Leap Forward in chapter six; and the Great Leap Forward of 1959 in chapter seven.

Chapter six can serve as an example of this campaign-driven narrative. It begins by citing Mao Zedong's 1957 speech, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," as the justification of the Rectification Campaign. In May of 1957, the campaign was launched to "oppose bureaucratism, sectarianism, and subjectivism," but it was derailed because "after the airing of views began, the bourgeois rightists, owing to ulterior motives, shot a poison arrow at the Party and at socialism in a vain attempt to overthrow Party leadership and restore the capitalist order. ... Our Party firmly led the people of Gejiu in thoroughly smashing the bourgeois rightist attack."¹¹⁸

During the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Assistant Director Lu Miannan and Chief Engineer Ni Fengcai were accused of having been "agents of the Four Great Families," conspiring to "usurp Party leadership," and "brutally oppressing and exploiting workers before liberation." The text uses oral history to reproach the vilified men and to praise the irreproachable actions of the Party. When he heard that Lu Miannan had said, "Those who have virtue (*de*) but lack ability (*cai*) can do no good; those who have ability but lack virtue can do no wrong," old worker Dai Bingyuan lashed out:

Comrades, this attack is what Lu Miannan, who has ability but lacks virtue, considers good! The Party saved me. After liberation, I returned to the mines and now lead, as you can see, a life that meets my basic necessities. The Rightists want us to live as slaves once more. We must firmly struggle against the Rightists to the very end!¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 212.

¹¹⁹ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 220, 222-3. On Lu Miannan, see chapter one: 89. On virtue and ability, see chapter two: 116.

During a struggle session at a lower administrative level of the YTC, old worker Yang Peizhong likewise censured manager Zhang Chengli:

Rightist, I want to ask you something: You say that the backward state of our mines has not changed, but how were our mines before liberation? We used pickaxes to extract ore, and each team progressed only three inches. Today we use mechanized drills, and one person can do what previously was done by a team. You just close your eyes in order to tell lies!¹²⁰

The campaign wound down in May of 1958 and was declared a “complete and decisive victory”:

As a result of the Anti-Rightist struggle, all Party members, cadres, and workers of the city raised their consciousness, overcame bourgeois individualism, established the communist style, responded to the Party’s call, and, in the midst of the Great Leap Forward of 1958, brought their boundless revolutionary enthusiasm into full play to make great contributions to socialist construction.¹²¹

The exuberant figures adduced in the final sections of the chapter offer confirmation of these elated sentiments. We learn, for instance, that industrial production increased by 66%; that the output of steel (7,530 tons), iron (8,793 tons), and copper (64 tons) reached unprecedented heights; that over 18,000 Gejiu residents vanquished illiteracy; that the Four Pests (rats, bedbugs, flies, and mosquitoes) were eradicated; and that the extermination of 1,418,307 rats yielded a gain of 25,528,585 *jin* of grain per year. The quantitative success of the Great Leap Forward is proof of qualitative progress, and the folksong on the last page of the chapter clearly states who enabled this:

The new society compares to the old,
As heaven compares to earth.
Never forget the Communist Party,

¹²⁰ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 228-9. One *cun* = 1/30 meter.

¹²¹ Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 234.

Countless generations will follow Chairman Mao.¹²²

Recollections of Tin Miners and *A History of Gejiu Tin* illustrate how Mao Zedong Thought could give shape and meaning to individual experience and to a local past. Although different in perspective and scope, both texts narrate the linear, teleological trajectory of Chinese Marxist history, demonstrating how the elevation of class-consciousness and the revolutionary agency of the proletariat spurred socio-historical development. The prescriptive, theoretical vision of the Party determines the “facts” selected for inclusion, the emplotment of time, and hence the “objective” reality of the representation. In both texts, historical experience prior to 1949 conforms to Mao’s 1939 essay “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party.” The reader learns that the Three Great Enemies exploited and oppressed the Chinese people, that the proletariat politically matured under the leadership of the Party, and that the working class fulfilled its historic mission and ushered in a new stage of development on October 1, 1949. Liberation therefore marks a decisive rupture in the narrated time of the nation. Because Mao’s treatment of post-1949 history is necessarily generic rather than specific, both texts write historical experience from 1949 forward through excerpts from Party policy and pertinent quotations by Mao Zedong. The domination of historical experience by the local implementation of consecutive national campaigns results in a perfect conformity between historical narrative and “campaign time.”¹²³

¹²² Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 288. See also Zhonggong Gejiu shiwei xuanchuanbu and Yunnan daxue lishixi 1955 ji 1959: 241-286. One *jin* = 0.5 kilograms or 1.102 pounds.

¹²³ Hershatter 2002: 44, for the phrase “campaign time.”

Authenticating National History

On the pages of factory histories, the transcribed voices of members of the working class tell individual and collective experience as Chinese Marxist history. Offered as both records and products of the mental emancipation of workers, these collective anonymous creations testified to the productive feats of new communist men, individuals both red and expert. The stunning feats of their labor proved that the subjective could create the objective. Writing became the privileged mode of speaking History during the Great Leap Forward, because it generated a quantifiable, material output and thereby assisted in the demonstration of the heightened productivity of a nation at the gates of communism. This new emphasis on measurable, surpassing production (“greater, faster, better, and more”) derived from Mao’s theory of permanent revolution, which not only advocated speed instead of a gradualist approach to development but also attributed determinacy to the superstructure. As I will show in chapter four, historical interpretation under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping garnered Party legitimacy by dismissing these theoretical innovations as pseudo-scientific readings of social evolution and causality.

By propagating a persuasive historical reality, factory history provided readers with an interpretive framework to re-conceptualize self and society in accordance with the current needs of Party policy. It introduced concrete, living individuals as national and universal subjects of Marxist theory, identified by class, and used life writing and local history to authenticate Chinese Marxist history. Its employment of individual and local experience as a provocative means to relate the awesome achievements of the working class under the leadership of Party, as well as its educative method of

contrasting the past with the present, were designed to emancipate the mind of the reader and to rouse a desired response. In other words, the author of factory history—the old miner or old factory worker in Gejiu—mediated the reader’s own interpellation as a political subject. By this means, readers were to assume a communist subjectivity, becoming vehicles of national development. Like the workers in the world of the text, the readers were called on to devote themselves heroically and tirelessly to the goals of the Great Leap Forward.

In December of 1959, Shi Quan invoked the sovereign space of the People’s Republic of China to summarize the national campaign to write factory history in the *Journal of Literature and Art*: “Open the map. If you insert a red flag in all of the regions that have written factory history, red flags, one could rightly say, are everywhere under heaven.”¹²⁴ Although each factory and each locality varied in detail, factory history manifested the universal, Marxist history of the Chinese nation. Whether telling the history of coal miners in Benxi (Liaoning Province), of printing press workers in Guilin (Guangxi Province), or of automotive workers in Guiyang (Guizhou Province),¹²⁵ the individual and the local stand metonymically for the nation, and emancipation (*fanshen*) coincides with liberation (*jiefang*). October 1, 1949 marks a complete rupture in the narrated time of the nation; the old society and new society are antithetical. The same typical characters in the same typical circumstances populate each factory and each locality: the villainous exploiters and the heroic oppressed of the old society, and the

¹²⁴ Shi Quan 1959: 2.

¹²⁵ See Guilin yinshuachang changshi bianjuanzu 1960; Guiyangshi wenhuaju “gongchangshi” bianxiezu and Guizhou qiche zhizaochang changshi bianweihui 1963; Pan Xiyan 1963.

dedicated leaders and the valiant workers of the new society. After turning over in time with national liberation, the working class delivers unfettered progress under Party leadership. Because during the Great Leap Forward a red flag (as opposed to a white flag) symbolized proletarian ideology and politics in command, Shi Quan's invitation to plant flags on the map of the PRC identifies factory history not only as a "correct" (*zheng*) representation but also as the political expression (*biaoxian*) of a nation possessed of communist social relations and consciousness. In this nation, the working class ever substantiates Mao's vision of permanent revolution and the Party's claim to legitimacy, as its members "recollect the past, regard the present, and look forward to the boundless joy of the future" (*huixiang guoqu, kan jintian, zhanwang jianglai wubian*).¹²⁶

¹²⁶ This was also a slogan of the national campaign to write factory history. For example, see Xiao Yu 1958: 11; Zhongguo zuojia xiehui Kunming fenhui 1961: 2.

Chapter Three. Class Education: Bodies of Evidence and Living History in the Socialist Education Movement (1962-1965) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

To overthrow a political regime, it is always necessary to first create public opinion and engage in ideological work.

Mao Zedong ¹

In the previous chapter, the factory histories written during the Great Leap Forward demonstrated how local history and autobiography instantiated the universal Marxist history of the Chinese nation. Presented as compilations of spontaneous recollections of workers, factory histories authenticated the Party's Marxist narration of Chinese history by representing the official historiography of the nation and of the local as individual memory, and thereby as undeniable, embodied truth. To propel the accelerated social development of the Great Leap Forward, moreover, factory histories depicted labor as a transformative process, both in the industrial process of writing and in the resulting historical narratives. The factory histories therefore testified to the mental emancipation of workers whose voluminous literary output exhibited the heightened productivity and plenty of a nation at the gates of communism.

The "Four Histories" of the Socialist Education Movement (*Si shi*; family, village, factory, and commune history) and the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution yet again instantiate the universal Marxist history of the Chinese nation by means of local history and life history. These two consecutive mass campaigns, however, introduced a new use of history in their pursuit of political education: the reenactment of

¹ Mao Zedong 1962 quoted in "Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Concerning the Great Cultural Revolution" (August 8, 1966), in Union Research Institute 1968: 33. See also Lin Biao 1970 (April 1, 1969): 30.

specific historical events. Whereas the factory histories of the late 1950s privileged writing, because of its quantifiable, material output, the Four Histories of the Socialist Education Movement and the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution privileged actual speech, in the form of “recollect bitterness” (*yiku*) narratives that were recited by old workers and old peasants to invoke the revolutionary past. Recollect bitterness narratives were a modified form of “venting grievances” (*suku*, lit. “vent bitterness”), a propaganda technique and method of class struggle that was widely used in land reform during the Civil War (1946-1949). The practice of *yiku* (to recollect one’s suffering in the old society, lit. to recall bitterness) reenacted the older, powerful practice of *suku*, beginning in the 1960s. Under the banner of the slogan, “Recall the bitterness of the past and savor the sweetness of the present” (*Yiku sitian*), old workers and old peasants recounted their experience of exploitation and oppression in the “old society,” in order to arm the citizenry with a concrete and vivid understanding of classes and proletarian revolution.

The Four Histories and the class education exhibitions, moreover, gave renewed prominence to the Marxian concept of class. Mao’s theory of continuous revolution, formulated in 1962, posited the existence of classes and class struggle in socialist society. The historical narrative of the Four Histories and class education exhibitions identified the nature of classes and class struggle in socialist society, and was therefore narrower in scope, than the narrative of the earlier factory histories. The new emphasis on conflict became more evident in 1965, when the narrative structure of the Four Histories was reduced to an invariable tripartite sequence of exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation. This instruction in class education mobilized the citizenry to combat

revisionism by eradicating bourgeois ideology and class enemies and by entrenching all aspects of the socialist system.

Class education exhibitions and, especially, the Four Histories preserved for future generations the transient recollections of the revolutionary generation as “living educational material” (*huo jiaocai*). Although often mediated by material objects (e.g., artwork, “pre-liberation” artifacts, and published narratives), the speech acts featured in “living ideological education” (*huo sixiang jiaoyu*) enjoined the citizenry to “re-embody” (*tihui*) the exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation of the Chinese proletariat. Whereas the Four Histories provided a visceral and vicarious experience of class struggle by offering recollect bitterness narratives in writing, class education exhibitions recreated the time and space of the narrated events in new forms of historical reenactment. Both forms of political education, however, instilled “perceptual knowledge” (*ganxing renshi*) of classes and class struggle in order to raise the class-consciousness of the citizenry and thereby to incite young and old to carry socialist revolution and socialist construction through to the end! The two examples of the Four Histories that I found in Gejiu: *Speak in Blood and Tears of the Past, Triumphantly Extol the Present: An Abridged Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine* (1963) and *Blood Debt: A Record of the Criminal Deeds of Landlords* (1963), and the three class education exhibitions staged in Gejiu: *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu* (1966), *The Recollect Bitterness Center* (1969), and *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* (1972), provide concrete detail of these new forms of political education, instantiated in the local circumstances of Gejiu and in the figure of the *shading* (sand hog). These traces of living ideological education present as “iron proof” (*tie shishi*) the existence of classes

and class struggle in socialist society, as they strive to interpolate new political subjects who will fight to sustain the sweetness of the present.

“Classes and Class Struggle Still Exist”

When the Central Committee of the CCP convened in January of 1961, popular morale was low, untold numbers of counties lay bare and devastated by famine, and crime and vagrancy were on the rise. Blaming natural calamities more than human error for the disasters of the Great Leap Forward, the leadership acted to ameliorate the situation, guided by Liu Shaoqi.² The measures for restoration reversed the policies of the Great Leap Forward. In agriculture, communes were dismantled, and peasants were allowed to till private plots, engage in sideline occupations, and trade on the re-instituted free market. In industry, managers and technicians regained relative control of the operation of factories, a sign that expertise had replaced redness as the criterion of authority. In addition, material incentives were substituted for ideological inducements as the favored means to entice peasants and workers to generate more in less time. A centralized Party bureaucracy, rebuilt from the ground up, coordinated these measures, which Mao Zedong derogated as “production in command.”³ From Mao’s perspective, collectivism, egalitarianism, and decentralization were being sacrificed for bourgeois individualism, socio-economic differentiation, and bureaucratism. The ousting of “politics in command” in the name of economic instrumentalism not only eroded the political thought of Party

² See “Communique of the Ninth Plenary Session of the Eighth Communist Party of China Central Committee” (January 20, 1961), in Harold Hinton 1980: 903-5.

³ Baum 1975: 3. See also MacFarquhar 1997: 61-89.

cadres but also induced the abandonment of the socialist path, a course already mapped out by the Soviet Union. To save China from the brink of revisionism and to revolutionize the national citizenry, Mao proposed a socialist education movement.

The Socialist Education Movement (1962-1965) grew out of Mao's speech to the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee in September 1962. Eight months earlier at the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, Mao had professed: "During the whole socialist stage, classes and class struggle still exist."⁴ At the Tenth Plenum, Mao reiterated this notion and alerted the assembly that Party cadres and the populace alike were in dire need of political education:

Now then, do classes exist in socialist countries? Does class struggle exist? We can now affirm that classes do exist in socialist countries and that class struggle undoubtedly exists... We must acknowledge that classes will continue to exist for a long time. We must also acknowledge the existence of a struggle of class against class, and admit the possibility of the restoration of reactionary classes. We must enhance our vigilance (*tigao jingti*) and properly educate youth as well as the cadres, the masses, and the middle and basic-level cadres. Old cadres must also study these problems and be educated. Otherwise a country like ours can still move toward its opposite. ... Therefore, from now on we must talk about this every year, every month, every day.⁵

The historical vision and alarmist tone of these pronouncements are born of Mao's theory of "continuous revolution" (*jixu geming*). Like Mao's idea of permanent revolution, this theory attributed historical causality to the superstructure, argued that the ideological remnants of the old society lived on in socialist society, and hence conceived of the perpetuation of class struggle in the ideological field. Mao now further posited that the overthrown reactionary classes were "not reconciled to their doom" (*buganxin yu miawang*) and thus "always attempt to stage a comeback" (*zongshi qitu fubi*). Moreover,

⁴ "Talk at an Enlarged Central Work Conference" (January 30, 1962), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 168.

⁵ "Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee" (September 24, 1962), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 189-90.

in socialist society “new bourgeois elements may still be produced.”⁶ The presence of these bourgeois influences meant that China could “still move toward its opposite.” In other words, historical retrogression, resulting in the restoration of capitalism, was a distinct possibility. Given the existence of classes, the period of transition to communism consequently would be disrupted by a “two-road struggle” (*liangtiao lu douzheng*) between socialism and capitalism—a continuous revolution. This theoretical departure, afoot in Mao’s ideas of the late 1950s, was highly unorthodox, and would be castigated as “ultra-‘Left’ thought” (*ji “zuo” sixiang*) in the late 1970s.

The appearance of a perilous threat of revisionism at home was heightened by the Party’s concurrent attack on the main sources of revisionism abroad: the ideological changes in the Soviet Union and the imperialism of the United States of America. The 1962 slogan “Oppose revisionism, prevent revisionism” (*fan xiu, fang xiu*) hovered over this tense atmosphere.⁷ At this time, the Sino-Soviet conflict was grave and no longer muffled in the press. Nikita Khrushchev’s refutation of the existence of class struggle in Soviet society, his stated belief in “the primacy of economics over politics in socialism” and his advocacy of “peaceful coexistence” with the United States were at odds with Mao’s analysis of the current situation. In 1964, the CCP would formally accuse the Soviet Union of betrayal: Khrushchev’s “phony communism” was “simply another name for capitalism.”⁸ The official severance of diplomatic ties followed. Isolated from its

⁶ “Talk at an Enlarged Central Work Conference” (January 30, 1962), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 168; “Communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Communist Party of China Central Committee” (September 27, 1962), in Harold Hinton 1980: 951.

⁷ See Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 263.

⁸ “On Khrushchov’s Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World” (July 14, 1964), in Barnett 1967a: 136-45, 169, 178.

former ally, the Chinese Communist Party paired anti-Soviet rhetoric with a fierce condemnation of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam, a practice it carried into the next decade. The situation at home and abroad, in sum, led to a litany of violent injunctions such as “raise our vigilance” and “in no way relax our exertions” (*bie xieqi*), injunctions meant to mobilize the populace to prepare for war, fight for world liberation, and carry on socialist revolution and socialist construction through to the end.

“Grasp Class Struggle as the Key Link”

Mao Zedong devised the Socialist Education Movement to counter revisionist tendencies within the Party and the population, and to prepare the country to resist the assault by revisionist forces from the Soviet Union and the United States. The official policies and strategies of the Movement shifted over time, as Mao Zedong continued to contend with his opponents for control of the Party. Deng Xiaoping in 1963 and Liu Shaoqi in 1964 attempted to confine the Socialist Education Movement to a modest reform of basic Party organizations and Party cadres.⁹ Mao Zedong, however, envisioned an all-encompassing revolutionary struggle in which, on the one hand, “unclean” cadres were purified through class struggle and on the other hand, older generations recollected and reenacted the experiences of land reform for the educational benefit of the citizenry. The vengeful

⁹ See “Later Ten Points” (September 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 72-94; “Revised Later Ten Points” (September 10, 1964), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 102-21. The full, official title of the two versions of this document is “Some Concrete Policy Formulations of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in the Rural Socialist Education Movement.” For a detailed discussion of the shifting policies and strategies of this period, see Baum 1975; MacFarquhar 1997; Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998.

ideological remnants of the old society and the stirring forces of the new counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie would be eradicated by a revival of the trusted strategies of the late 1930s and 1940s.

The Socialist Education Movement began in February 1963 with the Four Clean-Ups Campaign in the countryside and the Five-Anti Campaign in the cities. The two campaigns had been devised during a trial period in selected places during the preceding winter: the Baoding special district committee in Hebei had developed the “Four Clean-Ups” (*siqing*) to correct the mismanagement of the accounts, granaries, property, and work point allocation system of its communes, and Party committees in Hunan had begun educating young and old in the local history of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.¹⁰ At the Central Work Conference in February of 1963, Mao upheld these campaigns in Hebei and Hunan as the national model and urged other provinces to follow their lead. “Once class struggle is grasped,” he declared, “miracles are possible.”¹¹ Like its rural counterpart, the Five-Anti Campaign was devised to uproot revisionism by weeding out practices of graft and embezzlement, profiteering and speculation, extravagance and waste, decentralism, and bureaucratism.

A few months later, on May 20, 1963, the Central Committee of the CCP issued the first of four directives to explicate the transformative goals of the Socialist Education Movement. Early provincial reports indicated that Party officials had been indifferent to

¹⁰ See “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 63-5. The full, official title of this document is “Draft Resolution of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Some Problems in Current Rural Work.”

¹¹ Mao Zedong quoted in the “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 63.

“the various kinds of class struggle phenomena,”¹² and had instead privileged administrative and economic reform, in keeping with the efforts of 1959-1961. The “First Ten Points,” drafted under Mao’s supervision, specified the methods to transform unclean cadres into new men, as well as improve the class education of the citizenry. It authorized the resumption of pertinent land reform and cadre rectification policies of the late 1930s and 1940s. The reinstatement of these historic measures vested the Socialist Education Movement with the symbolic power of the revolutionary tradition. And by reenacting aspects of the drama of land reform, the Four Clean-Ups Campaign and the Five-Anti Campaign staged what Mao envisioned as “the first great struggle since land reform”¹³—“a struggle that calls for the re-education of man”:

This is a struggle for reorganizing the revolutionary class armies for a confrontation with the forces of feudalism and capitalism, which are now feverishly attacking us. We must nip their counter-revolution in the bud. We must make it a great movement to reform the bulk of elements in these counter-revolutionary forces and turn them into new men.¹⁴

During this new stage of the Socialist Education Movement, unclean cadres were subjected to the old methods of cadre rectification, methods from the Yan’an days that had been refined during the Civil War in coordination with land reform. By gaining first-hand knowledge of village life, by participating in physical labor, and by taking the class stand of Marxism-Leninism, unclean cadres were to grasp the mass-line and reunite with

¹² “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 61.

¹³ “Instruction on the Commune Education Movement” (May 1963), in Mao Zedong 1974b: 314. See also “Speech at the Hangchow Conference” (May 1963), in Mao Zedong 1974b: 318.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong quoted in the “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 70-1.

the masses.¹⁵ Different from the past, however, unclean cadres were to be subjected to mass criticism, a mode of persuasion previously reserved for “landlords” (*dizhu*). A reenactment of class struggle during land reform, these struggle sessions were to set the masses in motion and then open up democratic discussion. The masses were to be “given full opportunity to express their views, make criticism of errors and shortcomings, and expose bad people and evil deeds.” Forced public confession was to be avoided since the goal was “education.”¹⁶ Yet as during land reform: “If the masses demand nothing less than death, and it is reasonable, we will not prohibit killing.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, the number of uncovered enemies was to be kept under 5% of the community as a whole.

In January 1965, the “Twenty-Three Articles,” amended by Mao, reoriented the Socialist Education Movement once more. Harking back to Mao’s Tenth Plenum speech of 1962, it warned that in “our cities and villages alike, there exists serious, acute class struggle” and that this “class struggle is necessarily reflected within the Party.” By claiming the Movement was about “the contradiction between socialism and capitalism,” this fourth and final directive cast the perpetrators of the Four Uncleans as class enemies who were bent on the destruction of socialism. The improper behavior of officials, in other words, was no longer criticized as an economic offense (as it was in Liu Shaoqi’s “Revised Later Ten Points” of September 1964) but as an incorrect political orientation. Renamed the Four Cleans Movement, the new goals were to not only “clean politics, clean economics, clean organization, and clean ideology” but also the rectification of

¹⁵ See “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 58-9, 67-71. On cadre rectification methods developed in Yan’an, see Selden 1979: 188-200, 210-2.

¹⁶ “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 67.

¹⁷ “Speech at the Hangchow Conference” (May 1963), in Mao Zedong 1974b: 322.

“those people in positions of authority within the Party who take the capitalist road.” To this end, the Party was to “boldly unleash the masses,” and Party cadres were to submit to supervision “both from above and from below.” The “Twenty-Three Articles” in this way signaled a return to the revolutionary methods of mass mobilization and democracy, a return that promised to eliminate the social bases of revisionism according to the summons, “grasp class struggle as the key link.”¹⁸

“Recall the Bitterness of the Past and Savor the Sweetness of the Present”: Political Education in the People’s Liberation Army during the Early 1960s

Significant forms of political education adopted by Mao Zedong during the Socialist Education Movement were developed in prior years within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), under the leadership of Lin Biao. Having replaced the disgraced Peng Dehuai as Minister of Defense and Chair of the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the CCP in 1959, Lin strove to arrest dissention caused by the purge and to secure command of the PLA. At the same time, he endeavored to restore the prestige of Mao Zedong, faith in the Party, and the fighting morale and military discipline of the troops, all of which were low during the “three years of hardship” (1959-1961) that followed the Great Leap Forward.¹⁹ To this purpose, Lin Biao recalled to duty the reliable methods of

¹⁸ “Twenty-Three Articles” (January 18, 1965), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 119-20, 125. See also “Twenty-Three Articles” (January 18, 1965), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 119-26. The Four Uncleans refers to the practices that were to be rectified via the Four Clean-Ups Campaign, that is, the mismanagement of the accounts, granaries, property, and work point allocation system of rural communes.

¹⁹ See Solomon 1971: 436-8.

political work that the Army had practiced during the Civil War, and initiated the PLA's transformation into a "great school of Mao Zedong Thought."

Lin Biao summarized his purposes and methods in his "Resolution on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army," subscribing to Mao's belief in the supremacy of politics: "Politics is both the supreme commander and the soul [of all work]." ²⁰ Revised by Mao prior to adoption by the Military Commission on October 20, 1960, the Resolution revived methods from the corpus of "revolutionary traditions," in the service of Lin's "four relations," the new guidepost for political and ideological work in the army. The four relations placed men above weapons, political work above other work, ideological work above general political work, and "living ideology" (*huo sixiang*) above book learning. Lin Biao moreover equated politics with Mao Zedong's ideas: "To put politics in command is to put Mao Zedong Thought in command." The Resolution upheld the works of Mao Zedong as the "only correct line" for building the PLA and the "best means" to learn Marxism-Leninism. ²¹ It enjoined the troops to intensive, repeated study of these unsurpassed writings, which it called "a spiritual atom bomb." Lin thus narrowed the meaning of the term "politics" (*zhengzhi*) from "an activity monopolized by one political party" (as it had been used during land reform) ²² to a sphere of practice dictated by one man. The particular power of Mao Zedong Thought, according to Lin, lay

²⁰ "Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army" (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 67.

²¹ "Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army" (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 66-8, 70-1. The "four relations" were later dubbed the "four firsts."

²² T. A. Hsia 1963: 6-7.

in its application to practice as a “living ideology.” Unlike the dead language of “book ideology,” which could only serve as an object of study, Mao Zedong Thought could serve actual needs. This notion renders transparent what is more or less always at play in PRC politics: the desire for a direct connection between the word (whether the Party’s language or Mao’s language) and correct political behavior, held to be the concrete expression (*biaoxian*) of ideology. The Resolution therefore offers “correct” Mao Zedong Thought as the infallible weapon in the ideological battle against “erroneous thought,” to be passed onto the soldiers by means of “living ideological education” (*huo sixiang jiaoyu*).²³

To carry out this “living ideological education” in the PLA, Lin Biao launched the Movement of “Two Recollections and Three Investigations” (*liang yi san cha*) in October 1960. In accordance with the beliefs expressed in the Resolution, the Movement revived methods of political education used in the Army during radical land reform, namely “venting bitterness” and the “three investigations,” and employed “Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding principle and his writings as its weapons.”²⁴ The Movement aimed to solve ideological problems and raise the class-consciousness of the troops by “fostering

²³ “Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army” (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 67-8.

²⁴ “Several Notable Problems in the Current Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’—Summary of a Talk Given by Deputy Director Liu Chih-Chien on a Telephone Conference” (January 7, 1961) in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 98. See also “Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army” (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 78-80.

proletarian ideology and liquidating bourgeois ideology.”²⁵ It would thereby “lay a cornerstone of firm belief,” both in cadres riddled by “capitalistic individualism” and in young soldiers ignorant of old China, inexperienced in battle, and untested in ideological strength.²⁶ The Movement sought to transfer the disillusionment and discontent of the three years of hardship onto the bitter past, laying all blame for present shortcomings on individuals who nurtured bourgeois ideology, rather than on the Party. If successful, this living ideological education would hail an army of socialist subjects in the image of Lin’s “Four Good Companies” (good in political thought, work style, military training, and management of living) of “Five Good Soldiers” (good in political thought, military training, work style, carrying out tasks, and physical training).²⁷

Of the two vintage methods of political education, the Two Recollections (the recollections of class and national suffering) was the most important and the most consequential. Both in name and in practice “recalling bitterness” (*yiku*) invoked the propaganda technique of “venting bitterness” (*suku*) of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the radical phase of land reform (mid-1946 to mid-1948) during the

²⁵ “Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army” (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 80.

²⁶ “Directive of the Political Department of the Peking Military Region Concerning the Development of the Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’” (January 3, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 106.

²⁷ See “Several Notable Problems in the Current Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’—Summary of a Talk Given by Deputy Director Liu Chih-Chien on a Telephone Conference” (January 7, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 97-104; “Directive of the Political Department of the Peking Military Region Concerning the Development of the Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’” (January 3, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 106-10; “The Summing-up Report of the Educational Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations” (March 22, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 412-3.

Civil War. During land reform, the PLA dispatched work teams to each village to discern peasant activists who could be taught to “vent bitterness and dig out roots” (*suku wagen*), allowing them to perceive class exploitation and class oppression as the source of their woes. The activists in turn taught poor peasants to “pour out bitterness” (*tu kushui*) and then helped the work team to organize village-wide “vent bitterness meetings” (*sukuhui*) as a public, formal site for class struggle against the “landlords” and “local tyrants” (*eba*). The meetings took the form of a trial in a “people’s court” (*renmin fayuan*). Standing on a real or improvised stage festooned with propaganda banners, wealthy members of the local gentry faced the rehearsed accusations of the peasant activists, who proposed to the other villagers that they “settle accounts” (*suanzhang*) with their former oppressors. If all went as planned, the PLA work team just observed from the sidelines. The villagers would “pour out bitterness,” pointing at the reviled class enemies and demanding confessions, and the people’s court would decide the fate of the humiliated, overthrown gentry.²⁸ Venting bitterness hence became a new praxis of class struggle that not only hailed new political subjects but also propagated a new reading of history. The work team then divided land and other “fruits of the struggle” (*douzheng guoshi*) among the villagers according to their newly assigned “class status” (*jieji chengfen*).

Because by 1960 everybody had already “turned over” (*fanshen*) and become liberated, classed subjects of a socialist society, the Political Department of the PLA devised “recollect bitterness meetings” (*yiku hui*), meetings at which old peasants and

²⁸ On land reform policy during the civil war, see Gittings 1967: 62-3; Westad 2003: 107-37. On “venting bitterness” during the Second Sino-Japanese War, see Belden 1949: 163-4; Crook and Crook 1959: 96-100; Karol 1967: 170. For eyewitness accounts of radical land reform and “vent bitterness meetings” during the civil war, see Belden 1949; Crook and Crook 1959; William Hinton 1966. On the propaganda technique of venting bitterness, see Anagnost 1997: 35-40; Rofel 1999:137-48.

veteran soldiers did not condemn present injustices but rather “recalled bitterness” (*yiku*), specifically the hardships before 1949. These orators instructed assemblies of soldiers by recalling bitterness and provoked them to “uproot the source” (namely class exploitation, the system of private ownership, and the Three Great Enemies). Party cadres next led the troops to “talk about the sweetness” (i.e. “today’s happy life”) and to “think of its source” (“the correct leadership of the Party and Chairman Mao”), a goal best achieved by “making comparisons” (e.g., the old society vs. the new society, or individual effort vs. collective work). The final stage, “settling the accounts,” secured the newfound devotion to socialism. “Living educational material” (*huo jiaocai*) such as plays, exhibitions, and lectures, “amplified the evidence” of past woes and present bliss. The Three Investigations followed at a later date. This was a political study session, in which Party cadres urged soldiers to question their class standpoint, performance of duty, and will to fight. Each stage of the movement roused soldiers to “recall the bitterness of the past and savor the sweetness of the present” (*yiku sitian*), and each stage armed them with Mao Zedong Thought, as all political discussions revolved around essays by Mao.²⁹

²⁹ “Several Notable Problems in the Current Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’—Summary of a Talk Given by Deputy Director Liu Chih-Chien on a Telephone Conference” (January 7, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 101-2; “Directive of the Political Department of the Peking Military Region Concerning the Development of the Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’” (January 3, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 110-2; “The Summing-Up Report of the Educational Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations” (March 22, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 412. See also “Directive of the Political Department of the Peking Military Region Concerning the Development of the Educational Movement of ‘Two Recollections and Three Investigations’” (January 3, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 106-7, 109-13; “The Summing-Up Report of the Educational Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations” (March 22, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 415-6.

The Four Histories Movement: Living Ideological Education outside the People's Liberation Army

During the Socialist Education Movement, local Party Committees carried out this living ideological education across the nation, using recollection and self-examination to reprise the Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations. Local Party Committees, however, did not use Mao Zedong Thought as a weapon and guide of living ideological education until 1964. Under the banner of the slogan, “Recall the bitterness of the past and savor the sweetness of the present,” they held “recollect bitterness meetings” in which old workers and old peasants, as well as Civil War veterans, recounted personal experiences of the old society. Known as “recollectors of bitterness” (*yikuren*) or just “recallers” (*huiyizhe*), these living individuals spoke as classed subjects in order to inspire a “class sentiment” (*jieji ganqing*) and thereby raise the class-consciousness of listeners.³⁰ In this way, the older generation imparted the central lesson of socialist education aimed at class education: “Never Forget Class Struggle!” (*Qianwan bu yao wangji jieji douzheng*). Pieced together from Mao’s 1962 Tenth Plenum speech, this slogan rallied the masses to carry the revolution through to the end. Through the induced recollection of past bitterness the citizenry gained historical knowledge of classes and of revolution (educational study), which, in contrast to 1960, was intended to mobilize class struggle (actual practice).

Although recollectors at recollect bitterness meetings were not agents of revolution as had been speakers of vent bitterness narratives, they likewise roused class

³⁰ See “Jieji jiaoyu yao jingchang zhuajin” 1963: 1; “Speech at the Hangchow Conference” (May 1963), in Mao Zedong 1974b: 321; Solomon 1971: 439-40.

struggle and propagated the historically specific understanding that revolution is made by means of speech acts in the form of public accusations. This reenactment of venting bitterness thus furthered Mao's political goals, while also lending substance to the Party's account of Chinese Marxist history. As living educational materials, moreover, these recollectors illustrated the synthesis of ideology and practice in the lived experience of the past, a convergence that their listeners could replicate in the present. The persuasive power of lived experience ensured the "living" quality of this ideological education:

Actual practice has proved that if we can give to ideological education the qualities of a living thing, it will become vivacious and concrete, rich and colorful; it can be seen and touched, brimming full with great persuasive power. On the contrary, if we depend only on teaching material and teach entirely according to the text, we shall soon destroy the life that was originally in it, and make it hard for ideological education to become effective.³¹

Study and practice, past and present, lived experience and living education were mediated by a standardized choreography of "struggle" (*dou*), a series of postures, speech, and emotions in which the oppressed vanquished their oppressor by means of both weapons and words. The praxis of "class struggle" (*jieji douzheng*) points to the particular, dual meaning of the verb *douzheng*: to struggle *and* to accuse or denounce at a meeting. During the Socialist Education Movement, land reform was imagined as a drama in which "peasants" accused and fought "landlords," fueled by emotion in a progression from tears, a visible sign of pain and hardship, to hatred and then to action. The postures that the class antagonists assumed were both physical and metaphorical. If previously the proud landlord had "held up his head" (*taitou*) as powerless peasants paid their rent with "lowered heads" (*ditou*), now the landlord bowed or "submitted" (*ditou*) to

³¹ "The Summing-up Report of the Educational Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations" (March 22, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 414.

peasants who denounced him/her from a position of “elevated stature” (*taitou*).³² The Socialist Education Movement also revived the visceral and visual language of land reform—the stirring “tears of blood” (*xuelei*) that roused “bitter and deep-seated hatred” (*shenchou-dahen*) and the urge “to get even” (*suanzhang*, “to do the accounts”), to make the landlord repay for his ruthless extraction of rent—the root cause of the tears, hatred, and revolutionary agency of the peasantry. The reenactment of this drama in recollect bitterness meetings taught the citizenry to understand their own life histories as well as the collective past in terms of “oppression” (*yapo*) and “exploitation” (*buoxue*), and to identify themselves as class subjects. They were shown how antithetical states of being were maintained but inverted—as villagers shed their prior passivity to acquire revolutionary agency—and hence the meaning of revolution.

To spread the lessons of the Socialist Education Movement to the nation’s youth, the Party devised the Four Histories Movement. Directed by the Communist Youth League in consultation with the Party, the movement sent League members and local youth to collect oral histories of old peasants and old workers in their community, either at large recollect bitterness meetings or at small forums where they “interviewed” seniors by having them recite “the history of blood and tears of the old society” (*jiu shehui de xueleishi*) and “the history of ‘turning over’ after liberation” (*jiefang hou de fanshenshi*).³³ In some cases, they even helped local Party committees organize exhibitions on the local history of class struggle. The resulting “Four Histories” (*si shi*; histories of the family, the village, the factory, and the commune) fixed the recollections

³² See Li Chi 1958: 9-13. Mao described this ritual inversion of the social hierarchy as “turning things upside down.” (Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 1927): 1:30.)

³³ “Xiang qingnian jinxing jieji douzhengshi de jiaoyu” 1963: 2.

of the revolutionary generation in writing for future generations, as permanent living educational materials (*huo jiaocai*). This was imperative because

the people who understand the old society, who personally experienced class oppression and class exploitation in the old society, will yearly decrease in number; a few decades from now, it will no longer be possible to conduct class education by having them re-vocalize their experience of suffering in the old society.³⁴

The preservation of these “real people and real events” (*zhenren-zhenshi*) would provide lasting evidence of the undeniable, embodied truth of Marxist history. In all its rich, living detail, these testimonies of lived experience proved that all over China, the classes were the same; the essence of each class was the same; the ruling classes of every locale relied on the exploitation and oppression of the proletariat; and class struggle existed everywhere.

Although the Four Histories resembled the factory histories of the Great Leap Forward, they differed from their predecessors in their accusatory tone, in their copious use of land reform vocabulary, and in their emphasis on class struggle. The genre known as memoir (*huiyilu*) in the late 1950s was now called “family history” (*jiashi*). Like the factory histories, the Four Histories chronicled the modern and contemporary history of the proletariat in a variety of genres, based on oral accounts of the older generation.³⁵

³⁴ Zhao Youfu and Li Kai 1965: 6. See also “Xiang qingnian jinxing jieji douzhengshi de jiaoyu” 1963: 2. On the Four Histories Movement, see Ben kan bianjibu 1964: 2; “Chahe dadui shi zenyang gaoqi jieji dangan he jieji douzhengshi de yongyuan bu neng wangji jieji douzheng” 1963; Dong Lingguang, Weng Shiliang, and Lin Zhixiong 1963; “The Four Histories Movement: Everyone a Historian” 1966; He Shiqing 1963; Song Renqiong 1963; Yang Liwen 1965; Zhao Youfu and Li Kai 1965; Zheng Ye 1963; Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe 1965; “Zhongshi bianxie ‘si shi’ de gongzuo” 1965.

³⁵ The participation of professional historians in the Movement began in the fall of 1964 and sparked another round of debate about which genres and styles should be used to write the Four Histories. While all participants in this discussion called for the unity of “historical quality” (*lishixing*) and “literary and artistic quality” (*wenyixing*), a minority argued that a prior over-emphasis on literary and artistic quality had compromised

And like the factory histories, they educated readers by contrasting the pre-liberation past with the post-liberation present, a device now labeled “recalling the past and contrasting it with the present” (*huiyi duibi*). Yet even when the Four Histories incorporate passages from older factory histories, the editors have revised or framed those passages to enhance their reference to class struggle, making their tone more strident. This new emphasis on conflict becomes still more evident in examples of the Four Histories compiled in 1965, when the narrative structure of the histories is reduced to an invariable tripartite sequence of exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation.

The Four Histories enjoined the youth of the People’s Republic of China to re-embodiment (*tihui*, “learn from experience”) the exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation of the older generation. The histories taught youth the concrete meaning of revolution by affording them a visceral and vicarious experience of life and class struggle in the old society from the standpoint of the working class. Whether heard or read, recollect bitterness narratives—with their accusatory tone, their rousing language of land reform, and their operative function of indicting a class enemy—provided a “perceptual knowledge” (*ganxing renshi*) of classes and class struggle. According to the Marxist theory of knowledge expounded by Mao Zedong in the “First Ten Points,” accumulated perceptual knowledge becomes “rational knowledge” (*lixing renshi*), which can be

historical accuracy. Greater attention to historical quality was the proposed solution. See Dong Lingguang, Weng Shiliang, and Lin Zhixiong 1963; “The Four Histories Movement: Everyone a Historian” 1966; Li Kai 1965; Yang Liwen 1965; Zhao Youfu and Li Kai 1965; Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe 1965; “Zhongshi bianxie ‘si shi’ de gongzuo” 1965.

realized as objective truth through practice.³⁶ The vicarious experience of class struggle would ensure that the younger generation, born in the new society, would never waver in their class stand, or succumb to the influence of the bourgeoisie, or, in the words of Lin Biao, “mistake the present sweetness for bitterness.”³⁷ By reading “the family history of the proletariat” (*wuchanjieji de jiapu*), youngsters would “recognize that the fruits of the revolutionary struggle were not easy to acquire.”³⁸ They would learn to distinguish friend from foe, socialism from capitalism, and the public good from private interest. They were hence primed to safeguard what Mao hailed as the “Three Great Revolutionary Movements” (*san da geming*; class struggle, the struggle of production, and scientific experiment) that establish a powerful socialist nation.³⁹

Prepared by this living ideological education, the youth of the 1960s would merge ideology and practice by settling accounts with class enemies in the present and thereby carry the revolution to an end. The emotional economy of recalling bitterness—tears and

³⁶ See “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 58-9. This exposition was later reprinted as the philosophical essay, “Where Do Correct Ideas Come From.” See Mao Zedong 1977 (May 1963): 155-7.

³⁷ This 1960 quote by Lin Biao was cited and paraphrased over the course of the 1960s: “If you don’t understand what classes are and you don’t understand what exploitation is then you cannot understand the meaning of revolution. If you don’t understand the bitterness of the past then you cannot understand the sweetness of the present; you might even mistake the present sweetness for bitterness.” See “The Summing-up Report of the Educational Movement of Two Recollections and Three Investigations” (March 22, 1961), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 413; Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.; *Shouzuyuan: geming xiandai nixiang* 1971: n.p.; Zheng Ye 1963: 5.

³⁸ “Speech at the Hangchow Conference” (May 1963), in Mao Zedong 1974b: 321. See also “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 63; “Later Ten Points” (September 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 74, 76, 86.

³⁹ “First Ten Points” (May 20, 1963), in Baum and Teiwes 1968: 70.

pain, physical expressions of exploitation and oppression—inspired a class sentiment (*jieji ganqing*) that would be converted into deep class hatred and revolutionary agency. In other words, the desired political subjects of the Movement would be hailed. Armed with their heightened class-consciousness and their perceptual knowledge of the historical experience of the proletariat, the younger generation would defeat the enemies identified by Mao in 1962: the reactionary ruling classes who were seeking to return to power, and individuals who nurtured bourgeois habits and ideology. To apprehend these forces of revisionism, youth were consequently reminded to enhance their vigilance (*tigao jingti*) and especially to “never forget class struggle,” since “forgetting the past means betrayal” (*wangji guoqu jiu yiweizhe beipan*).⁴⁰

In Gejiu, I discovered two examples of the Four Histories: a copy of *Speak in Blood and Tears of the Past, Triumphantly Extol the Present: An Abridged Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine* (1963), co-edited in Gejiu by the Laochang Mine Labor Union and the Laochang Mine Communist Youth League; and a copy of *Blood Debt: A Record of the Criminal Deeds of Landlords* (1963), compiled in Hunan province, but formerly in the collection of the reading room of the Ma Mine Labor Union.⁴¹ Like

⁴⁰ Hunan renmin chubanshe 1963: “Bianzhe de hua”: 2; “Xiang qingnian jinxing jieji douzhengshi de jiaoyu” 1963: 2; Zheng Ye 1963: 5.

⁴¹ Only a handful of scholarly articles address the Four Histories, and these few articles are flawed by inadequate knowledge of earlier campaigns and by an insistence on academic criteria of historiographical objectivity. In the most far-reaching review of the Four Histories Movement, for example, Shi Chengzhi groups the histories into two categories: academic and propagandistic. The former, usually compiled by academies or universities, are the village, the commune, and the factory histories that marshal a wide array of data to narrate institutional history. The latter, usually compiled by local Party committees, recount as “family history” stories of personal suffering and emancipation. Shi’s analytic schema suffers from ignorance of the campaign to write factory history. Many of the Four Histories that he cites as academic monographs are factory histories of the Great Leap Forward, hence their compilation by institutions of higher learning. When

many factory histories of the Four Histories Movement, *Speak in Blood and Tears of the Past* is an abridgement of a factory history compiled during the Great Leap Forward, *A Preliminary History of the Laochang Mine* (1959)—written by undergraduate majors in History at Yunnan University, under the auspices of the Gejiu Party Propaganda Department. And like other Four Histories, *Speak in Blood and Tears* rearranges its inherited historical materials to conform to Mao's theory of continuous revolution. Adopting the class viewpoint method of historical interpretation, it demonstrates the universality of classes and class struggle through the local figure of the *shading*.

In the first chapter, the “blood and tears of the *shading*” illustrate the historical effects of semi-colonialism, semi-feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism on local society and industry. In excerpts from family histories, old workers compare the exploitation and oppression in the mines of private bosses to the exploitation and oppression in the mines of comprador capitalists backed by the Four Great Families. All experiences confirm, however, that “the miserable life of Laochang workers epitomizes the miserable life of the working class in old China.”⁴² The second chapter explicates the theoretical stance of the first chapter by identifying the “*shading*” and the “*laoban*” (boss) as the classed

considered in isolation from the memoirs of the late 1950s, these monographs, which are as didactic in nature, acquire greater objectivity. Therefore, his categorization of these histories as either academic or propagandistic is misguided. All scholars who have written on the Four Histories assess the quality of the data and the objectivity of the text in this manner. Some conclude that the Four Histories are partisan political tracts of no merit, while others argue the contrary. By examining these official histories as instantiations of Chinese Marxist history, I dispense with the practice of discounting of propaganda and instead attend to and therefore recuperate the historical value of these texts: their role in defining socialist society, subjectivity, and historical knowledge. See “The Four Histories Movement: Everyone a Historian” 1966; Greenblatt 1976a; Shi Chengzhi 1971-1972; Uhalley 1966; Siu-lun Wong 1979: 93-105.

⁴² Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: 1-2.

subjects of the “worker” and the “capitalist.” Just as the miners at Laochang represent the Chinese working class before liberation, Gejiu represents the “old China”: a society in which universal, antithetical classes exist in an unrelenting, antagonistic “struggle of life and death”—the capitalist’s unceasing resistance to the demands of labor and the worker’s unyielding engagement in revolutionary struggle. Victory in class struggle, however, depends on Party leadership, which organizes successful acts of worker protest. At the end of the chapter, individual experiences of turning over (*fanshen*) coincide with the liberation (*jiefang*) of Gejiu: “Awaiting stars, awaiting moonlight, /Awaiting the savior, the Communist Party; /The dark evening sky is illuminated, /Chairman Mao’s brilliance shines on Laochang.”⁴³ Chapter three, the final chapter, conducts the reader through the new society created by liberation. A series of political and economic campaigns fend off class enemies and raise the class-consciousness of the masses (Democratic Reform, the Three-Anti Campaign, the Five-Anti Campaign, the First Five-Year Plan, the socialization of industry, the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward). Several pages of quantitative and qualitative contrasts between living standards and labor conditions before and after 1949 prove the efficacy of socialist construction, which has triumphantly turned “hell on earth” into “heaven on earth.”⁴⁴

True to the purpose of the Four Histories Movement, *Speak in Blood and Tears* mobilizes its readers against present class enemies and against revisionist tendencies by recalling the past and contrasting it to the present (*huiyi dubi*). The preface even states

⁴³ Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: 30, 41, citing a verse from “The Original Clapper Song of Li Youcai” (see chapter two).

⁴⁴ Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: 46.

that this “family history of the proletariat” will rouse youth to “acquire a firm class and class struggle viewpoint,” thereby better to oppose “imperialism, modern revisionism, and reactionaries of various countries.”⁴⁵ In its final pages, *Speak in Blood and Tears* raises the specter of historical regression, paraphrasing Mao’s 1962 Tenth Plenum speech by warning its readers that “class enemies still exist within the country. They are not reconciled to their doom; they always plan to attack socialism, restore capitalism, make the laboring people their beasts of burden, their slaves forever.” Even in Laochang, “class struggle not only exists but is very sharp.” Although the “transition from capitalism to communism” is inevitably marked by “class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie,” the reader should never waver in countering capitalist restoration, and should “zealously participate in socialist revolution and socialist construction.”⁴⁶

Whereas *Speak in Blood and Tears* narrates national history through an account of the Gejiu tin industry, *Blood Debt: A Record of the Criminal Deeds of Landlords* narrates Chinese Marxist history as autobiography. Although *Blood Debt* was written in Hunan province, the copy I purchased at a used-bookstand once belonged to the reading room of the Ma Mine Labor Union. Because I have not yet found a family history written in Gejiu during the Socialist Education Movement, I provide this example as a substitute. The booklet contains fourteen family histories extracted from Hunan newspapers that date to the early 1950s and early 1960s. With subtitles such as “A Family History of Blood and Tears” (*xuelei jiashi*) and “A Criminal History of Building up a Family Fortune” (*zuie*

⁴⁵ Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: n.p.

⁴⁶ Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: 46-7.

fajiashi), these life histories recount the exploitation and oppression of the peasantry by the landlord class and conclude with land reform, emphasizing that the peasantry turned over (*fanshen*) under the leadership of the Party. The histories from the early 1950s allegedly are transcripts of vent bitterness (*suku*) narratives, whereas those from the early 1960s are transcripts of recollect bitterness (*yiku*) narratives. Both varieties of personal testimony are affective records of class struggle, simultaneously exposing the crimes of class enemies and settling accounts (*qingsuan*). Photographs of material objects offer further evidence that “The corrupt, pleasure-seeking life of the feudal landlord class is built on the pain and labor, blood and sweat of the peasantry.”⁴⁷ The photographs reproduce the “sharp contrasts” of a display at a 1963 Hunan exhibition on the history of class struggle: the luxurious otter skin coat of a landlord and the tattered cotton garment of a peasant; the palatial family residence of a landlord and the collapsing thatched shack of a peasant; a landlord’s rare delicacies and a peasant’s foraged foods.

“The Tragic Misfortune of Xiong Guzi’s Family” (1951) is an example of a vent bitterness narrative, an act of class struggle that reveals the essence (*benzhi*) of classes: the savage nature of the exploiting classes and the revolutionary role of the peasantry. Xiong Guzi, a beggar, wanders with his mother, wife, and two sons into a rural township of Hengshan, a sacred Buddhist site, where landlord Liu Yiting offers him wasteland to till. After repeatedly confiscating wasteland that Xiong makes fertile (during which time his mother and wife die from eating poisonous wild plants), landlord Liu offers Xiong wasteland to rent. As rent is raised yearly, Xiong and his two sons cultivate a tangerine grove to provide a future means of sustenance, a grove still fruitless when Xiong dies of

⁴⁷ Hunan renmin chubanshe 1963: 4, 7-8.

exhaustion, as does his eldest son shortly thereafter. Spurred by greed, the grandson of Liu Yiting, Liu Xuchu, eventually confiscates the tangerine grove of the Xiong family. Death, illness, and poverty consequently ravage Xiong Guzi's descendants, forcing surviving members to become beggars once more. In the final paragraph, Hengshan is liberated and land reform takes place under the leadership of the Party. At a village-wide struggle meeting in 1950, Xiong Linsheng, the grandson of Xiong Guzi, takes the stand and "vents bitterness," presumably recounting the above tale. Pointing his finger at the accused, he draws his family history to a close by saying, "Today, you repay this blood debt, one life for another." At the struggle meeting, Liu Xuchu is "beaten down."⁴⁸

"Unforgettable Class Hatred" (1962), by contrast, is a recollect bitterness narrative, a reenactment of class struggle that teaches about classes and class struggle so as to fend off a renewed attack by class enemies and hence to safeguard the sweetness of the present. When Zheng Xiangzhai, an elderly peasant of a flourishing commune, receives a certificate of merit as a model worker, he says, "Once the wound has healed, the pain is forgotten; when you drink the water, therefore, think of those who dug the well." He then tells a story of physical torture and injustice at the hands of a malicious family of local tyrants and landlords who wrongly accused him of banditry. Only in 1949, when the peasantry turned over under the leadership of the Party and Chairman Mao, was he reunited with his family. In the final paragraph, he reminds readers, "Explaining the bitterness of the past is the only way to make later generations understand the sweetness of the present. Besides, landlords and rich peasants still exist today; they are not

⁴⁸ Hunan renmin chubanshe 1963: 35-6.

reconciled to their doom. I want to teach my descendants never to forget this bitterness and to always follow the Party and Chairman Mao.”⁴⁹

This message is reiterated in “Restoration Record,” the conclusion to *Blood Debt*, which offers a 1950 letter by landlord Fang Kesheng as proof that “rural class struggle has not ceased; unlawful landlords at all times and in all places still think of resurgence.” Fang reportedly wrote his letter while being reeducated, while land reform was underway in Ningyuan, his hometown. In the letter, he advises his son to do what the peasantry tells him, and “to admit his guilt [lit. ‘bow his head,’ *ditou*] to others and to the masses, at least outwardly.” He also reports, with counter-revolutionary hope, that “several thousand PLA soldiers have been killed in the war in Taiwan.” Given this “proof” of the two-faced nature of the landlord class, *Blood Debt* concludes, “we must raise our vigilance and rigorously put landlords, rich peasants, and counter-revolutionary elements under surveillance,” for only defeat of the capitalist restoration will “safeguard the fruits of our victory and consolidate the people’s democratic dictatorship.”⁵⁰

In contrast to the factory histories of the late 1950s, the Four Histories were not compiled to mobilize human consciousness to unparalleled heights of production, and their success was not measured in terms of output. Rather, the Four Histories raised class-consciousness by offering perceptual knowledge of classes and class struggle, and incited Chinese youth to conclude the revolution of their forebears and so to entrench the socialist stage of development. Class education, the reenactment of class struggle during land reform, prepared the younger generation how to conduct class struggle by means of

⁴⁹ Hunan renmin chubanshe 1963: 62, 65.

⁵⁰ Hunan renmin chubanshe 1963: 77-8.

weapons and words. In family histories, these words are forever audible in the recollect bitterness narratives of old workers and old peasants who narrate Chinese Marxist history as historical memory. Like the factory, commune, and village histories of this period, family histories show the truth and the universality of the Marxist history of the Chinese nation. Analyzed in this way, the Four Histories are historical artifacts of a political praxis that authenticate and implement Mao's vision of history and of proper personhood.

Three new priorities in the Four Histories compiled in 1964-1965 point toward the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution: the national campaign to learn from the PLA; the emulation of Mao Zedong Thought; and the training of "revolutionary successors" (*geming jiebanren*). As revolutionary practitioners, the soldiers of the PLA had always been ideal instructors for the youth. With the launching of the campaign to learn from the PLA, in February of 1964, these flawless fighters became much more: models for the entire citizenry. Already in 1963, the propagation of model soldiers such as Lei Feng indicated that the PLA was transforming into a power base from which Mao could alter the political landscape. The new campaign to learn from the PLA broadcast Lin Biao's 1960 political program to a national audience, replacing "living Marxism" with the "living study and living application" (*huoxue huoyong*) of Mao Zedong Thought.⁵¹ Although the Party promoted the 1962 edition of Liu Shaoqi's *How to Be a Good Communist* as its model for the cultivation of Communist morality, compliance with the dictates of the Party, and adherence to Marxism-Leninism, the PLA proclaimed, "Study Chairman Mao's writings, follow his teachings, act according to his instructions,

⁵¹ On living Marxism, see Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:79. See also "The Whole Country Must Learn from the PLA" (February 1, 1964), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 95-102.

and be his good fighters.”⁵² In May of 1964, the Political Department of the PLA took an important step toward the deification of Mao and sanctification of his word by its publication of *Quotations From Chairman Mao (Mao zhuxi yulu)*, the mandatory study guide known as the “little red book.” The next month, the Chinese Communist Youth League called for the training of successors to the revolutionary cause, proffering the Four Histories as means to forge this new political subject.⁵³

The Four Histories compiled in 1965 lastly register this use of Mao Zedong Thought as a guide to revolutionary history and revolutionary action. The quotation “Where there is oppression, there is resistance” (*Nali you yapo, nali jiu you fankang*),⁵⁴ prefigures the tripartite structure of the histories (exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation) and defines revolutionary action. In accordance with Mao’s “Twenty-Three Articles” of January 1965, moreover, the Four Histories foregrounded a two-road struggle between socialism and capitalism and incited youth to oppose the capitalist road.

⁵² “The Whole Country Must Learn from the PLA” (February 1, 1964), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 96. See also “Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army,” (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 70; Solomon 1971: 445-6.

⁵³ See Hu Keshi 1964; Hu Yaobang 1964: 23-5; “Jiaoyu qingnian yidai yongyuan dang gemingpai—zhu Gongqingtuan di jiu ci quan guo daibiao dahui shengli bimu” 1964: 1. For examples of Four Histories, published in 1964-65, see Greenblatt 1976; *Lishi yanjiu* 1965:2, 1965:3, and 1965:4; *Zhongguo qingnian* 1964:7 and 1965:21.

⁵⁴ I have yet to see a source cited for this quotation. One possible source is Mao Zedong “Toward a New Golden Age” (July 1919), in Schram 1965: 106. The quotation is sometimes lengthened: “Where there is exploitation and oppression, there is resistance and struggle” (*You boxue, you yapo, jiu you fankang, you douzheng*).

“Give Prominence to Politics”: Arts, Literature, and *The Rent Collection Courtyard*

In 1965, Mao visited the army base in the Jinggang Mountains where he had developed the military tactics and agrarian policies that had secured the Communist victory.⁵⁵ The Chairman reflected aloud:

What is expressed in that commonplace term ‘revisionism’ is the death of the revolution...I have told you that the revolution is also a feeling. If we decide to make of it what the Russians are now doing—a feeling of the past—everything will fall apart. Our revolution cannot be simply the stabilization of a victory.⁵⁶

In other words, feeling, as a force of human agency, is the lifeblood of the revolution. It keeps revolutionary traditions alive as it impels the future. The revolutionary praxis that the Party leaders developed in their youth would provide this sense of historical continuity. As Lin Biao said, “We should always preserve our political youthfulness, follow our revolutionary steps, and never stop halfway.”⁵⁷

Mao and his supporters blamed the relaxed cultural policies of the early 1960s, specifically the “Eight Articles” on literature and art,⁵⁸ for making the revolution a feeling of the past. The policies granted greater freedom to intellectuals, allowing an intellectual such as Wu Han to write his *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (1961), a play that was interpreted as a thinly veiled criticism of the Party. In his Tenth Plenum speech

⁵⁵ See MacFarquhar 1997: 432.

⁵⁶ Malraux 1968: 375.

⁵⁷ “Resolution Made by the Enlarged Meeting of the Military Affairs Commission of the Central Authorities of the Chinese Communist Party on Strengthening Political and Ideological Work in the Army” (October 20, 1960), in J. Chester Cheng 1966: 77.

⁵⁸ See MacFarquhar 1997: 116-20.

of 1962, Mao vented his disapproval with pungent irony: “Writing novels is popular these days, isn’t it? The use of novels for anti-Party activity is a great invention.”⁵⁹

In February of 1966, Jiang Qing (at the request of Lin Biao) convened a forum in Shanghai where she urged the need to revolutionize culture. At this forum on literature and art in the armed forces, Jiang Qing emphasized the notion of “giving prominence to politics” (*tuchu zhengzhi*), the Five Point Principle put forth by Lin Biao in November of 1965.⁶⁰ An elaboration of Lin Biao’s 1960 political program, “giving prominence to politics” meant accepting the existence of classes and class struggle in socialist society as a fact, and putting Mao Zedong Thought in command. Lin furthered the hyperbolic adulation of Mao Zedong Thought by pronouncing that “Every word is a truth, and one word equals ten thousand words” spoken by others.⁶¹ He even declared that Mao Zedong Thought possessed the power to “produce instant results” (*li gan jian ying*) and offered the “Three Constantly Read Articles” (*Laosanbian*) as a shortcut to mastering Mao’s works.⁶²

⁵⁹ “Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee” (September 24, 1962), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 195.

⁶⁰ See Xiao Hua “Hold High the Great Red Banner of the Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, and Resolutely Implement the Five Point Principle of Bringing Politics to the Fore” (January 24, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 170-85. The Five Point Principle dictates 1) study and apply Chairman Mao’s work 2) persist in the “four firsts” and grasp living ideas 3) send leading cadres to basic-level units to oversee the campaign to foster “four goods” companies 4) promote good commanders and fighters to leadership posts 5) train hard and master superior military techniques and close range and night fighting tactics. See also footnote 21 in chapter three.

⁶¹ Xiao Hua “Hold High the Great Red Banner of the Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, and Resolutely Implement the Five Point Principle of Bringing Politics to the Fore” (January 24, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 171, 177.

⁶² See Gu Anlin et al. 2006: 342. The “Three Constantly Read Articles” refer to following three essays by Mao Zedong, “In Memory of Norman Bethune” (December 21, 1939),

The Summary of the Forum, revised by Mao and published in April of 1966, states that the Forum pursued the aim (already iterated by Lin Biao in his 1960 Resolution) “to foster proletarian ideology and liquidate bourgeois ideology” in the cultural field. It explains that during the past sixteen years, “there has been a struggle between the two classes and the two lines on the cultural front, that is, the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for leadership on this front,” but that during these crucial years literary and artistic circles “have been under the dictatorship of a black anti-Party and anti-socialist line which is diametrically opposed to Chairman Mao’s thought.”⁶³ To reverse this dangerous situation, the Summary promotes the living study and living application of Mao Zedong Thought as interpreted by Jiang Qing. To create a “new socialist revolutionary literature and art,” cultural workers have to depict contemporary “revolutionary persons” (*gemingren*) and make art that “springs from the life of the people,” using the appointed method of combining revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism. Despite the importance of “first-hand material,” the Summary emphasizes that artists should create generalized situations and typical characters. The presentation of heroic models of workers, peasants, and soldiers, in historical and modern revolutionary dramas, ensures the “unity of revolutionary political content and the best possible artistic form.” These model revolutionaries can even be fictive “living heroes,” so long as cultural workers “concentrate and generalize experience from real life.” This

“Serve the People” (September 8, 1944), and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed Mountains” (June 11, 1945).

⁶³ “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing” (March 22, 1966), in K. H. Fan 1968: 101-2, 114.

radicalization of literature and art opens a “heroic and tenacious offensive against the literature and art of the feudal class, the bourgeoisie, and the modern revisionists.”⁶⁴

In addition to Jiang Qing’s revolutionary model operas, the Summary singled out a tableau of life-sized clay sculptures as a model of revolutionary art: *The Rent Collection Courtyard* (*Shouzu yuan*).⁶⁵ Press reports heralded this tableau as a “brilliant victory” for Mao Zedong Thought, a victory in revolutionizing the art of sculpture, a former stronghold of feudal and bourgeois art.⁶⁶ Created in the small town of Anren, Dayi County, by professional artists from the Sichuan Institute of Fine Arts in collaboration with local amateurs, *The Rent Collection Courtyard* provided “a classroom for conducting class education” by offering “a vivid and truthful picture of the raging class struggle in old China’s countryside.”⁶⁷ In the actual courtyard of the former “landlord” Liu Wencai—now called the “Manor House of Crime” of “the living King of Hell” (*huo*

⁶⁴ “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing” (March 22, 1966), in K. H. Fan 1968: 103, 106-8, 111-2. The Summary repeatedly invokes Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art,” stipulating that cultural workers should “make the past serve the present,” “make foreign works serve China,” and “weed through the old to bring out the new,” but replacing the term “reform” with the term “revolution.”

⁶⁵ See “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing” (March 22, 1966), in K. H. Fan 1968: 103. The term *yangbanxi* (model operas) refers to a broad range of “theatrical works” or “dramas” (*xi*). The eight model operas that Jiang Qing propagated include the five operas: *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *On the Docks*, *The Red Lantern*, *Shajiabang*, and *The Raid on White Tiger Regiment*; the two ballets: *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-haired Girl*; and the one symphony: *Shajiabang Symphony*. See also McDougal 1984: 294.

⁶⁶ “A Revolution in Sculpture” 1966: 30. See also “We Must Revolutionize Our Thinking and Then Revolutionize Sculpture” 1967: 97, 101, 112.

⁶⁷ *Rent Collection Courtyard: Sculptures of Oppression and Revolt* 1968: n.p.; *Shouzuyuan nisu qunxiang: Sichuan Dayi tudi zhuangyuan chenlieguan* 1966: n.p.

Yanwang)—the artists sculpted 114 life-size clay figures out of local materials, and placed them among more than 100 historical artifacts, such as reed baskets, a measuring peck, steel spring whips, a winnower.⁶⁸ The historic location and the evocation of real people and real events (*zhenren-zhenshi*) lent authenticity to the represented scenes: “Standing in the original compound where rent was collected, these sculptures people it again with the life and passions of the past.”⁶⁹ Within the 100-meter long gallery encircling the courtyard, the clay sculptures were arranged into six scenes that together formed a narrative, from the bloody exploitation and oppression by the landlord class to the victorious uprising of the peasants against the injustice of the old society.

Commissioned by the provincial government, *The Rent Collection Courtyard* opened to the public on National Day (October 1) of 1965. Explicit labels told visitors the correct interpretation of the six scenes. In the first scene, “Delivering the Rent,” poor, downtrodden peasants in frayed, patched clothes trudged through “the gates of hell” with baskets of grain, which they fed into the “trick” winnower. When fanning the chaff from the grain, the winnower discarded good grain, thereby reducing the total weight. In the second scene, “Examining the Rent,” one of Liu Wencai’s henchmen raised a whip to strike an outraged tenant, an elderly man whose grandson tried to retrieve the good grain that lay scattered on floor. In the third scene, “Measuring the Grain,” Liu Wencai used an oversized measuring peck, which earned him an illicit extra 330,000 *jin* of grain per year. In the fourth scene, “Settling Accounts,” Liu ordered the sale of a young man as a

⁶⁸ *Shouzuyuan nisu qunxiang: Sichuan Dayi tudi zhuangyuan chenlieguan* 1966: n.p. See also “New Szechuan Clay Sculptures: ‘Compound Where Rent Was Collected’” 1965: 26; “A Revolution in Sculpture” 1966: 31; *Shouzuyuan nisu qunxiang: Sichuan Dayi tudi zhuangyuan chenlieguan* 1966.

⁶⁹ “New Szechuan Clay Sculptures: ‘Compound Where Rent Was Collected’” 1965: 26.

conscript on the pretense that his father's rent was not paid in full. Although Liu held a Buddhist rosary, the caption pointed out, "his heart is as venomous as a viper." The fifth scene, "Forcing the Payment," showed that failure to pay the rent resulted in the severance of peasant families, by destitution, wretchedness, imprisonment, and the sale of kin. In the sixth scene, "Revolt," simmering anger erupted in armed struggle. By 1966, but possibly already in 1965, this scene bore as caption the Mao Zedong quotation, "Where there is oppression, there is resistance."⁷⁰

The Rent Collection Courtyard was a recollect bitterness narrative in sculptural form—a "sculptural denunciation" of old China that offers "bloody criminal evidence" of the savage nature and cruel methods of the landlord class—and was therefore a re-enactment of class struggle. A peasant's praise of the artwork suggests as much: "You are accusing our enemies and speaking on our behalf."⁷¹ As early as 1963, during the Four Histories Movement, regional newspapers and national journals such as *Guangming ribao* and *Zhongguo qingnian* had already published "family histories" about the affliction of the Dayi peasantry at the hands of landlord Liu Wencai, and about the exhibition on the history of class struggle in Dayi County.⁷² Like those earlier accounts, the sculptural tableau emerged from the recalled bitterness (*yiku*) of old peasants and taught about classes and class struggle.⁷³ But its tripartite structure gave a new prominence to politics. First, it identified the social relation of rent as the source of

⁷⁰ *Shouzuyuan nisu qunxiang: Sichuan Dayi tudi zhuangyuan chenlieguan* 1966: n.p.

⁷¹ The Team which Made the "Rent Collection Courtyard" 1966: 23, 27.

⁷² See Chen Shaoxuan 1964; Li Lei 1963.

⁷³ See *Rent Collection Courtyard: A Revolution in Sculpture* 1967: 2, 6.

suffering and indignation, and of the emergence of the peasantry as a revolutionary class. Second, it showed how the emotional economy of digging out the root of bitterness forges class-consciousness. This process was made visible by the piercing gaze, clenched fists, and defiant stance of the clay peasants who grasped their revolutionary agency in the last scene. Third, the narrative imparted the main lesson of class education: the nature of classes and class struggle. The latter took the form of both armed struggle (in the final revolt) and public accusation (the recollect bitterness narrative). The antithetical nature of the revolutionary and predatory classes emerged from the contrast between the just, heroic, and self-sacrificing peasantry of Dayi County and the merciless exploitation by Liu Wencai, whose pious prayer beads could not hide his depravity. The visitors to the exhibition acquired a historical understanding of revolution through experience (*tihui*), as they followed the corporeal choreography of the clay-cast peasantry, from the slouching bodies of suffering to the upright postures of liberation.

The merger of local experience with national history, and the coincidence of the individual experience of “turning over” (*fanshen*) with the national experience of “liberation” (*jiefang*), became especially apparent when reproductions of *The Rent Collection Courtyard* traveled through the country. In January of 1966, the National Museum of Chinese Art in Beijing devoted an entire gallery to replicas of about forty of the clay figures, which were exhibited beside photographs of the Sichuan originals. By the year’s end, a set of “new, improved clay sculptures” went on permanent display in the Palace Museum (also known as the Forbidden City).⁷⁴ Placed in the hall where the

⁷⁴ “We Must Revolutionize Our Thinking and Then Revolutionize Sculpture” 1967: 98. See also “New Year Holiday Attractions” 1966: 31; *Rent Collection Courtyard: A Revolution in Sculpture* 1967: 3; Topping 1974: 70.

emperors of the Qing dynasty (1636-1912) used to worship their ancestors, the tableau symbolized the defeat of the feudal past by the socialist present, enshrining the proletariat and its vanguard as the founders of the People's Republic. The revolutionary artists who made the new set of clay sculptures explained:

Collecting rent was a typical event, the compound where rent was collected was a typical environment of such a scene, and Liu Wencai was a typical landlord and despot. By using such things typical of the old society to reveal the essence, by expressing the general through the particular, we presented a microcosm of all pre-liberation China and made this single compound reflect the whole of the old society.⁷⁵

Middle school students in Gejiu, too, learned about the exhibition, although at a distance. “An Explanation of *The Rent Collection Courtyard*” in their 1969 Chinese language and literature textbook contained an explanation of the six scenes of the tableau as well as the captions of a number of clay sculptures, culminating in the injunctions, “Always remember class hatred!” and “Be a revolutionary person forever!”⁷⁶ In this way, youth in Gejiu were roused to undertake socialist revolution and socialist construction.

“Never Forget Class Struggle”

On May 4, 1966, the *Liberation Army Daily* published an editorial entitled “Never Forget Class Struggle!” Under this slogan from the Socialist Education Movement the editors rallied the masses to “carry on the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution to the end,” in

⁷⁵ “We Must Revolutionize Our Thinking and Then Revolutionize Sculpture” 1967: 106-7. For an earlier version of this article, see The Team which Made the “Rent Collection Courtyard” 1966.

⁷⁶ Yunnansheng Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou geming weiyuanhui zhengong zu 1969: 1:32. See also Yunnansheng Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou geming weiyuanhui zhengong zu 1969: 1:26-32.

order to defeat “the anti-Party and anti-socialist black line in the domain of culture.”⁷⁷ In the preceding months, opponents of Mao Zedong and Lin Biao had tried to reframe the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution, arguing that politics should remain subservient to the economy, that expertise was as valuable as redness, and that Marxism-Leninism stood on a par with Mao Zedong Thought.⁷⁸ Mao Zedong and his supporters countered these arguments in editorials in the *People’s Daily* and the *Liberation Army Daily*, and in Party documents.⁷⁹ As the editorial “Never Forget Class Struggle!” explained,

the current great polemic on the cultural front is by no means a problem concerning a few articles, plays and films, or a dispute between different schools of arts, but it is an extremely sharp class struggle, ... an acute, protracted struggle on the question of whether the proletariat or the bourgeoisie will win in the realm of ideology.⁸⁰

In June of 1966, the movement was renamed the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), culture was the object of revolution. Culture provided both the field in which top leaders struggled for power and the means by which top leaders (assisted by the Army and Red Guards) subverted opponents. The mobilization of meaning and subjectivity, in other words, was the motivating force of the events of this decade. It is of paramount importance for understanding the decision of

⁷⁷ “Never Forget Class Struggle” (May 4, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 205, 210.

⁷⁸ See “Outline Report Concerning the Current Academic Discussion of the Group of Five in Charge of the Cultural Revolution” (February 12, 1966), in Harold Hinton 1980: 1380-1.

⁷⁹ See Xiao Hua “Hold High the Great Red Banner of the Thought of Mao Tse-Tung, and Resolutely Implement the Five Point Principle of Bringing Politics to the Fore” (January 24, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 170-85; Solomon 1971: 481-6; “Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China”(May 16, 1966), in Union Research Institute 1968: 20-8.

⁸⁰ “Never Forget Class Struggle” (May 4, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 205.

adults and children to wage a civil war, for understanding the manner in which they made revolution, and for understanding the trauma or defiance of its survivors. Through manipulations of the cultural field, the Maoists gained control of the central Party apparatus in the fall of 1966, fomented the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968), suppressed the revolutionary ranks at the end of 1968, and finally reconsolidated the Party by the appointment of revolutionary committees, beginning a period of reconstruction (1969-1976). The complexities of this power struggle, with its fragile subplots, shifting strategies, and betrayed alliances—not to mention the dynamic of the less understood power struggles it sparked at each administrative level of the nation—took place “in the domain of culture.”

Rallied by slogans such as “To rebel is justified,” zealous students at universities and secondary schools began criticizing academic and Party authorities and putting up “big-character posters” (*dazibao*) during the summer of 1966. Mao expressed support for the Red Guards by writing a big-character poster of his own, under the title “Bombard the Headquarters.”⁸¹ He maneuvered to direct the insurgents as he saw fit, forestalling anti-Maoist efforts to quell the Red Guards and secure political power. In August 1966, at the Eleventh Plenum, he issued the first official guideline of the Cultural Revolution. This “Sixteen Point Decision” began by repeating an observation Mao had made in 1962: “To overthrow a political regime, it is always necessary to first create public opinion and engage in ideological work.”⁸² The Decision then set two main goals: to dismantle the

⁸¹ See “Bombard the Headquarters” (August 5, 1966), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 261.

⁸² “Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Concerning the Great Cultural Revolution” (August 8, 1966), in Union Research Institute 1968: 42.

“four olds” (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits) and erect the new (new ideas, new culture, new customs, and new habits), and to “knock down those power holders who take the capitalist road.”⁸³

Lin Biao laid out the ideological foundations of the proletarian revolution in October 1966, in a speech entitled “Why A Cultural Revolution?” In this speech, he explains that a proletarian revolution has three aspects: the political, the economic, and the ideological. In the People’s Republic, the proletariat has held political power since liberation, and with the creation of the socialist system of public ownership, it acquired economic power. The proletarian victory in the ideological field, however, has yet to be won. As long as social consciousness lags behind, it hinders the development of the economic base and creates an opportunity for revisionists to subvert the people’s democratic dictatorship, topple the socialist economy, and cause China to “retrogress to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal status.”⁸⁴ A cultural revolution—culture being the concrete expression of ideology—will transform the superstructure so as to make it compatible with the economic base. The revolution must consolidate the socialist system by eliminating old ideology, summarized in the word “self” (*si*), and by replacing it with new ideology, represented by the word “public” (*gong*). The destruction of the self-centered bourgeois worldview will enable the creation of “a new man to construct a new

⁸³ “Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Concerning the Great Cultural Revolution” (August 8, 1966), in Union Research Institute 1968: 42.

⁸⁴ Lin Biao “Why A Cultural Revolution” (October 26, 1966), in Schoenhals 1996: 13. See also Lin Biao “Why A Cultural Revolution” (October 26, 1966), in Schoenhals 1996: 9-26.

society, a man with a communist spirit.” Such is the nature of a cultural revolution that “truly touches people’s souls.”⁸⁵

Class Education Exhibitions during the Period of Radicalism: *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle (1966)* and *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu (1966)*

Local exhibitions had served as classrooms for political education during the Socialist Education Movement and other campaigns, but the exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution were unprecedented in their scale, in the range of their media, in the reach of their ideas, and in their emotional impact. *The Rent Collection Courtyard* provided the model for these exhibitions, and Party committees across the country closely imitated its form. But the contents of the class education exhibitions was always local, based on materials gathered during previous political campaigns such as the factory histories, memoirs, and exhibitions of the 1950s and 1960s. An exhibition in Datong offered living proof of the exploitation of coal miners, an exhibition in Tianjin recreated the “horrible living hell” of apprentices in the machinery plants and foundries, and the well-known tableau *Wrath of the Serfs* depicted the bondage and revolutionary struggle of Tibetans.⁸⁶

The class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution introduced new, inventive uses of living educational materials. Recollectors were freed from the formal context of the recollect bitterness meeting (becoming what I call “roving recollectors”) to ply their trade at a broader array of venues, serving as guides during class education

⁸⁵ Lin Biao “Why A Cultural Revolution” (October 26, 1966), in Schoenhals 1996: 10, 18.

⁸⁶ See Shanxisheng Datong kuangwuju “Kuang gong jiashi” bianxie zu 1972; “A History of Blood and Tears: On the Art Works of the Three Stones Museum in Tientsin” 1969; *Wrath of the Serfs: A Group of Life-Size Clay Sculptures* 1976.

exhibition tours, or recounting their former suffering at impromptu or informal meetings. In their attempt to resurrect the past as “living history” (*huo lishi*), many exhibitions even recreated the time and space of the narrated events and used forms of historical reenactment to impart perceptual knowledge (*ganxing renshi*) of classes and class struggle through the full range of the senses. *The Recollect Bitterness Center* in Gejiu, for example, invited visitors to crawl through an old mine shaft and allowed them to experience the joy of liberation when they emerged, once more upright, into the sunlight at the end of the tunnel. Living educational materials, in other words, served as historical witnesses that authenticated and verified the truth claims of official history. The “iron facts” (*tie de shishi*) of instruments of torture and bodies of suffering were put, in the words of Roland Barthes, “in business of signifying that the event represented has *really happened*,”⁸⁷ while the recollect bitterness narratives told Chinese Marxist history as historical memory, and hence as undeniable, embodied truth.

At the forum on literature and art in the armed forces in February 1966, Jiang Qing had summoned revolutionary artists and writers to create model revolutionary persons, “living heroes” born out of real life, who would (in Mao’s words) “help the masses propel history forward.”⁸⁸ The class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution answered this summons by presenting visitors with model practitioners of socialist revolution and socialist construction, risen from the local soil to become revolutionaries worthy of universal emulation. The written captions, the sculpted clay figures, the roving recollectors, the historical settings, and the physical reenactments

⁸⁷ Barthes 1986: 139. See also Anagnost 1997: 23, 39.

⁸⁸ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 1942): 3:82.

offered an embodied experience (*tihui*) of the lived reality of classes and class struggle and thereby hailed the desired political subjects of the Cultural Revolution. Armed with a sharpened class-consciousness and with historical knowledge, they would go forth to win victory in the Three Great Revolutionary Movements: class struggle, the struggle of production, and scientific experiment.

The three exhibitions organized in Gejiu—*The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu* (1966), *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* (1972-1979), and *The Recollect Bitterness Center* (1969-1978)—illustrate all the general features of class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution: the imitation of *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, the use of local materials from previous political campaigns, the recruitment of roving recollectors, and (especially at *The Recollect Bitterness Center*) the creation of “flesh and blood” (*youxue yourou*) experiences to offer living instruction in the bitterness of the past, the sweetness of the present, and the meaning of revolution. The Gejiu exhibitions also illustrate the changing politics and rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, which followed the progression of the Three Great Revolutionary Movements, from the practice of inciting class struggle to the practice of studying the history of class struggle for the sake of socialist construction. *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu* was a product of the period of radicalism (1966-1968), a period characterized by class struggle. *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* and *The Recollect Bitterness Center*, by contrast, were products of the period of restoration (1969-1976), a period characterized by the struggle of production and by scientific experiment. This profound ideological transformation also involved a retreat from the personality cult of Mao Zedong in favor of an acknowledgment of the

historical agency of the people, a de-emphasis of individual genius to allow the recognition of the collective wisdom of the laboring masses and their vanguard, the Communist Party. As the Mao cult waned, living ideological education came to an end.

The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu, like *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, was conceived in the early years of the Socialist Education Movement, but the Gejiu Party Propaganda Department began concrete preparations only in 1965. The exhibition occupied the left hall of Yunmiao, once the temple of the guild of Yunnan merchants and today the reading room of the Gejiu City Library. According to local gazetteers compiled during the 1980s, the exhibition consisted primarily of three-dimensional clay sculptures, some of which were painted. In addition, it included photographs, explanatory texts, and historical artifacts, such as the guns and torture devices with which Gejiu tin bosses secured their wealth and privilege. Together, these living educational materials demonstrated the stark contrast in the daily existence of Gejiu tin bosses and *shading* in old China. The exhibition concluded by comparing the quality of life and the political position of miners in the past and in the present. Red Guards caused a premature end to the exhibition in the summer of 1966, when they shut down the Department of Culture, the manager of the exhibition, and other government and Party bureaus.⁸⁹

In the absence of a catalogue of this first exhibition in Gejiu, the catalogue of the provincial exhibition in Kunming, *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle* (1966), probably preserves the most accurate impression of its tableaux. The probability that the section dedicated to Gejiu in the provincial exhibition was a reduced version of *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu* is enhanced by the similarity of that section to the later

⁸⁹ See Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 25-6, 132-3; Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1370; field interviews.

class education exhibitions in Gejiu, which drew on that earlier exhibition. In addition, the displays in the provincial exhibition included references to materials in *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines* (1966), a collection compiled in preparation for the Gejiu exhibition, to be discussed below.

The general narrative of *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle*, the class education exhibition of Yunnan, incited class struggle, and urged the living study and living application of Mao Zedong Thought. A lengthy quotation of Mao Zedong, mounted on the wall of the entrance hall behind a bust of the Chairman, laid out the fundamental forces of the continuous revolution:

In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership, and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods have in the main come to an end, there are still remnants of the overthrown landlord and comprador classes, there is still a bourgeoisie, and the remolding of the petty bourgeoisie has only just started. The class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not yet settled.⁹⁰

The exhibition, arranged in a three-part chronological sequence, demonstrated the truth of Mao's words by means of drawings, photographs, tableaux of painted figural clay sculptures, family histories, historical artifacts, and explanatory texts. The first part, *Class Struggle Before Liberation*, showed how the Three Great Enemies exploited and oppressed the Chinese people in the old society, revealing the atrocious crimes of American imperialists, Guomindang reactionaries, the native chieftains of Yunnan, and

⁹⁰ Yunnansheng jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1966: 1. This quotation is from Mao Zedong's speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (February 27, 1957).

the bureaucratic capitalists of Gejiu. The second part, *Class Struggle During the Socialist Revolutionary Period*, began with the liberation of Yunnan in 1950, treated the achievements of socialist development and the gains of the political campaigns of the 1950s, and warned of the current attempts by class enemies to topple socialism and restore capitalism (including American aid to Taiwan, the writing of “reactionary family histories,” and support of capitalist practices in the name of “peaceful evolution”). The final part, *Raise High the Revolutionary Red Flag of Mao Zedong Thought and Carry the Socialist Revolution Through to the End*, offered revolutionary people (cadres, workers, peasants, and soldiers) as living models of selfless toil for the country, the propagation of socialist culture, the struggle against class enemies, and aid to Vietnam in the resistance against the United States. At the exit, an injunction by Mao reminded the visitors: “**Never forget classes and class struggle.**”⁹¹

The most vivid materials on Gejiu appeared in the fifth section of the first part of the exhibition. This section, “The Cruel Exploitation of Workers by the Bureaucrat-Capitalist Class,” consisted of eleven displays, nine of which focused on Gejiu. Like all other sections in the exhibition, this section presented living educational materials as “iron proof” (*tiezheng*) of the historical truth of the represented reality. The titles of many of the displays were taken from folk songs, such as “Even Beasts of Burden Need a Rest; Those Who Become Tin Miners Suffer the Greatest Bitterness”—a couplet from the first song in *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines*, used as the title of the fifth display. The displays themselves used the full range of living ideological materials. “Just Out of the Gates of Hell and Into the Palace of the King of Hell” (display number four) exhibited a

⁹¹ Yunnansheng jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1966: 1-52.

skull, bones, and ankle shackles, said to be those of a child laborer who had been beaten to death by a capitalist. These artifacts were on view in a coffin-shaped glass case. The label explained that the peasantry, driven into destitution by the landlord class (the “gates of hell” stand for rent collection), sent its children to become laborers in “the Palace of the King of Hell”—the Gejiu mines. The fifth display summarized the family history of miner Li Youcai (see chapter two), a story that palpably represents the brutality of the henchman’s whip and heavy burden of capitalist greed. Display number six, “The Miners of the Old Society, The Slaves of the Capitalists,” paired the grievous life history of miner Wu Congxin (who was forced to wear twenty-five-pound ankle shackles for three years as penalty for attempting to escape oppression) with a tableau of a shackled miner hauling ore under the watch of the boss’s lackey, as an illustration of the “fascist rule” of the bureaucrat-capitalists. A photograph of this display in the catalogue, moreover, captures Wu Congxin himself in the role of a roving recollector,⁹² showing that the exhibition was also a performance space for the reconversion of histories of blood and tears into a living history (*huo lishi*) of oral recollect bitterness narratives.

In the final displays of this section on Gejiu, the bitterness of oppression erupted into class struggle, as the sparks of defiance became a roaring blaze: “Where there is oppression, there is resistance.” The exhibition cited a number of strikes as instances of the “continuous struggle” of Gejiu miners against their capitalist overlords, and showed the final victory of the miners under the leadership of the Party and their welcome of the liberation in 1949. In the last display on Gejiu, “Because Miners Have the Communist Party, They Will Be Masters of Their Own House for Generations,” the family history of

⁹² Yunnansheng jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1966: 22-3.

miner Dai Bingyuan highlighted the beneficence of the Party by juxtaposing the dark past and the golden present: Before liberation, Dai injured his foot during work, but his capitalist boss denied him care and medicine. A preventable amputation left him a crippled beggar. Yet after liberation, he “jumped out of the bitter waters.” With the help of the People’s Government, he was given a prosthetic foot and a new lease on life. His parting words deliver the political message of *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle*:

The Party and Chairman Mao are our parents. We miners have been reborn from them. We will always follow Chairman Mao’s teaching; we will always act according to his instructions; and we will carry the revolution through to the end.⁹³

Of the remains of the 1966 class education exhibition in Gejiu itself, I have found only *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines*, a collection of source materials for *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu*. Deriving its text from the factory history *Speak in Blood and Tears of the Past* (see above), *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines* presses the weightier historical narrative of its predecessor into the tripartite structure of exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation. Mining songs elucidate each of these three stages of revolutionary struggle. This new narrative structure gives prominence to politics by emphasizing class struggle and the practical application of Mao Zedong Thought.

The sixteen-page introduction to *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines* offers a summary three-part history of Gejiu, from “the bloody crimes of Gejiu’s capitalists” in the old society to revolt and liberation.⁹⁴ The first thirteen pages extract the most gruesome examples from *Speak in Blood and Tears* to illustrate the savagery of class exploitation and class oppression. Duped into paying a “settling-in allowance,” peasants

⁹³ Yunnansheng jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1966: 23-4.

⁹⁴ Yunnansheng zonggonghui xuanchuan bu and Yunnan renmin chubanshe 1966: 1.

from the destitute regions of Yunnan toil as *shading* for fifteen hours a day in shafts so narrow that the miners can hardly breathe. Denied medicine and care, sickness and death prevail. The crippled become beggars at Huazi Cave, while those who lose their eyesight are made to mill ore. Capitalists mentally abuse and physically torture the miners, who are “cheaper than beasts of burden”:

None are as venomous as capitalists; they all use various means of torture.
Flogging, branding, wearing a stone hat, whipping the intestines, skinning, all plunder to the bone!⁹⁵

But toward the end of the introduction, the miners erupt in “fierce revolt and struggle.” Beginning with the quotation, “Where there is exploitation and oppression, there is resistance,” this account of class struggle clearly puts Mao Zedong Thought in command. Another mining song provides living evidence of “the raging fire of revolt of miners” which “was not put out but rather grew greater as it burned more intensely”:

The boss’s heart is venomous; the *shading*’s will is great.
The raging fire of revolt, it burns day and night.
The day will surely come, when it burns you down.

These “spontaneous” and “unremitting” armed struggles, however, were only preliminary struggles, “sparks of class struggle” that required the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party to “become a blazing fire.”⁹⁶ Liberation arrives on the final page of the introduction, with a song of emancipation:

The sun has arisen red through and through; the *shading* have become the masters.
The appearance of the mines has greatly changed, only because of Mao Zedong.

⁹⁵ Yunnansheng zonggonghui xuanchuan bu and Yunnan renmin chubanshe 1966: 1, 2, 4, 12. See also Yunxi laochang xikuang gonghui and Gongqingtuan Yunxi Laochang xikuang weiyuanhui 1963: 3-5, 8, 10-2.

⁹⁶ Yunnansheng zonggonghui xuanchuan bu and Yunnan renmin chubanshe 1966: 13, 15.

Alluding to the new contemporary saying, “Without Mao Zedong Thought, there wouldn’t be a New China,” this mining song contributes to the deification of Chairman Mao by giving him the exclusive credit for all the marvels born of liberation.⁹⁷ The introduction ends, however, by warning the reader, “This class hatred, we must never forget it!”⁹⁸

The five “family histories” that conclude *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines* share the same tripartite structure as the introduction and likewise aim to rouse working-class consciousness and hatred of class enemies. These “blood-and-tear indictments” of capitalist tin bosses by five old miners are recollect bitterness narratives recounted by liberated, classed subjects of socialist society, to testify to the transformative nature of class struggle. Several of these autobiographical accounts of Chinese Marxist history explicitly narrate *fanshen* in time with *jiefang*. The two family histories that were later used in the 1972 exhibition exemplify the violent imagery and strident tone of the recollect bitterness narratives of this period. In “I Was a *Shading* for Seventeen Years,” Xu Wenchang says that “a *shading*’s life was worse than that of a beast of burden” and that the bosses and their lackeys “were more venomous than poisonous snakes and more fierce than jackals and wolves.” At age twelve, he was tricked into working in the mines, where he was called a *shading* and was scolded and beaten until he made three trips a day into the black pits, instead of two. He was forced to work even when sick, often after being flogged so brutally that his skin lacerated. His next boss was even worse. After Xu fell ill, he woke to find himself in a crevice surrounded by wild dogs and human bones,

⁹⁷ See “Long Live the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (June 1966), in Myers Domes, and Groeling 1986: 227.

⁹⁸ Yunnansheng zonggonghui xuanchuan bu and Yunnan renmin chubanshe 1966: 16.

left to be eaten alive. His abuse at the hands of various boss men continued until liberation, when he was “rescued from hell” by the Party. Xu ends by swearing that he will never forget class hatred and will always follow the Party. Du Xingkui’s “The Henchman Who Was Given a Good Beating” describes similar methods of “cruel exploitation,” but it ends with revenge as miners threaten and reprove a despised henchman at gunpoint. This act of resistance fueled by class hatred draws the book to a close with the lesson: “we miners won’t be casually bullied and oppressed.”⁹⁹

The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu likely propagated the same tripartite division of time as the provincial exhibition *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle* and the sourcebook *Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines*, and thereby contributed to the radicalism of the period by urging the same class stance and revolutionary agency. Historical reenactment supplied a provocative knowledge of each stage of the revolutionary past, teaching visitors the nature of classes, class hatred, and the meaning of revolution. Dioramic sculptural tableaux, replete with historical artifacts, recreated the time and space of old Gejiu and offered graphic evidence of the class inequities of the old society. The tattered clothes and skeletal frame of the miner, contrasted with the silk robes and corpulent flesh of the capitalist, testified to the relationship between depravity and splendor and hence to the inhumanity of the capitalist system. Reenactments of revolt, the recollect bitterness narratives exposed and denounced the crimes of class enemies, while their speakers—both in word and in flesh—represented liberation, the promise of class struggle. It is likely also that *The Class Education Exhibition of Gejiu*, like other exhibitions in this period, alerted viewers to the threat of the remnant reactionary classes

⁹⁹ Yunnansheng zonggonghui xuanchuan bu and Yunnan renmin chubanshe 1966: 17, 26, 41, 44.

by depicting class enemies as both savage taskmasters and sly impersonators of righteous individuals. Fortified by the knowledge of the revolutionary past, however, visitors would revolutionize their consciousness and become Chairman Mao's good fighters, ready to counter the forces of retrogression and secure the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Red Guards, who mobilized during a nation-wide movement in the summer of 1966, were a product of the kind of learned historical practice that the exhibition taught. Dressed in army attire of the Yan'an period—military greens, wide belts, caps with a red star, and collars with red badges, to which they added red armbands¹⁰⁰—Red Guards began in August of 1966 to reenact episodes from the myths and legends of revolutionary history. Having consulted Mao Zedong's "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (1927) for guidance, these revolutionary successors crowned "capitalist-roaders" (*zouzipai*) with dunce hats, hung them with placards that labeled them as criminals, and paraded them before the masses. At interrogation meetings and mass rallies, they struggled (*dou*) these and other class enemies, forcing them to bend forward or kneel while they themselves stood erect, uttering accusations and denouncing their crimes.¹⁰¹ And on "long marches" through the countryside, they retraced the footsteps of the PLA, not only "establishing ties" (*chuanlian*) with peasants, workers, and Red Guards from other localities but also "exchanging [revolutionary] experience" (*jiaoliu jingyan*) with their forbears.¹⁰² Red Guard activism, in other words, shows how

¹⁰⁰ In 1965, Lin Biao replaced the Soviet-style attire of the PLA with this uniform. See MacFarquhar 1997: 436.

¹⁰¹ For example, see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006: photographs of struggle sessions during the Cultural Revolution, n.p.; Solomon 1971: 483; Solomon 1975: 99, 101.

¹⁰² See H. C. Chuang 1967: 15-6.

knowledge of the revolutionary past informed the political expression of proper personhood (in this case, the revolutionary successor), which incorporated historical reenactment. The Red Guards understood that revolution is made by weapons as well as by speech acts, namely public accusations; they enacted the choreography of antithetical bodies engaged in struggle; and by these means they carried out Mao's vision of continuous revolution. Class struggle had attained a set choreography, with an institutionalized history and a metaphorical language of revolution. And yet the Red Guards, like the workers and peasants who joined the battle in 1967, challenged the interpretative monopoly of Party leaders. Although they fought in Mao's name—even invoking Mao Zedong Thought to attack the revolutionary credibility of rival factions—their subversion of socio-spatial hierarchies, their historical chronologies, their bloodline theory, and their inventive terms of castigation and emulation all testify to an active re-envisioning of the revolution.¹⁰³

Class Education Exhibitions during the Period of Restoration: *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines (1972-1979)* and *The Recollect Bitterness Center (1969-1978)*

When preparations began for *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* in February of 1971, the turbulent radicalism of the late sixties had given way to a period of relative calm, in which the leadership gave precedence to political stabilization, Party consolidation, international concerns, and economic growth. At the end of 1968, Mao had demobilized his once indispensable Red Guards and sent them

¹⁰³ For example, see Jin Chunming, Huang Yuzhong, and Chang Huimin 1989; Rofel 1992; Yiching Wu 2007.

down to the countryside to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. In the rubble of administrative power, revolutionary committees were established across the country, a task completed in late 1968. This new organ of governance was comprised of representatives of the revolutionary cadres, the PLA, and the revolutionary masses, a “three-in-one combination” which gradually wrested power from the military and returned it to the Party.

At the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held in April 1969, Lin Biao declared that the Cultural Revolution had been won and implied that the time had come to shift the priority of the Three Great Revolutionary Movements, from class struggle to the struggle of production and scientific experiment. Both Lin Biao and Mao Zedong urged greater unity within the Party and among the broad masses of the people. Lin even called the Cultural Revolution “the most broad and deep-going movement for Party consolidation in the history of our Party,”¹⁰⁴ and Mao called upon the people to “Unite to win still greater victories!” The slogan “Grasp revolution, promote production” (*zhua geming, cu shengchan*) still placed politics in command, but it promoted socialist construction and preparedness for war instead of class struggle.¹⁰⁵ The study of the history of class struggle would spur socialist construction, but not the armed violence of

¹⁰⁴ Lin Biao “Political Report to the Ninth Party Congress” (April 1, 1969), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2224, 2234. See also “Talk at the First Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party” (April 28, 1969), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 282-9.

¹⁰⁵ “Talk at the First Plenum of the Ninth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party” (April 28, 1969), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 287. See also “Communiqué of the Second Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee of the CCP” 1970: 5-7; “Communiqué of the Enlarged Twelfth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP” (October 31, 1968), in Myers, Domes, and Groeling 1986: 391-3; Zhang Wenhe and Li Yan 1998: 462-75.

its practice. By the time Mao issued his directive, “Undertake education in the ideological and political line,” in 1971, Lin Biao had come under severe criticism and Mao Zedong had begun to dismantle his own personality cult:¹⁰⁶

Someone has said that to oppose genius is to oppose me. But I am no genius... To be a genius is to be a bit more intelligent. But genius does not depend on one person or a few people. It depends on a party, the party that is the vanguard of the proletariat. Genius is dependent on the mass line, on collective wisdom.¹⁰⁷

The current political line placed Mao Zedong Thought once more on a par with Marxism-Leninism. Lin Biao died in a mysterious (and unreported) plane crash in September 1971, and in 1973 became the object of the national campaign to “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius,” which accused him of leading a treasonous “Lin Biao Anti-Party Clique.”

As Party cadres in Gejiu were learning about these developments from classified materials,¹⁰⁸ they organized *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* (1972-1979) to remind Gejiu residents of the sweetness of the present and to encourage their productive effort. In late 1970, the Yunnan Province Revolutionary Committee instructed the Revolutionary Committees of Honghe Prefecture, Gejiu City, and the Yunnan Tin Corporation to build a long-term class education exhibition hall, make a set of sculptures of miners, publish a book on the history of mining, and put up an

¹⁰⁶ “Summary of Chairman Mao’s Talks with Responsible Comrades at Various Places during His Provincial Tour” (middle of August to September 12, 1971), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 299. See also Schram 1973: 103-5.

¹⁰⁷ “Summary of Chairman Mao’s Talks with Responsible Comrades at Various Places During His Provincial Tour” (middle of August to September 12, 1971), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 293.

¹⁰⁸ For example, see *Zhongguo gongchangdang jici zhongda luxian douzheng shiliao* 1972. Reprinted in Gejiu, this text circulated in upper-administrative levels of the Party bureaucracy. Given the date of publication, Lin Biao’s violation of the Party line is not cited. Yet, the former owner of this book completed this list of line struggles by penning in Lin Biao and the Gang of Four as additions.

exhibition about the same subject. Under the leadership of Li Yingxing, a member of the Gejiu Revolutionary Committee, a joint team of YTC construction workers, engineer Xiang Mingcan, and 120 middle-school graduates converted two apartment blocks for married workers at the YTC Xinguan Ore Separation Factory into an exhibition hall and a dining hall for staff and workers.¹⁰⁹ To create the sculptures, five members of the sculpture committee traveled to Sichuan to view *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, while its two other members visited eastern cities (primarily Beijing and Shanghai) to consult with the artists who had made the improved version of *The Rent Collection Courtyard*. With the aid of Yunnan University art professors, 24 painters from Kunming, and 96 worker-peasant-soldier students who were art or music majors at Yunnan Normal College, the committee then produced the sculptures, artwork, and displays of the exhibition. A reference-material committee edited a three-volume sourcebook, the *Compilation of Materials on the History of Gejiu Tin* (1972), collected historical artifacts, interviewed more than 200 old miners, and transcribed the histories of blood and tears (*xuelei shi*) of some 100 former child laborers.

By September of 1971, after three months of work, the staff of nearly 400 people had completed an exhibition of 14 displays of a total length of 126 meters (in four parts: *The People Create History*; *The Deep Hatred and Great Bitterness of the Shading*; *Smashing the Shackles of A Thousand Years*; and *Unite to Struggle and Write a New History*), and a sculptural tableau of 95 life-size human figures and one dog, in a 57-meter-long procession that told Chinese Marxist history through biography (in five parts: *Cajoled Into Becoming Miners*; *Senseless Suffering*; *Inhuman Treatment*; *Revolt*; and

¹⁰⁹ See Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 9:92-4; Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 132-3.

Ushering in Liberation).¹¹⁰ Based on the suggestions of provincial officials and representatives of the masses, the largest of the three period rooms was removed, as it was deemed excessive. After a study of the class education exhibitions in Huize and Dongchuan, old mining centers for lead, zinc, and copper in northeastern Yunnan, Gejiu officials added a section on the Long March, adopted from the Huize exhibition (itself probably an imitation of *Never Forget Classes and Class Struggle*) so that visitors would “learn the hardships of the tortuous course of the revolution, as well as receive a traditional revolutionary education from the older generation of revolutionaries.”¹¹¹

The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines finally opened to the public on March 21, 1972. By the end of the year, it was the premier class education exhibition in Yunnan, a status bestowed by the Yunnan Province Revolutionary Committee when it ordered a replica made for permanent display in the provincial capital. A replica was even exhibited in Dali, in northwestern Yunnan, in February of 1973. Like *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, the Gejiu exhibition also boasted a number of foreign visitors, including delegations from Vietnam, Singapore, Laos, and Thailand. More impressive is the number of domestic visitors: At the height of its popularity (1972-1974), over 1,000 visitors crammed its corridors each day. They came in truckloads from work units and military units in Gejiu, in Honghe Prefecture, and in prefectures farther north. For children in the elementary and middle schools of Gejiu and its hinterlands, the exhibition and the movie *The Story of Tin City* (see chapter one) were

¹¹⁰ See Gejiushi wenhua ju 1988: 133; Honghezhou geweihui “kuangshi” chouzhan bangongshi xiezuozu 1972: “Bianzhe de hua”: n.p.; Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 9:94-5, 98.

¹¹¹ Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 9:97.

required courses in class education. By the time the exhibit was dismantled in 1979, more than one million people had visited its galleries.¹¹²

The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines promoted socialist construction by highlighting the sweetness of the present and by relegating class struggle to the past, as an object for historical study. The precise layout, displays, and captions of the exhibition are difficult to reconstruct, as I have been unable to locate a copy of *The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines* (n.d.), compiled by the reference material committee. But a preliminary, stenciled version of that overview (*An Outline of The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines*, 1971), and an abridged, printed version of it (*A Short Guide to The Exhibition on the History of Class Struggle in the Gejiu Tin Mines*, 1973), present the historical narrative and general appearance of the exhibition. Although the *Outline* is longer than the *Guide*, and mentions several items that are conspicuously absent from the latter (such as a statue of Chairman Mao, quotations by Mao Zedong and Lin Biao, the adulation of Mao Zedong Thought, and the use of family history), they share a common historical narrative. The 1972 exhibition evidently abandoned the tripartite structure of its 1966 predecessor, returning instead to the weightier historical narrative of the factory histories of the 1950s. It used this historical narrative, moreover, to demonstrate the historical agency of the people, to affirm the leadership of the Party, and to urge the need for political unity and economic and scientific growth, in other words, to carry out Mao Zedong's directive, "Undertake education in the ideological and political line." Although Mao Zedong Thought and class struggle retained a prominent presence in the galleries,

¹¹² See Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 983; Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 9:96-8; field interviews.

the 1972 exhibition marked a shift away from the deification of Mao and the theory of continuous revolution.¹¹³

The first part of the exhibition, *The People Create History*, presented a brief history of two thousand years of tin production that attributed all technological achievements to the laboring masses. An extract from the *History of the Han (Han shu, 92 CE)* about a mining center named Bengu; a drawing of miners in ancient grab engaged in early methods of tin production (taken from an unspecified gazetteer); and a photograph of present-day miners extracting tin with mechanized tools provided “ample proof” of the “great Marxist truth” that Mao Zedong related: **“The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.”**¹¹⁴ The *Outline* indicates that this first part of the exhibition also included family histories. It uses the abridged life history of Peng Guihe, an old miner held in bondage by his debt to a recruiter, to demonstrate the rural origin of the Chinese working class and its emergence in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal stage of development.

¹¹³ For example, the *Outline* lists “Once we grasp class struggle, miracles are possible” among a series of four “highest-level directives” (*zuigao zhishi*). The exhibition itself appears to have opened with a statue of Chairman Mao and a quotation about class struggle:

Classes struggle, some classes triumph, others are eliminated. Such is history, such is the history of civilization for thousands of years. To interpret history from this viewpoint is historical materialism; standing in opposition to this viewpoint is historical idealism.

Gejiu xikuang jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1973: n.p.; Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

¹¹⁴ Gejiu xikuang jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1973: n.p.; Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p. In the *Outline*, the four parts of the exhibition also had different titles: *The Masters of the Mines*, *An Indignant Accusation*, *Waves of Anger in the Mines*, and *Continue the Revolution, Advance on the Crest of a Victory*.

The second part of the exhibition, *The Deep Hatred and Great Bitterness of Shading*, showed that between 1840 and 1949 the “Three Great Enemies” seized the mines and developed five exploitative methods to “press dry the blood and sweat of workers” (appropriation of cheap labor power, inhuman labor conditions, increased labor intensity, the use of child laborers, and extended work hours). A painting in which a recruiter sunders children from their destitute parents; early 20th-century photographs of three ravaged beggars and of child laborers crawling out of a shaft; clay sculptures of miners wearing tattered rags and living in Huazi Cave; and a photograph of a mound of skulls and bones presented evidence of the “fascist methods” employed by the Three Great Enemies, who shackled, jailed, tortured, shot, or buried alive defiant workers, and discarded miners when they were ill, injured, or old. A mining song (“Huazi Cave: its depth is great/Yet not as deep as a miner’s hate”) intimated the course of revolution.¹¹⁵ According to the *Outline*, the second part of the exhibition also included a photograph of Xu Wenchang (cf. above), displayed alongside his account of exploitation and oppression. Though denied medical care, cast into a crevice to be eaten alive by wolves, beaten and shackled, forced to work in a mine where one shaft had already collapsed, and fined for complaining about his workload and the lack of drinking water, he lived to deliver his testimony as an indictment of the capitalist class.¹¹⁶

The third part of the exhibition, *Smashing the Shackles of A Thousand Years*, demonstrated the synchronous sympathy between the struggles of the Gejiu miners and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party. Under the quotation “**Where there is**

¹¹⁵ Gejiu xikuang jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1973: n.p.; Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

¹¹⁶ Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

oppression, there is resistance,” the exhibition showed how the resistance of the miners entered a new stage with the birth of the CCP, advanced under Communist organizer Li Xin, intensified due to the propaganda work of the Red Army on the Long March, achieved concrete results with the Party-led strike of 1949 and final victory on January 17, 1950, when Gejiu was liberated and “miners became their own masters.” In addition to a photograph of PLA soldiers marching through the mountains of Yunnan, the exhibition displayed six socialist realist paintings of idealized moments in this revolutionary history, such as the armed uprising of 1903, and a secret meeting of tin miners with a Communist activist whose face illuminates the darkness.¹¹⁷

The fourth part of the exhibition, *Unite to Struggle and Write a New History*, reminded visitors how, after 1949, miners had consolidated the dictatorship of the proletariat and under the guidance of Mao’s revolutionary line had made strides in the development of the tin industry. Photographs showed modernized mines gleaming in the night; trucks full of ore cramming the roads during the day; a parade marking the birth of the Gejiu City Revolutionary Committee; cadres studying the works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao; and workers listening to Peng Guihe propagate “the spirit of the Ninth Party Congress.” The caption of a photograph of a female tram operator reads, “In the old society, women could not enter the mines; in the new society, women hold up half the sky.” The caption of a photograph of workers preparing to load a train with gleaming tin ingots incites the viewer to “Produce more metal for the revolution.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Gejiu xikuang jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1973: n.p. See also Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

¹¹⁸ Gejiu xikuang jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 1973: n.p. See also Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

Gejiu residents completed their visit to the exhibition in political study sessions conducted by their work units, where they first denounced the Three Great Enemies and “settled the accounts,” and then identified the Party and its political line as the source of the present sweetness. The *Outline* and the *Guide* of the exhibition encourage this kind of study. The *Outline*, for example, puts forth six revolutionary persons as embodiments of the “living study and living application of Mao Zedong Thought.” Different from the model revolutionaries of 1966, these models do not engage in class struggle, but lead comrades in the study of Mao’s works and advance “revolutionary production.”¹¹⁹ These study methods do not resolve the subtle tension in the narrative of the exhibition between the rhetoric of Mao devotion and the new emphasis on authority of the Party. If Mao’s revolutionary line directed the whole span of revolutionary history, the Party cannot claim equal stature. And yet, as noted above (pp. 210-1), the retreat from the theory of continuous revolution, the depiction of post-liberation history as a linear series of victories under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Party, and the praise of the historical agency of the laboring masses effectively dismantled the Mao cult. As Mao himself explained in 1971:

There never has been any supreme savior, nor can we rely on gods or emperors. We rely entirely on ourselves for our salvation. Who has created the world of men? We the laboring masses.¹²⁰

No longer a guide to class struggle in the present, knowledge of the revolutionary past now served as an injunction to comply with the current political line of the Party, which

¹¹⁹ Honghezhou, Gejiushi, Yunnan di yi kuang geweihui lianhe juban 1971: n.p.

¹²⁰ “Summary of Chairman Mao’s Talks with Responsible Comrades at Various Places During His Provincial Tour” (middle of August to September 12, 1971), in Mao Zedong 1974a: 297.

would sustain the sweetness of the present. This lesson in Chinese Marxist history, in other words, roused new political subjects who were devoted to socialist construction.

Besides the *Outline*, the *Guide*, and the three-volume *Compilation of Materials on the History of Gejiu Tin*, the reference materials committee also published *The Flames of Fury of the Tin Mines* (1973), a volume comprised of twenty family histories.¹²¹ In its search for living educational materials, the committee had not only collected historical artifacts (early bronze vessels, weapons of torture, rubbings of steles, maps, photographs of *huofang*, iron shackles of former *shading*, excavated bones of miners worked to death), but it had also gathered the family histories of more than 200 old miners and some 100 former child laborers. The twenty recollect bitterness narratives in *The Flames of Fury* retain the tripartite structure of the family histories in *The Deep Hatred of the Tin Mines* of 1966 (exploitation/oppression, revolt, and liberation), but they point to the sweetness of the present in order to endorse the current political line. In “Seventeen Years in the Abyss of Misery,” for example, Xu Wenchang recounts once more his physical and mental suffering at the hands of various tin bosses—who left him alive in a crevice as feed for jackals—but he also tells of tin miners uniting in struggle, and of his realization that the only way out of misery is to overthrow the reactionary rule of the Guomindang. With liberation, he finally turns over (*fanshen*). Although he does not conclude with the moral aphorism that summarizes other family histories in this volume (“When you drink the water, think of those who dug the well”), Xu offers the *Recollect Bitterness Center* as evidence that Party policy has created the sweetness of the present.¹²²

¹²¹ See Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 9:92-5, 98; field interviews.

¹²² See Yunnan xiyegongsi “Xi shan nuhuo” bianxie zu 1973: 1-9, 49-62, 217.

The Recollect Bitterness Center was the epitome of living ideological education in Gejiu. With its mining tunnel, roving recollectors, historical artifacts, songs, and authentic pre-liberation food, it brought the narrated events into the present and imparted perceptual knowledge through the full range of the senses. The Propaganda Department of the Yunnan Tin Corporation installed *The Recollect Bitterness Center* at the YTC Songshujiao Mine, in a site of almost ten square kilometers called the “recollect area” (*yiku qu*). Between June of 1969 and August of 1978, 1.13 million visitors from eight provinces and 3,125 work units traversed the sinuous course of its central attraction, “The Recollect Bitterness Pit,” one of five recollect bitterness sites offering a living trace of the old society that had been painstakingly restored and revised. “The Recollect Bitterness White Bone Cave” even had to be entirely recreated due to the unsafe and inconvenient location of the original.¹²³

Although the “recollect area” has been dismantled and is no longer accessible, *A Short Guide to the Site of the Recollect Bitterness Center* (1973) describes the living educational materials of the site and sets them in a narrative. The Recollect Bitterness Pit, a 400-meter long mine tunnel, and “The Recollect Bitterness Mill,” with its worn millstone, old picks, ore separation area, and sludge bank, depicted tin production in the old society. At “The Recollect Bitterness *Huofang*,” jars of foraged food, a treadle-operated hammer for hulling rice, and tattered garments of *shading* told of the misery of daily life. Nearby gaped the “Man-Eating Pit,” where the ill were left to die. Several yards away, “The Recollect Bitterness Blockhouse” exposed the “fascist dictatorship” of the capitalist class, with its windowless jail, water dungeon (a requisite feature ever since

¹²³ See Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 2, 10; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 983.

The Rent Collection Courtyard),¹²⁴ torture chamber replete with tools of the trade, and an account of the “criminal history” of tin boss Zhou Bozhai. The Recollect Bitterness White Bone Cave put on view the unearthed bones of long-dead miners. Proffered as “iron facts” (*tie shishi*), these living educational materials “forcefully denounce the evil consequences that the cannibalistic, exploitative system inflicted upon the laboring people.”¹²⁵ A “terrace from which one can see one’s home in the distance” (*wangxiangtai*), built in a far corner of the recollect area, completed the theme park.

Adopting the tripartite structure of a recollect bitterness narrative, *The Recollect Bitterness Center* provided a typical portrait of the antagonistic classes of Chinese society and of class struggle during the brief semi-colonial and semi-feudal stage of historical development. “**The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history,**” it announced at the start. Yet the exploitation and oppression of the laboring masses by the Three Great Enemies forestalled the advance of history. The viewing terrace and the five recollect bitterness sites laid out the atrocious crimes of the Three Great Enemies: poverty severed peasants from their families, trickery and debt kept miners in servitude, deplorable conditions in the mines caused illness and death, and miners were mercilessly beaten, policed, and robbed of their humanity in prisons that were stocked with weapons and instruments of torture. The Recollect Bitterness White Bone Cave testified that Three Great Enemies “sucked dry the blood and sweat of workers.” And yet, miners only grew more defiant, for “**The deeper the oppression, the greater the resistance; the longer it is stored up, the swifter it will erupt.**” An extract

¹²⁴ For example, see Chen Tse-yuan and Liu Chih-Kuei 1977.

¹²⁵ Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 10, 12. See also Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 1-12.

from a family history on display at the Recollect Bitterness Blockhouse illustrated this quotation by recounting how miners took up arms to attack a henchman. *The Recollect Bitterness Center* implored visitors never to forget this “blood debt” (*xue zhai*).¹²⁶

Like *The Rent Collection Courtyard* in Sichuan, *The Recollect Bitterness Center* of Gejiu recreated the time and space of its historical narrative. Located at an old mine and replete with historical artifacts, the five recollect bitterness sites transported visitors back in time. The trek to reach the recollect area—from the small, administrative town of Song Mine, where visitors disembarked, up through the rugged mountain terrain—enhanced the compelling historicity of this encounter with the bitter past, as it severed visitors from their familiar world and confronted them with the unknown. The old miners who led tours through the architectural remains further intensified the social realism of the theme park. A photograph in *A Short Guide to the Site of the Recollect Bitterness Center*, for example, shows Xu Wenchang talking to a tour group in front of a map of the recollect area. In a photograph in a different book from the period, the same Xu Wenchang, stands by the Man-Eating Pit where he “angrily denounces the monstrous crimes of capitalists who persecuted miners in the old society.”¹²⁷ This reunion of a space of experience with former inhabitants accentuated the authenticity of the five sites and confirmed the accuracy of the historical narrative, all the more because their recollect bitterness narratives told Chinese Marxist history as autobiography.

The living ideological education of *The Recollect Bitterness Center*, however, extended beyond the familiar artifacts, photographs, and roving recollectors to impress

¹²⁶ Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 1, 11-2.

¹²⁷ Yunnansheng geming weiyuanhui zhishi qingnian shangshan xiexiang gongzuo bangongshi n.d.: n.p. See also Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 3.

the history of suffering, revolt, and liberation on the full range of the visitors' senses. When they crawled through the dark, worn cavities of the Recollect Bitterness Pit to the light at the end of the tunnel, visitors not only experienced the bitterness of the past and the sweetness of the present, but they felt the transformative power of class struggle as they enacted the metaphorical choreography of liberation—from the bent, oppressed *shading* to the upright worker who had “turned over.” The folk song “*Shading*” (pieced together from different sources, just as the Center joined together pre-existing mines) gave meaning to the sinuous course that visitors traversed as they tunneled through the sixteen segments of the Pit. After descending into the darkness with small oil lamps to light the way, visitors had to squeeze through narrow passages and grasp at indentations in the walls to mount steep inclines. In the sixth segment, visitors were exhorted “To Become a Worm and Shed Skin,” as they squirmed on their stomachs to get through. Their bodies remained bent over for the next seven segments of the Pit, under intermittent hardship. During this long stretch, the folk song related how tin bosses exploited and oppressed Gejiu miners. After the song announced, at the “Reservoir of Agitation,” the fourteenth segment of the Pit, that the fires of revolution had been stoked, visitors began to ascend. The next segment, “Pit of the Rankled Heart,” was located a few meters from the exit. Revenge blazed a path of deliverance in the accompanying verse of the folk song. As visitors neared the end, sunlight filled the shaft, and as they stood up tall at last, the final verse of the song reminded them that it was the Party and its revolutionary line that had offered the means of emancipation:

The Communist Party arrived at the mines; from then on *shading* saw the sun.
Unite with one mind to make revolution; liberate throughout the world those who
suffer.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 14. See also Songkuang yikuzhan 1973: 5-6, 13-4.

Visitors to *The Recollect Bitterness Center* took home an embodied memory of revolutionary history. By its juxtaposition of dark and light, and of bent and erect bodies, the “recall the bitterness of the past and savor the sweetness of the present education” (*yiku-sitian jiaoyu*) of the Recollect Bitterness Pit created a physical sensation of the contrast between the past and the present (*jin-xi duibi*). The youth of Gejiu was even served “recollect bitterness food” (*yikufan*) after traversing the Pit. “Old mother’s soup” (*laomama tang*) and wild greens taught them never to forget “class bitterness” (*jieji ku*). Then, they rode the electric trams of the modernized socialist mines, and stood upright as they surveyed technological developments and improvements in labor conditions.¹²⁹ In this way, they were assured that theirs was a golden age. In the decades to come, these youths and their descendents—and even their predecessors—would in turn transmit, revise, and grapple with what Mao and the Party had hailed: historical consciousness in the service of revolutionary politics.

Conclusion: Bodies of Evidence and Living History

Shortly before leaving Gejiu, I was invited to return a favor to an informant who had aided my research. Zhou Xingyuan (b. 1941) rose from the ranks of workers at the YTC Ma Mine to become a cadre engaged in literary and artistic work. Tempered in the Cultural Revolution, he possesses political acumen, which he now uses to reap the benefits of reform and opening up. Even so, he remains poised to criticize the power

¹²⁹ See Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 983; field interviews. Old mother’s soup is made from diluted, mashed soybeans.

holders of the very system that he helps to perpetuate. On this day, a reporter and camera crew from a local, state-owned channel were to film Zhou's pontifications about Tin Culture to a foreign audience, namely me. On the abandoned and subsiding ground of the uppermost station of Ma Mine, Zhou used his lived experience to validate the truth claims of official history. The dirt path up the mountain on which tin bosses traveled to and from Gejiu had long since been replaced by the paved road we had taken. The now crumbling blockhouse in which tin bosses had stored money, dynamite, and weapons was in his day converted into an office and an infirmary. And the practices of these bosses—gambling, smoking opium, disregard for labor conditions, and the mistreatment of workers—he never knew, for they were outlawed. In sum, “Miners had been oppressed in the past, but they stood up after liberation.” As we sped down the mountain in an imported SUV, fledgling miners, coated in red ore, emerged from the earth—uneducated, impoverished, rural youth who are part-time laborers, paid by the load. The director of the camera crew yelled, “*Shading!*” And Zhou hollered in defiance of current Party leaders, “Some say exploitation no longer exists! It still exists!”

While this last remark takes us forward in time, pointing to changes that will occupy us in the chapters to come, it also highlights an enduring trait of the propaganda we have considered at several repetitions: the *shading* as a site of political critique. Both in the Four Histories of the Socialist Education Movement and in the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution, the *shading* yet again made visible the history of the Chinese nation through local suffering and emancipation. Their physical torture and emotional pain at the hands of the feudal, imperialist, and bureaucrat-capitalist classes illustrated class exploitation and class oppression; their passage from angry victim to

revolutionary agent demonstrated the emergence of class-consciousness. The temporal convergence of the individual experience of *fanshen* (turning over) with the national experience of *jiefang* (liberation) allowed Chinese Marxist history to be narrated through the transformation of the *shading* into the *gongren* (worker).

In the 1960s and 1970s, historical reenactment substantiated this account of revolutionary history through local history, biography, and autobiography. Above all, recollect bitterness narratives testified to the nature of classes and class struggle, and transmitted the historically specific understanding that revolution is made not just with weapons but also with speech. As significant, these public accusations rendered universal the experience of class exploitation and class oppression whose fundamental resolution the Chinese Communist Party alone made possible. While this account of revolutionary history lived on into the future, its association with Mao's theory of continuous revolution was redressed under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. And like Mao Zedong, Deng too demanded that the people "free themselves from old ideas" (*jiefang sixiang*) to ensure a present that is not held captive by the past.

Chapter Four. Seeking Truth From Facts: Rewriting History in the “New Socialist Local Gazetteers,” 1978-2000

The factory histories of the Great Leap Forward, the Four Histories of the Socialist Education Movement, and the class education exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution all demonstrated the truths of Marxist history through the biographies and autobiographies of living individuals. As the local circumstances of Gejiu and the figure of the *shading* (sand hog) instantiated this universalized history of the Chinese nation, they also illustrated the theoretical innovations by which Mao Zedong had directed the course of the Chinese revolution. The factory histories of the late 1950s provided evidence for Mao’s theory of permanent revolution, showing that the creation of Communist social relations and consciousness drove the development of the productive forces, resulting in the spectacular steel output, the abundant harvests, and the unprecedented literary and artistic production of the Great Leap Forward. The Four Histories and the class education exhibitions of the 1960s confirmed Mao’s theory of continuous revolution by revealing the existence of bourgeois enemies and their plans to stage a comeback, thereby lending urgency to Mao’s injunction to carry the revolutionary struggle through to the end.

The reformers of the 1980s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, chose the “new socialist local gazetteer” (*shehuizhuyi xin difangzhi*) as their preferred historiographical form. With its maps, graphs, and tables, and with its implicit historical narrative, the local gazetteer projected an appearance of scientific objectivity and laid claim to an historiographical tradition that extended beyond 1949 to the imperial period. Although the “Provisional Rules for the Compilation of New Local Gazetteers” (1985) demanded that the new socialist gazetteers be free of ideology and propagandistic

tendencies, the injunction to excise “politics” (*zhengzhi*) and to “seek truth from facts” (*shishi qiu shi*) issued from immediate political interests and from profoundly ideological considerations: the defeat of ultra leftism and the restoration of orthodox Marxism, and the concomitant subordination of ideology to economic development. The local orientation of the gazetteers matched the economic and administrative policies of the period, which decreed decentralized government, relative provincial autonomy, differentiated regional development, and a socialist market economy. The gazetteers compiled during the 1980s and 1990s, moreover, bore out the new historical narrative devised by the reformers, set forth in the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (1981), in which the reformers’ return to power in 1978 rivaled in importance the founding of the PRC in 1949. The “new socialist local gazetteer,” in other words, is characterized by a double paradox: its excision of politics is itself political, and its emphasis on regional diversity is part of a coordinated national (and nationalist) agenda.

The *Gejiu City Gazetteer*, begun in 1984 and published in 1998, follows the new historiographical guidelines and the new historical narrative. The gazetteer identifies tin as the source of the local particularity of Gejiu. Its introduction and fifty-five chapters present numbers and graphs to demonstrate the continuous development of the locality since 1949 (interrupted only by periods of ultra leftism), as well as the impressive progress that has already been made under the leadership of the new regime. Biographical entries commemorate local model subjects, both red and expert, including Communist martyrs and persons previously condemned as Rightists. Both the topical chapters and the biographies demonstrate the “quality” (*suzhi*) of the locality, as does the gazetteer itself,

put forth as the product of the careful local implementation of national policies by capable officials, skilled staff, and learned retirees.

“Seeking Truth From Facts”

In the late 1970s, Party leaders were once again divided about the future course of the revolution. The death of Mao Zedong on September 9, 1976 complicated matters by creating the threat of political discontinuity. Communist discourse, however, provided a sense of continuity, as all factions invoked Mao’s language and relied on the established rhetorical repertoire. Hua Guofeng rose to power after the secret arrest and imprisonment of the “Gang of Four,”¹ becoming Chairman of the CCP and Premier of the State Council in October of 1976. In the subsequent months, he cultivated his stature as Mao’s rightful heir by performing the Communist rites of burial and accession with something akin to filial devotion: he built Mao’s mausoleum on Tiananmen Square, he hung newly painted portraits of the deceased next to his own, he enhanced his physical likeness to Mao by imitating his hairstyle, and he edited the fifth volume of the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Like the Party heretofore, he also legitimized his rule by making the past serve the present. Hua asserted that his “smashing” of the Gang of Four fulfilled Mao’s prophecy that “great disorder across the land leads to great order.”² He gained the

¹ The historical outline of the first two paragraphs is based on Meisner 1996. The members of the Gang of Four are Jiang Qing, Zhang Qunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen.

² Hua Guofeng “Speech at the Second Dazhai Conference” (December 25, 1976), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2633. See also Hua Guofeng “Speech at the Second Dazhai Conference” (December 25, 1976), Harold in Hinton 1980: 2627-34. The representation

support of the Leftists in the Party by endorsing class struggle, the central tenet of Mao's revolutionary line, promising to govern by "grasping class struggle as the key link and bringing great order across the land" (*zhua gang zhi guo*).³ At the same time, he courted reformers by pursuing an economic program that championed Zhou Enlai's Four Modernizations⁴—the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology—while also drawing heavily on the 1975 proposals of Deng Xiaoping. The new Party constitution exemplified his ill-fated pandering to political adversaries. Adopted at the Eleventh Party Congress in August of 1977, it affirmed Mao's theory of continuous revolution, but also ratified the Four Modernizations.⁵

Despite his acknowledgment of reformist policies, Hua Guofeng placed his faith in the power of the Leftists, and in the legacy of Mao Zedong. In February of 1977, he lent support to the Leftist political platform that became known as the "Two Whatever's": "to resolutely defend whatever policies Chairman Mao has formulated and unswervingly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao has issued."⁶ The Two Whatever's secured the political status quo and enshrined the assessments that Mao Zedong had made

of Hua Guofeng's reign that is outlined in this paragraph was conveyed in the picture book *Honghe, 1957-1977: Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou chengli ershi zhounian* (1977).

³ Hua Guofeng "Report to the Eleventh Party Congress" (August 12, 1977), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2687, 2706.

⁴ See Zhou Enlai, "Report on the Work of the Government" (January 13, 1975), in Lotta 1978: 177-85.

⁵ See Hua Guofeng "Report to the Eleventh Party Congress" (August 12, 1977), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2686-2706; "The New Party Constitution" (August 18, 1977), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2715-9.

⁶ "Study Well the Documents and Grasp the Key Link" (February 7, 1977), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2656.

in the final years of his life, in particular his pronouncements that the Cultural Revolution had succeeded, that the verdicts made during those years were just and irreversible, and that the “Tiananmen Incident”—the public mourning of Zhou Enlai on April 5, 1976, which had turned into a violent protest for liberalization—had been counter-revolutionary. By embalming these final judgments, Hua sought to contain the power of Deng Xiaoping, the foremost among the reformers. Although purged early in the Cultural Revolution as a “capitalist-roader,” Deng had reappeared in public in 1973 and by mid-January of 1975 had attained high offices, such as Vice-Premier of the State Council, Chief of Staff of the PLA, and Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the CCP. In 1975 he had made proposals that privileged the development of the economic base rather than the revolutionary transformation of the superstructure. He had moreover justified these proposals with a bold, explicit rejection of Maoism in favor of orthodox Marxism: “Revolution is liberating the productive forces. Revolution is promoting the development of the productive forces.”⁷ Deng had even endorsed the creation of a technical and managerial elite, appointed to govern industrial growth, and a system of rewards and distribution, based on the principle of “to each according to his work.”⁸ The Left had condemned these proposals as revisionist and as a threat to “the socialist new things” created by the Cultural Revolution, specifically, egalitarianism, self-reliance, and the

⁷ Deng Xiaoping “On the General Program of Work for the Whole Party and the Whole Nation” (1975), in *Lotta* 1978: 440. See also *Lotta* 1978: 27-32.

⁸ See Deng Xiaoping “On the General Program of Work for the Whole Party and the Whole Nation” (1975), in *Lotta* 1978: 439-44; Deng Xiaoping “Some Problems in Accelerating Industrial Development” (September 2, 1975), in *Lotta*: 454-7, 464-8.

gradual elimination of the “Three Great Differences.”⁹ When the mourning for Zhou Enlai in April 1976 turned into a public demonstration in support of political liberalization, the Leftists blamed Deng Xiaoping and purged him once more.

To break the political and discursive stranglehold of the Two Whatever, the reformers summoned two tenets of Mao Zedong Thought: “Seek truth from facts” (*shishi qiu shi*) and “Practice is the sole criterion of truth” (*shixian shi jianyan zhenli de wei yi biao zhun*). Although Deng Xiaoping was restored to his posts in July of 1977, his power, his policies, and even his person remained circumscribed by Mao’s ominous latter-day condemnations. For Deng, this prohibition against reevaluating the past, including his own, was “unacceptable.”¹⁰ Discerning that Mao’s death had made his words available for divergent interpretations, the reformers took up Mao’s pronouncements about truth, facts, and practice in order to defend their resumption of socialist construction. By associating “truth” and “facts” with the economic base, and by equating “politics” with the superstructure and with the left ideology of the Gang of Four, the reformers turned Mao’s language against his most avid supporters, and forced a retreat from ultra leftism.

In his closing address at the Eleventh Party Congress, in August of 1977, Deng Xiaoping identified “seeking truth from facts” as the defining characteristic of Mao Zedong’s legacy: “We must revive and carry forward the practice of seeking truth from

⁹ Chang Chunqiao “On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie” (1975), in Lotta 1978: 215. See also Yao Wenyan “On the Social Basis of the Lin Biao Anti-Party Clique” (1975), in Lotta 1978: 196-208; Chang Chunqiao “On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie” (1975) in Lotta 1978: 215; 209-20. The “Three Great Differences” refers to the difference between workers and peasants, the city and the countryside, and mental and manual labor.

¹⁰ Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (May 24, 1977): 2:51; Misra 1998: 21.

facts, the fine tradition and style which Chairman Mao fostered in our Party.”¹¹ The next month, Chen Yun, an influential economic planner during the 1950s who had recently returned to power, amplified this assertion in a speech commemorating the first anniversary of Mao’s death. Chen openly criticized dogmatism, presented “seeking truth from facts” as a basic tenet of Marxian materialism, and argued that upholding this tenet distinguished true Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought from its false iterations.¹² Hu Yaobang led a related effort at the Central Party School. In each case, unimpeachable tenets of Mao Zedong Thought conferred legitimacy on the reformers and de-legitimized the surviving Leftists in the Party and the administration.

The article “Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth,” published on May 11, 1978, best illustrates the powerful workings of the reformers’ rhetoric. The article put forth four main arguments. First, social practice determines the truth and therefore is the sole criterion for gauging the validity of any theory. Second, because theory is united with practice, a theory in and of itself is not the truth. Moreover, the verification of theory in practice makes it scientific. Third, Marx, Engels, and Mao all endorsed the tenet “practice is the sole criterion of truth,” as shown by the fact that their own theories were tested in practice and revised accordingly. And fourth, truth is relative, for social practice never ceases to change. As a result, a theory must continuously be “supplemented,

¹¹ Deng Xiaoping “Closing Address to the Eleventh Party Congress” (August 18, 1977), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2719. See also Deng Xiaoping “On the General Program of Work for the Whole Party and the Whole Nation” (1975), in Lotta 1978: 446-7. On the campaigns to criticize the Gang of Four and the practice debates, see Misra 1998; Schoenhals 1991.

¹² See Chen Yun 1977: 1.

enriched and corrected.”¹³ While ostensibly attacking the Gang of Four, the article in effect undermined the ideological foundations of the Two Whatever. The Left’s blind worship of Mao’s every word, after all, enshrined as enduring truth a body of thought that had always evolved in relation to social practice. Mao Zedong himself had condemned dogmatism, and had criticized those who believed that “only what is recorded in the scriptures is correct.”¹⁴ The article warned that although the Gang of Four had been “smashed,” it had put “mental shackles” on the people that kept them tethered to these pseudo-scientific practices:

Both in matters of theory and in practical work, the “Gang of Four” created many “forbidden zones” (*jin qu*) that obstructed the thinking of the people. We must dare to touch and dare to clarify the correctness of these “forbidden zones.” Science has no forbidden zones. A “forbidden zone” that in any respect oversteps practice and presents itself as absolute lacks science, lacks true Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and only indulges in obscurantism, idealism, and cultural tyranny.¹⁵

Allegiance to “the ready-made clauses of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought,” thus is to err, for social practice continues to generate “new problems,” which necessitates the continuous development of theory.¹⁶ In this manner, the reformers rejected the entire left ideology—blind faith, dogmatism, book worship, Lin Biao’s hyperbolic adulation of Mao Zedong Thought (“every word is a truth”), the deification of Mao, the theory of continuous revolution, the Two Whatever, and indeed Maoism itself—as pseudo-scientific, “phony Marxism,” while asserting themselves as defenders of a scientific, orthodox Marxism that would deliver social progress. In July of 1978, for

¹³ “Shixian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun” 1977: 1.

¹⁴ “Shixian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun” 1977: 1.

¹⁵ “Shixian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun” 1977: 1.

¹⁶ “Shixian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biao zhun” 1977: 1.

example, Hu Qiaomu contended that, unlike the Gang of Four's policies, Deng's program for socialist modernization adhered to "objective economic laws."¹⁷

Although moderate reformers, including Hu Qiaomu, thought that the publication of "Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth" would become a political liability, its arguments proved convincing. Leftists such as Wang Dongxing of course deemed the ideas heretical, while radicals such as Hu Yaobang read Deng's insistence on "seeking truth from facts" as an expression of approval. But the debate turned in favor of the reformers in the fall of 1978, when military commanders and prominent provincial Party leaders sided with Deng and Hu Yaobang. By the end of the Central Work Conference (November 10-December 13), the reformers had secured their agenda, which prepared the way toward Deng's decisive victory at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP (December 18-22, 1978).¹⁸ Deng's final speech at the Central Work Conference and the decisions made at the Third Plenum together defined the course of the revolution during the reform era.

At the final session of the Central Work Conference, Deng Xiaoping associated the agenda of the reformers with "liberation" (*jiefang*), a pivotal word in Communist discourse. Eleven months prior, Hua Guofeng had already stated that "A new liberation has come with the smashing of the 'Gang of Four.'"¹⁹ In his speech, Deng Xiaoping now appropriated this new historical transition for the reformers, arguing that "socialist

¹⁷ Hu Qiaomu "Act in Accordance with Economic Laws, Step up the Four Modernizations" (October 6, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2787.

¹⁸ See Misra 1998; Schoenhals 1991.

¹⁹ Hua Guofeng "Unite and Strive to Build a Modern, Powerful Socialist Country!" (February 26, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2831.

modernization” depended on the “emancipation of the mind” (*jiefang sixiang*). The latter phrase derives from the famous Great Leap Forward slogan, “Do away with superstitions, emancipate the mind” (*pochu mixin, jiefang sixiang*).²⁰ But whereas in the late 1950s the slogan had incited the populace to reject the bourgeois claims of supposed experts and to grasp the belief that “the subjective can create the objective,” Deng Xiaoping used the phrase to the opposite effect: to discredit ultra leftist voluntarism, and to insist on the priority of the base (economy) over the superstructure (politics). The “mental emancipation” he advocated would break the “mental shackles” forged by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, and would hail new political subjects, “pathbreakers who dare to think, explore new ways, and generate new ideas.”²¹ These new agents of socialist modernization would abolish the “forbidden zones” and “phony Marxism” of the Gang of Four; overthrow leftist bureaucratism to restore democratic centralism; repair the distinctions between right and wrong and between merit and demerit, and mete out rewards and penalties as deserved; and escape “the force of habit of the small producer, who sticks to old conventions, is content with the status quo, and is unwilling to seek progress or accept anything new.”²² In short, they would create a decisive rupture with ultra leftism and restore scientific Marxism.

The Third Plenum sanctioned the ascendance of economy over politics by decreeing that class struggle had in the main come to an end and that Party work would

²⁰ See chapter two: 107, 115, 129. It is worth noting that Hua Guofeng also used this slogan, along with other slogans of the Great Leap Forward. See, for example, Hua Guofeng “Unite and Strive to Build a Modern, Powerful Socialist Country!” (February 26, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2839.

²¹ Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (December 13, 1978): 2:152-3.

²² Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (December 13, 1978): 2:152-3.

henceforth focus on economic development,²³ in effect endorsing a return to the position put forth at the Eighth Party Congress in 1956. Under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, the Eighth Party Congress had declared socialism to be achieved, which meant that the contradiction between the proletariat and bourgeoisie had been resolved, the system of class exploitation had been brought to an end, and class struggle had ceased to exist. “Socialist construction,” or economic development, was now the “chief task.”²⁴ In 1978, the Communiqué of the Third Plenum took up the ideological agenda of the reformers by equating the Party’s prioritization of economic development with revolution:

Carrying out the Four Modernizations requires great growth in the productive forces, which in turn requires diverse changes in those aspects of the relations of production and the superstructure not in harmony with the growth of the productive forces, and requires changes in all methods of management, actions, and thinking which stand in the way of such growth. Socialist modernization is therefore a profound and extensive revolution.²⁵

The Third Plenum even adopted the core phrases of the reformers, affirming that socialist modernization required that the Party and the citizenry emancipate their minds and seek truth from facts. To this purpose, it denounced subservience to the personality or word of any individual, and proposed institutional changes to prevent such blind adulation. Propaganda organs were to devote more publicity to the collective, and the personal view of a leader could no longer be called an “instruction.” Decentralization

²³ See “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (December 22, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2723.

²⁴ “Resolution of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Political Report of the Central Committee” (September 27, 1956), in *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Volume One: Documents 1956*: 115-34. See also Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (January 16, 1980): 2:229, 409.

²⁵ “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (December 22, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2723-4.

would forestall bureaucratism. The Party would reconsider its guiding role in government, and the government would diminish its control over enterprises, allowing greater decision-making authority to economic managers. Egalitarianism was now deemed an impediment to economic growth. The principle of “to each according to his work” was applied even to the peasantry, who were invited to take full advantage of decollectivization, of the cultivation of private plots, of sideline occupations, and of the revival of rural markets in order to improve their livelihood and boost productivity. The unwritten laws of the recent past were replaced by an explicit legal system, and a Central Commission for Inspecting Discipline would check future abuses of political power. In addition, the Third Plenum announced that wrongful sentences and other injustices of the past would be officially redressed. The Party revoked its condemnation of the Tiananmen Incident, but it postponed its intended reevaluation of the contributions and errors of Mao Zedong, and its verdict on the Cultural Revolution.²⁶

“Bring Order Out of Chaos”

According to a common formulation, the Third Plenum of 1978 “brought order out of chaos” (*bo luan fan zheng*) after the smashing of the Gang of Four, and introduced a new period of harmony and stability that was free of the disorder and excess of the recent past.²⁷ The Third Plenum indeed inaugurated the restoration of political order and the ideological reorientation of the Chinese nation, by means of measures that contributed

²⁶ See “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (December 22, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2723-7.

²⁷ For example, see Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001: 1:107.

simultaneously to “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*) and to the reversion to Mao Zedong Thought as a “scientific system.”²⁸ In February of 1980, Deng Xiaoping and his allies purged the remaining Leftists in the Politburo and elected Hu Yaobang as General Secretary of the CCP. By the fall of 1980, reformers had control of the center, with Hu as Chairman of the CCP and Zhao Ziyang as Premier.²⁹ They reconstituted democratic centralism in the Party by issuing new guidelines for intra-Party political life, guidelines that stressed collective leadership, opposed arbitrary decision-making by single persons, forbade the veneration of living leaders, prohibited factionalism, and demanded both adherence to the “Four Cardinal Principles” and compliance with the decisions of Party committees.³⁰ At the same time, the reformers began the thought reform and even dismissal of Leftists in lower-levels of the Party bureaucracy, which would last through the 1980s.

The establishment of order was in important part a discursive operation, dependent on the assignment of the proper names to persons, places, and historical periods. In June of 1979, the Party abolished class labels, granting parity to those

²⁸ “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (December 22, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2726. See also Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (December 13, 1978): 2:154, 1960.

²⁹ See “Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (February 29, 1980), in Harold Hinton 1986: 29-32; Hua Guofeng “Speech to the Third Session of the Fifth National People’s Congress” (September 7, 1980), in Harold Hinton 1986: 53; “Communiqué of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (June 29, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 54-5.

³⁰ See “Guiding Principles for Intra-Party Political Life” (March 14, 1980), in Harold Hinton 1986: 151-8. The Four Cardinal Principles—“uphold the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” (Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (March 30, 1978): 2:172)—redefined the parameters of political debate.

heretofore labeled a “landlord,” “rich peasant,” “capitalist,” or “Rightist.” Early in 1980, it reversed the verdicts by which the Left had crushed the political opposition, and thereby rehabilitated some 2.9 million people. Among them was Liu Shaoqi. His posthumous rehabilitation, like all of these acts of justice, was meant to show that “the Chinese Communist Party is a Marxist revolutionary party which seeks truth from facts, corrects mistakes whenever found, and is serious, earnest and aboveboard.”³¹ Private citizens, in the meantime, visited local Public Security Bureaus to rid themselves of the names they had taken on in a revolutionary enthusiasm that they had come to question. In resuming their birth names, these penitent youths also restored the authority of the family.

The “rectification of names” (*zheng ming*) extended also to places.³² The “Provisional Rules of the State Council Regarding the Naming and Changing of Place Names” (1979) insisted on accuracy, truth, and comprehensiveness. In Gejiu, for example, the members of the Gejiu Place Name Committee argued that the standardization of place names was an important aspect of the “scientization” (*kexuehua*) of government management, which would efface the “great chaos of place names” created during the Cultural Revolution.³³ Between October of 1980 and December of

³¹ “Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (February 29, 1980), in Harold Hinton 1986: 31. See also Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (January 16, 1980): 2:227-9; Hua Guofeng “Report to the Second Session of the Fifth National People’s Congress” (June 18, 1979), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2848, 2850.

³² See “Guowuyuan guanyu diming mingming, geng ming de zhanxing guiding” (Provisional rules of the State Council regarding the naming and changing of place names) (December 25, 1979), in Gejiushi renmin zhengfu 1985: 81-4.

³³ Gejiushi renmin zhengfu 1985: “Qianyan”: 1. In the late 1960s, radicals had even proposed renaming Gejiu “Red City” (*Hong cheng*).

1982, the Committee interviewed long-time residents, consulted old gazetteers, and scrutinized local place names. The investigation resulted in the promulgation of 757 local names that referred either to the accomplishments of socialist revolution and socialist construction or to characteristics of local history, culture, and geography.³⁴ While some of the place names were new, the most striking changes in the landscape issued from restoration. Major thoroughfares and well-traveled side streets that Red Guards had renamed resumed their former designations. Anti-Imperialism Street, for example, once more became Zhongshan Street, named for Sun Zhongshan (i.e., Sun Yat-sen), thereby recalling the revolution of 1911 in the socialist present. And the bullet-ridden statue of Chairman Mao on the northern terminus of May First Street was removed.

The proper designation of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution posed the most formidable challenge. Radical and moderate reformers debated the merits and demerits of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution at the Theory Conference in Beijing, from January 18 to April 3 of 1979.³⁵ It wasn't until five months later that Ye Jianying, a vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP, revealed the outcome of this secret conference, in a major speech about the experiences and lessons of Party rule, on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. The speech severely criticized the policies and theoretical basis of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which it blamed on Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.³⁶ The final verdict, however, was passed only after further deliberation, on June 27, 1981, with the

³⁴ See Gejiushi renmin zhengfu 1985: 93, 97-110.

³⁵ For a discussion of the Theory Conference, see Misa 1998: 55-75.

³⁶ See Ye Jianying "Thirtieth Anniversary Speech" (September 29, 1979), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2983-91.

adoption of the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China.” The Resolution declared Mao Zedong accountable for left errors in economic work and for the Cultural Revolution. It condemned the Cultural Revolution as the “ten years of domestic chaos.”³⁷

The Resolution was careful, however, not to endanger the legitimacy of the Party and its new leadership by too broad a condemnation of Mao Zedong. As Deng Xiaoping explained, “When we write about his mistakes, we should not exaggerate, for otherwise we shall be discrediting Comrade Mao Zedong, and this would mean discrediting our Party and state.”³⁸ The Resolution therefore assured the reader that “His merits are primary and his errors secondary.” It attributed left deviations to unspecified “complex social and historical causes,”³⁹ and assigned blame to both Mao and the Party for subjective errors in analysis. Nonetheless, it held Mao chiefly responsible for several left mistakes. Mao had allowed the scope of the Anti-Rightist Campaign to widen, causing unjust harm to many, and he had ignored “objective economic laws” during the Great Leap Forward. In 1962-1966, when Liu Shaoqi and his allies took measures to rectify economic work, Mao had deemed class struggle absolute and in 1965 had attacked capitalist-roaders in the Party as the source of Chinese revisionism. These trends culminated in the erroneous theory of continuous revolution and in the disorder and

³⁷ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 97.

³⁸ Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (March 1980-June 1981): 2:287.

³⁹ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 92, 102. See also Misra 1998: 55-86.

severe losses of the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁰ The Resolution salvaged Mao Zedong Thought as an enduring source of Party legitimacy, calling it “a scientific system of guidelines befitting China’s conditions,” a “crystallization of the collective wisdom of the Chinese Communist Party,” and the guiding force of the Party’s achievements.⁴¹

Besides abolishing class labels, revoking verdicts, restoring place names, and enumerating the errors of Mao Zedong, the reformers also created new historical markers to change the storyline of Party rule. As narrated in the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” the new history of Party rule conformed to the political biography of Deng Xiaoping. The Resolution laid out a history of continuous, linear socio-economic development, interrupted only by periods of ultra leftism—the periods during which Mao had lapsed into error and Deng Xiaoping had lost power. The Party had been strong in the early fifties, when it heeded the policies that Deng supported, such as the socialist transformation of private property in 1956. The Eighth Party Congress, under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, had correctly declared the end of class struggle and rightly given priority to economic growth. The Resolution even commended the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward, the former led by Deng and the latter endorsed by him. After 1957, socialist construction had failed only due to a disregard for economic laws of development, a preemptive focus on class struggle, and a failure to teach the skills required to build the country. The Resolution unequivocally

⁴⁰ See “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 92, 95-8.

⁴¹ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 102, 106.

condemned the Cultural Revolution, the nadir of Deng's career. Whenever Hua Guofeng had disregarded Deng's policies or impaired his career, Hua had fallen into left error. The Third Plenum of 1978 had marked a turning point in the history of the Party, ushering in a new period that righted past wrongs and renewed socialist modernization.⁴² The Thirteen Party Congress formally recognized this new historical divide in 1987.⁴³

Although the Resolution identified the Third Plenum as a rupture in the narrated time of the nation, it did not thereby intend an absolute separation of an authoritarian "Mao era" from a liberal "reform era." Rather, the Third Plenum represented a final break with ultra leftism, accomplished by mental emancipation. The recovery of scientific Marxism and the proper course of socialism involved a return to the policies of the early 1950s and early 1960s, not a departure from everything that had come before. To use an expression of thought reform, the reformers "cured the sickness" (ultra leftism) and "saved the patient" (the Party). The reformers proposed, in other words, a discursive division internal to the first thirty years of Party rule, between "phony Marxism" and scientific Marxism. By means of this new antithesis, the reformers equated "politics" (*zhengzhi*) with left ideology, while identifying their own agenda—both before and after 1978—with scientific objectivity. The disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward and the violent chaos of the Cultural Revolution proved the error of "putting politics in command" and of "giving prominence to politics." Under the new leadership

⁴² See Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (March 1980-June 1981): 2:281. "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China" (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 91-109.

⁴³ See Zhao Ziyang "Advance Along the Road of Socialism With Chinese Characteristics" (October 25, 1987), in *Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* 1987: 70, 74.

of the reformers, the Party would inaugurate a new historic period free of left error and hence achieve truly substantive national development.

“Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”

At the Twelfth Party Congress, in September of 1982, Deng Xiaoping introduced the concept of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (*you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi*) as the defining framework of the new socialist modernization. The concept upheld the Marxian universalism of socialism while allowing at the same time for particularism: national characteristics, local variations, and individual difference. As Deng announced at the start of the Congress, “We must integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, blaze a path of our own and build a socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁴⁴ China would henceforth chart its own course, rather than copying the Soviet or Eastern European experience. It would set this course, moreover, with the aid of foreign capital investment and with the assistance of technology imported from capitalist countries, instituting a new open-door policy that departed from the Maoist principle of self-reliance.⁴⁵

If the course of Chinese socialism diverged from the course of socialism in other countries, then the socialist modernization of different regions within China could also proceed at a varied pace, and skilled individuals would likely benefit sooner than less

⁴⁴ Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (September 1, 1982): 3:14.

⁴⁵ See Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (September 1, 1982): 3:14; “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 105-6; Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 208.

educated ones. Deng Xiaoping argued that “some [people] must get rich first,” because their high living standard would stimulate others to follow their lead.⁴⁶ Individuals and enterprises that contributed more to the construction of socialist material civilization were hereupon allowed to reap the fruits of their labor. Experts who applied themselves, for example, would receive material rewards, because the prosperity of others depended on their scientific knowledge, technical abilities, and managerial skills. As Deng remarked,

Revolutionary spirit is a treasure beyond price. Without it there would be no revolutionary action. But revolution takes place on the basis of the need for material benefit. It would be idealism to emphasize the spirit of sacrifice to the neglect of material benefit.⁴⁷

This differentiated compensation increased the difference between mental and manual labor, and departed from the Maoist goal of egalitarianism. By 1992, the pursuit of material wealth was not only lauded in the slogan, “To get rich is glorious,” but it had come to define socialism itself: “Socialism’s real nature is to liberate the productive forces, and the ultimate goal of socialism is to achieve common prosperity.”⁴⁸

Socio-spatial differentiation and interregional competition further compromised social leveling. The policies of 1982 designated individuals, enterprises, and localities as self-contained, atomized entities that sought to increase their profits by competing with each other, just as the Chinese nation competed in the global capitalist system. In accordance with the principle of “to each according to his work,” each individual unit

⁴⁶ Cited in Meisner 1996: 508. For earlier formulations of this idea, see Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (December 13, 1978): 2:163-4; Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (January 12, 1983): 3:32-3.

⁴⁷ Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (December 13, 1978): 2:157.

⁴⁸ Cited in Meisner 1996: 516. For a slightly different version of this quote, see Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (January 18-February 21, 1992): 3:361.

would capitalize on its own assets and thereby contribute to the construction of socialist material civilization. In October of 1984, the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee officially adopted a “socialist commodity economy,” a system that combined a planned economy with a commodity economy.⁴⁹ The Thirteenth Party Congress, which met in October of 1987, furthered the uneven geography of modernization by issuing policies that divided the nation into three zones of development. The eastern zone would receive priority, while the central and western zones would market their resources to the eastern zone, all in the spirit of “equal exchange” and “free competition.”⁵⁰

Hu Yaobang created a theoretical and ontological basis for these policies of individual and regional differentiation. In his report to the Twelfth Party Congress, he identified the “Two Civilizations”—socialist material civilization and socialist spiritual civilization—as the indices of socialist modernity. The reformers had of course sought to raise the level of socialist material civilization since the Third Plenum, when they declared the improvement of the “living standards of the people” to be the primary objective of economic development.⁵¹ At the Twelfth Party Congress, Hu Yaobang offered a more urgent and specific formulation of this objective: “The fundamental aim of socialist production and construction is to continuously meet the growing material and

⁴⁹ See “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee” (October 20, 1984), in Harold Hinton 1986: 631-2.

⁵⁰ Zhao Ziyang “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” (October 25, 1987), in *Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* 1987: 5, 25, 29, 30-2, 39-40.

⁵¹ “Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee” (December 22, 1978), in Harold Hinton 1980: 2724-5.

cultural needs of the people.”⁵² A continuous compilation of numbers would remind the citizenry of the improved quality of their material wellbeing, and stimulate their nationalist pride in a “rich and strong” China.⁵³ Socialist spiritual civilization, comprised of culture and communist ideology, would hail new socialist subjects, “socialist-minded people of a new type,” necessary for the realization of socialist material civilization.⁵⁴ Individuals who possessed a high level of culture in the form of scientific knowledge, technical expertise, or managerial skills were not only better educated, but they were constitutionally distinct: they were “persons of ability” (*rencai*) and persons of “quality” (*suzhi*).⁵⁵ The Party constitution of 1982 stipulated that the Party should cultivate cadres of this new type in order to ensure its continuance as the arbiter of social life. Party cadres were to be “more revolutionary, younger in average age, better educated and more professionally competent.”⁵⁶ The fields of education, literature and art, and public health acquired responsibility for the general improvement of socialist spiritual civilization.

⁵² Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 203.

⁵³ Meisner 1996: 99.

⁵⁴ Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 208. See also Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 199-218.

⁵⁵ The terms *rencai* and *suzhi* were in use when the new gazetteer policy was issued in April of 1985, although the latter became more common after the National Conference of the Chinese Communist Party in September of 1985. These terms figured prominently in the “Resolution on the Guiding Principles for Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization” (1986), the basis of the ideological platform of both Zhao Ziyang and Jiang Zemin. See Zhao Ziyang “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” (October 25, 1987), in *Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* 1987: 3-77; Jiang Zemin 1999.

⁵⁶ “The Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party” (September 6, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 196. See also Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress”

Communist ideology, the second aspect of socialist spiritual civilization, would prevent the adverse effects of material civilization. Hu Yaobang warned that prosperity would likely generate materialism, which could obstruct socialism by giving rise to social ills such as corruption, sloth, self-interest, and misconduct. Communist ideology, instilled by ideological education, would reform the social collective—the people and the nation—to remain committed to morality, hard work, self-sacrifice, and discipline, and thereby would safeguard the socialist character of China’s spiritual civilization and the superiority of socialism to capitalism.⁵⁷ Rather than red and expert, the new Party cadres would be technocrats as well as paragons of morality and revolutionary ideals. They would lead the people in constructing the Two Civilizations, and guarantee the steady growth of economic development and communist consciousness.

Reforming History: The Revival of the New Socialist Local Gazetteer

The new socialist local gazetteer served both as an instrument and as a record of the implementation of reformist policies. The compilers of these new gazetteers (see pp. 256-7) rewrote local histories in accordance with the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (1981), in the language of scientific objectivity. By excising politics and seeking truth from facts,

(September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 208-10, 213-6. The abolition of lifelong tenure as a right of office and the admission of intellectuals into the Party made it easier to improve the socialist spiritual civilization of Party cadres.

⁵⁷ See Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 206-7; “*Nuli jianshe gaodu de shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming*” 1982: 2-9.

they profess to be reliable records, rather than assertions of ideology. The resulting volumes proved that local officials had successfully implemented the new principles and new policies of the central government; that the locality over which they preside has a high level of material and spiritual civilization; and that the compilers themselves had emancipated their minds, valued scientific knowledge, possessed the professional skills to execute a local gazetteer, and therefore had “quality” (*suzhi*). The local gazetteer was moreover a traditional Chinese genre whose history extended back through the Republican and imperial eras to the eleventh century.⁵⁸ The new socialist local gazetteer was thus uniquely suited to legitimize the new regime and aid its goals of “reform and opening up.”

Although scholars who have written about the new socialist local gazetteers are aware of the limitations of these texts, and even of their political objectives, many still believe that in the end the facts speak for themselves.⁵⁹ As they celebrate these new gazetteers as repositories of a wide array of data on local life and geography, some argue that “had ideological education been the aim, there would have been no reason to present the material in a form so dry and pedantic that the public at large cannot be expected to read it.”⁶⁰ Although I do not dispute the accuracy of the data contained in the new socialist local gazetteers—the lack of access to Party and Government archives makes it impossible to do so—I will show that the gazetteers select and present their data to conform to the new narrative of official history, and that their professed scientific

⁵⁸ See Bol 2001: 52-3.

⁵⁹ See Thogersen and Clausen 1992; Vermeer 1992.

⁶⁰ Thogersen and Clausen 1992: 172.

objectivity constitutes part of a particular, powerful ideological project. For illustrations of the guidelines for the compilation of the new socialist local gazetteers and for examples of their contents, I shall rely on the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* (1998).

Neither the concept nor the name of these local records was new during the 1980s. In 1956, the State Council had named the compilation of the new socialist local gazetteers a field of priority in the “Twenty-Year Plan for Philosophy and the Social Sciences.” A Local Gazetteer Group was accordingly set up under the Central Bureau of Propaganda. In March of 1958, Mao Zedong proposed that all localities compile new gazetteers. Zhou Enlai explained that the purpose of their compilation was to “make the past serve the present” (*gu wei jin yong*). The gazetteers were to document revolutionary history, the history of the struggle of production, and the lives of revolutionaries, thus providing matter for village history and factory history.⁶¹ By the early 1960s, more than 500 counties had begun to compile materials and over 250 had prepared preliminary drafts, although only a few had managed to publish a finished gazetteer. During the Cultural Revolution, however, all work on gazetteers ceased. After the Third Plenum, work resumed under the principle of seeking truth from facts. Although the new regime maintained the designation “new socialist local gazetteer,” it condemned the inferior quality of the earlier effort for its “left ideology” and lack of scientific approach.⁶²

Hu Yaobang and Hu Qiaomu revived the effort to compile local gazetteers. Hu Yaobang (at the suggestion of Li Baiyu) advocated the resumption of the nation-wide

⁶¹ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 40; “*Guanyu xin xiu fangzhi de jidian yijian*” (Some suggestions on the new compilation of gazetteers) (October 20, 1958), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 255; “*Guanyu bianxie difangzhi gongzuo de jidian yijian*” (Some suggestions on the effort to compile local gazetteers) (July 23, 1963), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 259-60.

⁶² See Lai Xinxia 1988: 18-25, 40-1.

compilation of gazetteers in July of 1979, and in April of the following year Hu Qiaomu, a member of the Politburo and president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, endorsed this proposal with an influential recommendation:

In the past, every county, every prefecture, and every province had a gazetteer. Our country has this historical tradition of compiling local gazetteers. Today, we should carry on this tradition. ... We should use new perspectives, new materials, new methods and formats [the “Three News”] to compile local gazetteers.⁶³

His words provided the impetus for the establishment, in 1981, of the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers, which in turn founded a national journal and created the first group of local-level compilation committees, such as the Yunnan Province Gazetteer Compilation Committee. Commentators in the national press also took up Hu Qiaomu’s recommendation. They expressed regret about the recent decline in the esteemed tradition of the Chinese local gazetteer and argued that the socialist subjects of the present, writing from the standpoint of historical materialism, would produce gazetteers far superior to those made by the exploiting classes of the past. Although some commentators imagined that the new socialist local gazetteers would become collections of “living data” (*huo ziliao*), preserving the knowledge of the revolutionary veterans, elderly intellectuals, and sent-down youth, the gazetteers departed sharply from this Maoist tradition and served instead the Four Modernizations.⁶⁴

The ideology of the new socialist local gazetteer was laid out at the first conference of the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers in 1981. According to the summary in the proceedings of the conference, the delegates justified their efforts

⁶³ Lai Xinxia 1988: 22.

⁶⁴ See “*Difangzhi de bianxiu gongzuo jidai kaizhan*” 1980: 2; “*Jianyi bianxie difangzhi*” 1980: 4; “*Jianyi bianxiu difangzhi*” 1980: 2; “*Liaoning sheng zhian xian bianxuan chu xin xianzhi*” 1980: 3; Liu Weiyi 1980: n.p.

by reference to the 1981 Resolution: “It is imperative for the whole Party to strengthen the study of Marxist theory, Chinese and foreign history and current events, and all fields of the natural and social sciences.”⁶⁵ The new socialist local gazetteer would use the past to serve the present by “preserving history” (*cunshi*), by “aiding government” (*zizhi*), and by “enlightening through education” (*jiaohua*).⁶⁶ In his address at the conference, Hu Qiaomu pressed upon the delegates that “the new gazetteers must be more scientific and modern than the old gazetteers.”⁶⁷ Zeng San, Vice-Director of the Office of the Central Committee of the CCP and Director of the Central Archive, told the delegates that the present era of earth-shaking reform would transform China into a great, powerful socialist country, and that “we should reflect the characteristics of this era in the local histories and local gazetteers that we compile.”⁶⁸ In other words, the delegates were to apply the “Three News,” their expert knowledge, and their new professionalism in the service of the Party and the new leadership of the reformers.

⁶⁵ “*Zhongguo difangshizhi xiehui chengli dahui ji shoujie difangshizhi xueshu taolunhui huiyi jiyao*” (Summary of the Inaugural Conference of the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers and the first plenum of the Academic Conference on Local Historical Gazetteers) (August 1, 1981), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 263. See also “*Zhongguo difangshizhi xiehui chengli dahui ji shoujie difangshizhi xueshu taolunhui huiyi jiyao*” (August 1, 1981), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 261-5. The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1981-1985) reiterated this dictate and designated local history and local gazetteers as areas of historical research of special interest to the government. See *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di liu ge wu nian jihua 1981-1985* 1983: 127, 129.

⁶⁶ This formulation is given in *Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui* 1998: 1.

⁶⁷ “*Zhongguo difangshizhi xiehui chengli dahui ji shoujie difangshizhi xueshu taolunhui huiyi jiyao*” (August 1, 1981), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 262.

⁶⁸ “*Zhongguo difangshizhi xiehui chengli dahui ji shoujie difangshizhi xueshu taolunhui huiyi jiyao*” (August 1, 1981), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 263.

Subsequent guidelines and discussions confirmed this ideological function. Preliminary regulations, drawn up by the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers in March of 1982 and adopted in July, stated that the main purpose of the new socialist local gazetteers was to serve the Four Modernizations by contributing to the “construction of the Two Civilizations” (*liangge wenming jianshe*).⁶⁹ By gathering information that would facilitate local development the gazetteers would further socialist material civilization, and by carrying out “patriotic education and traditional revolutionary education” they would advance socialist spiritual civilization.⁷⁰ In a speech at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, Hu Yaobang acknowledged that historiography offered a means to conduct ideological education:

It is necessary to do more to educate the masses of the people, and first of all cadres and youth, in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, in the history of our motherland, and especially its modern history; in the program, history and revolutionary tradition of our party; and in the constitution of our country, the rights and duties of citizens and civic morality.⁷¹

The new socialist local gazetteers were uniquely fit to serve this purpose, both because they would be “teaching materials reflecting local conditions and suited to local needs” (*xiangtu jiaocai*),⁷² and because they would create effective contrasts between the past

⁶⁹ See Ching-li Chang 1983: 23.

⁷⁰ “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (Proposal on the regulations for the new compilation of local historical gazetteers) (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 271. See also “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 271-3; Lai Xinxia 1988: 25-6.

⁷¹ Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 207-8. Hu Yaobang quotes here from the 1981 Resolution.

⁷² “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 271.

and the present.⁷³ In the fall of 1983, the Party Group of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences submitted a report to the Central Bureau of Propaganda that noted the economic and ideological functions of the gazetteers, and expressed the hope that the gazetteers would reflect the glorious achievements of more than thirty years of socialist construction. This Party Group oversaw the Chinese Local Gazetteer Guiding Small Group, which in turn directed the nation-wide effort to compile the new gazetteers.⁷⁴

Excising Politics: The Regulations for the New Socialist Local Gazetteers

After two years of deliberation, in the spring of 1985, the Chinese Local Gazetteer Guiding Small Group issued “Provisional Rules for the Compilation of New Local Gazetteers,” a set of rules that remains in force today. The rules effectively commandeer the new socialist local gazetteer as the vehicle of the Four Modernizations and socialism with Chinese characteristics.⁷⁵ The rules stipulated that the gazetteers should “preserve

⁷³ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 135; “*Yao zhongshi bianxiu xin difangzhi*” 1982: 5.

⁷⁴ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 27; “*Guanyu difangzhi gongzuo qingkuang he yijian de baogao*” (Report on the situation and views of local gazetteer work) (September 24, 1983), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 2; “*Guangyu jiaqiang quanguo difangzhi bianzuan gongzuo lingdao de baogao*” (Report on strengthening the leadership in the national effort to compile local gazetteers) (March 7, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 3-4. In 1985, the Guiding Small Group became an independent body that reported directly to the CCP Central Committee and the State Council.

⁷⁵ The 1985 policy states that the new socialist local gazetteers were essential to construction of the Two Civilizations and were to uphold the line of the Third Plenum and the Twelfth Party Congress, the Four Cardinal Principles, the 1981 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” and the 1984 “Resolution on Economic Structural Reform,” the guideline of the socialist commodity economy. See “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (Provisional rules for the compilation of new local gazetteers) (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 5.

truth and seek facts” (*cunzhen qiushi*) and reflect history as a product of local, regional, and cultural difference. Conscientious application of scientific Marxism and the Three News would ensure that compilers would achieve “a unity of thought, science, and data,” and that they would complete a systematic record of the natural and social history of their locality as well as a full description of its present circumstances.⁷⁶ The new socialist local gazetteer thereby assumed all the paradoxes of reformist policy: an avoidance of “politics” that was itself profoundly political, the pursuit of scientific objectivity in the service of a specific political agenda, and the elevation of local characteristics as evidence of a universalizing Marxist history. The Party tried to control the uncertainties and misunderstandings generated by these paradoxes by eradicating remnants of left ideology, by insisting on the strict observation of the “Three Requirements,” by requiring that every historical narrative conform to the 1981 Resolution, by offering professional training in the compilation of gazetteers, by imposing a uniform format, and by demanding a rigorous review of every draft gazetteer, at multiple administrative levels. The denied, subtle paradoxes exceeded these formal and institutional controls, however, leaving compilers to resolve them for themselves. This led to discrepant treatments of past political campaigns and other sensitive matters, not only in the gazetteers of different localities, but also in different chapters of the same gazetteer.

Like all of the policies that the Party devised in the early 1980s, the “Provisional Rules for the Compilation of New Local Gazetteers” sought to excise politics, that is, to

⁷⁶ “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 5. See also Lai Xinxia 1988: 41.

eradicate left ideology and to appeal instead to scientific truth.⁷⁷ At gazetteer conferences in the early 1980s, Party officials repeatedly urged such excision of politics, but the very effort to rid the new regime of any association with the previous era bespoke the continuity in Party work and the inherent politics of historiography. As early as the first conference of the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers, in 1981, Party officials criticized delegates for using leftist rhetoric and for giving local history the appearance of propaganda. Zeng San warned that this outdated approach to history impeded the excision of politics and would hinder the timely completion of the 2,000 county gazetteers within the next five to ten years.⁷⁸ The preliminary regulations of 1982 prohibited exaggerated, false, and empty talk, associated with putting politics in command.⁷⁹ Although the Provisional Rules of 1985 assumed the eradication of such language, Hu Qiaomu had to draw attention to the persistence of such rhetoric at a gazetteer compilation conference in December of 1986, where he urged delegates to avoid the tendency to “politicize” (*zhengzhihua*). He stressed that the new socialist local gazetteers were to be “scientific” and “objective” rather than “dyed the color of propaganda.” They were to be “objective histories,” not “historical commentaries.” The

⁷⁷ See Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 199.

⁷⁸ See “*Zhongguo difangshizhi xiehui chengli dahui ji shoujie difangshizhi xueshu taolunhui huiyi jiyao*” (August 1, 1981), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 261-2. The goal Zeng San put forth was clarified in “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” ((July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 273): County gazetteers were to be compiled in three to five years, city gazetteers in five to seven years, and provincial gazetteers in seven to ten years.

⁷⁹ See “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 272; “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 6.

facts were to speak for themselves. Evaluation “ruined the effect by adding something superfluous” and caused the new socialist local gazetteers to “lose luster.”⁸⁰

The so-called Three Requirements (*san yi*) offered a positive guide for the avoidance of political mistakes: “be general rather than detailed” (*yi cu, bu yi xi*), “separate rather than merge” (*yi fen, bu yi he*), and “be brief rather than elaborate” (*yi lüe, bu yi xiang*).⁸¹ Devised at the 1983 National Symposium on City Gazetteers, the Three Requirements were based on Deng Xiaoping’s remarks on successive drafts of the 1981 Resolution:

I have gone over the outline of the resolution prepared by the drafting group, and my impression is that it is over-extended. We should avoid the narrative method and make the writing more succinct. ... As I said before, it is better to write in broad outline and not go into too much detail. The purpose of summing up the past is to encourage people to close ranks and look to the future. We should try to ensure that when this resolution is adopted, the thinking of Party members and non-Party people alike will be clarified, common views will be reached, and, by and large, debate on the major historical questions will come to an end.⁸²

The Three Requirements dictated how to handle politically sensitive subjects, such as political campaigns, and, as a corollary, indicated how to avoid committing a political mistake. As the first of the three methods, “be general rather than detailed,” was explicitly formulated to deal with politics, it appears more often in gazetteer conference proceedings. Several delegates, for instance, opposed its adoption, arguing that political

⁸⁰ “*Hu Qiaomu tongzhi zai quanguo difangzhi di yi ci gongzuo huiyi bimuhui shang de jianghua*” (Comrade Hu Qiaomu’s closing address to the First National Gazetteer Work Conference) (December 24, 1986), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 8-9.

⁸¹ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 123-125; “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 272; “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 6; Vermeer 1992: 455.

⁸² Deng Xiaoping 1984-94 (March 1980-June 1981): 2:276-7. Cf. Lai Xinxia 1988: 123-5; Vermeer 1992: 455. The preliminary regulations of 1982 also refer to these notions. The Three Requirements were a crucial if implicit aspect of the 1985 provisional rules.

campaigns permeated all aspects of society and ought to be detailed, especially if later generations were to learn from the past. But it was evident that the detailed treatment of political campaigns yielded unacceptable results. Explicit criticism of the unscientific policies and tragic disasters of the Great Leap Forward, full descriptions of the violence and chaos of the Cultural Revolution, and detailed treatment of present policies would compromise the legitimacy of the Party, and therefore the many gazetteers that had included such passages during the early 1980s in the name of seeking truth from facts were now severely criticized.⁸³ Intended to eliminate remnants of left ideology, the Three Requirements created their own forbidden zones. Party officials had, after all, found similar political mistakes when they scrutinized the new socialist local gazetteers of the early 1960s: mistakes in the assessment of revolutionary history, in the interpretation of the political line of the Party, in the selection of model Communists, and in the representation of political campaigns.⁸⁴

Although their injunctions could not name specific transgressions and therefore remained vague and general, the formulations of the Three Requirements instructed compilers to pay minimal attention to the political events of the recent past. In respect to the first method, “be general rather than detailed,” compilers were told never to be so general as to be vague about historical questions, and never so detailed as to harm the image of the Party. The second method, “separate rather than merge,” was likewise a means to safeguard the legitimacy of the Party and thereby to promote national unity under its leadership. Rather than providing an integrated, linear narrative of the political

⁸³ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 122, 129-32, 135-6, 144, 149-50, 155; Vermeer 1992: 455.

⁸⁴ See “*Guanyu bianxie difangzhi gongzuo de jidian yijian*” (July 23, 1963), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 259-60.

events of the Mao era, local gazetteers should fragment these political events into their varied aspects and discuss these aspects in the pertinent topical chapters. The avoidance of a grand historical narrative and the dispersal of harmful details across a multitude of technical chapters coupled apparent scientific precision with political opacity. The third method, “be brief rather than elaborate,” reduced the risk of political mistakes by reducing the length of the exposition. Brevity in regard to matters political, moreover, ensured that more space remained for extolling the glorious achievements of the Party.⁸⁵

If the Three Requirements and the prohibitions against left ideology could only offer vague indications of how to circumscribe forbidden subjects, the historical narrative of the 1981 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China,” the standards of professional competence, and the definite format of the new socialist local gazetteer provided specific criteria and concrete structures. In accordance with the 1981 Resolution, the gazetteers were to give prominence to “economy” (*jingji*)—as opposed to the “politics” of class and class struggle—and to offer an account of socialist modernization and the growth the productive forces through the lens of local characteristics. Because the 1985 Provisional Rules identified natural resources and socio-economic development as crucial aspects of local history,⁸⁶ many compilers defined the distinctiveness of their locality by these two criteria.⁸⁷ The *Gejiu City Gazetteer*, for example, upholds tin and tin production as the defining characteristics of Gejiu. “Deng Xiaoping Theory” (*Deng Xiaoping lilun*), and

⁸⁵ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 122, 129-32, 135-6, 144, 149-50, 155; Vermeer 1992: 455.

⁸⁶ See “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 5.

⁸⁷ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 125, 131, 133-4, 138; Vermeer 1992: 453-4.

especially socialism with Chinese characteristics, thus determined the new shape of Chinese Marxist history. When the new socialist local gazetteers began, in 1986, to include specific accounts of the reforms of the previous ten years, the central position of Deng Xiaoping's ideas became especially clear.⁸⁸

If the written guidelines handed down by the Chinese Local Gazetteer Guiding Small Group could not eliminate mistakes and misunderstandings, personal instruction of the individuals charged with compiling the new socialist local gazetteers promised to be more effective. If these men and women emancipated their minds and fought remnants of left ideology with scientific knowledge and technical expertise, the language and contents of their gazetteers would bear no trace of politics. The absence of political mistakes would yield a corresponding gain in truth. As early as 1982, the Chinese Association of Local Historical Gazetteers organized training courses in Suzhou, Wuhan, Taiyuan, and Tianjin, instructing more than 1,350 people in the skills of gazetteer compilation. The Yunnan Province Gazetteer Compilation Committee held the first of a series of similar training courses in Kunming, in June of 1984, in partnership with Yunnan University. Participants from various administrative units within the province, including Gejiu, listened to lectures about topics such as the history of Yunnan, extant source materials, and the purpose and history of gazetteer compilation.⁸⁹ The Provisional Rules of 1985 recommended that the compilation committee of every locality be comprised of experts in gazetteer studies, scholars, and teachers, as well as “retired revolutionaries” (*lixiu*

⁸⁸ See Zeng San 1987 (December 22, 1986): 5.

⁸⁹ See Lai Xinxia 1988: 41-2, 55. Universities became involved with the new socialist local gazetteer in 1983, as a result of the ingenuity of the institutions of higher learning that pioneered gazetteer studies and produced “experts” in this new academic field, such as Beijing Normal University.

ganbu) and “retired cadres” (*tuixiu ganbu*) who had “a proper level of culture.”⁹⁰

Although the Provisional Rules mentioned that compilers should possess a proper level of political thought, they emphasized expert knowledge and writing skills, as compilers were to be people of quality (*suzhi*). The Provisional Rules also promised that each compilation committee would receive a full staff, office space, equipment, funds, and government support.⁹¹ The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986-1990), drawn up in 1985, identified the compilation of local gazetteers as an area of social-science research of special interest to the government and allocated resources to support it.⁹²

The gazetteer compilation committees at the lower levels of the bureaucracy were comprised of local officials rather than academics, and in practice they were hard pressed to train and oversee a workforce of government workers and retirees while also carrying out their habitual duties.⁹³ The Gejiu Gazetteer Compilation Committee, for example, was made up of twelve officials, only one of whom was an “expert.” Chen Huichuan, a Vice-Mayor and Vice-Party Secretary of Gejiu, served as the Chair of the committee. Vice-Chair Zeng Yi, who held a bachelor’s degree in gazetteer studies from Yunnan University and was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer*, headed the Compilation Committee Office, as his work unit, and bore responsibility for the success

⁹⁰ “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 7.

⁹¹ See “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 7.

⁹² See “*Zhongguo difangzhi quanguo guihua huiyi jiyao*” (Summary of the National Conference on the Gazetteer Plan for the Entire Country) (March 22-27, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 277; *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di qi ge wu nian jihua 1986-1990* 1986: 128-9.

⁹³ Thogersen and Clausen 1992: 167-9; Vermeer 1992: 457.

of the project. In January of 1985, the Committee formed small leadership groups for each of the 74 “specialized gazetteers” (*zhuanzhi*) of the city. The Committee and small leadership groups in turn appointed more than 100 individuals to gather the necessary data, chosen from among retired cadres, retired revolutionaries, as well as Party cadres and workers from every department of the local government. Despite two training courses held in 1986, the workforce remained ill prepared and lacking in quality (*suzhi*). In addition, Party cadres and government workers often could spare little time from their other obligations, and the scarce resources for the gazetteer were easily diverted to more pressing matters. As a result, only 14 out of the 74 specialized gazetteers existed as completed drafts in 1990, and these were distressingly diverse in their format, language, and historical analysis. After the abandonment of the “two steps to arrive in place” (*liang bu dao wei*) method in 1991, however, the compilation of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* could begin prior to the completion of the specialized gazetteers, and this both quickened the work and made submitted texts more coherent. The Office of the Gejiu Gazetteer Compilation Committee moreover stepped in to rewrite drafts of specialized gazetteers of poor quality and to complete gazetteers that had fallen behind schedule.⁹⁴ Finally, in 1998, it saw the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* into print.

Its arrangement as a kind of “encyclopedia” (*baike quanshu*) gave the new socialist local gazetteer a precise, rigid format that prevented many of the political complications of an integrated historical narrative.⁹⁵ Though there were exceptions, most

⁹⁴ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: n.p., 1406-7, 1616; field interviews.

⁹⁵ The format of the new socialist local gazetteers closely resembled that of imperial and Republican era gazetteers. See Bol 2001: 52-3; “*Yao zhongshi bianxiu xin difangzhi*” 1982: 5.

of the new gazetteers were divided into chapters that mirrored departments of local government.⁹⁶ The segregation of historical data into these topical chapters diffused the cumulative effects of left policies and mistaken campaigns, much as intended by the requirement “separate rather than merge.” The 1985 Provisional Rules regulated the following aspects of the format: the form of the title; the timeline (1985 as ending date, starting date not fixed); the choice of genres (records in the form of *ji*, *zhi*, and *lu*, commentaries, maps, and charts); the layout (chapters, sections, and subsections, and an accurate table of contents); the historical emphasis (“detail the present and sketch the past” [*xiangjin lüegu*]); the contents of biographical entries (factual accounts of notable individuals, devoid of judgment); the prose style (the vernacular); the total length (at most 10,000,000 characters for provincial gazetteers; from 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 characters for city gazetteers; from 300,000 to 500,000 characters for county gazetteers); appropriate contents (names, dates, historical facts, quotations, scientific data); size and format of the book size (16 *mo*, horizontal print).⁹⁷

With its 55 chapters in two volumes, the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* conforms closely to the 1985 regulations.⁹⁸ Most of the chapters mirror the departments of local government, but others cover traditional topics that highlight local characteristics, such as the natural environment, famous places, cultural artifacts, and biographies of local dignitaries. The 74 specialized gazetteers of the city (each of which recorded the history of a committee,

⁹⁶ Thogersen and Clausen 1992: 170; Vermeer 1992: 445-6, 457. *The Harbin City Gazetteer*, discussed in Thogersen and Clausen (1992), is a counter-example.

⁹⁷ “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 5-6.

⁹⁸ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 2, 1406-7, 1616.

office, or department of local government) were its source materials, as was the *Yunnan Tin Corporation Gazetteer* (1992). Apart from its ending date of 1990, the format of the gazetteer accords strictly with the 1985 Provisional Rules. The colophon (*fanli*) explicitly cites the 1985 policy and demonstrates compliance. The third of its ten items, for example, explains that the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* provides a comprehensive record of the local history, but that it “details the present and sketches the past” and “plants its feet in the present age” (*lizu dangdai*) by giving most prominent treatment to the past 41 years.⁹⁹

Although the historiographical restrictions of the 1981 Resolution, the standards of professional competence, and the segregating format of the local gazetteer prevented many possible political mistakes, only direct examination could determine whether compilation committees had indeed avoided leftist errors and omitted sensitive political matters. As early as 1982, therefore, the Party instituted a formal procedure of examination and approval.¹⁰⁰ It required that the final draft of a gazetteer (whether of a city, county, or province) be examined and approved by the responsible compilation committee. Thereafter, the committee had to send the draft up the administrative hierarchy, to be examined and approved by the upper levels of the Party bureaucracy and by the Security Council. The Propaganda Department of the locality bore the responsibility for publishing the approved gazetteer.¹⁰¹ The Provisional Rules of 1985 reduced these requirements, stipulating that final drafts needed be examined and

⁹⁹ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 2.

¹⁰⁰ See “*Guanyu xin bian difangshizhi gongzuo tiaoli de jianyi*” (July 25-31, 1982), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 273.

¹⁰¹ See “*Guanyu difangzhi gongzuo qingkuang he yijian de baogao*” (September 24, 1983), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 2.

approved only by the compilation committee and by the Party Committee of the locality. County gazetteers in addition had to be examined and approved by the Party Committee of the administrative level above the county. The rules moreover stipulated that the responsibility for the publication of the gazetteer should be shared by the compilation committee and the local Propaganda Department and, more important, that the new socialist local gazetteers were to be made available for “open distribution” (*gongkai faxing*), rather than reserved for “restricted distribution” (*neibu faxing*).¹⁰² The Chinese Local Gazetteer Guiding Small Group expressed its confidence in the new procedure by adopting the principle “Be positively safe, allow for unseen circumstances, and guarantee quality” (*jiji wentuo, liuyou yudi, baozheng zhiliang*). All told, scientific accuracy guaranteed the quality of the new socialist local gazetteers, while the strict process of examination and approval guaranteed that what was scientifically accurate was also politically correct.¹⁰³

In Gejiu, the process of examination and approval left little room for political error. The final draft of each chapter of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* was first examined and approved by the small leadership group that had compiled the specialized gazetteer on which the chapter was based, as well as by the corresponding department of the prefectural government. Over a hundred individuals participated in this process. The

¹⁰² See “*Xin bian difangzhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*” (April 19, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 5, 7.

¹⁰³ See “*Zhongguo difangzhi quanguo guihua huiyi jiyao*” (March 22-27, 1985), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 277. Hu Qiaomu even expressed his hope that, with the proper supervision in place, the new socialist local gazetteers would be “openly published” (*gongkai chuban*) in the near future, which would of course reflect well on a period presumably characterized by reform and opening up. See “*Hu Qiaomu tongzhi zai quanguo difangzhi di yi ci gongzuo huiyi bimuhui shang de jianghua*” (December 24, 1986), in Lai Xinxia 1988: 8-10.

Office of the Gejiu Gazetteer Compilation Committee then revised the draft. By January of 1995, after three rounds of revisions, the Committee submitted the text to the Gejiu Security Council, the Gejiu Office of Foreign Affairs, the Gejiu Committee on Nationality Affairs, the Gejiu Office of Religious Affairs, and the Gejiu Party United Front Department. In addition, officials of the YTC examined and approved the chapter “The Tin Industry,” which drew extensively on the *Yunnan Tin Corporation Gazetteer*. The gazetteer was then sent to Chen Huichuan, Chair of the Gejiu Gazetteer Compilation Committee, who approved it and forwarded it to the Office of the Honghe Prefecture Gazetteer Compilation Committee and to the Office of the Yunnan Province Gazetteer Compilation Committee. Based on the suggestions of these upper-level officials, the committee undertook another round of revisions from August of 1996 to April of 1997. Before sending it off to the printer, the revised final draft, some two million characters in length, was sent to the Gejiu People’s Government for the Mayor’s signature of approval.¹⁰⁴ The excision of politics evidently required intensive political vigilance.

The Politics of Economy: The *Gejiu City Gazetteer*

The *Gejiu City Gazetteer* more than demonstrates the inherent contradictions of the new socialist local gazetteers: scientific objectivity bearing out a distinct political agenda, and insistence on local difference complying with national economic policy. It manifests these contradictions in its very structure, which frames the scientific objectivity of the chapters with overtly political statements in the preface (*xuyan*), colophon (*fanli*), and

¹⁰⁴ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1406-7, 1616; field interviews.

postscript (*houji*). The references to national policy and the summary of compilation guidelines in the front and back matter make visible the politics in the project. So, too, do the compulsory general introduction (*gaishu*) the selection of biographical subjects, and the technical treatises, such as the chapter on forestry.

The preface and postscript of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* affirm that the process of compilation has proceeded in accordance with the national guidelines and that the finished text supports current policy. The prestigious preface, signed by the Party Secretary of Gejiu, Li Xingwang, and by Mayor Su Weifan, sets up the local uniqueness of Gejiu within the context of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and assures the reader of conformity with the “Provisional Rules for the Compilation of New Local Gazetteers” of 1985. It explains local distinctiveness in terms of natural resources, especially the long history of tin production, and notes with gratitude that the local population has used these resources to build the material and spiritual civilization of the city. The recording of this local history, especially the history since 1949, will “preserve history,” “aid government,” and “enlighten by education.”¹⁰⁵ The less prestigious postscript recounts the process of the compilation of the gazetteer and its submission to the authorities for examination and approval. Zeng Yi and the staff of the Gejiu Gazetteer Compilation Committee Office, authors of the postscript, allude to ideological aims but dedicate more attention to the procedures.¹⁰⁶ Both the preface and the postscript, however, assert the scientific objectivity of the gazetteer and the quality (*suzhi*) of its compilers, and thereby politicize the content.

¹⁰⁵ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: “Xuyan”: 1.

¹⁰⁶ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1616.

The front and back matter of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* explicates the political and ideological concerns that remain implicit in the “General Introduction” and in chapters such as “Forestry” and “Personages.” The general introduction identifies tin as the defining characteristic of Gejiu history, and presents local historical experience as an instantiation of the new storyline of Chinese Marxist history. In an account that is “general rather than detailed” and “brief rather than elaborate,” the introduction narrates Gejiu history as a linear trajectory of continuous socio-economic development, which after 1949 advanced with ever more rapid strides, interrupted only by periods of ultra leftism. The historical narrative moreover presents the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, held in 1978, as an historical divide that equals in importance the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Instead of using 1949 as the only rupture for contrasting the past with the present (*jinxi duibi*), the narrative gives special prominence to the marked difference in the growth of the productive forces and other indices of socialist modernity before and after 1978—a technique of Communist propaganda that underscores the ideological nature of the narrative. Although the gazetteer never denies the importance of class and class struggle as the driving force of history, the erasure of all explicit reference to class struggle leaves economic growth as the only identifiable historical force—a force that moreover reduces the contrast between the “semi-feudal and semi-colonial” past and the early years of the People’s Republic of China. Formerly condemned as the reign of the Three Great Enemies (imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism), the late imperial and Republican periods are now recognized as a time of national growth and as the progressive beginning of Chinese

modernity.¹⁰⁷ The overarching historical narrative of the general introduction, in other words, conforms to Deng Xiaoping Theory and to the 1981 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China.” There is, though, one exception. The *Gejiu City Gazetteer* significantly deviates from the 1981 Resolution in its designation of 1949 as “liberation” (*jiefang*) rather than “foundation” (*jianli*). The word *jianli* connotes construction and hence the economic program of the reformers.¹⁰⁸ By using the phrases “before liberation” and “after liberation” the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* ineluctably invokes the political discourse of class and class struggle.

The “General Introduction” foregrounds the recent past both in its contents and in its composition. Of its nine paragraphs, the first offers a survey of the physical and social geography of Gejiu, the second summarizes the entirety of the ancient and imperial past, and the third and fourth discuss the period from 1909 through 1949. The remaining paragraphs, occupying twice the length of the first four paragraphs, are dedicated to the period after 1949. The “General Introduction” begins by locating Gejiu in the national and international landscape, recording its location, its distance from the provincial capital, its size and terrain, its population and ethnic composition, its administrative subdivisions, and its status of “city open to foreign visitors.” The second paragraph identifies tin as the source of the city’s distinctive local historical experience and as the foundation of the city’s industrial economy, a distinction that has earned Gejiu domestic

¹⁰⁷ For earlier examples of this practice of historical reclamation, see volume four of *Zhengxie Gejiushi wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1982-2001*.

¹⁰⁸ See “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 91-102.

and international fame as the “Tin Capital” (*Xidu*). A tendentious reading of the archaeological and historical record claims the region’s ancient and imperial past for the present-day modern nation-state. For example, the text cites the archaeological discoveries of the 1980s, which identified the region of present-day Gejiu as one of the earliest sites of tin production in the world, to argue that the indigenous, non-Han population had already achieved a relatively high level of civilization by the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.E.). The florescence of the silver, tin, and lead industries during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) is attributed to the infiltration of the “Central Plains culture” and by implication to the Han Chinese.¹⁰⁹ By the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) Gejiu tin had achieved domestic renown, and during the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), tin production developed further as technology improved, commerce increased, local society progressed, and the imperial government took an interest in the local industry. By the end of the imperial era, Gejiu tin was for sale on the international market, and the Gejiu metallurgy industry was modernized with the help of imported machines and Western engineers. Tin output had reached more than 3,600 tons.

Between 1909 and the late 1930s, the tin output increased to more than 11,000 tons per year, and Gejiu tin accounted for over ninety percent of the nation’s exports. The Yunnan-Vietnam Railroad, completed in 1910, and the connection of the local Ge(jiu)-Bi(se) Railroad to that international line in 1921, brought greater prosperity and incorporated the city more tightly into national and international networks. The provincial and central governments set up an increasing number of tin enterprises. In 1913, Gejiu earned a classification as a rank-one county. Between 1939 and 1949, the protracted

¹⁰⁹ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: “Gaishu”: 1.

warfare and the endemic corruption of the Republican government almost destroyed these accomplishments. The “General Introduction” offers a long list of figures to demonstrate the destitution of Gejiu in the year 1949: tin production had plummeted to some 3,300 tons; there were only twelve schools; the city occupied just two square kilometers; and the residential population had been reduced to a mere 13,000. The 41 years “after liberation” saw continuous linear progress, interrupted only by unspecified “tortuous mistakes.” Designated as one of the country’s key sites of construction, Gejiu earned a classification as a city in 1951. A large number of managers and technicians, transferred from north, northeast, and southwest China, arrived to improve the tin industry. As a result, the economy expanded and urban development proceeded apace, under the leadership of the Party and the People’s Government. After the Third Plenum of 1978, local development accelerated. By 1990, Gejiu had a multi-pronged economy and all the capacities of a modern industrial center.¹¹⁰

In conformity with the principle of “detail the present and sketch the past,” the “General Introduction” dedicates its four final, long paragraphs to the present situation of Gejiu, which it defines by means of lists of flattering numbers that testify to the city’s rich material and spiritual civilization. It explains that the non-ferrous metallurgy industry constitutes the core of the Gejiu economy. With its extensive mining district (100 miles long) and its many enterprises (state-owned, city-owned, and collective), the Gejiu metallurgy industry is “an advanced production and management mechanism with Chinese characteristics.” From 1950 to 1990, this industry yielded over 630,000 tons of tin concentrate and refined some 579,800 tons (1.8 times the total output of the sixty

¹¹⁰ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: “Gaishu”: 1-2.

years prior to liberation); paid more than two billion *yuan* in taxes (four times the amount of the state's investment); and earned over one billion U.S. dollars in foreign exchange. Other numbers prove the florescence of economic sectors outside the tin industry—agriculture, forestry, rural and township enterprises—and chart the city's thriving professions and its high standard of living: 226 scientific and technical work units, 223 hospitals and clinics, 353 local schools, a population of 137,200 in an expanded area of 10.01 km², and the official designation of Gejiu as “an advanced green city.” The contrasts between the level of development before and after 1949, and particularly before and after 1978, offer proof of the infallibility of Party rule.

The “General Introduction” ends with the current plan to restructure the Gejiu economy. Although the reserves of tin and lead are waning, Gejiu will rely on its 2,000-year mining history and the invaluable work of the last 41 years to set a new course. Its well-developed technological infrastructure, its highly trained workforce, its abundant natural resources, and its beautiful environment provide the infrastructure for the extraction of untapped reserves of 25 non-ferrous and ferrous minerals, the growth of related chemical industries, the sustainable harvesting of tropical timbers and foods, the repositioning of the city as an import-export corridor, and the attraction of tourists. The concluding sentence predicts a splendid future for Gejiu, secured by the “traditional virtue” of the arduous struggle of its people.¹¹¹

The chapters “Forestry” and “Personages” adopt the general historical pattern laid out in the “General Introduction,” acknowledging the economic progress of the Republican era and marking the Third Plenum of 1978 as a fundamental transition, but

¹¹¹ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: “Gaishu”: 2-4.

they nonetheless diverge slightly in their historical trajectories, and in their treatment of sensitive political episodes. The chapter “Forestry,” in effect an institutional history of the Gejiu Department of Forestry, covers the period from 1913 to 1990. With its technical sections and subsections it appears to be free of ideology. Yet as the sections “separate rather than merge,” and as the subsections offer numbers and brief chronological overviews, they create narrative divisions that cordon off the past and obstruct an integrated view of the political events of the Mao era:

- A. Forested Lands
 1. Forest Surveys
 2. The Present Situation of the Forests
- B. Afforestation
 1. Tree Seeds
 2. Seedling Cultivation
 3. Man-Made Forests
 4. Volunteer Tree Planting
 5. Closing the Hillsides to Facilitate Afforestation
- C. Forest Protection
 1. Prevention of Forest Fires
 2. Protection of Rare Plants
 3. Prevention and Treatment of Plant Diseases and Insect Pests
 4. Ruling the Forest by Law
- D. Forestry Administration
 1. Management Institutions
 2. Enterprise and Professional Work Units
- E. Government Management of the Forests
 1. Authority Over the Mountain Forests
 2. Timber Management
 3. Forestry Jurisdictions.¹¹²

An analysis of the general introduction to the chapter and a discussion of the subsection “Tree Seeds” will indicate the ideological paths and historiographical ditches that run through the forest of facts.

The general introduction to the chapter casts the past in the image of the 1981 Resolution. It begins by linking the history of Gejiu forestry to the exploitation of tin, citing “pre-liberation” sayings such as “When tin abounds, the forest wanes” (*xi xing lin*

¹¹² See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 586-610.

shuai). The historical narrative starts in 1913, the date of the designation of Gejiu as a county. Although the Gejiu Office of Industry and Commerce put a forestry policy in place by 1932, only about 100,000 *mu* of forested land existed in 1949. In 1950, the People's Government began to mobilize the masses to set up afforestation cooperatives and joint state-private cooperatives. By 1954, state-owned and collective forests had come into being. The communization of 1958, however, threw the ownership system into "chaos" with its policy of "equalitarianism and indiscriminate transfer of resources" (*yi ping er diao*), and thereby impaired afforestation. During the Great Leap Forward, "boasting and exaggeration" (*fukua feng*) was rife, while the mass refining of steel and iron severely damaged the forests. From 1964 to 1966, reforestation was carried out on a large scale, but during the Cultural Revolution, forests were again destroyed to open up land for cultivation. Communal forests were confiscated, and forestry work was neglected due to the prioritization of agriculture.

After the Third Plenum, the Gejiu Party Committee and Gejiu People's Government reformed the Department of Forestry and took measures to protect the forests, to expand afforestation, to combine extraction with new growth, and to achieve perpetual usage. In 1981, Gejiu was named a green Chinese city, an honor it shared with 106 other cities. In 1984, the city introduced the "three fixes" policy (stabilize authority over the forests, delimit privately-owned forests, and define the forestry production responsibility system) and the "two mountain forests" policy (determine privately-owned mountain forests and contract responsibility for mountain forests). By 1986, the number of forest fires had greatly diminished. The introduction concludes this general history of forestry with a series of numbers, to demonstrate the continuous development of Gejiu

since 1949 and to emphasize the marked progress since 1978. The reader learns that during the 41 years since “liberation,” the national government invested a total of 6,676,000 *yuan* into forestry. During that same period, Gejiu cultivated 1,078,400 *mu* of forested land, and the Gejiu Volunteer Corps planted 21,980,120 trees. By 1990, forest coverage had increased to 24.4 % (four times the forested area of the initial “post-liberation” period); active tree growth had reached more than 2,000,000 m³ (three times the volume of 1971-1975, the period of the Fourth Five-Year Plan); the total value of timber reserves amounted to 142,000,000 *yuan* (21.3 times the total amount of state investment); and the cumulative profit was 10,130,000 *yuan*. All of these gains show that the old saying, “When tin abounds, the forest wanes” no longer holds true, for now “When tin abounds, the forest abounds” (*Xi xing lin xing*).¹¹³

The three-paragraph subsection “Tree Seeds” offers a similar recapitulation of the 1981 version of official history, but with its own slight political deviations. “General rather than detailed” and “brief rather than elaborate,” the subsection explains that the Gejiu Office of Industry and Commerce, set up in 1913, bought over 100 kg of more than ten species of tree seeds from outside the locality every year up to 1938. The gathering and purchasing of seeds largely ceased for the next five years. But between 1944 and 1949, the Gejiu Office of Construction raised funds to purchase 9,800 kg of seeds. From 1950 to 1953, the Yunnan Bureau of Forestry apportioned seeds to local counties. After 1954, the Gejiu Office of Construction and the Gejiu Office of Agriculture and Forestry submitted the seeds bought from outside to a more rigorous inspection. In 1955, Yuxi District provided the Yunnan Bureau of Forestry with over 60% of its Huashan Pine

¹¹³ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 586.

seeds. Seed gathering technology was improved at this time, and both the amount and the quality of walnut, alder, and chinaberry seeds in Gejiu increased, reaching 15,000 kg by 1957. From 1958 to 1959, the need for mountain forest seed varieties grew due to the incorporation of Mengzi City. In these two years alone, 29,000 kg of mountain forest seeds were purchased. Many seeds were wasted, however, 25,000 kg being lost to mold, for example. Due to insufficient funds and other factors, afforestation decreased between 1960 and 1963. From 1964 to 1966, afforestation increased dramatically due to the establishment of authority over the forests and due to the enactments of the policy “The one who grows is the one who owns” (*shei zhong shei you*). In these three years, more than 80,000 kg of seeds were acquired, some 10,000 kg of which were gathered locally. In response to the needs of national defense construction, more than 2,500 kg of the purchased seeds were *sanyedou* seeds, to be used for the development of shellac production. During the Cultural Revolution, self-sufficiency was promoted. At this time, communes on the whole were unable to purchase seedlings, and the Gejiu Forestry Station was only able to aid the poorest communes in the mountain districts. The annual use of seeds declined to between 500 kg and 5,000 kg. From 1977 to 1978, the situation began to change for the better as the total amount of seeds used during those two years rose to 20,000 kg.

The subsection “Tree Seeds” marks the Third Plenum as an important historiographical divide by emphasizing the new application of expertise and the improved results after 1978. As a sign of the new professionalization, the Gejiu Department of Forestry in 1979 appointed a person specifically in charge of the allocation and the transport of seeds. Each autumn or winter, this person distributed seeds

to every commune in Gejiu, determined who would be responsible for supervising the newly created seed warehouses, and guaranteed seed quality by improving the inspection of test sprouts. High-quality, fast-growing seed varieties also arrived in 1979. From 1985 to 1988, Gejiu Forestry Offices collected Huashan Pine seeds from seven counties in the region and set up a Huashan Pine test plot. After observing the seedlings over a stretch of time, it was determined that the Mile (pronounced mi-luh) variety was best suited to the environment of Gejiu. In 1985, the Gejiu Department of Forestry appointed a technician to undertake a survey of forest growth. Based on this survey of 15,000 *mu* of forested land, the department decided to harvest 60 dry, straight, mature, and healthy trees from within its 1,500 *mu*-reserve of Huashan Pine and Yunnan Pine trees. From 1979 to 1990, the use of seeds increased to more than 200,000 kg.¹¹⁴

Even in a technical chapter such as “Forestry,” the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* complies with the ideological demands of the new regime of reformers. In every section and subsection, the chapter devotes most of its attention to the period after 1949, and emphasizes the particular accomplishments since the Third Plenum. It characterizes the history since 1949 by the progression of a series of developmental policies that reform the system of ownership (cooperative, collective, and private) and restructure the nature of production. Growth and progress are the criteria of historical evaluation, and by this standard the present outstrips the past. The celebration of recent achievements accomplishes also an implicit condemnation of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. While refraining from explicit criticism, the chapter notes the falsehood, irrationality, chaos, waste, and decline during those years. The absence of economic

¹¹⁴ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 590.

achievement during these periods points to ill-conceived priorities: the debilitating insistence on “politics” and the disparagement of objective scientific laws. Yet the scientific objectivity of this new historiography is no less laden with ideology and no less driven by politics than the historiography it replaced. The close replication of the storyline of the 1981 Resolution and the dedicated implementation of the Three Requirements demonstrate that the new socialist local gazetteers are not objective histories, free of evaluation and propagandistic tendencies, but that they are carefully honed political tools.

The injunction to “separate rather than merge” proves especially effective as a political instrument, as it creates an impression of disinterested scientific observation while obstructing a broad view of the negative consequences of political events. By offering only passing, selective glimpses of these events, the segregation of the past into numerous sections and subsections impedes historical reconstruction and thereby thwarts a comprehensive critique of the Party. For example, to gain an overall sense of the impact of the Great Leap Forward in Gejiu, a reader must dig through the many chapters to gather scattered pertinent facts—facts already made scarce by the requirements to “be general rather than detailed” and to “be brief rather than elaborate.” The introduction to the chapter “Agriculture” mentions that during the Great Leap Forward the agricultural economy suffered and grain production markedly decreased.¹¹⁵ Neither this chapter nor the chapter “Health” explains how this affected the population. The “Chronicle of Major Events” (*dashiji*), however, notes that 1,125 employees at the YTC developed edema in January of 1961 as a result of malnutrition, and that by May the number had increased to

¹¹⁵ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 523.

5,059.¹¹⁶ But the most extensive information appears in the section “Significant Political Affairs” of the chapter “The Local Organization of the Chinese Communist Party,” which sums up the damage wrought by the Great Leap Forward: economic imbalances, investment losses, severe wear and tear of factory machinery, repeated release of toxic substances due to workplace accidents, and numerous outbreaks of edema. The section attributes these failures to the ignorance of objective economic laws and the unrealistic attempt at a leap forward, as well as to high quotas, blind conduct, arbitrary orders, and excessive boasting and communalism.¹¹⁷

The chapter “Personages,” the final chapter of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer*, demonstrates most keenly how the re-evaluation of the late imperial and Republican periods serves multiple, intersecting political interests. Although the individual biographies may indeed confine themselves to facts and refrain from judgment, the inclusion of Republican-era technocrats and former Rightists bears out the economic and nationalist agendas of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and corrects the erroneous verdicts of ultra leftists. The admission of the technological and cultural sophistication of the Republican era, moreover, diminishes the significance of the industrialization just after 1949 and focuses attention on the new technological advances under the Four Modernizations. The most striking example of the rehabilitation of persons of ability and quality is Lu Miannan (1894-1971), a revered expert and high-ranking manager of the YTC in the 1940s and early 1950s, who was labeled a Rightist in 1958. In his biographical entry in “Personages,” Lu is no longer a bourgeois capitalist who excelled as

¹¹⁶ See *Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui* 1998: 35.

¹¹⁷ See *Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui* 1998: 986.

a class oppressor, but has become a nationalist who made critical contributions to industrial modernization both before and after 1949. Officially rehabilitated after 1978, Lu now offers inspiration to future generations, looking up from the pages of the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* where red and expert rest side by side.¹¹⁸

If the gazetteer assigned renewed distinction to previous class enemies, however, it relegated former class heroes to the margins. It dedicated little attention to deplorable labor conditions before 1949 or to the life course of the *shading*, the representational locus of political liberation in Mao-era propaganda. This topic is confined to the chapter, “The Tin Industry,” a lengthy exposition that foregrounds the technical process of tin production and the scientific advancements responsible for the development of the Gejiu tin industry. The final section, “Tin Workers” allows for a contrast between the life circumstance of the workers before and after liberation, arguing that under socialism *shading* became the masters of the mines and workers were no longer exploited and oppressed. The depiction of life and labor before and after liberation, however, attempts to be impartial and to rely on statistical comparisons (composition of the workforce, level of education, wage scale, labor conditions, food and housing). In the present era of the liberation of productive forces, a revolution freed of “politics,” the *shading* is still a means to illustrate the Communist victory in 1949 but beyond that is of negligible consequence.

By illustrating the individual contributions of model subjects and the collective achievements of socialist modernization under the leadership of the Party, the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* fulfills its purpose as an instrument of “idealistic education” (*lixiang jiaoyu*). In

¹¹⁸ Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1523-64. For earlier representations of Miannan, see chapter one: 89; chapter two: 149-50.

1986, the “Resolution of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Guiding Principles for Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization” determined that idealistic education—a term that de-emphasized politics by substituting “ideology” (*sixiang*) with “ideals” (*lixiang*)—should be the main purpose of the study of history. It dictated that works of history make idealistic education lively and effective by describing the personal experience of the masses and the accomplishments of economic development, especially in the period of reform and opening up.¹¹⁹ A historiographical elaboration of Hu Yaobang’s 1982 exposition on the Two Civilizations, the 1986 Resolution urged the use of life history and the Party’s record of national growth to counteract the adverse effects of material civilization. As newly educated socialist subjects abandoned selfish ends for nationalist striving and pride, they would spur productivity and make China rich and strong. The new socialist local gazetteer served therefore both as an historical record and as educational material, relating in an objective voice the commitment of individual selves and local society to the realization of the Two Civilizations. The contributions of model subjects and the numerical evidence of national development at the same time legitimize Party policy, compelling readers in their turn to render the body productive of the social order.

¹¹⁹ *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao fangzhen de jueyi* 1986: 10. See also Hu Yaobang “Report to the Twelfth Party Congress” (September 7, 1982), in Harold Hinton 1986: 96, 101, 207-8; *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao fangzhen de jueyi* 1986: 2, 4, 6-7, 10, 12-4, 16, 18. The 1986 Resolution elaborated Hu Yaobang’s 1982 exposition on the Two Civilizations, and went on to inform the political program of General Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang (1987-1989) and his successor Jiang Zemin (1989-2002). See Zhao Ziyang “Advance Along the Road of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” (October 25, 1987), in *Documents of the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* 1987: 3-77; Jiang Zemin 1999.

Conclusion

As the chosen historiographical form of the Chinese Communist Party after the Third Plenum of 1978, the new socialist local gazetteer lent discursive form to the ideological paradoxes of the new era: the political commitment to scientific objectivity, and the national coordination of local difference. Despite their determination to abolish the forbidden zones of left ideology and to seek truth from facts, reformist leaders continued to employ history as a political tool. They rewrote the past to create precedents for their economic and technological policies, to distinguish their regime from the politics of the Mao era, and to offer readers yet another interpretive framework for re-conceptualizing society and their place within it. The regulations for the compilation of new socialist local gazetteers and especially the 1981 “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” devise a linear trajectory of continuous economic development that is only interrupted after 1949 by the unfortunate episodes of ultra leftism. The resulting reclamation of a previously reviled past and the rehabilitation of formerly condemned experts create a longer, less differentiated “Chinese” history that reduces the distinctiveness of the early achievements of the PRC and that identifies the reformers as legitimate political and national leaders. The emphasis on local characteristics in the new era of socialism, rather than producing unique local landscapes with distinct commodity histories, contributes to this nationalist agenda by creating a uniform, universal national landscape, shaped by a uniform, universal narrative of the growth of the productive forces. As a result, local history looks

much the same all over China.¹²⁰ The new socialist local gazetteers, in other words, once more “make the past serve the present,” and once more rewrite local history to instantiate a new version of Chinese Marxist history.

The *Gejiu City Gazetteer* shows the new socialist local history at work. It writes a new, economic past in the national image of socialism with Chinese characteristics while at the same time claiming for the nation an ancient history. Its open publication (*gongkai chuban*) professes its freedom from “politics.” The gazetteer thus proves the local achievement of the Two Civilizations both in its contents and in its form: the compilers, after all, have realized mental emancipation and embraced scientific Marxism, have demonstrated professional abilities and quality, and have implemented the new policies of the central government. The gazetteer moreover markets Gejiu as a modern industrial city with a trained workforce and abundant natural resources. As cultural nationalism displaced the Marxist ideology of the Mao era during the 1990s, the new socialist local gazetteers even became a means to lure domestic and foreign capital investment, and to attract tourists.¹²¹ That the government associated historiography with economic promotion became clear to me when officials in Gejiu, especially the Party Secretary of the Gejiu Party Propaganda Department, requested that I “do propaganda work” (*gao xuanchuan gongzuo*), portraying Gejiu history in a favorable light in order to procure overseas investment in the locality. In the time of reform and opening up, historiography became one more means to re-engage the world of competition.

¹²⁰ Cf. Vermeer 1992: 454-58.

¹²¹ See *Gejiushi* 1990: “Xu.”

Chapter Five. In the Telling: Making Sense of Lived Experience in Gejiu

The previous chapters have demonstrated how, in writing and rewriting Gejiu history during successive national campaigns, the Chinese Communist Party used the local landscape, details of local life, and accounts of individual experience to substantiate the universal truth of Marxist history and to confirm the legitimacy of the Communist government. The chapters in effect provide a history of Communist discourse, as they illustrate how the Party sought at repeated iterations to fix meaning in a local geographic and historical context. As the goals and the theoretical visions of the Party leaders changed over time, the official histories of Gejiu adjusted their vocabulary and modified their concepts, offering each time an interpretive framework for individual and social experience that matched the needs of current policy. The official historiography of Gejiu since 1949, in other words, has not produced a singular, cumulative historical narrative, but has created instead a collection of diverse, divergent histories that testify to the ever-evolving nature of Chinese socialism. If the historiographical record possesses an overarching narrative, it is a narrative of Party practice. In each new history of Gejiu, the Party provides new vocabularies and new narratives for understanding the past and the present, society and the self, and introduces new subject positions or redefines existing ones, always to assist the local population in advancing along a newly conceived path of national development.

In contrast to the diachronic shifts in historical writing, the oral histories of Gejiu retirees confront us with the synchronic variation of living discourse. Gejiu retirees give voice to diverse, alternative histories of the present in words and narratives that defy the

intention of the Party to universalize individual experience. The oral histories of Gejiu retirees that I collected during my fieldwork (November 2001- June 2003) show how Gejiu retirees today make selective use of the cumulative vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and of the storylines of successive official histories of Gejiu, to give shape and meaning to their lives. In narrating their life histories, Gejiu retirees take up terminologies and stock narratives of Communist discourse (both current and abandoned) to formulate and frame their individual experiences—experiences that are shaped in addition by the particular institutional constraints of life in the People’s Republic of China, such as class status, education, job assignments, and Party membership. Their narrative identities, in other words, take shape in a dialectic with the discursive and institutional framework created by the successive policies and campaigns of the CCP. This final chapter uses two sets of binary neologisms—politics (*zhengzhi*) / economy (*jingji*) and cadre (*ganbu*) / worker (*gongren*)—to frame the analysis of these narrative identities. The chapter exposes to view an interpretive space wherein Gejiu retirees, in individual ways, recall Communist concepts and narratives to perform explanatory tasks (sometimes as intended by the Party, sometimes not), reassemble official storylines to form varied combinations, and adopt or reject (in whole or in part) subjectivities that the Party made available in the early decades of the People’s Republic of China, as they articulate personal experience.

The products of dialogical exchange, the life histories collected in this chapter are retrospective constructions and present interpretations of lived experience that my interlocutors devised both for me and for themselves. Born in the exceptional space of the interview, these life histories are a partial and selective record of the narrative identities

of Gejiu retirees. Which passages of lived experience Gejiu retirees narrated and which passages they passed over and thereby relegated to silence was, no doubt, influenced by their perception of me, by my needs and comments, but most importantly, by the context in which they find themselves today. Partial in scope and selective in content, the life histories of Gejiu retirees are nonetheless “self-constitutive.”¹ They represent a moment in the life-long process of making sense of lived experience. Narrated in response to the unsettling time of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the life histories of Gejiu retirees are retrospective constructions in which the past, the present, and the self are figured anew through the act of interpretation. They do not offer a static record of the ways in which Gejiu retirees understood lived experience in the past or the ways in which they identified themselves during prior decades.

As expressions of a dialectic between government propaganda and individual interpretation, these life histories afford an understanding of Chinese socialism as a lived experience. Although much affected by the Party’s definition of words, emplotments of time, and successive official histories, the individual social actors portrayed in this chapter exert their own interpretive agency, producing personal histories that diverge in smaller or larger measure from the Communist historiography of Gejiu and the Chinese nation. In creating their individual histories of the present, Gejiu retirees therefore demonstrate not only the productive power of the Party’s words but also the inventive redeployment of Communist discourse. The life histories of six Gejiu retirees (men and women, cadres and workers, all except one former employees of the Yunnan Tin Corporation) will illustrate how the adults and adolescents of the first thirty years of Party

¹ Crapanzano 1980: 9.

rule (1949-1979) variously mine the layered deposits of Communist vocabulary and the multiple veins of historical narrative, as they extract words and temporal markers from their historical context to give shape and meaning to their lives today. The social concepts of politics (*zhengzhi*) and economy (*jingji*), and the subject positions of the cadre (*ganbu*) and the worker (*gongren*) are central relational markers that give shape to collective memory and that provoke self-reflection and social commentary.

Politics and Economy

Politics (*zhengzhi*) and economy (*jingji*) are social concepts that situate self and society in history. The etymology of these two words itself demonstrates this: Around the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals adopted the Japanese translations of the European words “politics” (Jap. *seiji*, Chin. *zhengzhi*) and “economy” (Jap. *keizai*, Chin. *jingji*), thereby overwriting the older classical Chinese meanings of these phrases.²

These neologisms helped reconceive the social order, and thereby assisted in the destruction of the ancient imperial dynastic system and the emergence of a new modern nation-state. Whereas in the edicts and memorials of the Qing Empire *zhengzhi* had meant “governance” (the alignment of human civilization with the cosmos through virtuous government), it now meant “politics,” the secular activities of political organizations and individuals in the domestic and international sphere. The binome *jingji*, similarly, shifted in meaning from “statecraft” (the establishment of ordering in the world by governance and humane aid) to “economy,” the financial and monetary condition of

² Lydia H. Liu 1995: 302, 315, 330-1.

the nation-state.³ With the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the Party invested these two neologisms with its own, specialized meanings. As fixed in the *Dictionary of New Nouns* (1949), “politics” and “economy” now formed a binary that conveyed meanings derived from Marxist theory. “Politics” signified the concentrated expression of the economy. “Economy” signified the activities that secured subsistence. The Party moreover defined economic formations entirely in terms of the social relations of production.⁴

As the Party grafted new meanings onto these two words during subsequent political shifts, and as it substantiated these new meanings with concrete social practices, it made available a range of historical and practical meanings by which individuals could assess present and past policies. In my conversations with retired Party cadres Yang He (b. 1951) and Hong Tai (b. 1925), for example, both took up the current, reformist definitions of “politics” and “economy,” while also invoking older meanings of these terms. In both cases, the juxtaposition of these contradictory definitions complicates the interpretation of contemporary policy, and makes visible the fissures between the changed terms of the national present and the remembered discourses of a personal past.

During a lull in her sister's noodle shop, former Red Guard and retired Party Secretary of the Gejiu Department of Culture, Yang He explains current policy by associating “politics” with the Cultural Revolution and “economy” with the reform era. Although she begins by linking politics to the Marxist concept of “class” (*jieji*) and to the concrete, face-to-face practice of “class struggle” (*jieji douzheng*) during Land Reform,

³ See *Hanyu da cidian* 1986: 2914, 5670.

⁴ See *Xin mingci cidian* 1949: yi114, bing1.

she appears to accept the new, narrower equation of politics with Left ideology that Deng Xiaoping formulated, as he set out the new course at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978:

In the process of creating an equitable society, the CCP confiscated all private property. Owning private property was akin to being a class enemy. This is the “fight for the cause of class struggle” [*jieji douzheng er fendou*] that Mao Zedong spoke about. At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress, Deng Xiaoping set a new path. He said that we should no longer fight for the cause of class struggle, but that we should now fight for the cause of economic construction [*jingji jianshe er fendou*]. Politics therefore relaxed. At that time, he raised the question of how to distinguish right from wrong, and how to assess the Cultural Revolution and other past policies. To do so, he said that we had to “emancipate the mind” and “seek truth from facts.” From then on, we were to achieve the goal of economic construction, to carry out reform and opening up, and to build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Jiang Zemin has emphasized the need to further what Deng Xiaoping began. Privatization is now really being promoted, and capitalists can now join the Party.

Hong Tai, a former Rightist and a “retired revolutionary” (*lixiu ganbu*), likewise gives voice to reformist Party rhetoric. His penchant for contrasting the past with the present (*jin-xi duibi*) highlights his acceptance of the Third Plenum of 1978 as a historical divide that equals in importance the foundation of the PRC in 1949. According to Hong, “The Third Plenum in 1978 brought order out of chaos (*bo luan fan zheng*).” Throughout our conversations in his apartment, Hong explains the social transformations of everyday life in Gejiu by drawing attention to the ways in which language and speech have shifted after 1978, away from the discourse of class and class struggle:

During the Mao era, we spoke about class struggle. We spoke about antitheses [*duilimian*]. The antithesis of a worker is a capitalist. The antithesis of a peasant is a landlord. Class struggle exists between antitheses. Now we don’t speak about class struggle or about class enemies but about those people who threaten the security and the safety of the country, such as criminals.

In the past, we had classes. We now have [social] strata [*jieceng*]. Intellectuals form a stratum, as do state workers, and private entrepreneurs.

In the past, we said that workers were the masters. Now we don’t speak about this.

When the People's Republic of China was established, nobody knew what socialism was. So we studied the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union encouraged the creation of large-scale, state-owned enterprises. They were like small societies that provided for all the needs of a worker, from the cradle to the grave. This was called "the iron rice bowl" [*tiewanfan*]. Now we speak about "breaking the iron rice bowl" [*dapo tiewanfan*].

Under the planned economy, the state took the loss if an enterprise went belly-up. Now the state doesn't manage [*guan*] enterprises. Enterprises have been given over to private bosses [*siren laoban*] to run.

In the past, the salary of the director [*jingli*] of an enterprise was kept very low. If it were high, the director walked the capitalist road [*zou zibenzhuyi dao lu*]. Now we don't speak about this.

Although they belong to different generations, both these Party cadres express loyalty to the reformist Party leaders, and to the Communist Party, by affirming their reconceptualization of the social order. When discussing the Party's current effort to transform state-owned enterprises such as the YTC into profitable companies, they both rehearse the official justification: The burden of the state is too great, and only individual accountability, achieved through privatization, will yield greater economic development and national prosperity. Hong, who was labeled a Rightist in 1958 for criticizing the policies of uneducated economic planners, feels that current policy confirms his previous views of economic practice as well as his political attitude: "We now have freedom of speech."

The Soviet Union experimented with Socialism as outlined by Marxist-Leninist theory. Yet look at the Soviet Union's economy. It couldn't support its own population! Soviet methods didn't result in the sort of development and prosperity that we now have. Today we speak of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, with the emphasis on "characteristics." What does this mean? It means that China is now experimenting with a market economy. China is catching up with the lessons of America [*bu Meiguo de ke*]. China is now socialist in regard to politics but capitalist in regard to the economy.

Yet as they spell out the Party's current economic priorities, these Party cadres also deploy, engage, or wrestle with meanings and narratives that the Party made available during the Mao era. Yang He offers essentially the same unorthodox explanation of the

concept of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as Hong Tai: “Our present system has characteristics [*tese*] because it is in part socialist and in part capitalist.” In so doing, she too equates socialism with Party rule and in effect defines “politics” as “an activity monopolized by one political party,” a definition that dates back to Land Reform.⁵ Due to the enduring sense of empowerment she tempered in the Cultural Revolution, moreover, she is less at peace than Hong with the current politics of economy. Unwilling to devalue her revolutionary experience, she sometimes interrupts her rapid-fire delivery of Party rhetoric to question the validity of Party practice in light of old convictions, or to wonder if present developments have invalidated the sacrifices of the past. Continuing the above conversation, she explains:

What is being decided now is whether the practice of admitting capitalists into the Party will be written into the Party constitution. These are not the capitalists of the past who oppressed the people. Rather, they invest in the development of the country and pay taxes to the government. They are in the lead of building the national economy. Aren't they a part of the proletariat? [Hesitation] Yes. Yes. They are. So why shouldn't they be allowed to join the Party? [Lowering her voice and bowing her head, and speaking to herself more than to me:] It looks as if we have returned to the past, as if we have moved in a circle. In the past, there were capitalists, then there weren't, and now there are again. [Hesitation] Yet according to the Party, this is a transitional period. Whether this is or isn't Socialism is not for me to judge. It's best simply to listen to what the Party says and to carry out its work.

Many Gejiu retirees speak about the present and the past in a similarly layered discourse. They accept the temporal markers set by the Third Plenum and use many of the phrases proffered by the reformers; yet they also invoke older definitions of Communist terminology and prior historical narratives in an attempt to reconcile the new national past with their personal experience. By the repeated redefinition of Marxist terminology, the CCP has maintained discursive continuity and political legitimacy, but

⁵ T. A. Hsia 1963: 6-7.

this strategy has at the same time allowed resonances and memories of older meanings to persist. These points of historical permeation—the layered meanings of “politics,” “economy,” “class,” and so forth—can become points of contestation, points where retirees attempt to resolve perceived contradictions between current Party policy and the political discourses that they took up at an earlier time, and that seem to have become bound up with their memory of themselves, their families, and their lives.

Yu Shizhen (b. 1930)

Energetic and intelligent, Yu Shizhen was born to an ancient family of wealthy landowners in Zhejiang Province. He “participated in the revolution” and joined the CCP in 1950. In 1952, he was transferred from the Central Bureau of Metallurgy in Beijing to the YTC in Gejiu, where he held the highest managerial rank, inferior only to the Party Secretary and the General Manager of the YTC. In 1958, however, he was labeled a “Rightist” and for the next twenty years he wore a “Rightist hat.” As a result of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978, “the mistake was amended,” and his former rank and Party membership were restored. Since retiring in 1987, he has pursued painting and calligraphy as his main hobbies. Now, in his old age, he is enjoying his “second spring.”

This concise life history—the ascent in the 1950s, the descent in 1958 due to “ultra-Left thought” (*ji ‘zuo’ sixiang*), and the re-ascension in 1978—Yu told me when we first met, and he repeated it often during later conversations. The narrative provides an interpretation of Party history and personal experience that conforms closely to the

“Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (1981, see chapter four). And yet even this narrative, though it hews closer to the 1981 Resolution than any other narrative I heard in Gejiu, deviates from the official line in one significant respect. Whereas the Resolution deemed the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 “correct and necessary,” Yu includes it among the perversities of ultra leftism.⁶ Yu moreover makes idiosyncratic use of the 1958 phrase “red and expert” (*you hong you zhuan*, see chapter two) to characterize successive periods in the recent past and to explain the course of his life. Introduced in the year of his condemnation as a Rightist, the phrase “red and expert” privileged the ascribed class status of workers and peasants over the achieved class status of intellectuals, and thereby contributed to Yu’s downfall. By invoking this phrase, Yu not only expresses his approval of current policy—which in his opinion has restored the proper balance between politics and economy, between ideological commitment and individual skill, between redness and expertise—but attempts in vain to reverse his disastrous condemnation as a Rightist. He was always red and expert. He would have measured up to any test of loyalty. In the privacy of his study, Yu holds forth:

During the Qing dynasty, my father was an official. I grew up as a pampered son of a wealthy family [*gongziger*]. At age five, I began to study calligraphy as I learned to write. Before 1949, I was already at Zhejiang University. Those of us in college at that time came into contact with Western ideas, like Marxism. I felt that Marxist thought was correct and sided with the Communists. In order to test me, the Party sent me to my natal village to carry out Land Reform. To demonstrate good political behavior [*zhengzhi biao*], I had to struggle [*dou*] my family. I had to divide up our land and give away our house and all of our possessions. Landlords and capitalists were stripped of everything on the road toward an equitable society. Afterwards, I was sent to a military academy in Beijing, to its military science division, to study politics. I wasn’t able to remain there, because of my family background [*jiating chusheng*]. So I was sent to study economics at the People’s University. At that time, the Party cultivated cadres such as

⁶ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 95.

me. We were both red and expert. By 1958, things had changed. I was seen as an intellectual, but you had to be red then, not expert.

Like so many Party cadres of his generation, Yu asserts his revolutionary credentials and his identity as a Party cadre through demonstrations of loyalty to the Party. In the example above, he shows his commitment to the Party by forsaking “my family, my class background, my entire past” to create a new social order; he shows that he complied with Party orders; and he shows that he believes that Land Reform was a legitimate act of political violence. When recounting his experiences in the early 1950s, he often identifies himself as a Party cadre by using characterizations that Liu Shaoqi supplied in *On the Cultivation of Communist Party Members* (1939)⁷:

Party cadres were the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts [*chiku zai qian, xiangshou zai hou*]. You went where you were sent, without questioning it, because it wasn't about you. It was about serving the country. That was honorable. It was our honor. You couldn't be arrogant; you had to obey the Party.

⁷ In the late 1930s, Mao declared that Communists “should play an exemplary role in every sphere.” Liu Shaoqi further define the role of Party members in *On the Cultivation of Communist Party Members*, compiled in English under the title, “How to Be a Good Communist.” He defined a Party member as having five traits: A Party member 1) has a high Communist morality, the motto of the Song-dynasty political reformer, Fan Zhongyan (989-1052): “To be first to worry about the world's troubles and the last to enjoy its pleasures” (*Shi dang xian tianxia zhi you er you, hou tianxia zhi le er le*) serving as the basis of the eminent principle “Be the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts” (*Chiku zai qian, xiangshou zai hou*); 2) has the greatest revolutionary courage, for having no selfish motives, s/he has nothing to fear; 3) has the ability to grasp the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism, thereby integrating the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with concrete revolutionary practice; 4) has the greatest sincerity, candor, and happiness, as s/he has no axe to grind and nothing to conceal; and 5) has the most self-respect and self-esteem. To embrace the cause of Communism as one's life work, however, requires self-cultivation, a process of ideological remolding. A Party member, in other words, can only become an incorruptible vessel of the “Party spirit” by unconditionally subordinating personal interests to the interests of the Party. See Liu Shaoqi 1964 (July 1939): 44-55, 66-8, 94-5; Mao Zedong 1967-77 (October 1938): 2:197.

Yu locates the central conflicts of his life in moments when understandings of social membership shifted as a result of the unresolved contradictions in Mao Zedong's definition of the Marxist concept of class (*jieji*). Starting in the 1920s, Mao held two overlapping but contradictory views of class: on the one hand, he understood class membership as ascribed, defined by the economic status of the family into which one was born; on the other hand, he allowed that class membership could be achieved, and that persons born into the ruling classes might overcome the class stand of their family and achieve the correct political consciousness of the proletariat.⁸ Mao defined ascribed class membership by an individual's relation to the means of production.⁹ During Land Reform, work teams from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) used this economic criterion to assign a "class status" (*jieji chengfen*) to rural and urban populations, creating a new social hierarchy that effectively inverted the old social hierarchy.¹⁰ During the subsequent decades, children inherited their father's class status, which was known as their "family background" (*jiating chushen*). Yu, for example, has the family background of a "landlord" (*dizhu*). Since economic class was a means to distinguish "friends" from "enemies" during the revolution,¹¹ the class status of an individual (and by extension the

⁸ Mao put forth a third definition of class in the late 1950s, as he began to combat bureaucratism, namely the rank and status of an individual in socialist society. See Schram 1984: 30-2.

⁹ This view of class is dominant in Mao's essays on the classes in Chinese society, which PLA work teams studied during land reform. See Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 1926): 1:13-21; Mao Zedong 1967-77 (October 1933): 1:137-9; personal interviews.

¹⁰ There were, however, exceptions to the practice of assigning a class status on the basis of an individual's relation to the means of production, for example the class status "revolutionary cadre" (*geming ganbu*). On class status and the class status system, see Billeter 1985; Kraus 1977; Kraus 1981; James L. Watson 1984; White 1976.

¹¹ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 1926): 1:13.

family background of a child) was a gauge of political trustworthiness, and therefore a judgment of value: an individual's class status was either "good" or "bad." The assignment of class labels, in other words, created new social inequalities, and the resulting system of official class labels, known as the "class status system" (*chengfenzhi*), perpetuated these social inequalities over generations. Depending on the political climate, the class status (or family background) of an individual could affect material welfare, political security, chances of promotion, marriageability, the realization of political ambition, and the career opportunities of descendants.

But in principle, individuals could overcome their ascribed, economic class status by developing a correct, political attitude toward the revolution. This political criterion created an opportunity for self-determination: "You cannot choose your family background, but you can choose your path." By cultivating proletarian consciousness and by serving the working class, a person from a bad family background could adopt the class stand of the proletariat and thereby achieve equal membership in Communist society. (This idea is often associated with Zhou Enlai.) Since thought is not discernable to the eye, the Party relied on political behavior (*zhengzhi biaoqian*)—the speech and actions of an individual—to assess ideology. This is the notion that Yu invokes in the above passage: he demonstrated good political behavior by conducting land reform in his natal village. And yet, his political reliability remained in question because of his family background. His ascribed class status denied him equal social membership, forcing his removal from the military academy and from political work, and his reassignment to economic work. Despite this experience, Yu contends that the Party endorsed the view of class as a function of political behavior:

LK: If workers were the masters, shouldn't workers have held the leadership posts?

YSZ: Mao Zedong wasn't a worker! But he was able to be a great leader because he assimilated proletarian thought. I was a bourgeois intellectual, but I too was a Party member! Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi said so. Although we were bourgeois intellectuals, we took the class stand of the proletariat. We wholeheartedly served the proletariat and therefore were considered part of the proletariat. In terms of politics, class interest, and class ideology, we manifested [*biaoxian*] proletarian intellectuals and therefore were proletarian intellectuals, not bourgeois intellectuals.

Yu describes the early 1950s as a period of great national growth and personal accomplishment. In 1952, he was sent to carry out “wage reform” (*gongzi gaige*) at the YTC and hence became its “chief economist” (*zongjingjishi*), one of the “three masters” (*san shi*) on whom the Party Secretary relied to make corporate decisions.¹² From 1953 to 1958, he served as the Director of the Labor and Wage Department of Laochang Mine, after a brief stint as Mine Manager. In describing his work during those years, Yu emphasizes that he was not only esteemed for his knowledge of enterprise management, but that the Party trusted him to carry out political work. By portraying wage reform as a kind of liberation, an experience of “turning over” (*fanshen*), Yu indicates that his work as an economic expert possessed a strong political aspect. In addition, Yu undertook personnel work (*renshi gongzuo*), “the work of managing people” (*guan ren de gongzuo*), which was considered political work because it gave access to personal files (*renshi dang'an*). His former status and responsibilities, in other words, offer proof that the Party cultivated cadres like himself—intellectuals of good political behavior. And when the Party allowed equal social membership to intellectuals, socialism flourished:

¹² The three masters (*san shi*) were the highest-ranking experts and managers in the YTC in the early 1950s: The chief engineer (*zonggongchengshi*) oversaw industrial production; the chief accountant (*zonghuijishi*) oversaw corporate finances; and the chief economist (*zongjingjishi*) oversaw enterprise management.

When I implemented wage reform at the YTC in 1952, my job fell under the rubric of personnel work [*renshi gongzuo*]. Only Party and Communist Youth League members were entrusted with this work;¹³ it entails knowing how to make proper use of personnel—how to evaluate a person’s file [*dang’an*], how to train personnel, and how to assign jobs and salaries. Before 1949, the YTC was a KMT state-owned enterprise. The inherited wage system was a mess. I was sent to straighten it out. I first divided the old Personnel Department into two: I set up a Labor and Wage Department to manage [*guan*] workers and a Cadre Department to manage cadres. After investigating the situation, I assigned new wages, based on the Soviet system. Workers were divided into eight ranks. Three criteria were used to determine a worker’s rank: knowledge of production, technical skill, and work experience, with technical skill as the standard. Cadres were divided into four ranks.¹⁴ A cadre’s rank was also determined by means of three criteria: educational level, technical skill, and work experience, with educational level as the standard.

After wage reform, workers made more money than they ever had. And they were provided with health care, housing, and social benefits. Their life improved greatly. They turned over and became masters of their fate [*fanshen zuo zhuren*]. They turned over twice, first politically and then economically. Their social status was now high, and their salaries were high also. The country looked after them. Everything was for them. This was socialism. This was the excellence of the Communist Party.

Workers were motivated by these improvements. Labor productivity rose. The economy soared to new heights. It was like this up until the late 1950s. But then the Anti-Rightist Campaign came, and they had to struggle [*dou*] us. Look at me. Do I look like a class enemy?

When Yu speaks about his directorship of the Labor and Wage Department at Laochang, however, his downfall as a victim of “politics” dominates the conversation. The enduring distinction between cadres of good political behavior and cadres of good class background created the structure for his imminent descent:

In the 1950s, educated cadres were called “intellectual cadres” [*zhishifenzi ganbu*] and uneducated cadres from the army were called “worker-peasant cadres” [*gongnong ganbu*]. The worker-peasant cadres implemented the political campaigns. Even though I was a Party member, I was struggled for two reasons: My family background was bad, and I was an intellectual.

¹³ Yu later pointed out that non-Party cadres also undertook personnel work; yet they constituted the minority.

¹⁴ Yu also mentioned that the rank scale for cadres became more complex in the mid-1950s. Meisner (1996: 130) states that cadres were divided into 26 ranks by 1955, with a corresponding salary scale that ranged from Y30 to Y560 per month.

Yu blames Mao Zedong—Mao’s ultra leftism and his distrust of intellectuals—for the rupture he suffered in his life. Ultra-Left thought recognized only redness (*hong*) by birth, and invalidated the notion of class as a function of political behavior:

In 1957, with the Anti-Rightist Campaign, your family background [*jiating chusheng*] started to matter above all else. We called this “pseudo-class ideology” [*wei jieji sixiang*]. If your family background was bad, you were not to be trusted.

No longer red, Yu was only expert (*zhuan*), and therefore suspect:

Mao didn’t trust intellectuals. He wanted to suppress them because intellectuals have a mind of their own. Yet by then Mao had already been deified. He could rouse the masses to oppose the Rightists because the masses followed him blindly. They thought Mao could do no wrong.

The denial of achieved class status eliminated the distinction between intellectuals inside and outside the Party. Yu possessed as little political immunity as educated cadres without Party membership: “We raised opinions in 1957 and then were called Rightists in 1958.” When the Party inaugurated the Rectification Campaign (see chapter two) and invited cadres to offer criticisms, Yu objected to the replacement of the Soviet “one-man leadership system” (*yizhangzhi*) with the “Party Committee responsibility system” (*dangwei fuzezhi*), and criticized the new policy, which placed authority in the hands of the worker-peasant cadres, by saying, “Laymen cannot lead experts!” The subsequent Anti-Rightist Campaign damaged socialism and destroyed Yu’s career:

We said, ‘Laymen cannot lead experts!’ How could those uneducated cadres from the army be put in charge of making technical and managerial decisions? We opposed this. But at the time, Mao thought that the Party could take charge of everything. He gave prominence to politics [*tuchu zhengzhi*]. Politics made a mess of the economy.

If the official histories of the 1950s and 1960s used biography to illustrate the new Marxian history of the Chinese nation, Yu here does the reverse: he tells the recent history of the nation in a manner that conforms to his own life experience. By associating the Anti-Rightist Campaign with “giving prominence to politics” (a slogan from the

Cultural Revolution), he identifies that campaign as the genesis of ultra leftism and as the beginning of the economic decline: “All Mao wanted to do from then on was wage class struggle.” Although Yu’s critique of ultra leftism conforms to reform-era historiography—his association of left ideology with the promotion of blind faith; his equation of politics with ultra leftism; and his correlation of the rise of politics with the decline of economy—he departs from this historiography in his alignment of the Anti-Rightist Campaign with the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The reformists condoned the Anti-Rightist Campaign (which was conceived by Deng Xiaoping), but Yu condemns it as an illegitimate act of political violence. He was unjustly wronged.

After being labeled a Rightist, Yu was demoted to a grade-one “junior cadre” (*xiaji ganbu*), his Party membership was revoked, and his monthly salary fell from a peak of Y170 to a low of Y65, where it remained until 1978.¹⁵ To assume his new post at the YTC Construction Company, he first had to spend two years as a miner at the Laochang Mine. At the Construction Company, he was a dispatcher (*diaodu yuan*), choosing and dispensing the personnel that was needed for each construction project. With every political campaign, however, he was “sent down” (*xiafang*) to do physical labor. He spent interminable, demoralizing years toiling as a bricklayer, a carpenter, a stonemason, and a general construction worker. He refers to these twenty years as a Rightist as the period of his “four deaths,” a series of near-fatal illnesses and accidents that befell him when he

¹⁵ According to Yu, Rightists were punished according to the severity of the charge. He cited a total of six charges, starting with the most severe: “reform of criminals through labor” (*laogai*), “re-education through labor” (*laojiao*), demotion to a grade-one worker, demotion to a junior cadre, “internal control” (*neikong*), and “contained Rightist” (*zhongyou*). The latter is a charge that will be handled behind closed Party doors but unlike the charge *neikong*, it will also not be recorded in a person’s file.

was a manual laborer, all of which he miraculously survived. He sometimes mentions being labeled a “Stinky Number Nine” (*chou laojiu*) and being struggled (*dou*), because of his family background, during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶ Near the end of the 1970s, he married his wife, who was a widow.

At present, Yu feels vindicated and validated. At the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in 1978, Deng Xiaoping declared the end of class struggle, prioritized economic development, and brought to power those who were red and expert. As a result of the Third Plenum, Yu finally lost his “Rightist hat.” He regained his Party membership and former rank; he returned to work at the main office of the Laochang Mine as Vice-Mine Manager, a post created for him; and his salary again increased. During our time together, Yu said little more about either the years prior to his early retirement in 1987 or about his subsequent job as the Director of the Mojiang Gold Factory in Simao County (1987-1989). He rather talked in a general way about the policies of reform and opening up that had righted past wrongs and had brought about a change for the better. And yet his effusive, general discourses about the recent past are also narratives about himself. The renewal of national progress under the leadership of the Party after 1978 offers him solace and affirmation. The golden present demonstrates what could have been achieved during the 1960s and 1970s if Mao Zedong had respected intellectual cadres:

¹⁶ “Stinky Number Nine” (*chou laojiu*) was a derogatory label ascribed to intellectuals, whether college professors or educated cadres, during the Cultural Revolution. China supposedly had nine social classes, of descending status. The intelligentsia was the ninth class. Whereas intellectual who were educated in the new society were called “fragrant intellectuals” (*xiang zhishifenzi*), those educated in the old society were called “stinky intellectuals” (*chou zhishifenzi*).

One can say that Mao Zedong was a great leader, but over time, he became a zealot and allowed ultra-Left thought to prevail. He thought that workers could do everything, that you didn't need managers, scientists, or technicians. He thought that human labor power and ideology alone could do everything, that that was enough to enable China to surpass England and to catch up with America. Preposterous! But that is what he thought. An economy like today's can't be built up by workers alone. You need managers, scientists, and technicians. They possess the necessary knowledge for building an economy. But in the past, they had to be treated on a par with workers. Everyone was equal, even though some contributed more than others. Those who made real contributions to the growth of a corporation were not compensated for their efforts. But now corporations can reward qualified personnel [*rencai*]*—*people who possess talent, ability, and knowledge. Only now, because of these changes, is the economy really soaring.

In these observations, Yu tells recent history in a manner that conforms to the 1981 Resolution, notably by his identification of the Third Plenum of 1978 as a historical divide that rivals 1949 in importance. Before 1978, extreme leftism thwarted progress by promoting class politics, egalitarianism, voluntarism, and anti-intellectualism. After 1978, the Party achieved continuous socio-economic growth as a result of the institution of policies that Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping had endorsed in 1956: the eradication of classes and class struggle in socialist society, economic construction as the goal of Party work, and the courtship and monetary compensation of experts as a means to promote national development. To illustrate the Party's high regard for persons of ability (*rencai*) and "quality" (*suzhi*), Yu cites the "separation of the Party from enterprise" (*dangqi fenkai*), a policy of the 1980s that put decision-making authority in the hands of the General Director—a trained specialist—rather than reserving it for the Party Secretary.¹⁷ Since the policy basically reverses the enterprise management system that Yu criticized

¹⁷ Yu goes on to explain that Party is still in command nonetheless:

Enterprises have implemented this policy in different ways. At the YTC, it was implemented by abolishing the independent post of the Party Secretary and by putting the General Director—who is educated and holds a degree—in charge. The General Director, however, is also the Party Secretary. The corporation is still under the leadership of the Party. Only now one person holds what were formerly two separate posts.

in 1957, he remarks, “We are now back where we started.” Still, the implementation of the new policies of reform has created results that could not be foreseen in the early 1950s or in the late 1970s. Yu therefore endorses recent innovations in Marxist theory, including Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, a system he describes as “capitalism wearing a red hat”:

In 1958, the Party entered a state of ideological confusion [*sixiang hunluan*]. It closed its eyes and opposed science. China was to arrive at socialism by skipping over capitalism entirely, which isn’t realistic. We now recognize that you must pass through capitalism to reach socialism, where all are equal. But Mao wanted us to continue down the same road indefinitely. If we had, the present would not have been possible. The planned economy generated internal contradictions, which prevented further development. The market economy and our emphasis today on science and technology, on economic development, and on material compensation resolve these contradictions. As Jiang Zemin says, we must advance with the times [*yu shi ju jin*].

Although reformist policies and narratives have enabled Yu to remake and to retell his life, he uses the ultra-Left phrase “red and expert” to make sense of successive periods in the history of the Party and to justify his subject position as an intellectual cadre. Continuities between the past and the present lend renewed relevance to the relationship between ideology and expertise. Because the country is again advancing under the leadership of cadres whose background resembles his own—“Our top leaders are now scientists and technicians who have college degrees”—Yu feels confirmed in his faith in the Party. His position was always correct. He should have always been recognized as both red and expert. Yu’s uneasy concern with self-justification informs also his interpretation of Jiang Zemin’s “advance with the times” as both an ideological position and a therapeutic device. He explains that “advance with the times” means that one must change so as to remain vital. For the Party, this means that it has to maintain a dynamic approach to socialism. For himself, it means that he has to let go of the past in order to live on. This therapeutic practice of working through, which he calls

“unburdening the heart,” he pairs with a deliberate regime of daily physical exercise. Despite this dedicated pursuit of optimism, there were moments during our conversations when his feelings of irreparable loss shattered his effort to find closure through the retelling of his life. Eight months after our meeting, for instance, he confessed that none of his four children were his own, because only a widow with children would marry someone of his class background during the 1970s. And his rehabilitation proved incomplete: “They removed my Rightist hat and returned my Party membership, but they didn’t allow me to retire as a revolutionary [*lixiu*].”¹⁸ Although red and expert, Yu lost twenty years of his adult life. He has reframed those years, with intellectual and material assistance from the Party, but concrete circumstances remind him that he can never recuperate those twenty years.

Tao Ying (b. 1950)

As we sat down on a secluded, lakeside bench, Tao Ying said, “I want to tell you my story of suffering [*ku*, lit. ‘bitterness’].” Tao identifies herself as a worker of the generation that came of age during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and as a worker that derives meaning from Maoist ideology. Her use of the Communist speech genre of “recollecting bitterness” (*yiku*, see chapter three) to narrate her life history demonstrates her commitment to Maoist ideology both in its fiery rhetoric and in its form. She became acquainted with this speech genre during her formative years, first as a rebellious Red Guard and then as a dedicated factory worker. During those years, Tao was roused

¹⁸ On the retirement policy for veteran cadres, see chapter 5: 322-4.

repeatedly to “recall the bitterness of the past and savor the sweetness of the present” (*yiku sitian*): “At that time, we talked a lot about recalling the bitterness of the past and savoring the sweetness of the present. It was a way of explaining and of understanding the past. But nowadays, nobody cares about politics or about the past. All they want to do is make money.”

The speech genre of recollecting bitterness assumes as its speaker a liberated socialist subject who recalls past suffering, indicts the culprits of that suffering, and exposes their true nature. In the Mao era, “recollectors of bitterness” (*yikuren*) spoke about their experience of class exploitation and class oppression in the old society, and demonstrated political agency by their public accusation of a class enemy. This Communist speech genre, in other words, was a political instrument for unmasking and criticizing social injustice by contrasting different periods of historical experience, within the framework of life history. Whereas the recollectors of the Cultural Revolution contrasted the bitterness of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial past with the sweetness of the socialist present, Tao fixes her present in the Cultural Revolution, and uses her experience of that time to criticize both the past (the 1950s) and the future (the 1980s and 1990s). As she takes up Communist words and narratives to tell her story, moreover, Tao uses the speech genre of recollecting bitterness to expose a culprit that the campaigns of the past never intended: the Chinese Communist Party itself.

Tao was born in a village in Jianshui County, northwest of Gejiu, to a lower-middle peasant family. Her family was fortunate to have received this class status, for her grandfather was much wealthier than his class label suggests:

My grandfather was a private boss [*siren laoban*], with a small mining operation in Gejiu. Most of his capital was tied up in mining, not in land. Since land was the primary

criterion for assigning class status during Land Reform, they didn't pay attention to his mining assets. As a result, he was labeled a lower-middle peasant.

Her father, from whom she inherited her class label, in turn had the good fortune to become a YTC worker in the early 1950s, even though his past also had its questionable aspects: "He was a foreman in my grandfather's mines before liberation." Along with her mother, four siblings, and paternal grandparents, Tao moved to Gejiu in 1958, where she lived with her father at the YTC complex in the dusty township of Datun. Her only political liability was that her mother had bound feet ("two tiny lotuses"), a trace of the prosperity of her family before 1949. To shield the family from potential criticism, her parents decided that her mother should stay indoors. Aware of the political ramifications of having a bad family background, Tao takes great pleasure in discussing the inaccuracy of her class label and her evasion of class persecution. Her mischievous smile and the amused tone of her voice indicate that she knows the fate that might have befallen her—should have befallen her—if her family had received its proper class label. For Tao herself, her mother's bound feet signify "the backwardness of feudal society," and thereby her own political standing as a socialist subject, as a liberated woman: "Being a woman in the old society was dreadful. There was no equality of the sexes. It's not so now."

Privileged by the class status system and by the emancipation of her sex, Tao speaks as a liberated socialist subject, specifically as a worker (*gongren*) who was tempered during the Cultural Revolution. From this political stance, acquired in the late 1960s, she condemns not only the feudal past that bound her mother's feet, but also the failed policies of the Chinese Communist Party during the 1950s:

My father worked at the YTC ore-dressing plant in Datun. When we moved there in 1958 [during the Great Leap Forward], he was making Y50 a month. He had to support nine

people on his salary. My mother didn't have a job. She was just a housewife. To earn a little bit of money, she sewed clothing for other families. She also searched for rocks in the mountains and had my older brother carry them home for her. She chiseled them with crude tools and sold them as building materials. At that time, we all ate at the canteen. Gruel was cooked in huge caldrons. Afterwards, there was nothing to eat. That was the period of hardship [*kunnan shiqi*, 1959-1961]. It was so bitter then! We suffered because there was no food and because we were paying off our debt in kind to the Soviet Union. We sent *our* pork and eggs to the Soviet Union!

Tao defies the historiography of the Mao era by blaming Party rule for scarcity and suffering in socialist society, and contradicts the historiography of the reform era by arguing that economic growth during the Cultural Revolution vanquished this scarcity and suffering. The bitter past of the Great Leap Forward and the Three Years of Hardship, remembered from the sweet present of the Cultural Revolution, was a time of economic shortage and deprivation. Tao equates her personal experience, and the fate of her family, with the starvation in the nation at large. Just as her father's income was insufficient to support the large number of his dependents, the political failures of the Party deprived the citizenry of its food, as they caused the Soviet Union to withdraw support and to demand repayment of its loans. As a result, the family and the nation suffered. Tao even presents her practical training at a technical middle school, begun in 1964, as a negative consequence of the Great Leap Forward. Rather than presenting her education as a favor accorded by the government to a "hardship family" (*jianku jiating*), Tao reproaches the Party for having determined her future by forcing her to master a trade.

At the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Tao was sixteen years old and had completed a total of eight years of school. By the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, she was a seasoned worker at the Hongqi Ore Dressing Plant, with eight years of professional experience to her credit. She focuses her discussion of this ten-year period

on three experiences, which she treats rather generally: her time as a Red Guard (summer and fall of 1966), her avoidance of the factional fighting (1967-1968), and her dedication to national development (1969-1976). She moreover explains her participation in socialist revolution and in socialist construction in the languages of class politics.

When she recalls how she “made revolution” (*gao geming*), Tao becomes full of youthful energy, mingling play and defiance. Her accounts demonstrate that she learned to conduct class struggle as a historical practice, as a mobilization of weapons and words. With animation, she begins:

We rose up and seized power! I was a Red Guard. I wore a red armband on my sleeve. To be a Red Guard, you had to have a good class background. If you came from a bad class background, you couldn't participate.

As a lower-middle peasant, Tao acquired political power and social privilege. She was red by birth.

Emboldened by class politics, Tao took to the streets as a Red Guard in the summer and fall of 1966. In August, she participated in the campaign to “smash the four olds” (*po si jiu*: the destruction of old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits). Although she is enthusiastic about this experience, she does not recount in detail the violence she committed. Like other middle schools in Gejiu, her school was assigned a district in which to carry out its activities. Their assigned district lay in the south of the city. The teachers of her school divided the student body into field groups. Tao's group wrote big-character posters and paraded about singing songs in praise of Chairman Mao. With the *Quotations from Chairman Mao* in hand and with Mao buttons pinned to their chests, they rampaged houses for “vestiges of feudalism” (*fengjian yiji*). They confiscated whatever they found. And at struggle meetings, they criticized the old ideology of the individuals who had possessed artifacts of the old culture. In September, she traveled by

bus to Kunming to “establish ties” (*chuanlian*) with other Red Guards and thereby gain revolutionary experience.

After her two seasons as an agent of class struggle, Tao became a target of political violence when factional fighting between the rebel groups broke out in 1967. Like her father, Tao was a member of the “1/28 faction,” which consolidated when rebel groups in Gejiu (student groups, peasant groups, worker groups, and cadre groups) overthrew the Party Committees of the locality on January 28, 1967. Opposing rebel groups challenged their actions on February 23, 1967, forming the “2/23 faction.” After the People’s Liberation Army arrived in March to assume political authority, the fighting between the two factions only escalated, because rival factions within the Army funneled guns to the local factions they supported. To escape the violence, Tao fled to Jianshui, where she resided with relatives. In 1968, she was assigned a job at the Hongqi Ore Dressing Plant in Laochang Township, an opportunity she owed to her family’s hardship status. In the workforce, she could no longer avoid factional strife:

When I began working at the local mines [*difang kuang*],¹⁹ the two factions were struggling [*fendou*] each other. The fighting led to a lot of chaos [*luan*]. At that time, we wore Mao buttons to work, and at the start of our shift, we danced the Chairman Mao Loyalty Dance. We were then told our work assignments and the production goals for the day. We also attended political study, but not every day. Our political instructor read to us from the *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. The instructor would sometimes call on you to speak about a passage, to express your deep, heartfelt reaction to the words. Political activities and important meetings were usually held around 7 p.m., after dinner. If your shift was at that time, you were released from production to attend. Attending was revolutionary; not attending was counter-revolutionary. At that time—I am talking about 1968—you *had* to participate in the Cultural Revolution. Otherwise, you would have been accused of opposing it.

¹⁹ Local mines (*difang kuang*) refer to the mines owned and managed by the Gejiu City People’s Government. The same is true for the term, “local enterprises” (*difang qiye*). Whereas local mines took the form of state-owned enterprises, local enterprises also took the form of “collective enterprises” (*jiti qiye*).

Tao describes her participation as compliant but not instigative. Because the main targets of political struggle were the “heads” (*tou*) of the two factions, she was not on the frontline of battle. Nevertheless, she wore her work cap low and avoided eye contact because “an ordinary worker who was red and hardworking could also be accused and carted off.” Her former enthusiasm for the revolution turned into fear:

There were many ways to struggle [*dou*] a person. Most people first had their hands tied behind their back, were made to kneel down, and then were criticized. But some people were also made to bend over so that their lower back or private parts could be beaten. One person had a wire inserted up his nose while being ordered to confess his crimes. He bled all over his face. It was terrifying. I remember especially how one of the heads was struggled. He was the Chairman of the Labor Union. His hands were tied behind his back, and he was bent over. The wood plaque, hung around his neck, said “counter-revolutionary.” They made him write a self-criticism while they beat his lower back. At some point, he walked over to the large band saw and plunged his neck into it, committing suicide. Blood was everywhere. Anyone could be accused. I was so scared.

Although Tao uses the word “chaos” (*luan*) in her account of the Cultural Revolution, her use of this word differs distinctly from the manner in which reformist leaders later applied it in the official assessment of the period. First, Tao uses “chaos” as a descriptive term for specific situations, rather than as a generic label for the entire period. The 1981 Resolution uses the word “chaos” as a synonym for “counter-revolutionary activity,” most notably in its condemnation of the Cultural Revolution as “ten years of domestic chaos.”²⁰ Second, unlike reformist leaders, Tao never calls the Cultural Revolution a “mistake” (*cuowu*). Third, she characterizes the latter years of the Cultural Revolution (1969-1976) as a time when expertise drove economic growth, and therefore as a period continuous with the current economic development. In sum, Tao departs from the 1981 Resolution and the Communist historiography of the reform era

²⁰ “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” (June 27, 1981), in Harold Hinton 1986: 97.

both in her judgment of the politics of the Cultural Revolution and in her assessment of its economic accomplishments.

When recounting her life during the remaining years of the Cultural Revolution, Tao emphasizes the technical knowledge, work ethic, and moral fiber she displayed at the Hongqi Ore Dressing Plant (1969-1982). She talks at length and with gravity about the production process and the technology of ore dressing. As we pour over old technical manuals (which she keeps under lock and key to prevent their theft), she tells me repeatedly, “People with my kind of knowledge are rare indeed.” She explains the responsibilities of each of the three shifts, the technological process, “the degree of difficulty” (*nandu*) and the physical demands (“bitterness,” *ku*) of her work, and reasons for reprimands (a low recovery rate, failure to complete a set task). The economic accomplishments of those years, she says, were the result of political commitment: “During the Mao era, we worked so hard and our zeal was great. It’s not like that now.”

The nature of the planned economy, moreover, ensured economic productivity:

If you worked at a machine plant, you were told how many parts were to be assembled each day, just as we were told how much tin was to be recovered each day. We all had set tasks. That is the nature of production. That is the planned economy. From the top to the bottom, you are told a production target, and you must meet it, according to the plan. The market economy is entirely different, I tell you. The market economy is about one thing only: money.

During the reform era, Tao worked at the YTC Gejiu Ore Dressing Plant in Gejiu, from 1983 to 1995. She then retired early, at age 45. She was transferred to her new work unit in 1983 due to a government policy that facilitated the reunion of spouses who had been separated for ten years.²¹ She held a variety of posts at the Ore Dressing Plant but

²¹ Her husband, who was an administrator at the YTC General Hospital, petitioned the YTC for her transfer to his work unit, the YTC. The Labor Department of the YTC Organization decided her placement within the corporation.

highlights two of them: her tenure as a lacquer worker (*tuqigong*) at the Machine Shop, where she assisted in the manufacture of the YTC ore-dressing beds of international renown, and her tenure as an ore dresser (*xuangong*) at the Plant, where she was responsible for operating as many as five ore-dressing beds at a time.

Although Tao acknowledges that the year 1978 marked an historical divide between an era dominated by Mao Zedong and a new era dominated by reformers, she perceives the transition in political rather than economic terms, and she reverses the value judgment of reform-era historiography. Taking up the speech genre of recollecting bitterness and situating herself in the sweet, idealized present of the 1970s, she exposes the true face of the socialist subjects of the reform era and indicts the social injustice of the current political order. She argues that the differential rewards of the reform era have caused people to place selfish desires above national goals, and that they have encouraged corruption and incompetence rather than expertise. Unlike Yu Shizhen, she assesses the politics of the market economy as a worker rather than as a cadre. Reformist leaders rejected Maoist egalitarianism as an impediment to economic growth and endorsed differential rewards (based on the principle of “to each according to his work”) to facilitate the creation of a technical and managerial elite, comprised of educated persons. But Tao denies that knowledge (*zhishi*) and ability (*cai*) are duly rewarded, and instead perceives a structural corruption that prevents the promotion and the reward of truly skilled workers such as herself:

When I was working at the Plant, there were six people in my group [*zu*]. We were all women. I was the oldest. The new hires were all in their twenties. Yet only the workers who [like me] were over thirty years old had any technical knowledge: I manufactured and operated ore-dressing beds. I tell you, there were only a handful of people with my knowledge. But who did our team leader select as group leader? This young, incompetent

girl. And why? Because her husband worked in the chemical analysis laboratory and the team leader, of course, wanted to stay on friendly terms with the chemical analysis team, because their work bore on ours. And what happened? They went off for lunch and told me to stay behind, because I was the only one who could calibrate and repair the ore-dressing beds. The group leader couldn't do it—she lacked technical knowledge, but because I had these skills, I had to work harder than everybody else. They all harmed me!

Because she thinks that bonuses are used to create personal ties, Tao rejects the common equation of bonuses with merit—one of the central motivations in the Party's experiment with a market economy:

I tell you, and you may not believe it, the workers who are praised today are not necessarily the ones who work hard and deserve to be praised. In the past, we all worked *so* hard. And there were rewards, but they came in the form of praise, not money. If you did a good job, leaders [*lingdao*] would praise you in front of others and pin a red flower to your shirt. Oh, you felt so proud! You were so happy! You might even receive a plaque for your hard work. It was like that then. Today, it's the slack workers who weasel their way out of things, who flatter the leaders, and who are rewarded bonuses for work that they don't do.

Drawing on Maoist ideology, she speaks of a time when labor was an act of devotion. In the rosy past of the Mao era, workers were honest, conscientious, and dedicated to the collective good, to national development. In the reform era, workers are dishonest, lazy, and interested only in their own ease and wealth. By contrasting her cohort with reform era workers, Tao refutes the reform-era criticism that Maoist egalitarianism created workers who “loved ease and hated work” (*haoyi-wulao*), and argues instead that it is bonuses and differential rewards that produce such workers.

Tao reserves her harshest criticism for reform-era Party cadres, whom she holds responsible for the contemptible state of affairs. According to Tao, the past was a time of “upright politics.” She cites the practice of wage distribution as an example. When wages were distributed in the Mao era, cadres at the Labor and Wage Department put out a roster with the names and the wages of each worker. Each worker not only had to sign the roster prior to receiving his or her salary but could also see what fellow workers were

earning. In the 1980s, by contrast, the team leaders (*banzhang*) signed the roster instead of workers, and they collected the team's wages as a lump sum. This lump sum they passed on to their subordinates, the group leaders (*zuzhang*), who distributed the wages to individual workers. The new practice, thinks Tao, was rife with opportunities for fraud and embezzlement. She therefore concludes:

Today's leaders are characterized by corruption and flattery! I tell you, the Plant Director requested my transfer from the Machine Shop. But I didn't flatter him or give him money to be transferred. My generation doesn't engage in such practices. We tell the truth. We tell it like it is. We were influenced by the Cultural Revolution. If a leader is no good, we say he is no good. If a leader is good, we say he is good. We don't flatter or speak in false tongues.

Just as Yu Shizhen identifies himself by the ultra-Left phrase “red and expert” in order to shame his erstwhile accusers, Tao Ying uses the phrase “seek truth from facts” (*shi shi qiu shi*) to condemn the reform-era leadership. Reformist leaders employed the phrase “seek truth from facts” to signify their commitment to scientific objectivity and their rejection of the unscientific voluntarist politics of the Left (see chapter four). Tao, by contrast, has less interest in the scientific correspondence of words to things than in the moral correspondence of words to deeds, an attitude she deems characteristic of the cadres and workers of the Mao era. According to Tao, the rule of money has disjoined word and deed, and replaced truth with falsity. Her very habit of “telling it like it is” demonstrates the political rectitude and moral superiority of the workers of the Mao era, while it also exposes the reform-era leadership as a pack of criminals and accomplices:

When I was working at the Machine Shop, it was much the same. Yet there were only two people in my group [*zu*]: me and some guy. He was the labor union representative, at the group level. I had to do the work of both of us—he said as much—because he was often called into the workshop office. Of course, he always got the higher bonus. Around that same time, the Labor Union organized a lottery—for a television. Naturally, the Party Secretary wanted that television, but he couldn't say so in front of everybody—that would have been improper. After all, the event was for workers, first and foremost. I tell you, this actually happened at our Plant. We all drew lots, and the guy who drew the

winning lot had been recruited by the Labor Union to help organize the event. Get it? Before the lottery took place, the winning lot, with the “x” on it, was already in his pocket, passed on to him by the Labor Union cadre who was acting on behalf of the Party Secretary. After he received the television, he handed it over to the Party Secretary. That was the arrangement. In those days, only Party Secretaries and other top leaders had televisions. We called them “television apparatchiks” [*dianshiji dangshuji*]. They are all fake! They tell nothing but lies! The Party Secretary goes up to the podium to deliver a speech at a conference. He gives quite a performance, quoting Party slogans and making promises, and after he steps down from the stage, he fleeces our wages and engages in corruption. I just hate it! The Communist Party? What Communist Party? A fake! I tell you, it used to be very difficult to join the Party, only a few could be members. Now all you need is money to join, and by joining, you can make more money. Television apparatchiks, that’s what we said. I hate them! The [Party] cadres of the past weren’t like this. They sought truth from facts [*shi shi qiu shi*]. Their politics were upright [*zheng*]. They served the people [*wei renmin fuwu*]. The common people admired and praised them. And, in the past, our status as workers was high. We could raise opinions, and officials listened to us.

Appropriating the abandoned speech genre of recollecting bitterness, remembered from her youth during Cultural Revolution, Tao Ying voices interpretations of the past and the present that diverge from Communist historiography. Unlike recollectors of bitterness during the Mao era, Tao neither propagates a universal, linear developmental narrative in which sweetness replaces bitterness under the leadership of the Party, nor testifies to the timeless beneficence of socialist society oriented upon a boundless future. Instead, she situates herself in the finite present of the Cultural Revolution, to expose and indict the social injustice that she suffered at the hands of the Party: first the economic hardship of the 1950s, then the political hardship of the 1980s and 1990s. The respect for expertise and the commitment to the national good during the Cultural Revolution assured an economic growth that eliminated the economic suffering of the 1950s. But during the 1980s and 1990s the leaders of the reform era overturned the political advances of Maoism to inaugurate a period of political suffering that continues today. From the perspective of Maoist ideology, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics appears immoral, self-serving, and corrupt, and the present Party cadres appear fake. Tao’s

perception of the past is certainly idealized. She extols the virtues of the planned economy even though she denounces the economic calamities of the Great Leap Forward. She celebrates the egalitarianism of her generation and the unity of its ideals and values, despite her awareness of the unfair inequalities inflicted by the class status system. She insists that the Party cadres of old served the people, in spite of their well-known mistakes and favoritism. But in this blurred past—whence hunger, terror, and inept governance have receded—the cadre and the worker work in mutual respect, to establish a perfect balance of politics and economy, of ideology and expertise. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, workers had high status and could raise opinions, and Party cadres served them with uprightness, honor, and dedication. If Yu Shizhen believes that politics and economy were properly aligned in the economic policies of Socialist Construction and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Tao perceives the ideal balance of expertise and ideology in the Cultural Revolution, in a political order now eclipsed.

Cadres and Workers

Like the social concepts of politics and economy, the subject positions of the cadre (*ganbu*) and the worker (*gongren*) are relational constructs whose shifting meanings and shifting relation trace the outline of a changing Marxist interpretation of history. In 1942, Mao Zedong cited the word cadre (*ganbu*), already in general use, as an example of the import of a “foreign word” into the “old Chinese vocabulary.”²² Initially, only Party

²² Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 8, 1942): 3:60. The term *ganbu* is a loanword from modern Japanese (See Lydia H. Liu 1995: 284-5).

members who occupied the middle tier of the Party organization were called cadres.²³

By the Rectification Campaign (1942-1944), however, all Party members were known as cadres.²⁴ The word “cadre,” hitherto already reserved for Party members, now became interchangeable with the word “Party member” (*dangyuan*). This usage of the word *ganbu* is often rendered into English as “Party cadre.” For Mao Zedong, the notion of the Communist Party member (*gongchandangyuan*) possessed a strong moral connotation. As the vanguard of the proletariat, Communists “should play an exemplary role in every sphere.”²⁵ Liu Shaoqi elaborated this moral concept of the Party member in his *On the Cultivation of Communist Party Members* (1939).²⁶

During the Civil War (1946-1949), the CCP introduced residents of rural and urban communities to this new political subject, the Party member, through propaganda materials such as songs:²⁷

²³ In the late 1930s, Mao characterized the Party organization as a three-tiered system. He referred to its respective constituents as “leaders”-“cadres”-“members” in 1937 and as “leading cadres”-“cadres”-“rank and file” in 1938. He moreover considered cadres a decisive factor of the revolution, for they were expected to be resolute in carrying out the Party line, in keeping to Party discipline, in having close ties with the masses, and in being independent, active, hard-working, and unselfish. See Mao Zedong 1967-77 (May 7, 1937): 1:291; Mao Zedong 1967-77 (October 1938): 2:201-3.

²⁴ At the Communist base camp in Yan’an, the concept of the cadre, already in use, began to be systematically developed. Since all Party members were now called cadres, they were distinguished through a range of adjectives, for instance, “leading cadres” vs. “basic-level cadres,” “outside cadres” vs. “local cadres,” and “old cadres” vs. “new cadres.” See Mao Zedong 1967-77 (February 1, 1942): 3:45-6; Mao Zedong 1967-77 (June 1, 1943): 3:118; “Reform in Learning, the Party, and Literature” (February 1, 1942), in Mao Zedong 1952: 24-5, 27-8. See also Lewis 1963: 186-94; Schurmann 1968: 162-3.

²⁵ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (October 1938): 2:197.

²⁶ See footnote 7 in chapter five.

²⁷ Zhongguo geming bowuguan bianxiezhu 1974: 54.

Party Members

Each unit/Has Party members/They are the most politically awakened/They are the bravest.

They don't fear death/They don't fear difficulties/They are the last to retreat/They are the first to charge.

They observe discipline/They are models/With the masses/They are tightly linked.

Shortcomings/They are able to correct/They like to study/They are fond of arduous learning.

Bad tendencies/They will struggle/A good Party member/Has a firm stand.

For the revolution/They willingly sacrifice themselves/The most honorable/Are Party members.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, as the Communist leaders took on the new task of governance, the meaning of the word "cadre" became more complicated. Because their experience in battle had not necessarily equipped Party members with the knowledge and skills required to administer the new nation, the Party appointed retained personnel (former KMT officials and "old intellectuals" [*lao zhishifenzi*]) as well as recent graduates from middle school, high school, and vocational colleges to assume leadership positions in state institutions and state-owned enterprises, alongside revolutionaries. By the mid-1950s, the Party had also promoted numerous workers in industrial enterprises to managerial posts.²⁸ As a result, a hierarchy of power and privilege came into being—a ranked, administrative system that Mao would later condemn as bureaucratist. By 1954, all of these state functionaries were called cadres, as the *Dictionary of New Nouns* (1954) shows:

Cadres are persons who work in state institutions or in a department of production; they are capable of unifying and leading the masses to carry out Party and government policies and directives; and they implement duties and programs promptly under the leadership of the Party and higher-level government institutions. ... [Cadres] must possess a

²⁸ See Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1159-68; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 737-9; field interviews. See also Barnett 1967b; Lewis 1963; Schurmann 1968; Vogel 1967. Individuals educated in the "old society" were sometimes referred to as "old intellectuals" (*lao zhishifenzi*).

revolutionary character and a revolutionary style of work, and be capable of cementing ties with the masses and of actively taking the lead ... they must be the tutor of the masses and in turn be the pupil of the masses.²⁹

A cadre, in other words, was a state functionary who held a leadership position, was committed to the Communist ideal, but was not necessarily a Party member. This new meaning of the word was built on the older meaning and did not replace it but coexisted with it.

Although the word *gongren* may appear less specialized than the word *ganbu*, it also possesses a distinct history and specialized meanings. The word *gongren* is indeed a classical Chinese character compound that appears as early as the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-256 B.C.E.). Only in twentieth-century Communist usage, however, did the phrase come to denote a laborer who does not own the means of production and therefore depends on wage earnings for a livelihood.³⁰ In Communist usage, therefore, the word “worker” figures a local self as a national and universal subject of Marxist theory, identified by class. As previous chapters have shown, the citizenry of the People’s Republic of China learned about this new political subject through political study and through various forms of Communist propaganda.

²⁹ Schurmann 1968: 168. Compare this definition with the one given in the 1953 edition of *Xin mingci cidian* (Dictionary of new nouns) on page 5003:

Cadres are the various core leaders of the revolutionary ranks...Cadres are not civilians, nor so-called working personnel of government organizations. A cadre differs from the regular personnel of most organizations, as well as from soldiers in the army. [Cadre] signifies one who has a certain level of political consciousness and is responsible for certain political tasks of centrality.

³⁰ See *Hanyu da cidian* 1986: 1141. In the historical records of the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-256 B.C.), the word *gongren* referred to the title of an official: *gongrenshi*. By the Tang dynasty (618-907), and again in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), it signified an artisan.

Shao Yong (b. 1934), a worker and a cadre of the early 1950s, remembers that the new subject positions of the People's Republic of China did not speak for themselves and had to be taught. Because of his good family background (lower-middle peasant) and his good political behavior, Shao Yong, a worker at the YTC Machinery Plant as of 1950, was “cultivated” (*peiyang*) to become a cadre in 1952. After a year of political study at the Army and Government Revolutionary University in Chongqing, he returned to the YTC to assume his new role as a “political instructor” (*zhengzhi laoshi*). A member of the first of three cohorts who were trained to institutionalize political study in Gejiu, Shao taught YTC miners and factory workers the political vocabulary, worldview, and message of the Party. At home, he explains the importance of this political work:

In class, I taught the *Political Textbook for Workers* [*Gongren zhengzhi keben*]. The content was mainly concerned with Marxist-Leninist theory, especially Marx's theorization of socio-historical development. I told them that according to Marxist theory, society moves through stages of development: from primitive society to slave society to feudalism to capitalism to socialism to communism. This is a movement from a primary stage to an advanced stage of development, from small-scale to large-scale production, and from weakness to strength. In class, we also contrasted the old society to the new society, and I used this contrast [*duibi*] to explain how social development was in their interest. I told them that in the old society, workers labored like beasts of burden for private capitalists. They were exploited and oppressed. They didn't own the means of production, and capitalists profited by their unpaid labor, by what is called “surplus value” [*shengyu jiazhi*]. I told them that in the new society, in socialist society, they were the masters. They were no longer exploited, and the country owned the means of production. Workers labored for the country, and the country in turn served them. Workers could see that the country was acting on their behalf: the standard of living had been raised; there were eight grades of workers; and workers earned good wages. Workers and cadres were one family. Workers were treated as their equals and were given status. To create a communist society, we all needed to contribute selflessly to building the country. So cadres also participated in physical labor.

Just as residents of Gejiu use the perceived balance between politics and economy to judge the soundness of current and former policies, they assess the relationship between cadres and workers to measure the health of the body politic in the past and in the present. The manner in which Gejiu retirees take up or refuse the subject positions of

the cadre and the worker in their narrative identities provides instances of a more general adoption and rejection of the socialist subjectivities that the Party made available during the early decades of the People's Republic of China. Cadres and workers, Shao Yong taught, were one family, tied together by Marxist theory. By redefining "work" as "labor" and by re-conceptualizing the laboring body, cadres such as he instructed workers to identify themselves as agents of socio-historical change and as the masters of socialist society. The Party demanded, in turn, that all cadres embody Communist ideals, especially Party members, who were the vanguard of the proletariat. In Shao's words, the Party implored cadres, in their capacity of public servants, "to follow the mass line, to adopt the mass viewpoint, and to unite with the masses." Their compulsory participation in physical labor reminded cadres of this lesson. The relationship between the cadre and the worker, in sum, provided a means to gauge the equality and justice of the socialist system. The legitimacy of Party rule manifested itself both in the material benefits and political status of workers, and in the word and deed of cadres.

Yan Kun (b. 1931)

Since 1982, there exist two kinds of retired cadre: the *tuixiu ganbu* ("retired cadre") and the *lixiu ganbu* ("retired revolutionary cadre"). Although *lixiu* and *tuixiu* both mean "to retire," cadres who *tuixiu* receive 60% to 90% of their former salary as a pension, whereas those who *lixiu* receive 100%, as well as full medical coverage and additional benefits accordant to their *lixiu* rank as stipulated in the 1982 retirement regulations for

veteran cadres.³¹ In order to qualify as a *lixiu ganbu*, one must have “participated in the

³¹ The word “*lixiu*” is short for “*lizhi xiuyang*,” literally “leave of absence for convalescence.” When introduced in 1958, the word referred to the practice of allowing veteran cadres in poor health to temporarily retire from office but earn a full salary. The new retirement regulations that were put forth in 1978 strove to abolish lifelong tenure for cadres. With this reform of the cadre system, the word “*lixiu*” came to mean a special form of permanent (rather than temporary) retirement and as a result of the 1982 retirement regulations, it meant an age-based (rather than health-based) exit from office. Whereas the foundation of the PRC converted revolutionaries into “state cadres” (*guojia ganbu*), the retirement regulations of 1982 did the reverse by arguing that veteran cadres are “revolutionaries by profession.” Although they vacate their posts, “they do not retire ideologically, politically, and organizationally.” The veteran cadres at the pinnacle of the state and Party apparatus, however, were exempt from retirement, whereas the rest were invited to step down and “finish writing their glorious history” in a manner fitting to their stage in life, for example, by carrying out social investigations or writing beneficial books. Stratified retirement benefits rewarded “each according to his work,” on the basis of two criteria: revolutionary seniority (determined by the date an individual began to participate in the revolution) and an individual’s rank in the cadre system upon retirement.

At the time of my fieldwork, approximately 2,000 retired revolutionaries resided in the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture. To provide the appropriate “political benefits” (*zhengzhi daiyu*) and “livelihood benefits” (*shenghuo daiyu*) for veteran cadres, Veteran Cadre Departments were created under the jurisdiction of the Honghe Prefecture Party Committee, the Gejiu City Party Committee, and the YTC Party Committee. Each of these local Party Committees also built “Veteran Cadre Activity Centers” (*Laoganbu huodongshi*) for its wards. In Gejiu, there are fifteen of these recreational centers. At the Veteran Cadre Activity Center, in the residential compound in which I lived in Gejiu, retired revolutionaries attended political study one morning per week; perused official documents that corresponded to their rank; were briefed by present-day Party officials on the current political and economic situation, and enjoyed a mean game of ping-pong or mahjong. In Gejiu, both the YTC General Hospital and Gejiu City People’s Hospital have special wards for veteran cadres; the latter’s is far nicer, with windowed rooms that face Gejiu Lake. As livelihood benefits also include housing, the YTC put up Building 8 and 9 behind its main office for its veteran cadres and resettled those who wished to relocate to their hometown, all by the end of 1988. The Honghe Prefecture and Gejiu City Party Committees did likewise by the end of 1990. Building 9 and 11 house prefectural-level veteran cadres and are adjacent to the Number 10 Guest House. The residential building for city-level veteran cadres is adjacent to the Gejiu City People’s Government. All of these residential compounds are gated. See “The CCP Central Committee’s Decision on the Establishment of a Retirement System for Veteran Cadres” 1984 (February 20, 1982): 99-102. On the retirement system for veteran cadres, see also Gejiushi zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1998: 1171-3; Honghe Hanizu Yizu zizhizhou bianzuan weiyuanhui 1995: 6:607-12; Manion 1992; Manion 1993; Yunxi zhi bianwei hui 1992: 87, 735-60; field interviews.

revolution” (*canjia geming*) prior to October 1, 1949. Within the sequestered environment of the Veteran Cadre Activity Centers (*Laoganbu huodongshi*) in Gejiu, some retired revolutionaries long for power and recognition. They scorn the abolishment of lifelong tenure for Party members that was the occasion for the creation of the privileged status of *lixiu ganbu*. Other retired revolutionaries perceive their life as parallel to the lives of the Party cadres who replaced them, timing their arrival and departure from the Center according to the workday schedule. “When they go to work, we go to work,” they say, while acknowledging that they are in a holding pattern: “We often say to one another, we are just waiting to die.”

Yan Kun scoffs at these attitudes and contents herself with her new social role as a retired revolutionary. Like many other veteran cadres, she takes courses at the University for the Elderly (Laonian daxue), pursues hobbies, and ventures out into society as an active participant in the changing times.³² But in the narration of her life history, Yan Kun leaves no doubt about her commitment to the subject position of the Party cadre. She uses her own words and actions to illustrate what a Party member was, is, and should be. With her spouse, Mo Shiping (b. 1928), she shares a Communist worldview acquired in youth, an unfaltering faith in the Party, and a set of revolutionary values and beliefs that continue to give meaning to her life. In regard to national policy and Marxist theory, she defers to Mo, who is also a retired revolutionary. She rather sees herself as one of “the common people” (*laobaixing*): “I am just an ordinary commoner. If you spend time with me, you will better be able to understand the life of the common

³² Gejiu has three universities for the elderly. The Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture People’s Government, the Gejiu City People’s Government, and the YTC, each administer one of these institutions for its retirees. These universities offer an array of courses each year, from folk dance to photography to poetry composition.

people.” This characterization is drawn from a set virtues and style of work that define an ideal Communist—such as hard work, plain living, frugality, self-sacrifice, and obedience—and that is epitomized by the principle “serve the people.” As a result, Yan stresses her participation in the revolution rather than her years in power, and she places her own commitment to Communist morality in relief by contrasting her own words and deeds with the immoral practices of present and former cadres who have defiled public office by the pursuit of personal gain. Because Yan believes in the Party as a transcendent institution, always committed to selfless sacrifice for social equality and national development, her disapproval of the lacking moral commitment of present-day cadres does not affect her faith in Communist ideology or in the Party.

Born in a village in Hebei province, Yan Kun moved to Kunming with her family during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). There, as a student at the middle school attached to Yunnan University (Yunda fuzhong), she was exposed to “advanced thought” (*jinbu sixiang*).³³ Her participation in the student activism of 1945 was a formative experience. Although “too young to understand Communist ideology,” Yan was influenced by the older students at her school, including Mo Shiping, who organized the protests that sought to dissuade the Nationalist Party from waging war on the CCP. Along with her peers, Yan wrote anti-KMT slogans on public buildings, hawked illegal student newspapers full of anti-KMT propaganda, and marched in student demonstrations. The famous large demonstration on December 1, 1945, stands out in her

³³ Since her father was an engineer who worker for the national railroad, Yan Kun has the family background “[state] functionary” (*zhiyuanzhe*), which is equivalent to being a “small capitalist” (*xiao zibenjia*). I note this, for those interested, with a qualification. I had to request this information. Yan never referred to her class background. It is irrelevant to the story she wants to tell at present.

memory. During this student demonstration she and her classmates, who at age fourteen were the youngest participants, were placed at the head of the procession in order to deter violent repression by the KMT. Because the Yunnan University Middle School lay outside the city, the students of her school had walked ten kilometers in the dark to arrive in time for the early-morning rally. At the checkpoint, they were met by Wen Yiduo (1899-1946):³⁴ “He was holding a lantern, and he lifted it up to his face and asked, ‘Are you scared?’ We shouted, ‘We’re not scared!’ When the protest was underway, the older students cried out, ‘Overthrow!’ We echoed, ‘Overthrow!’ Or they cried out, ‘Oppose!’ And we echoed, ‘Oppose!’ We were opposed to the Civil War that the KMT wanted to wage with the Communists.” The demonstration became known as the December 1st Incident because the KMT authorities arrested the student leaders and opened fire on the demonstrators, killing four students. Yan often recalls the Incident by the following anecdote:

Half a year prior to my graduation from middle school, my father was transferred to Guizhou. I stayed in Kunming and lived in our school’s dormitory for the remainder of the school year. You have to remember that at that time we were poor. My parents had five children. Everything was in short supply. I owned a pair of pants, two shirts, a sweater, and an overcoat. That was all. When school let out for the Spring Festival, my mother came to fetch me. Our family was to celebrate in Guiyang, and I had to look presentable. But when she saw me, I looked disheveled and filthy, and my clothes were full of holes. I had donated my own clothing to the student committee to help meet the burial costs of the student protesters who had been killed by the KMT. As I had no money to contribute, I gave my clothing. My mother was furious and yelled at me, “What have you done?” And I hollered, “I have been making revolution!”

After attending high school for two years in Guiyang (the capital of Guizhou province), Yan Kun was expelled for her political convictions. In August of 1949, she left

³⁴ Wen Yiduo was an esteemed poet and professor of Chinese literature at Qinghua University, who moved to Kunming during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The war sparked his political activism, and by 1945, he was partial to the CCP. His outspoken criticism of the Nationalist government led to his assassination by KMT agents.

for the “Liberated Area” (*jiefangqu*) with a girlfriend who was a year ahead of her in school. She told her parents that her girlfriend’s family had arranged for them to resume their studies in Wuhan, Hubei province. Once in Wuhan, however, they boarded the train that ran for free into the Liberated Area, and disembarked at Zhengzhou, Henan province.

There she began her formal education in Communist ideology:

YK: In Zhengzhou, we started to look for work. My friend found a poster that encouraged people to enroll in the cadre school. A cadre? What was a cadre? I had no idea. I had never heard of the word before. My friend announced that she was going to enroll. What was I to do? She was the only person I knew, and I didn’t dare go off on my own. So I enrolled too. We spent about six months at the cadre school. We weren’t being trained as soldiers but as rear-service guards. We were to aid the troops and help establish the new People’s Governments. We spent most of our time studying politics. We read the works of Chairman Mao, such as “Serve the People” and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains.” We learned that we were to serve the people and that the oppressed were to stand up and be masters of their own fates [*fanshen zuo zhuren*]. Each person had to examine [*jiancha*] his or her ideology and make sure that it was correct.

LK: Was there any problem with your ideology?

YK: At the time, I still harbored hopes of continuing my schooling, as my parents wished. This I needed to examine and rectify.

When Yan Kun finished their training at the cadre school, the People’s Republic had been founded, and the Communist Party was taking possession of areas formerly under KMT rule. Yan Kun and her classmates became “cadres who went south with the advancing army” (*nanxia ganbu*). The Party would eventually assign them a type of work and a post in the Party Committee or the People’s Government of a designated locality. But first, it sent these cadres to different parts of the South and the Southwest to carry out Land Reform. Yan conducted Land Reform for two years, as a member of a People’s Liberation Army work team in the countryside of Hunan province. At the end of those two years, the Party transferred her to the Land Reform Office that oversaw her military unit, to become the director of its Organization Department.

Like other veteran cadres, Yan displays her revolutionary credentials—her devotion to the Party and her sacrifice for the nation—through stories of Land Reform. She recalls how her work team earned the trust of villagers by eating, living, and laboring alongside them, a strategy known as the “three together” (*san tong*). Her accounts of the actual division of land, she confines to two topics: “investigating the local situation, and struggling [*dou*] the landlords and local depots [*eba*].” These activities epitomized her participation in class struggle, and they tempered her as a cadre:

You know, members of our work team died. This wasn't uncommon. At the time, I was so scared in my heart, but I couldn't say such a thing aloud. We were all in the same position. Besides, Party members weren't supposed to fear death. I had to learn not to fear death.

By “investigating the local situation,” her work team “learned who the cruel landlords and local despots were. We learned where they lived, how much land they owned, and what sort of crimes they had committed.” At the evening meetings they convened to gather this information, her work team also instructed villagers in the Communist world view: “We told them, ‘The People’s Republic of China has been established. China is now socialist. You can stand up and be master of your own fate.’” They taught villagers the meaning of liberation by showing them how to make revolution, both with weapons and with words:

YK: In the evening, we held meetings for them to vent bitterness [*suku*] and struggle the landlords. Venting bitterness, inciting the masses, and struggling the landlords: that was the course of a vent bitterness meeting [*sukuhui*]. Sometimes we had to drag a landlord out from hiding to attend these meetings. The first time we convened a vent bitterness meeting, peasants didn't dare speak, didn't dare tell how the landlord had treated them. Only gradually were they willing to do so. We therefore approached people who had suffered greatly and encouraged them to vent bitterness. As they spoke, everyone listened and cried. With each progressive vent bitterness meeting, more and more people came forward. Finally, people were yelling out, “I also want to speak!” “I do too!”

MSP: The atmosphere roused their zeal, raised their consciousness, and incited them to curse and beat the landlords.

YK: After the peasants vented their bitterness, landlords had to admit their wrongdoings. Some confessed their crimes; others did not. Whether or not they confessed, landlords were to be shot—that was the policy.

In the context of Land Reform, Yan Kun assumed the subject position of the cadre. She committed herself to creating a new and better world, in the present and in the future, under the leadership of the Party. This is the way she wishes to be thought of and hence this is how she spoke of herself to me at the time of my fieldwork. Although it may appear from Yan's description of Land Reform that Party cadres instructed the masses in every aspect of the revolution, Yan depicts the Party cadre as both the loyal student and the trusted teacher of the masses, always working on behalf of the masses. She emphasizes the same political convictions in the description of her service in the new state bureaucracy. As a result of her engagement to Mo Shiping, the Party transferred Yan from Hunan to Yunnan province, where Mo was carrying out Land Reform, and assigned her to administrative work:

After I arrived in Kunming in 1952, I pleaded to be transferred to a lower-level administrative post. I didn't want to be told otherwise. I was eventually sent to Mengzi to work for the judicial department.³⁵ I didn't want that post either. I wanted to go to the countryside. I said, "I want to go down to the lowest, the very lowest level!" My co-workers said to me that I need not go to the countryside, that it would be difficult for a woman, that there were other ways I could contribute. I went out and found a barber on the street and told him what I wanted and not to ask questions. I paid him the amount he requested, and he cut off all my hair. It was very short, like a boy's. I returned to the office. Everyone looked shocked at the sight of me. I said again, "I want to go down to the lowest level!" In 1953, they sent me to the countryside.

Between 1953 and her early retirement in 1983, Yan Kun held various posts in Yuanyang, Mengzi, and Gejiu. Starting with her formal membership of the CCP in 1953, however, her account of her activities becomes more difficult to follow, as her

³⁵ Mengzi was the seat of Mengzi Prefecture, which was merged with the Honghe Hani Autonomous District to form the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture in 1958.

digressions about her dedication to Communist goals and values, and her criticism of Party leaders in the past and in the present become more animated. “Being a Party member meant that you had to eat bitterness,” she says, “You had to go where they told you to go and not ask why.” In the rural, mountainous setting of Yuanyang County, she joined 30 other cadres (including Mo Shiping, whom she married in 1954) and exerted herself to “build the county” (*jianguo*), both by establishing its physical presence and by expanding its institutional reach. Yan helped construct and ready the timber buildings that were to house the seat of the newly created Honghe Hani Autonomous District. More importantly, she worked in numerous Han and Hani villages, where she lived for extended periods while implementing Party policy, first on behalf of the Women’s Federation and later as a sanitation worker. When Yan represents her tenure in public office during the 1950s, she places *gong* (the collective, the public) above *si* (the personal, the private) and foregrounds her identity as a cadre:

Above all, I wanted to serve the people—not like today’s officials who always put themselves and their careers first. They are only concerned with money, status, and reputation. In the past, there were times when I didn’t see my husband for years at a stretch. After my daughter was born, I hired a nanny to look after her. I left her to go work in the countryside. I didn’t see her for three years. When I returned, she didn’t know who I was. She didn’t recognize me. She called me “aunty” [*ayi*].

Yan’s credentials eventually earned her an assignment to personnel work (*renshi gongzuo*) at the Yuanyang County Nationality Hospital. Starting in the mid-1970s she would hold a similar post at the People’s Hospital in Gejiu. While reticent about the details of her career from hereon, Yan likes to express her displeasure at having been assigned to personnel work. In this way, she disassociates herself from the power of the higher cadres and from the power of her office. As Yu Shizhen explained above, personnel work was political work. Each personnel department was an arm of the state

distributive system and hence a means to exert control over the population. Cadres charged with this political work assessed personal files (*renshi dang'an*) to determine eligibility and to make recommendations for job assignments, promotions, transfers, and social assistance. Only “politically reliable” (*zhengzhi kekao*) cadres were to undertake this work. In the reform era, the Party gradually ceded this power to the market, for example by creating a “job market” (lit. personnel market, *renshi shichang*), and no longer assigned every citizen a guaranteed job. Yan remarks:

They wanted me to do personnel work. I didn't want the job. I didn't want to appraise a person's level of education or class status. I didn't want to manage people [*guan ren*]. I don't like politics. I want everyone to be equal. If I could have chosen any job, it would have been agricultural work, because I want to be with the common people—not the leaders. I therefore couldn't rise any higher. In order to go up [*shangqu*], you had to spend time with the leaders. You had to cater to them. Do you understand? To have status and power, you had to dote on the leaders. I wasn't willing to do this. I don't like the idea of castes. In some countries, like India, the high castes won't spend time with low castes—the leaders don't want to be with the common people.

Yan attributes unenlightened, selfish behavior of Party members to “feudal ideology” (*fengjian sixiang*). By locating the blame for such failures in the pre-liberation past, she avoids discrediting the Party as an institution. Above, she criticizes “bureaucratism” (*guanliao zhuyi*), a style of work that the Party itself condemned during the Mao era. Bureaucratism divorced cadres from the people and encouraged immoral behavior. Yan explains that although classes were eradicated after 1949, “There were still people of status (*diwei*). The feudal idea of status persisted in people's thinking.” In the early decades of the PRC, corruption, however, wasn't nearly as severe or as widespread as it is at present. To be a cadre now is to be on the take: “What sort of Party members are today's officials? They are Party members who eat, embezzle, and don't understand morality.” According to Yan, the blind obedience of the Cultural Revolution also derived from feudal ideology. (Reformist leaders put forth this same notion in the late 1970s, to

discredit ultra-leftism.) When Red Guards attacked people in positions of authority, such as Yan and her spouse, they cited Mao's command, "To rebel is justified." But to Yan they were conformists, not rebels:

Let me tell you why they did these things—because of feudal ideology. Feudal ideology is already over a thousand years old in China. It can't be extinguished in an instant. Feudal ideology is like this: I am the leader, and whatever I say goes. Those young kids thought that whatever the highest leader said was definitely correct. I tell you, they came into my office looking for trouble. One said, "Why don't you have that image of Chairman Mao hung on the wall?" I had it on my desk because we didn't have any money at the time to purchase nails, and I had other work to do. So I said, "I don't have a nail to hang it up." One said, "Bullshit. You don't praise Chairman Mao!" I said, "I do!" Another said, "You don't support Chairman Mao!" And I said, "I do! I just don't have a nail. What do you want to make of it?" So they tied my hands behind my back, bent me over, and then criticized and denounced [*pidou*] me. Just like that.

Yan Kun's criticism of the incorrect behavior, misplaced ambitions, and backward ideas of Party members—and of Red Guards—enhances her own superior moral standing in the present. Because the Party still endorses the Communist ideals she advocates, her words and actions possess power, even if present cadres dismiss them as old-fashioned. She concedes that the economic policies of reformist leaders have ushered in a period of continuous growth, but adds that present-day society has "its light as well as its dark sides." She delights in repeating folk sayings that rebuke and ridicule today's officials. Bursting with laughter, she tells me that she heard someone sing a parody of a song composed for the recent anniversary of Gejiu. The official song begins, "I have two names,/ One is Gejiu, the other is Tin Capital" (*Wo you liangge mingzi,/Yige jiao Gejiu, yige jiao Xidu*). The man in the street sang instead, "I have two names,/ One is drinking [*he jiu*], the other is doing drugs [*xi du*]." By contrast, Yan presents herself as a model Communist. She draws attention to her thrift (she recycles yarn from worn-out sweaters to knit socks and hats), she publishes her commitment to moral principles (she writes stories about veteran cadres who continue to serve the people), and she examines her own

behavior (she refused to give her son and her daughter a wedding party, which she deemed an indecent waste, and instead sent the newly married couples on a trip around China so that they would come to know and understand the country). Her stories construct a life proffered for emulation, to serve a didactic function. One late afternoon, near the end of my stay, Yan and I, teacher and student, chatted at her home, while Mo Shiping listened. I showed that I had learned the lesson:

YK: We know people who have spent large sums of money on refurbishing their homes. We feel that such expenditures are extravagant. [Mo nods in agreement.] Some people even purchase fancy light fixtures. Look at ours. It is just a plain fluorescent tube. A light fixture is for light. Who needs a fancy one? A friend of ours even has a shelf for displaying glass vases and useless trinkets. We don't. I bought this plastic flower vase for two *yuan*. It's cheap, and good enough. We prefer to live simply. We hope that you will as well. We received ideological education [*sixiang jiaojù*]. In our youth, we only thought about working selflessly for the good of the country. We slept on long bunks covered with straw. In the rainy season, grass grew on the beds and the floor, up to twelve inches high! I wasn't homesick, and I didn't long for the comforts of home. Mo and I—we are not powerful people with high positions [*diwei*].

LK: You are cadres. [They nod in agreement.]

YK: But not cadres of high rank. Our ideal was simply to be a good cadre and a hard-working Party member.

Li Heyuan (b. 1927) and Zhao Baicheng (b. 1933)

Whereas Yan Kun is a veteran cadre (*laoganbu*), Li Heyuan and Zhao Baicheng are “veteran workers” (*laogongren*), individuals who joined the labor force prior to the completion of the First Five-Year Plan (1953-1957). Both men worked their entire lives for the YTC, at the Laochang Mine. It is plausible that they were acquainted, but I met them independently and never mentioned the one to the other. They both adopt the subject position of the worker to make sense of their lives, but they each choose a different cohort against which to construct their identity as a worker: Li contrasts his

experience with that of workers before “liberation,” and Zhao compares his life to that of reform-era workers. They use these antitheses to the same effect, however, namely to determine their precise identity as workers who possessed material benefits and political status. Through political study at the YTC and through Mao-era propaganda, they learned to re-conceptualize history, society, and the self, and now they use the socialist worker—his life expectations and labor conditions—to gauge the beneficence of the Party and the meaning of socialism. The worker, according to Mao-era propaganda, was an agent of the revolution who selflessly sacrificed himself for national development, but he was also a political subject who received rather than gave. Just as the subject position of the cadre (*ganbu*) implies the worker as beneficiary, the subject position of the worker (*gongren*) implies the cadre as benefactor. The former serves the people, and the latter is an obedient recipient in the socialist system. This reciprocal relationship was given expression by the word *guan*, which means both “to manage” and “to care about.” The Party-state assumed the power to manage people, but that power came with the obligation to care and to provide for them.

In front of his makeshift shack in Laochang, Li Heyuan speaks of the past. His recollections are punctuated by the comment, “Oh, the changes have been so great, so great!” One of those changes is the depletion of the tin mines: “Below us, below all of these mountains, are tunnels running in all directions. But these mountains have been emptied of ore and are now nothing but rocks.” Like Zhao Baicheng, he isn’t loquacious and assumes that the listener understands, for example, that he has a good class background. Poverty brought Li to Laochang Mine in 1942, in search of work. He first worked for a “private boss” (*siren laoban*) who owned a small shop on Wanzi Street,

then the main drag of Laochang. He hammered metal slabs and shaped them into the tools and machine parts that the shop sold, until a fire burned the shop down. Like the ore below ground, the street and the community that it supported no longer exist. In 1947, Li was recruited into the YTC workforce, becoming a miner at the Victory Tunnel (*Shengli keng*).³⁶ “In 1947, there were about 100 to 120 miners at the Victory Tunnel. By the late 1950s, there were as many as 10,000 miners.” Although he cites continuities across time—YTC workers were at least eighteen years old, lived in dormitories, and were given one day a week off to rest—he emphasizes the contrast between his life before and after liberation.

To explain his experience of liberation, Li contrasts his life as a YTC worker after 1949, when “everything was publicly owned,” to the time before 1949, when “*shading* worked for private bosses.” He notes that *shading* were often fifteen years old or younger, didn’t have a day off to rest, and wore shackles around their feet to prevent them from fleeing. When he describes the contrast in physical toil, he invokes the imagery of *fanshen* (turning over): “They crawled through narrow shafts in the mountains to mine ore. They had to hunch over. But we could stand upright in the Victory Tunnel.” To illustrate how life at the YTC improved under socialism, he cites the material benefits and political status of the socialist worker:

After liberation, our wages increased. That was a big change. Previously, there were only three grades of workers. Skilled and unskilled laborers also earned different wages. As an unskilled laborer, I made about 30 *yuan* a month, working full time. In 1953, our new wages were finally determined. Based on an investigation the company had made, we were assigned a new rank. In total, there were eight grades of workers. I became a grade-six worker. My wages increased to more than 60 *yuan* a month. I later became a grade-

³⁶ “The Yunnan Tin Corporation” and “Victory Tunnel” are names that date to the 1950s. In 1947, the YTC was a central government enterprise but was called the Yunnan Tin Corporation Ltd.

seven worker and made 110 *yuan* a month. Oh, our wages really increased. Mine more than doubled. In the 1950s and 1960s, I could support eight people on my salary alone: my parents, my wife, my uncle, my children, and myself. The changes that occurred after 1949 were good. Socialism was good. The status of workers was so high. Housing was free. We ate our fill. Our children's schooling was free. Our needs were met. The working class was the master of the country. This was a really good change.

After working underground in the shafts of the Victory Tunnel for several years, Li was transferred in 1953 to the Peace Tunnel (*Heping keng*), an opencast mine. When describing his work as a miner, he mentions the labor conditions and the rewards for hard work as evidence that the Party continued to care about workers:

In the shafts, I did exploratory drilling. I also put sticks of dynamite into the rocks we blasted away. I even dug out ore from the exposed vein. In the opencast mine, I worked for many years clearing away rock debris, shoveling ore into piles, and then loading it onto the mule carts that we used for transport. All of it, all of this work, is bitter [*ku*]. At least the Party cared about [*guan*] the safety and health of workers. For example, the Party cared about reducing lung cancer and so made sure that we used pneumatic water drills. We had those drills before 1949, but we were not encouraged to use them. We used regular pneumatic drills to bore into the rocks instead. The dust they produced was really terrible. We breathed in all that dust. I remember how much it stung my eyes and how they used to tear. We didn't like using the pneumatic water drills. They used water to disperse the dust, and your body ended up being coated in ore. The water was cold, and the ore was impossible to wash off. It was really unpleasant. But the Party said that we had to use the pneumatic water drills, as the health benefits were good. The Party paid attention to such things.

The Party further improved labor conditions by pursuing mechanization, which lessened the physical demands of Li's work, too. He cites transportation as an example. In the late 1950s, electric tramcars replaced transport by mule and by manpower in the underground mines. Trucks replaced mule-drawn carts in the opencast mines. The latter especially lightened the work Li did. Because a truck bed has a larger surface area than a mule cart, he could load ore with an earth digger instead of a shovel.³⁷ In 1962, moreover, the Party honored his hard work:

Meetings were held to discuss the performance of workers, and on occasion our leader would announce that one or two workers could move up a rank. I was earnest, capable,

³⁷ On earth diggers and opencast mining, see chapter five: 340.

and very hard working and therefore was recommended for promotion. I became a grade-seven worker. My salary was then really high.

Li has reason to be regretful or angry at present, but he isn't. After protecting his health and rewarding his contribution, the Party in April 1966 sent him to the countryside, as part of a resettlement policy for the "old, weak, and disabled" (*lao-ruo-can*). This policy was a backhanded solution for the pressing problem of unemployment. "Because of a leg injury, I was given a little money and sent back to my home village [in Jianshui County]. I basically retired from the YTC in 1966." Li lived in the countryside for fourteen years, tilling a small plot of land in the village commune. After the policy was redressed in the late 1970s, he returned to the Laochang Mine. But because he didn't want to continue working, he gave up his post to a younger person, his son. His pension was fixed in 1980, based on the salary he earned in 1966. He states matter-of-factly, "They told me that I was only entitled to 60% of my salary. I ended up with a bit more than 60 *yuan* a month as my pension."

Reflecting on his experience, Li posits that the prestige of workers is central to the definition of socialism. He contrasts his own experience as a worker both with his memory of the period before liberation and, briefly, with present conditions. In analyzing the past, he implicitly refers to the Marxist idea of surplus value to explain the bondage and the emancipation of workers. As his focus shifts to the present, he deploys the political language of the Mao era to criticize the current Party-state. The present, Li contends, has returned to the pre-liberation past, when "capitalists" (*zibenjia*) abused workers. The current Party-state is therefore communist in name only:

LHY: Workers initially didn't know what socialism was. During political study meetings, we sat and listened to what they told us. The smarter among us maybe understood, but most couldn't follow along. I remember being taught that socialism is followed by communism. The one precedes the other. You can call that movement progress. In the

1950s, our leader would also gather us to recollect how workers were oppressed and exploited in the old society. We were taught that workers were exploited because they received only five *yuan*. I mean, we were taught that if one hour of labor is worth ten *yuan* and a worker's salary is five *yuan* an hour, then the boss pockets five *yuan*. But those five *yuan* should go to the worker. That means we were exploited in the old society.

LK: And after 1949?

LHY: Of course, we weren't exploited in the era of Mao Zedong. Under socialism, workers are the masters of the country. We don't work for capitalists but for the country. I tell you, and I wouldn't dare tell this to anyone else—it is true that our government is still communist, but as for everything else, it's reversed. It's like that now for workers. Bosses pay them barely any wages for their day's labor and get rid of them when they aren't needed anymore. Those bosses are like the capitalists of the past. [Waving his hand in disavowal:] I don't occupy myself with such things. I don't try to understand government policy. I just play Mahjong instead.

If Li Heyuan exalts the socialist worker by contrasting him with the *shading* before liberation, Zhao Baicheng habitually illustrates the status of workers during the Mao era by juxtaposing it with the inequality and social ills of the present day. The predicament of his children, which he deems typical of workers today, intensifies his criticism of the Party-state. By all accounts, Zhao's situation is more secure than Li's. He lives in a rambling brick house built by his father, which he inherited in 1977. He receives a monthly pension of 566 *yuan*, and an additional 30 *yuan* a month for medication. He is grateful that he can afford to support his two youngest sons, both laid off by the YTC, and both unmarried. His expenses, however, have left him without savings. Sitting in his courtyard, Zhao declares:

In the past, we were proud to be YTC workers. The pay was high, the work was good, and workers had status. I could easily raise my family on my salary. The money went far. Rice cost only eleven cents a *jin* [pound]. It cost us only two *yuan* and fifty cents a term to send our kids to school. It cost me only fifty cents to visit the doctor. My wife had to pay one *yuan* to visit the doctor, but the YTC picked up half of the bill. Today everything is so expensive. You have to spend over 1,000 *yuan* just to educate your children. Of course, workers weren't all making the same wages in the past, but the difference between grades wasn't drastic. On the whole, people were equal. We were all poor. There wasn't a huge gap between the rich and the poor as there is today. And in the past, people had jobs. When my fifth child was laid off, the YTC gave him only three months of severance pay. Now he has to find work for himself, but there are no jobs to be had. Officials, the government—they all turn their heads and look away. They don't care

about us [*bu guan women*]. It wasn't so in the past. Chairman Mao was good. Jiang Zemin is no good.

Zhao often spends the afternoon at the Workers' Cultural Palace, a city park built in 1956 to provide workers with a space for recreation. There he mingles with his peers and the city's unemployed, swapping stories about current social ills and better times. Like other veteran workers I met in the park, Zhao said that he was not qualified to help me understand the past. History, he said, was a matter outside his competence; it was something managed (*guan*) by the government. Nonetheless, he was willing to talk about his own experience.

In 1948, Zhao left his village in Shiping County for Gejiu to join his father, who had opened up a small mine in Laochang Township in the 1930s. Since his father did not need assistance, Zhao worked as a miner for a private boss (*siren laoban*). He explains, "During the time of Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek, 1887-1975], a private boss was a capitalist. People like me who worked for capitalists were unskilled laborers [*xiaogong*]. Capitalists called us *shading*. We didn't use that word ourselves." A year later, at age sixteen, he too opened up a mine of his own, with six friends. It was just a small pit in the mountainside. They worked it themselves and sold the ore to a private refinery. In 1950, the Party confiscated his father's mine. His own mine was "collectivized" (*jitihua*) in 1953 and "socialized" (*shehuihua*) in 1956. The Party subsequently merged his mine with the YTC Laochang Mine. As a result, Zhao entered the YTC workforce in 1956, retiring as a grade-eight worker in 1989. He spent his career at the Peace Tunnel, driving an earth digger: a mid-sized Soviet model with six gears, which he learned to operate during a six-month course in the Northeast. Day in and day out, he coaxed this machine to dig into the mountain, lift out blasted rock and ore, pivot, and then unload the haul onto the flatbeds

of waiting trucks. After drawing me a picture of this machine, he explained its operation by reenacting, with hand and foot, the use of the various gears and levers, a knowledge bound up in physical memory. Zhao was hard put to say much more, except that he lived in the residential quarters for married couples until 1977, when he moved to the dormitory for single workers; that production lasted 24 hours a day, divided into three shifts (a morning shift from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., a mid-day shift from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., and a nightshift from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.); and that the shift ended when the steam whistle blew. Although aware of my dissatisfaction, he felt that this fully explained his past.

For Zhao, the main value of the past lies in its contrast with the present, which he characterizes as a time in which the Party no longer secures the welfare of the citizenry. Although he cannot conceive of the possibility of any kind of public protest, Zhao knows that his criticism has political implications. In the back-alleys of the Old Town and amid the rumbling in the city parks, his words find an echo and gain force. His depiction of the present as a time of extreme inequality, political corruption, rampant crime, and social instability contradicts the official representation of socialism after 1978. The current social order, Zhao contends, is the result of a government that “doesn’t care about us.” In a period of good governance, one can leave one’s door unlocked at night, he says, invoking an image already common in imperial times. Communist usage of the word *guan* draws on this same ancient notion of governance, conjuring a similar image of perfect order and perfect peace. According to Zhao, the Mao era realized this ideal order, in part by its use of political campaigns (*zhengzhi yundong*):

Current officials are corrupt, and they let drugs enter the country. Young people become addicts and drug dealers because they can’t find jobs. In the Mao era, gambling was outlawed. In the Deng era, it returned. Crime is also rampant now. You go out in fear of being mugged. In the past, none of these problems existed. We didn’t have to lock our doors. The government managed [*guan*] these things. Society was therefore safe, stable,

and well ordered. In the past, if you went against the Party or didn't do what you were supposed to do, you were criticized. But if you obeyed orders and did your work, you weren't criticized. The Party only struggled bad people [*huairen*]. That was good. Political campaigns were good. Now the government doesn't care [*guan*]. So there is crime, drug trafficking, and unemployment.

In the Mao era, moreover, socialism meant that “workers were at the helm.”

According to Zhao, a good job, a salary that covered the cost of living, and a respected social status were the pride of workers. YTC workers especially benefited from this plenty: “We were very conceited.” When he recalls that during political study, “we were taught that workers were the masters,” he expresses some skepticism, because in actuality “everything was under the leadership of the Party.” But the changes in the present confirm in retrospect the truth of those lessons at Laochang Mine:

In the past, workers really had high status and were respected. The leaders of society were workers, peasants, and soldiers. We were the backbone. It's not so now. Now... now workers are like the *shading* of the time of Jiang Jieshi. Their social status is that low.

Like Li Heyuan, Zhao identifies socialism as a lived experience with a particular meaning of the word “worker” (*gongren*) that was propagated during the first thirty years of Party rule. Also like Li Heyuan (if less explicitly), he interprets the present as a return to the time before liberation. Reversing a trope of political study, he illustrates social devolution by sketching the transformation of the *gongren* into the *shading*.

Although Li Heyuan and Zhao Baicheng mourn the end of the social order of the Mao era, they continue to make use of its concepts and meanings to interpret lived experience in the present. They continue to identify themselves as socialist workers, and they continue to perceive a socio-historical landscape the study sessions of the 1950s taught them to see: Before 1949, capitalists exploited sandhogs (*zibenjia*, *boxue*, *shading*); after 1949, Party cadres cared about workers (*ganbu*, *guan*, *gongren*). Each of

these Communist words still inhabits their speech, even though these veteran workers do not see themselves as agents of revolution and do not appear to be recollectors of bitterness. They instead identify themselves as socialist workers who reaped the fruits of the struggle in exchange for being “obedient” (*ting hua*) and refraining from “raising opinions” (*ti yijian*). When these veteran workers and their peers criticize the present government by contrasting its policies with those of the Mao era, they are not deliberately engaging in political protest or indulging in nostalgia. They are assuming the subject position of the socialist worker—not the agent but the beneficiary of revolution, expecting that the Party will reward their labor and their obedience by providing for them and their children. They insist that it is the Party’s obligation to meet their needs, and they are angry and puzzled that the Party does not seem to care about them anymore. Cadres and workers stood jointly at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy in the Mao era, and now they share a similar fate in the reform era: Party members lost their lifelong tenure, and workers saw their iron rice bowl broken. Unlike the cadre, however, the political subject of the worker has lost all the power and status it possessed during the Mao era, and its meaning has thereby changed. As political instructor Shao Yong explains, “Workers [*gongren*] aren’t the masters anymore. They just take on a job [*dagong*, as opposed to performing labor (*laodong*)].” Although the Party does not explicitly acknowledge this, the *gongren* has become a political subject depleted of value. Li and Zhao still find meaning in the discourse of the Mao era, but because the Party no longer elevates the political subject of the worker and no longer recognizes the related obligations of earlier years, their past experience offers little solace in old age.

Conclusion

The narrative identities of Gejiu retirees demonstrate both the productive power of Communist discourse and the constraints on its hegemony. The informants I have presented in this chapter, and the many I have omitted from it, deploy the vocabulary of government policies and mass campaigns, and the storylines of successive official histories of Gejiu, to make sense of lived experience. They adopt the subject positions of the cadre and the worker to define their moral stance, to justify their political expectations, and to explain past and present actions. They use the social concepts of politics and economy to evaluate the accomplishments and inadequacies of current and former policies. They take up the encompassing ideological and historical binaries provided by the Party—before and after 1949, before and after 1978, Maoism and reformism, socialism and capitalism, red and expert, and so forth—to give shape and meaning to their lives. But where their individual experience diverges from official historiography, they contest received definitions of Communist concepts and shift the temporal markers of historical narratives. Their attempts to resolve such ruptures between official policy and personal experience often center on a claim to the true meaning of individual words, the authentic definition of concepts that should have guaranteed their social membership: the class ideology of the Anti-Rightist Campaign was pseudo-class ideology, the labels inflicted by Red Guards lacked theoretical authority, the Cultural Revolution turned economy into politics, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is capitalism, the cadres of the present are not real cadres, the Communist Party is no longer the Communist Party. Thus, Yu Shizhen lays claim to the phrase “red and expert” to

denounce his unjust conviction, in the idle hope of regaining the twenty lost years of his life. Tao Ying applies the phrase “seeking truth from facts” to the Cultural Revolution in order to align the height of her empowerment with the restoration of expertise and economic production, and in order to disparage the falsity and corruption of recent decades. Yan Kun condemns both the blind obedience of Red Guards and the immoral behavior of reform-era cadres as remnants of “feudal ideology,” while maintaining her faith in the immanent correctness of the transcendent Party. If successive political campaigns used biography to illustrate the new Marxian history of the Chinese nation, Gejiu retirees tell the recent history of the nation in a manner that conforms to their own life experience.

The individuality of the life histories that Gejiu retirees devise by means of Communist concepts and genres, and the precise detail in which they engage Communist words and phrases, demonstrate the profound importance of Communist propaganda in the creation of meaning and subjectivity. The analysis of the narrative identities in this chapter therefore reveals the inadequacy of much of the existing scholarship on the early decades of the People’s Republic of China. Western scholars have commonly dismissed Communist propaganda as vacuous fabrication, irrelevant to an understanding of historical truth, and have characterized the Communist state as a totalitarian society whose power is coercive, repressive, and all encompassing. During the Cold War, Western scholars habitually disparaged Communist discourse, especially in the form of propaganda, as plain deception, cynical manipulation, and an obvious, pernicious distortion of truth. The widespread dissolution of Communist states in 1989 by no means reversed this historical positivism and ideological skepticism, as the events appeared to

confirm that Communist ideology had always been a flagrant lie, an unnatural refusal of democracy and capitalism. The first thirty years of the People's Republic, as a result, never acquired a substantive existence in Western scholarship. When Mao Zedong was alive, the Communist state was a perverse institution (or, for a small minority, a chimerical ideal); and after Deng Xiaoping came to power, the preceding period became irrelevant to understanding the new developments, and became equated in its entirety with the most violent and fanatical episodes of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward. But to argue, for example, that the Party's "linguistic engineering" has produced interchangeable individuals "forced" to express "politically correct thought"³⁸ ignores the diverse, individual ways in which the adults and adolescents of the Mao era articulate personal experience, and overlooks the critical specificity with which they engage Communist discourse.

The recognition of Communist discourse as a source of meaning enables new understandings of Chinese socialism as a lived experience, as it opens up the language of propaganda and political campaigns to historical and anthropological inquiry. In the first four chapters of this dissertation, I analyzed the successive iterations of Communist historiography to show how the Party mapped the Marxist history of the new Chinese nation onto the local landscape and onto the biographies of local workers and cadres. In this final chapter I have shown how retirees in Gejiu trace their own, individual trajectories through this discursive space. They use the concepts and narratives they acquired through political study and through exposure to propaganda in order to assess the passage of time, to evaluate their own role in history, and to explain who they are at

³⁸ Fengyuan Ji 2004: 2.

present. They do not mindlessly reproduce the Party line, nor do they automatically adjust the interpretation of their lived experience to the most current version of Communist historiography. Rather, they use Communist discourse to make sense of personal experience, the affirming and debilitating events of their lives. Although the Party has provided much of their language, their utterances are their own.

Conclusion. Tin Culture and Historical Speculation in the Era of Neo-Liberalism

When the tin industry waned during the late 1990s, the Gejiu City government began promoting tourism as a new source of revenue. It devised the notion of “tin culture” (*xī wénhuà*) as the hook to draw tourists and new capital to the city. At the time of my fieldwork (November 2001- June 2003), officials in the Gejiu Department of Culture were still debating the exact meaning of this new phrase. In consultation with the Gejiu Party Propaganda Bureau, the Gejiu Department of Culture developed plans to hold an “Ore God Festival” (*Kuangwang jie*), to build a museum showcasing tin culture, and to re-create a stretch of the old cityscape. The promotion of tin culture requires that local institutions decide which personages to commemorate, which sites to preserve, and which events to narrate. In other words, it requires that they recast once more the history and the landscape of Gejiu in accordance with the current needs of Party policy. But the present effort differs from previous campaigns by being both political and commercial, by using local history both as an instrument and as a product, by being directed both at the local population and at national and international tourists. The dedicated quest for personages, sites, and objects of “historical value” (*lishi jiazhi*) quite deliberately obfuscates the distinction between political and commercial usefulness. Put in charge of the development of tourism in March of 2002, the Gejiu Department of Culture has turned local history into a commodity. The common coin of tourism redeems and hence eliminates the historical and ideological distinctions between the *shading* and the tin boss, the Tin God and Lu Miannan, the Victory Tunnel and a Han-dynasty candlestick,

the exhibitions of the Cultural Revolution and the *Gejiu City Gazetteer*, as all are now converted into the shared denomination of tin culture.

The first public marketing of tin culture took place at a not-for-profit gallery called the Gejiu Exhibition Center, opened in January 2002 at a central intersection in the city by two local advertising firms. Cai Shenbang (b. 1963), the owner of one of the two firms, explained to me the rationale behind the first exhibition installed at the Center, “A Photography Exhibition on the History and Transformations of the Tin Capital” (*Xidu lishi yu bianqian tupian zhan*), which ran from January through February of 2002.

Surrounded by ancient tin artifacts and historical photographs, Cai says:

This is the second exhibition on the history of Gejiu. The first occurred in 1972, on the history of the Gejiu tin mines [see chapter three]. We have been collecting materials for this exhibition for about three years. It is important to tell the history of Gejiu. By holding this exhibition, we hope to educate the general public about the past. It is a way of contributing to society.

But the youth who keep an eye on the gallery contradict this explanation. According to them, the exhibition on the history of Gejiu was not conceived as an altruistic contribution to society, but as a means to promote Gejiu as a “tourist city” (*lüyou chengshi*) with a unique local culture. To support their assertion, they point out that the two advertising firms received the cooperation of the Gejiu City People’s Government and the Gejiu Party Propaganda Bureau. Cai and his partners had even hired Bao Jun, the Director of the Office of the Gejiu City People’s Government, as their “senior consultant” (*gaoji guwen*) for the exhibition. Not only did Bao write the captions for all the photographs, but after his imminent retirement he would become the Gallery Director. As the effective employer of Bao Jun, Cai demonstrates the new meaning and the new position of the *laoban* (boss) in the present neo-liberal era. If *laoban* was previously a damning label for the ruthless capitalists who grew rich by exploiting workers in the

decadent times before 1949, it is now a respectful term of address, used for owners of private companies whose profits may even earn them the accolade of “model worker” from the city government. As “advanced members” (*xianjin fenzi*) of the working class, these capitalists are allowed to become members of the Communist Party. Although not a Party member, Cai speaks about attending provincial government meetings on economic development, chairing the boards of local planning committees, and maintaining unspecified “relations” with Gejiu City officials. In word and deed, Cai shows the interpenetration of politics and commerce that characterizes the current era of neo-liberalism. Creating an alliance between advertising and propaganda, he demonstrates that, by collecting history and by commodifying culture, Gejiu can mine its past for the dual goals of ideological education and government profit.

“The Photography Exhibition on the History and Transformations of the Tin Capital” propagated a new instantiation of the official history of Gejiu. Although its narrative accorded largely with the history laid out in the *Gejiu City Gazetteer* (see chapter four), the exhibition went further in its extension of a proud history of continuous economic development and ancient national culture. Whereas the local gazetteers of the Deng era explicitly condemned the violence of ultra-leftism and sought to excise its political legacy from the Party record, the exhibition subsumed all previous periods in a common, undivided stock of memories that yield their political and commercial value in the splendid, patriotic present. An introduction posted at the beginning of the exhibition explained that the collected photographs and artifacts represented “a small contribution to the excavation and research of tin culture,” intended “to arouse the people’s ardent love for the ancestral land and for their hometown,” and hence to motivate them to “create a

more glorious future for Gejiu.” The introduction acknowledged the great advances made under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (to deny these would be “contrary to the historical facts”), but the exhibition itself erased all distinctive ideological shifts of recent decades. Instead, it presented a picturesque impression of the “two thousand years of the historical development of the tin industry.” Creating simple contrasts between the past and the present (the familiar technique of *jinxi duibi* put to new use), the three parts of the exhibition told a story of continuous national development, uninterrupted by class struggle or ideological violence. In part one, covering the period from the late nineteenth century through 1950, the wretched labor conditions and the miserable life of the *shading* simply ended with the liberation of Gejiu. In part two, which treated the floods of 1954 and 1996, the “beautiful scenery” of a fully recovered Gejiu emerged victorious from waterlogged devastation. Part three demonstrated the remarkable transformations of Gejiu by juxtaposing color photographs of the present city to black-and-white photographs of the same sites in the past: the southern stretch of May First Street in the 1940s and today; the Workers’ Cultural Palace in the 1950s and the present; a panoramic view of the city in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, and 2001. The nondescript captions of the photographs did not identify the political context of any of the historical settings, describing a scene from the Great Leap Forward as “the large-scale refining of iron and steel,” for example, or a scene from the Cultural Revolution as “a rally ground.” In other words, the exhibition presented all photographs and artifacts as the collective evidence of an undivided, continuous past that culminated in a glorious present of economic achievement and patriotic pride.

While the Gejiu Department of Culture welcomes the aid of entrepreneurs like Cai Shenbang, in its effort to produce and preserve a local past of historical value it relies above all on its own retired personnel and on their counterparts at the Yunnan Tin Corporation. Present officials eagerly consult a handful of retirees whose many years of experience in “cultural work” (*wenhua gonzuo*) has given them authoritative knowledge of the history of Gejiu. From this knowledge they mint the facts and stories that provide the Gejiu Department of Culture with the currency of a profitable tin culture. When I met these amateur historians, however, they proved critical of the officials and their efforts. Although they participate with enthusiasm in the development of tin culture, these retirees at times challenge the city’s decisions in public, or mock them in private. The former Vice-Director of the Gejiu City Museum, Chai Yimin (b. 1941), for example, denounces all the talk of cultural preservation as a farce, in light of the rapid demolition of the oldest neighborhood in Gejiu, known as the “old town” (*lao cheng*):

On the whole, little time or money has been spent on learning about the history of Gejiu. At some point in the 1980s, I raised this issue at a meeting of the Political Consultative Congress. No one was in the least concerned. The notion of tin culture was only put forth to turn Gejiu into a tourist city. “Tin culture” is nothing but empty words. The city plans to tear down all of the buildings in the old town. If they really wanted to understand tin culture they wouldn’t do this. Some officials [in the Department of Culture] even want to recreate an old city street, with tourist shops. But it’s new, not old. It lacks history. Are people going to come here for tourism? Impossible!

Zhou Xingyuan (b. 1941, see chapter three), a retiree from the YTC, goes so far as to say that government officials don’t pursue preservation because it doesn’t pay: demolition and the construction of new buildings bring in the stuffed envelopes.

Despite his criticism of the venality of officials, Zhou Xingyuan is determined to monopolize their attention. A skilled propagandist, well versed in Party rhetoric, he uses

the conceptual logic of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics to sell his approach to the development of tin culture. He stresses that tourism must market local distinctiveness:

Tin culture includes customs, habits, legends, culture, and especially an understanding of the evolution of the technological process of tin production. For example, miners had a custom in the past, a belief that tin ore contained an inner fire, an inner divinity. Miners would light incense to pay homage to the ore, and they would visit the temple in the Yunnan Trade Association to worship the Tin God. City government officials call this god “Kuangwang” [Ore God]. They even want to hold a Kuangwang Festival. Kuangwang? Kuangwang? What Kuangwang? I told them that there is nothing unique about a Kuangwang. Everyone has a Kuangwang. There is a Kuangwang for coal, for copper, for gold, for silver. What Gejiu has is not called a Kuangwang but a Hongwang [Tin God]. Only Gejiu has this word. It is a unique creation [*duchuang*].

The celebration of a Tin God, like tin culture itself, not only reclaims for the nation a previously reviled feudal past, but it also revises local history according to considerations of marketability. Cultural work thus both constructs and destructs the historical imagination. By redeeming “feudal superstition” (*fengjian mixin*) as “folk custom” (*minjian fengsu*), for example, the celebration of a Tin God assists in the creation of an extended, continuous “Chinese” past without ideological interruptions. The “Yunnan Province Regulations on the Preservation of Traditional Nationality and Folk Culture” of May 26, 2000 (of which the Gejiu Department of Culture distributed copies at a free concert of folk music in 2003) acknowledges this secularizing effect of the market, as it urges the “developmental value” (*kaifa jiazhi*) of traditional folk festivals (*jieri*) and folk ceremonies (*qingdian*).

Liang Cifu (b. ca. 1932), a playwright and former official in the Gejiu Department of Culture, offers additional examples of this process of historical reclamation and reinvention. He says that the new version of the official history of Gejiu will honor not only formerly condemned experts such as Lu Miannan (see chapters two and four), but

even formerly reviled capitalists such as Chen Heting and Miao Yuntai, men who were denounced under Mao but who would qualify for Party membership today:

The Department of Culture now does tin culture. At yesterday's meeting, we decided to hold the first Kuangwang Festival next year. We are still deliberating about a location. In order to have this festival, we must decide who the Kuangwang is. Opinions differ. There are now two candidates. The first is Wei Dingjiang, a man from Guizhou province, who lived during the Yuan dynasty [1272-1368]. Miners have a feudal superstition that mentions this Kuangwang. The most popular candidate is Zhao Tianjue, a tin boss who lived during the Qing dynasty [1636-1912]. He donated the money for the erection of Baohua Temple [a Buddhist temple in Gejiu]. The problem with these candidates is that they don't show that Gejiu has a history of two thousand years. So how can they be the Kuangwang? At the meeting, I suggested that the Kuangwang might actually be Dong Fuguo. His grave is located in the vicinity of the archeological site where the famous Han-dynasty tin candlestick was excavated. A copper chop was discovered in his grave. He must have been an official, someone who opened up a mine—a Kuangwang. Chai Yimin agrees. It is quite possible that we will have different gods for different historical periods.

To propagate Gejiu history, we also want to open a museum. But if we are going to have a museum, I said, we must showcase significant historical figures. This is what I proposed, and no one objected. We should promote the “three heroes of the Tin Capital” [Xidu sanjie]: Chen Heting, Miao Yuntai, and Lu Miannan. Chen Heting was a prominent local businessman. He built Gejiu's small-gauge railroad [in 1910]. Miao Yuntai was the Director of the Gejiu Tin Company during the 1930s. The company was later called the Yunnan Tin Corporation. Finally, Lu Miannan was a French-trained engineer who made important technological contributions to the tin industry [in the 1940s]. He figured out how refine tin to a purity of 99.95%.

Liang Cifu also proposes that the city enlist the writer Ba Jin (1904-2005) in its promotion of tin culture. In his novella *Shading*, after all, Ba Jin recognized the distinct language and culture of the tin mines (see chapter one), and this association of Gejiu with an author of international fame will help the city to “move toward the world” (*zouxiang shijie*) by elevating the prestige of Gejiu in the eyes of domestic and international tourists. Liang himself is firmly convinced of the “developmental value” of tin culture:

LK: Do you think that Gejiu will be able to attract more tourists?

LCF: Definitely. It depends on two key factors: it depends on how well the local officials do and on propaganda [*xuanchuan*]. We must really put a lot of effort into propaganda. What was Lijiang before propaganda? Just a small, insignificant town. But now people from all over the world flock there. And what about Zhongdian? It is now Shangri-la [after winning an official national competition for the unique right to use this name].

People want to go there for the natural environment. The same is true in our case. Propaganda will attract visitors.

Since my departure from Gejiu, local officials have implemented many of the suggestions of these retirees. Casting the national importance of the local soil and culture in the broadest possible frame, the officials promote their city as “a living museum of Chinese metallurgy” (*Zhongguo yejin huotai bowuguan*).¹ The city invites tourists to visit the old mines in the scenic hills around Gejiu (“several dozen completely preserved metallurgical sites and several thousand kilometers of mine tunnels”) as well as the permanent indoor exhibitions at the renovated Gejiu City Museum and the new Tin Museum. The Tin Museum, opened in 2007 by the Yunnan Tin Corporation Group (formerly the Yunnan Tin Corporation), exhibits photographs, sculptures, cultural artifacts, ore specimens, and technical models that illustrate the two-thousand-year history of the tin industry and explain the technological processes of tin production.² The main event in the promotion of tin culture is “The International Tin Culture Tourist Festival” (*Shijie xidu Gejiu guoji xiwenhua liuyou jie*). Organized jointly by the Yunnan Province Cultural Industry Office, the Gejiu Party Committee, the Gejiu City People’s Government, and the Yunnan Tin Corporation Group, the Festival was inaugurated in 2005 and is held every three years. The 2011 Festival coincided with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of Gejiu City, on January 1, 1951. During the Festival, tourists can visit special exhibitions such as an international exhibition of tin handicrafts, or an exhibition of ancient bronze artifacts; explore the cityscape, including

¹ www.hh.cn/special/special_cha/news/200811/t20081118_73067.html, visited May 1, 2011.

² See www.yn.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-05/24/content_10114022.htm, visited May 1, 2011.

the restored Qing-dynasty Yunnan Trade Association; enjoy cultural activities such as the performance of new operas about tin culture, or a parasailing competition; and witness the pageantry of the main attraction: a sacrifice to the Tin God. During the Festival, moreover, Gejiu City and the Yunnan Tin Corporation Group convene a forum on trade and economic development, so as to promote dialogue between domestic and international businessmen, officials, and scholars. In sum, the Festival is intended “to offer a comprehensive and multi-angled view of the new face of the development of the economic culture and social culture of the Tin Capital, to forge an international image for the Tin Capital, and to propagate the Tin Capital as a brand.”³

The central event of the Festival is the sacrifice to the Tin God (*jisi Hongwang*). This “folk activity” (*minjian huodong*) takes places at the Gejiu Golden Lake Cultural Plaza (Gejiu Jinhu wenhua guangchang), built for this purpose in 2004. The Cultural Plaza is a multi-purpose facility: a conference center with an indoor pool, set on the northern edge of a public square. The center bears a sign in the handwriting of Ba Jin, by courtesy of his family. At the eastern end of the square, in front of the dramatic cliff of Laoyin Mountain, stands a white marble statute of Hongwang, the Tin God, looking out toward Golden Lake. He is represented as a kneeling, ancient miner, dressed in a loincloth. With its substantial base, the statue measures a towering nine meters in height. The inscription on the pedestal explains the multiple identities of the Tin God as proposed by Liang Cifu:

³ www.honghe.travel/zt/2008/081013锡文化节/default.html, visited May 1, 2011. See also www.honghe.travel/zt/2008/081013锡文化节/default.html; www.yn.gov.cn/yunnan,china/74030117898158080/20051019/1013222.html; www.yn.xinhuanet.com/travel/2010-12/01/content_21527645.htm, visited May 1, 2011.

In Gejiu, for hundreds and thousands of years there has always existed the folk activity of sacrificing to the Hongwang. Even though everybody considered their object of veneration a god, each worshiper sacrificed to his own Hongwang. Still, there have been only six men in history who have generally been recognized as Hongwang: in the Han dynasty there was Dong Fuguo, the Yuan dynasty had Wei Dingjiang, and in the Qing dynasty it was Zhao Tianjue. The remaining three are the men who have been eulogized in modern times as the three heroes of the Tin Capital: Chen Heting, Miao Yuntai, and Lu Miannan.⁴

In front of this statute, a master of ceremonies conducts the rites. Clad in a red satin Chinese jacket, he offers the three-fold sacrifice of a cow's head, a pig's head, and a chicken while musicians bang their drums.⁵ Like the recipient of this cult, the ceremony itself is the product of historical reclamation and reinvention. If miners ever sacrificed to a Hongwang or Kuangwang, they did so in private acts of worship that bore little resemblance to this public, secular mimicry of Confucian sacrifice. As if to emphasize the non-religious nature of their performance, city officials at the first Festival declared: “‘Hongwang’ not only refers to specific, concrete individuals, but he is the embodiment of all the laborers who, in the course of the historical development of the Gejiu mining industry, have developed the tin industry and built the tin capital, and he is the symbol of Gejiu's tin culture.”⁶

If the political campaigns of the early decades of the People's Republic of China used the local landscape and the local past to render universal Marxist history visible to a local population, local officials now use (and alter) this same landscape and this same local past to demonstrate a unique regional culture to an audience of domestic and

⁴ www.jianshui.gov.cn/article/zbtravel/201101/648.html, visited May 1, 2011. See also www.honghe.travel/zt/2008/081013锡文化节/default.htm; www.jianshui.gov.cn/article/zbtravel/201101/648.html, visited May 1, 2011.

⁵ See www.honghe.travel/zt/2008/081013锡文化节/祭祀硇王.html, visited May 1, 2011.

⁶ www.jianshui.gov.cn/article/zbtravel/201101/648.html, visited May 1, 2011.

international tourists. Although Socialism with Chinese Characteristics urges the exploitation of unique local strengths, regional differences in effect create a distinct national unity. As Lian Gang, a cadre in the Gejiu Department of Culture, explains:

The Department of Culture began to place great stress on culture [*wenhua*] a few years ago. It spoke about this culture and about that culture. Everything can now be considered culture. We therefore have “art culture” and “tea culture” and “caravan culture.” This kind of culture often doesn’t have any content. Even so, culture is still a means to promote economic development. Since the Gejiu City government is now promoting tourism, it talks about tin culture. Tin culture represents the distilled essence of Gejiu history. It highlights and expresses [*biaoxian*] the key aspects of more than two thousand years of history in Gejiu.

Like the scientific objectivity of the reformist local gazetteers, the present commodification of local culture is ideological in its refusal of overt ideological language. Unlike the ideology of scientific objectivity, however, the ideology of commodification has eliminated all overt reference to previous ideological transitions. The merger of politics and commerce has eliminated the difference between propaganda and advertising, and has thereby made available the totality of tropes, stories, and rhetorical techniques of previous political campaigns as unmarked commodities for marketing and sale. “The International Tin Culture Tourist Festival” therefore conforms to current Party policy while at the same time appropriating a variety of recognizable elements from prior campaigns and from earlier historical eras denounced in those campaigns: Confucian sacrifice, worship of a local god, Republican expertise and capitalism, the literary realism of Ba Jin, the propaganda technique of contrasting the past with the present, didactic exhibitions that illustrate the local past by means of sculptures and artifacts, biographies of individuals who exemplify national goals, the reform-era historiography of local gazetteers, the promotion of local characteristics, and even a form of “living ideological education” involving “preserved metallurgical sites.” As an

economic “resource” (*ziyuan*) marketed for profit, local culture has become generic and interchangeable.

In a saturated market of cultural festivals and inflated claims to local authenticity, historical value is highly speculative. In 2003, the Central Department of Culture introduced the concept of a “culture industry” (*wenhua chanye*), an industry to be developed by “culture cities” (*wenhua chengshi*) that exploit the “cultural resources” (*wenhua ziyuan*) of their locality.⁷ But the marketing of tin culture and the promotion of the “Tin Capital as a brand” do not resemble industrial production so much as they resemble real estate speculation, an enterprise with which the development of tourism is moreover closely associated by its combination of demolition and construction. The empty suburban neighborhoods and unoccupied commercial towers that stand across the neo-liberal Chinese landscape as monuments to corruption and unrealized profits remind one that museums and cultural plazas, too, are immovable properties whose profitability depends on the consumer’s recognition of the affective, local experience they offer. The “historical value” of tin culture is therefore speculative in both senses of the word: Gejiu has invested in a local culture of doubtful authenticity, against uncertain economic returns. The entire province of Yunnan hopes to emulate the unimaginable economic success of Lijiang, a sleepy town that managed to earn the designation by UNESCO as a World Heritage site even though half the city consists of gaudy reconstructions built after a recent earthquake. Whether the cultural preservation and cultural invention in Gejiu will generate similar profits is—in the vague, evasive parlance of government officials—“very difficult to say” (*hen nan shuo*).

⁷ www.yn.xinhuanet.com/topic/2008-10/29/content_14775797.htm, visited May 1, 2011.

The chapters of this dissertation have opened new perspectives on the Chinese neo-liberal present by recuperating its continuities with earlier periods in the socialist past of the People's Republic of China, and by re-evaluating its apparent departures from that past. The promotion of tin culture in Gejiu offers one instance of the continuous evolution of Chinese socialism, one stage in the continuous process of the selective appropriation of prior discourses, the reinterpretation and elision of earlier slogans, the recycling of old images and old movies, the demolition of buildings and the construction of new ones, the reassessment of enduring subject positions. In *The Story of Tin City*, Wang Meiding took up the realist techniques and local detail of Ba Jin's *Shading*, but fitted them to an optimistic narrative of liberation and industrial progress. The factory histories of the Great Leap Forward rewrote local histories and the lives of individual workers to provide evidence for Mao's theory of permanent revolution, and to prove that the creation of Communist social relations and consciousness drove the development of the productive forces, in agriculture and industry as in literature and art. In the Four Histories and the class education exhibitions of the 1960s, biographies, sculptural tableaus, and artifacts revealed the existence of bourgeois enemies and their plans to stage a comeback, confirming Mao's theory of continuous revolution and lending urgency to his injunction to carry the revolutionary struggle through to the end. The reformers of the 1980s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, restored the historiographical tradition of the local gazetteer from imperial and Republican times, as a genre that departed from Mao-era conventions both in its traditional form and in its objectivist content. It is no coincidence that I have recovered many of my materials from the Mao era—factory histories, histories of blood and tears, catalogues of class education exhibitions—from garbage collectors at

flea market stalls. The dank alleyways and abandoned buildings of the informal economy are awash with the ideological refuse of the era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, discarded from public libraries, union archives, and personal collections. My oral histories, similarly, I gathered from retired cadres and retired workers whose nuanced assessments of present policy are ignored by the government and misunderstood by their grandchildren.

By characterizing the current era as “post-socialist,” American scholars and journalists create an inapt discontinuity between the present and the past, and thereby threaten to make the personal experience of many Chinese people irrelevant and unintelligible. The Chinese Communist Party remains in power, and it continues to legitimize this power by reference to the language and the achievements of past decades. When Hu Jintao rose to power in 2002, for example, he made his own selection of canonical phrases and images from the history of the Party, just as Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping had done before him. In the weeks before the Sixteenth Party Congress, the channels of Chinese Central Television broadcast movies about the Second Sino-Japanese War and about the victories of the People’s Liberation Army, along with programs that celebrated recent economic development. Party leaders in Gejiu “kept pace with the spirit” of the Sixteenth Party Congress by suspending three red banners from the façade of the Gejiu City People’s Government, flanking Mao Zedong’s stalwart slogan “Serve the People” (*wei renmin fuwu*) with Jiang Zemin’s injunctions to “Continue to Open Up” (*ji wang kai lai*) and to “Advance With the Times” (*yu shi ju jin*). The retired revolutionaries in the compound where I lived were particularly excited by Hu Jintao’s

revival of the “Two Musts” (*liangge biyao*). One of them, a fragile former Party historian, told me:

You have to read the “Two Musts.” Now write them down. [I write as he reads aloud:] “This must be made clear now in the Party. The comrades must be taught to remain modest, prudent and free from arrogance and rashness in their style of work. The comrades must be taught to preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle.”⁸ Hu Jintao has called on leaders to once again study the Two Musts. It’s in the newspaper.

The continued power of the Chinese Communist Party sustains the efforts of Gejiu retirees to give shape and meaning to their lives by means of the subject positions, the language, and the historical narratives that the Party has made available to them. Even if these retirees disagree with current policy or disparage the present generation of cadres, they discern in the background of today’s politics the discursive continuity of a transcendent Party that confirms the contributions they made in the past, lends substance to their sense of self, and gives them hope that their better expectations may still be realized. To call the present era “post-socialist” is therefore to make an ideological intervention of doubtful historical merit. By imposing a category that neither the government nor the majority of its citizens accept, scholars and journalists who write about a post-socialist China in effect repeat the mistakes of an earlier period of scholarship and punditry that dismissed Communist ideology as inherently false and meaningless, and assumed that Chinese citizens who spoke the language of the Party were either sly manipulators or brainwashed automatons. Only by accepting the Party’s assertion that socialism is a living tradition, and that the current experiment with a market economy is part of that living tradition, can one understand the current political and ideological debates in the Chinese Communist Party. And only by perceiving the

⁸ Mao Zedong 1967-77 (March 5, 1949): 4:374.

continued, sustaining presence of a transcendent Party in the background of their lives can one understand the subtle parsing of political slogans and the attempts to align the national past with personal experiences in the life histories of Gejiu retirees. A thorough knowledge of past campaigns and shifting discourses reveals the subtlety, the humor, the trauma, psychological distress, the vindication in these stories of Tin City. They are stories worth hearing.

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